



## Rep. Tom Emmer on Washington Journal

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**\*\*HOST:**

\*\* You are working on a bill. There's two issues I want to talk to you about. The opioid crisis, but also the suicide rate of farmers. It's called the Stress Act. We'll put on the screen some of the highlights. The Stemming the Tide of Rural Economic Stress and Suicide Act. It reauthorizes the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network. It was first authorized back in 2008. It tracks the efficacy and best practices of efforts funded by programs and reports the data to Congress and includes privacy protection so that personal information is not made available to the public. Explain this.

**\*\*REP. TOM EMMER:**

\*\* Well, first I have to back up. The reason I got involved in this, this is something that former Senator Tom Harkin was the champion of. It was originally this alphabet soup of Washington, D.C. There is a program called FERSAN, the acronym. It was originally established in 2008 in the Farm Bill of 2008. And the idea was to create grant money, a pool of grant money for local communities, rural communities, to try and roll out mental health programs, different options for our farm communities and quite frankly those that are under serious stress in our economy. I got involved because I had a staff member. This has been an issue in our office. I mean, while the health care in this country is extending lives, you know, we're treating cancer, we're treating all kinds of different challenges out there. Suicide has been on the rise. We, in my office, have been very concerned about our returning veterans, you know, suffering from PTSD, other issues. I had no idea until it was brought to my attention that in our farm communities, suicide is five times the national average. Why? Well, it's a lot because these folks are independent. They're on their own. They can't control variables like weather and the commodities markets out there, which are depressed right now. Dairy, which is the number one industry in the biggest, the county with the largest city in my district. Dairy is tough. For the farmers in my district, for every gallon of milk they're producing, \$0.25. So there's a lot of stress. They're isolated. They're tied to the land. You know, these farms that have been family farms for generations, when they start to become financially stressed, it only adds to their isolation. I give you an example. Minnesota. Minnesota has one mental health counselor for the entire state. On a slow day, this gentleman gets 16 calls. On a regular day, he's getting 40 calls a day. So the Stress Act, the idea would be to bring back a bill that it expired in 2014. We suspect because the champion of this legislation, Senator Harkin, retired, it expired. But this is such a big issue across this country that we decided it's time to bring it back. And we talked to the chair, Mike Conaway, of the House Agricultural Committee. He not only thought it was a good idea, he encouraged us to bring it back. And I understand, I think it was yesterday, it was certainly this week, the Senate is moving their farm bill, their version of it, and Jody Ernst and one other, I think it might, Tammy Baldwin. Jody Ernst from Iowa and Tammy Baldwin from Wisconsin have actually brought the same version on the Senate side. So I expect that we're going to get it passed in this year's farm bill.

**\*\*HOST:**

\*\* And you're right, it passed the Senate Ag Committee by a vote of 20 to 1 and now coming to the Senate floor. We'll have debate on the farm bill in the House and the Senate on our respective networks.



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