

[IAVA slams White House as “tone deaf,” calls for renewed focus on VA Reform, Defending the GI Bill, Women Vets, Suicide](#)

Obama addresses veterans at Disabled American Veterans Convention

NEW YORK, NY (August 1, 2016) – Today, in the midst of a firestorm of controversy surrounding recent comments made by Mr. Donald Trump about the family of a fallen soldier, ongoing problems at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and a suicide problem taking the lives of 20 veterans every day, President Obama spoke to the veterans of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) convention and touted VA success. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the leading voice for post-9/11 veterans and their families criticized the Obama record on veterans issues and urged the President to prioritize critical needs at the VA during his last months in office and to finally join every leading voice from his part in committing to [defend the GI Bill](#) from pending Congressional cuts. The VA scandal in 2014 under the President’s watch revealed unacceptably long wait times and challenges for all generations of vets in accessing care. Many of these deep-rooted problems remain, and IAVA members have not seen nearly enough progress or focus.

“There has been some progress, but this is no time for the President to celebrate success. To do so, as we lose 20 friends a day to suicide and continue to face enormous challenges at the VA, would be completely tone deaf. The President’s record on veteran issues is marred with disappointment,” said Paul Rieckhoff, CEO and Founder of IAVA. “The VA scandal was predictable, preventable and many of the core issues still remain over two years later. The administration’s announcement that overall veteran homelessness has been cut by 47 percent is admirable, but only a small part of the larger picture. It’s no headline—it’s a postscript. The truth is that the President missed his own goal of zero homeless veterans by 2015. He has also failed to reach his goal of ending the VA backlog by the beginning of 2016—which still stands at [over 70,000 today](#). VA funding increases are extremely helpful—but as we’ve seen over the last few years as funding has repeatedly increased, funding alone will not fix the VA.

“The President also risks his own legacy on key achievements by staying silent while IAVA has called for him to defend the GI Bill from the over \$3 billion cuts currently before Congress,” continued Rieckhoff. “Leaders ranging from Leader Pelosi to Secretary Clinton to Senator Kelly Ayotte have all committed to fight these cuts in the so-called “Veterans First Act.” But President Obama and candidate Donald Trump have failed to take a stand on this issue.”

IAVA’s recently released [7th annual IAVA membership survey](#) revealed exactly

how far the White House, Congress and the VA have to go to meet the needs of our veterans:

- Only 20% feel the President is doing a good job.
- Only 9% feel Congress is doing a good job.
- Only 20% feel the VA is doing a good job.
- Only 22% feel the country appreciates their sacrifices.
- A shocking 79% of respondents reported waiting 125 days to be notified of their claim decision.
- Only 47% reported a good or very good overall experience with VA health care.
- Only 24% think the VA is doing a good job on mental health; down from 38% in 2014.
- Only 31% would refer a friend to the VA.
- A stunning 79% reported waiting over 125 days to be notified of the VA claim decision.
- Over 56% reported waiting over 125 days to be notified of the VA appeal decision.
- 61% felt a financial impact while waiting on a clam.

“VA Secretary Bob McDonald has brought a welcome injection of leadership and pragmatism to the VA and is trying his best. But Bob McDonald can’t do it alone—and he’s quickly running out of time. President Obama must be candid in acknowledging the failures during his Presidency and turning the corner now. Today is an opportunity for him to finally offer a true national strategy to support our nation’s 22 million veterans of all generations. [IAVA’s comprehensive Policy Agenda](#) can be the backbone of that plan. Hundreds of thousands of IAVA members and all of America is standing by to help the President re-double our national efforts to support America’s veterans in the final six months of his time in office. This is the time. True reform can

happen but must be a team effort – Secretary McDonald and his successor can only improve veteran care with the full support of Congress and the White House, which we have yet to see.”

IAVA recently attended both political presidential conventions with an eye toward focusing the candidates on veterans issues. The organization’s assessment of each candidate’s positions on veterans can be found [here](#).