

Obama Commits to Vets Future – But Misses Urgent Retirement Issue

WASHINGTON, DC (January 28, 2014) – Recognizing the sacrifice of veterans, President Obama tonight addressed critical issues facing veterans returning from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan including mental health care, the VA disability claims backlog and unemployment. Yet, the President failed to address veterans' current fight to protect military retirement benefits. Earlier today, veterans and military families protested Congressional cuts to military benefits at a morning press conference and during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. Calling it a broken promise to those who serve, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) urged Congress to restore cuts to military retirement benefits. IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff attended the State of the Union as a guest of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and issued the following statement:

“Tonight, the Commander-in-Chief reminded our nation of its commitment to the men and women in uniform, like Cory, who have sacrificed so much. 2014 is a critical year. As the war in Afghanistan winds down, we must ensure that our country is ready to support veterans when they return home. On issues so important as mental health services, the VA disability claims backlog and unemployment, we have much work to do. Now it's time to act on these priorities and get results.

“We are disappointed the President did not address retirement benefits for our men and women in uniform. Veterans across the country are reeling from the surprise attack to their earned benefits. We need immediate action from the President and Congress to restore the promises our country made to them and their families. Unfortunately, on the critical issue of military retirement benefits, the President was silent. Veterans don't want any more excuses and won't take no for an answer. It's time to restore the retirement cuts.”

In addition to calling on President Obama and Congress to restore cuts to military retirees, IAVA has advocated for other priorities for veterans, including:

- Combating suicide by strengthening mental health care at a time when an estimated 22 veterans commit suicide each day.
- Re-focusing attention on ending the VA backlog, which still stands at more than 400,000.
- Fighting military sexual assault, particularly passing the Military Justice Improvement Act
- Passing advance funding for all of VA so veterans services aren't jeopardized by future government shutdowns.