

# [IAVA Releases 2017 Policy Agenda, Focusing On Improving Culture, Support For Women Veterans](#)

**WASHINGTON, DC (March 21, 2017)** – Today, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the leading organization representing post-9/11 veterans and their families, released its 2017 Policy Agenda, naming the need to improve culture and support for women veterans as its top policy priority for the year. Additionally, IAVA will work to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs, defend military and education benefits in the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and continue to combat suicide among troops and veterans.

“Since 2004, IAVA has brought the same cutting-edge thinking and urgency that we relied upon to fight two unconventional wars to the challenges and opportunities facing our community at home,” **said Paul Rieckhoff, Founder and CEO of IAVA.** “From our work to pass legislation like the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, to the Clay Hunt SAV Act, we’ve shown that we can work with government to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of veterans and their families. This year, we’re fighting to improve the lives of the women who served by changing the culture to be more inclusive and while improving access to care and benefits. It’s long past time.”

More on IAVA’s policy priorities can be found below:

## **Fully Recognize and Improve Services for Women Veterans**

Over 345,000 women have deployed in support of these current wars. While the number of male veterans is expected to decline in the next five years, the women veteran population will increase, and women have taken on new roles and responsibilities throughout the services. Though the quality of care and services provided by the VA for all veterans needs to dramatically improve, women veterans especially need to see an improvement in the VA’s standard of care. Not only do women veterans encounter barriers to care and benefits, they do so in a culture that often does not accept them or fully recognize them as veterans. The VA has created a firm foundation of care for women veterans, but now the VA, with Congress, must build on that foundation, improving access to care and benefits while changing the underlying culture to one inclusive of women.

## **Defend Veteran and Military Education Benefits**

The Post-9/11 GI Bill has sent more than one million veterans to school. It has helped these veterans in their transition home, but it has also trained America’s new greatest generation to lead in many professions. Though wildly successful, the GI Bill has been threatened with enormous cuts, and IAVA spent most of 2016 executing our successful campaign to #DefendTheGIBill. As a direct result of IAVA’s efforts, Congress did not cut the landmark benefit in 2016. Congress must never cut benefits that have been promised as a condition of military service, including this landmark benefit that has been

so transformational for our generation of veterans. The GI Bill has also been exploited by predators in the for-profit education sector who take advantage of veterans' benefits and often leave veterans stuck with unnecessary debt and a subpar education. Congress must close loopholes that reward these bad actors for exploiting veterans and strengthen regulations that help veterans choose the best educational programs to meet their career goals.

### **Reform Government for Today's Veterans**

The VA access scandal of 2014 brought to light problems that veterans of all generations face in trying to get their hard earned benefits and care from the VA: a negligent log jam of claims and overdue health care. Much of the crisis was preventable and predictable and it is surely fixable. Under former Secretary Bob McDonald, the VA embraced a culture of innovation and collaboration in the last two years and this must continue. The secretaries at the VA and Department of Defense must be given the resources, authority and space to succeed-while being held accountable. At the very least, funding and key structures at the VA must be protected from short-sighted cuts and political posturing. This must be the year we all finally work together to create a dynamic, responsive, integrative system with the veteran at its core that is set to meet every veteran's needs for decades to come. Our military is the world's most advanced; our care for our veterans must be the same.

### **Continue to Combat Suicide Among Troops and Veterans**

When it comes to veteran and troop suicide, there can be no misses-the stakes are too high and our national responsibility is too great. That anyone who has worn our uniform concludes that they have no support and no alternative but suicide is a national crisis and disgrace. For nearly a decade, IAVA and the veteran community have long called for immediate action by our nation's leaders to end this crisis. In that time, we have lost too many friends, but there has been some progress-most notably the passage of the IAVA-led Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act of 2015. We saw further success when the IAVA-backed Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act of 2016 was enacted. Also in 2016, at IAVA's urging, VA Secretary Bob McDonald elevated the Suicide Prevention Office within VA and further resourced it, empowering the office to address suicide prevention in a broader, public health context. But there is still much work to be done. There can be no rest until every veteran and every service member has access to the best mental health care and community support. Working with community groups, Congress and the Administration must lend the full force of the federal government to this problem to better identify and support those in crisis and dramatically improve access to and the quality of mental health care.

The complete IAVA 2017 Policy Agenda can be found [online](#).