

California's Veteran's Issues Dominate National Headlines

Mayor Lee's pledge, Oakland disability files scandal, VA Secretary's Bay Area visit, IAVA's Rieckhoff's SoCal tour spotlight state with 1 in 8 Post-9/11 vets

NEW YORK (April 22, 2015) – Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America today applauded San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee's announcement that he is committing \$1.7 million to end veteran homelessness in his city. IAVA welcomed this significant commitment to house veterans and contribute much needed resources to this critical goal.

"We are encouraged to see Mayor Lee address a veteran priority not just with rhetoric but with real resources," said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. "Today's commitment is a solid step for our community. IAVA's Rapid Response Referral Program team serves homeless veterans across the Bay Area and looks forward to being a key partner. However, our veterans urge the mayor to go even further and help make San Francisco a true national leader on veteran's affairs. He should establish a full-time, paid Veterans Commissioner or equivalent for City Hall and lead the creation and funding of a city-wide Department of Veteran's Affairs. To combat homelessness, and also to prevent it, and attack other key issues like veterans suicide, the powerful city of San Francisco needs a powerful plan of attack with robust resources."

San Francisco's mayor is also hosting a meeting today with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald, members of the city's Veterans Affairs Commission and city officials. IAVA member and Veterans Affairs Commissioner Ann Weeby, a leading national voice for veterans, will be in attendance.

IAVA Bay Area Field Leader Quan Nguyen, and other IAVA members will be in attendance later in the day at a town hall with veterans at the Oakland VA. Oakland has been an epicenter for problems, scandal and the shameful VA disability backlog. Secretary McDonald's visit coincides with a congressional hearing looking into 13,184 unprocessed compensation and disability claims found in 2012 at the VA regional office in Oakland. According to investigative reporting by the San Francisco Chronicle, claims – some dating to the mid-1990s – were reportedly hidden in a filing cabinet.

San Francisco has long been a national leader in veteran's services. "IAVA encourages Mayor Lee to use the upcoming Conference on Mayors in June to lead other mayors and city leaders to create comprehensive city-specific plans for their veterans. Every mayor in America should have a plan to support veterans. But after over a decade after 9/11, far too many still do not. We've fought for our cities. Now, our mayor's must fight for us. And Mayor Lee can lead the way. However, government can't do it alone. We encourage all foundations, private companies and individual citizens to step up as well."

Rieckhoff added.

Today's action comes on the heels of IAVA's ongoing efforts to encourage New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio to issue a real plan backed by real resources to assist the city's 200,000-plus veterans. Out of the city's \$72 billion budget, only around \$200,000 in city funds are earmarked for veteran's issues. [Rieckhoff's op-ed](#) in today's New York Daily News addresses many local veterans' concerns with the major's lack of attention to their issues.

Later this week, Rieckhoff will visit Los Angeles and San Diego to meet with IAVA members and their families, partners and supporters. In both locations, Rieckhoff will connect with members at IAVA's dynamic, empowering veteran community-building events known as VetTogethers. Information about those events, open to the press, can be found [here](#).

California is home to IAVA's Rapid Response Referral Program (RRRP) and an estimated 244,000 post-9/11 veterans, making it the largest new vet state in the country. RRRP is an innovative approach to supporting post-9/11 veterans by directly connecting them and their families to local resources and to one-on-one support with IAVA's Veteran Transition Managers. Since it launched in the state in 2014, RRRP has helped more than 500 veterans cut through red tape and provided them and their families with access to services ranging across employment, education, housing, mental health and more.