

# [Ahead of Election Day, IAVA Releases Voter Guide for Veterans' Issues](#)

Washington, D.C. (October 6, 2014) – In advance of midterm elections, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the nation's first and largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing post-9/11 veterans and their families, has released a guide to help voters assess candidates on their support for vital veterans' issues. The [2014 IAVA Veteran Voter Guide](#) focuses on policy issues for: combating suicide among troops and veterans; ending the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims backlog; improving support for female veterans; combating effects of burn pit exposure; defending veterans' education benefits; and lowering the veteran unemployment rate. The guide includes issue summaries and a checklist to help every American evaluate a political candidate's platform and talking points.

To read the full [2014 IAVA Veteran Voter Guide](#), click [here](#). Also included in the nonpartisan guide are questions voters can ask directly to candidates running for office; techniques to use when raising veterans issues at town halls and political events; and a tear-away Call to Action page.

IAVA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization and does not endorse any candidates for office or support any political party.

"This election year, IAVA wants to make sure that every veteran's voice is heard loud and clear by candidates across the country," said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. "This is a pivotal year for the military and veteran communities, as 22 veterans die by suicide each day and our country marks 13 years in Afghanistan. We expect more than yellow ribbons and campaign speeches from our lawmakers. Thousands of servicemembers will be returning home this year and our country isn't yet capable of meeting their needs. From increasing mental health care access to modernizing VA services for the unique needs of women, each American's vote will get us one step closer to improving the lives of the new greatest generation."

IAVA and its supporters want to see smart policy and tough decisions from leaders of both sides of the aisle on six critical issues:

**1. Combating suicide among troops and veterans:** According to the VA, 22 veterans die by suicide each day. Combating veteran suicide has been IAVA's top priority in 2014 with the ["We've Got Your Back: IAVA's Campaign to Combat Suicide."](#) In July, House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) introduced the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention For American Veterans Act (Clay Hunt SAV Act), H.R. 5059. Once passed, the bill will combat veteran suicide and improve access to mental health care. IAVA is urging for bipartisan support for H.R. 5059.

**2. Ending the VA disability claims backlog:** Although the VA has made significant changes to meet its goal of reaching backlog zero by FY 2015,

there is still work to be done. Currently, more than 230,000 veterans are stuck in the disability claims backlog. IAVA continues to call on the VA to create an infrastructure that allows the disability compensation system to protect future needs and adapt to a growing population of new veterans and even more complex injuries.

**3. Improving support for female veterans:** Women are the fastest growing segment of the veteran population. Similar to their male counterparts, women are facing challenges with unemployment, suicide and accessing mental health care. According to the latest data from the VA, 57.4 percent of female veterans are enrolled in VA health care. However, the VA health care system is not designed to support the unique needs and experiences of female veterans with a lack in even the most basic VA services. IAVA is urging the VA to modernize its health care system for our women warriors.

**4. Combating effects of burn pit exposure:** According to IAVA's [2014 Member Survey](#), 76 percent of respondents were exposed to burn pits while deployed and 54 percent of those exposed feel they have symptoms associated with that exposure. IAVA urges Congress to pass the Helping Veterans Exposed to Toxic Chemicals Act (H.R. 2510) to help improve health outcomes for veterans exposed to burn pits.

**5. Defending veterans' education benefits:** The Post-9/11 GI Bill (or New GI Bill) has been the best investment our country has made in its veterans since World War II. However, GI Bill benefits are under attack. Due to the "90/10 loophole," some for-profits are targeting the New GI Bill to line their pockets with taxpayer money by aggressively and deceptively recruiting veterans while failing to deliver the high-quality education and career opportunities they promised. Congress should pass legislation to close the 90/10 loophole that causes veterans to be unfairly targeted by some predatory for-profit schools.

**6. Lowering the veteran unemployment rate:** Post-9/11 veterans have consistently experienced a higher unemployment rate than their civilian counterparts. According to IAVA's [2014 Member Survey](#), 10 percent of respondents are currently unemployed. While veteran unemployment rates have gradually declined in the last few years, there are still populations of veterans that are struggling more than most. IAVA calls on Congress to pass legislation to translate military skills into equivalent certifications.