

Veterans Totally Omitted From Final Obama State of the Union

Despite special guests and focus on national security President fails to prioritize vets

WASHINGTON, D.C. (January 12, 2016) – Tonight, in his final State of the Union address, President Obama severely and shockingly disappointed the veterans' community by failing to focus on veterans issues. As our nation continues to wage war overseas, the President made only one passing mention of veterans in the entire 60-minute-long speech. The President failed to raise critical awareness to the issues that America's 2.8 million Iraq and Afghanistan veterans face every day ranging from suicide to homelessness. He also completely failed to address the ongoing challenges to reform the VA a year and a half after the biggest scandal in the agency's history.

"The President's total failure to focus on vets is an insult to all 22 million of us and a disservice to all Americans, particularly in a time of war," said Paul Rieckhoff, Founder and CEO of IAVA. "Tonight is the clearest sign yet that the President is not touching the VA ever again. He's leaving that mess for the next President. This was the absolute worst State of the Union of the entire Obama presidency for our veterans and military."

Despite the omission of veterans issues from the speech, seated with the First Lady was IAVA Leadership Fellow and Army Veteran [Naveed Shah](#), Major Lisa Jaster, the first female Army Reserve officer to graduate from the Army Ranger School, as well as veterans Cynthia "Cindy" K. Dias, Earl Smith, Spencer Stone and Oscar Vazquez.

Longtime IAVA member, retired U.S. Marine Lt. Col. [Michael Zacchea](#), was also in attendance as a guest of Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.). "Mike is the epitome of #VetsRising," added Rieckhoff. "After serving a full career in the Marines, Mike continued to serve his brothers and sisters as a member of the IAVA Board of Directors and now provides support for veteran entrepreneurs."

In October, IAVA provided a comprehensive [policy agenda](#) to the President and Congress, with hundreds of actionable items covering 11 key issues that will help improve the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families. This agenda was delivered to the White House, the VA, and Members of Congress in October 2015 and includes reform measures at the VA, the prioritization of women veterans, cracking down on for-profit schools taking advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and implementation of the critical measures of the SAV Act.