

Pentagon Bonus Scandal Remains: Veterans Urge Bipartisan, Sweeping Fix IAVA Backs Recent Action, Calls on Congress to Find Solution by End of Year

NEW YORK, NY (November 22, 2016) – Today, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) called on Congress to find a bipartisan solution to help thousands of National Guardsmen who have been required to pay back, with interest, re-enlistment bonuses. This call comes after Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) introduced the National Guard Bonus Repayment and Financial Relief Act (S. 3476), and Representatives Jeff Denham (R-CA) and Adam Schiff (D-CA) introduced similar bills.

“This issue may have faded from news headlines, but it is far from resolved. As we approach Thanksgiving, far too many military families are facing financial ruin. IAVA strongly supports a fix for this shocking breach of trust that removes the outrageous bonus repayment requirement for all National Guardsmen,” IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff said. “Now that the election is over, Congress must come together during the lame duck and act immediately to pass a law with an appropriate solution before the end of the year. This problem simply cannot be left for the next Congress to clean up. Too many veterans and servicemembers have already suffered enough.”

Introduced last week, Senator Feinstein’s bill would eliminate the requirement to repay the bonuses for service members who, through no fault of their own, received the funds in exchange for re-enlisting. It would also require the Department of Defense to return, with interest, bonuses that were already repaid. Credit reporting agencies would also be prohibited from listing the bonuses as debt, and the bill also requires the Army to conduct a complete, transparent review of all National Guard bonuses paid between 2004 and 2010. IAVA strongly supports this legislation.

“IAVA and our more than 400,000 members commend Senator Feinstein and Representatives Denham and Schiff for having our backs and we urge their colleagues on both sides of the aisle to unite behind this common-sense effort,” continued Rieckhoff. “This is not a partisan issue and impacts more than just servicemembers in California. Congress must act now and solve this problem for Guardsmen and their families nationwide.”

In 2010, a federal investigation found that thousands of bonuses and student loan payments were erroneously awarded to guardsman who re-enlisted in a time of war when their country needed them most. Instead of forgiving these overpayments that happened at no fault of the servicemember, the California Guard completed an audit in September 2016, requiring 9,700 current and

former soldiers to repay all or part of the bonuses, with interest. It has also been reported the Los Angeles Times and elsewhere that servicemembers in other states are faced with similar challenges.

IAVA currently has over 45,000 members in California, but is advocating on behalf of all of our members to ensure all those impacted are a part of the solution. Although the Pentagon has put a temporary pause on collection efforts for California Guard members, and media attention has faded, it remains unclear if and how the government will take the necessary steps to make all the affected servicemembers and veterans whole.

IAVA is standing by to help veterans that have been affected by this egregious mistake. If you are a veteran in need, please reach out to our [Rapid Response Referral Program team \(RRRP\)](#) for assistance. We encourage all Americans to stay connected and informed via IAVA.org and the [#PayThemBack](#) hashtag.

Following the Thanksgiving break, the House Armed Services Committee is expected to hold a Dec. 7 hearing to address the bonus scandal, as well as potential fixes to make affected servicemembers and veterans whole.

IAVA is the leading voice of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in Washington and communities nationwide. Led by veterans, our non-partisan advocacy work ensures that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families are supported, protected and never forgotten. Since 2004, IAVA has been a juggernaut in Washington, creating and driving the national conversation on issues ranging from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) to women veteran issues to veteran unemployment. IAVA's dedicated staff in Washington, D.C. leads this work, advocating on behalf of our members daily. We also train our member veterans to be powerful advocates for their local community. □

IAVA is focused on results and has delivered historic impacts. Every year since 2007, in an increasingly gridlocked political environment and with an extremely limited operating budget, IAVA has passed at least one major piece of groundbreaking legislation for our community ranging from the Post-9/11 GI Bill (2008), to the VOW to Hire Heroes Act (2011), to The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act (2015). □□

See [IAVA's Advocacy Program Digital Hub](#) the full list of victories and to learn more about how you can help.