

At GOP Debate, IAVA Calls for Candidates to Focus on New Veterans

IAVA's Chief Policy Officer Matt Miller available for media in Cleveland

CLEVELAND (August 6, 2015) – As the 2016 Presidential race gets underway with the first Republican National Committee (GOP) sponsored debate tonight, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the nation's first and largest nonpartisan organization for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, calls on leaders to outline concrete campaign agendas to address the most urgent issues impacting America's new veterans and their families. IAVA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization and does not endorse political candidates of any party. It will, however, attend debates and conventions sponsored by both parties with the goal of focusing candidates to discuss and support bi-partisan veterans' issues.

[Matt Miller](#), Chief Policy Officer at IAVA, will attend the first GOP primary debate on Thursday at 9 p.m. EST, co-hosted by Facebook and featuring the top 10 leading candidates for the GOP nomination. Miller, a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserves who, previous to IAVA, served in civilian and military roles in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq and Afghanistan, will be available for media on the ground at the debate.

"It is my hope that the candidates in attendance will devote a portion of their time to highlighting what they would do to improve the services provided to our nation's veterans," said Miller. "Of the 10 candidates participating in tomorrow's debate, only three have issued a policy platform that addresses veterans. We urge all of the candidates from both parties to address the vital issues for our community, such as mental health\PTSD, improving the VA to better serve veterans, and how they would address the health care needs of the fastest growing segment of the veteran retirement population – women."

The military and veterans' community are traditionally a powerful constituency at the polls. According to IAVA's recent membership survey, 93 percent of IAVA members are registered to vote. As the country's leading, nonpartisan veteran service organization, IAVA calls on all leaders from both sides of the aisle to adopt four crucial measures to support America's veterans and their families:

- 1. Build a Truly 21st Century VA:** When the 2014 scandal at the VA brought to light a negligent log jam of claims and overdue health care, IAVA called for the creation of a new "[Marshall Plan for Veterans](#)." This bold, eight-point plan outlines a comprehensive effort to restore confidence in the VA. We urge parties from all sides to resist the urge to politicize efforts to provide our veterans with quality care and to implement all aspects of this plan, including the VA Accountability Act. Our military is the world's most advanced and our care for our veterans must be the same.

2. Defend the New GI Bill: The Post-9/11 (or “New”) GI Bill sent more than one million veterans to school. Though wildly successful, the New GI Bill has been exploited by predators in the for-profit school sector who take advantage of veterans’ benefits and often leave veterans stuck with unnecessary debt and a subpar education. Candidates must support efforts to close loopholes that reward these bad actors for exploiting veterans and strengthen regulations that help veterans choose the best educational programs to meet their career goals.

3. Prevent Suicide Among Troops and Veterans: The passage of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act of 2015, spearheaded by IAVA, was a landmark, bi-partisan effort that showed America its politicians can work together, and that veterans issues are everyone’s issues. Veteran suicide remains a national crisis, with 22 veterans dying each day from suicide. IAVA calls on political leaders to implement the SAV Act by improving oversight of mental health programs, increase the number of mental health professionals in the VA, and swiftly address the stigma surrounding mental health to ensure timely access to the highest quality mental health care possible.

4. Improve Care for Female Veterans: Nearly 280,000 women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and while the number of male veterans is expected to decline in the next five years, the women veteran population is anticipated to increase. Yet care and support for these women warriors has lagged behind. The VA health care system and disability claims system are still not designed to support the unique needs and experience of female veterans. While we have seen progress in reforming these systems, our leaders must be more focused on getting female veterans the care they deserve.

For complete policy recommendations, read IAVA’s Policy Agenda [here](#). An updated version of the Policy Agenda is scheduled to be released in the coming weeks to serve as a blueprint for candidates and elected leaders from both political parties to help improve the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families.

To arrange an interview at the conventions with IAVA’s Chief Policy Officer Matt Miller, please contact Cynthia Olson, IAVA Director of Communications at 212-982-9699 x3228 or cynthia@iava.org.