

Historic VA Motto Change Effort Gains Momentum

NEW YORK, NY (February 28, 2018) – As controversy continues at the Department of Veterans Affairs, an important recent [story](#) in *The Washington Post* revealed that the call by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) to expand recognition and support for women veterans, spearheaded by a call to change the antiquated VA motto, has made major inroads at the Department, despite the Agency's official continued reluctance to modify the outdated stance. After months of advocacy and awareness around the non-inclusive motto, its impact on the way VA is perceived by some veterans and its impacts on the fastest growing segment of the veterans population, women veterans, the story reveals that IAVA's common sense effort to modify the motto has strong support from many inside the Department.

As the *Post* reports, a recently released VA strategic document included the Mission Statement: "to care for those 'who shall have borne the battle'", removing the gender-specific language that IAVA and other leading veterans groups oppose for its impact in excluding women veterans. Officials at VA then removed and re-posted the [document](#), changing only the Mission Statement to reflect the outdated motto: "to care for **him** who shall have borne the battle." VA Press Secretary Curt Cashour alleged that the modified motto that appeared in the first document was not approved by the Agency. In spite of growing support from outside and inside the Department, VA officials maintain that the exclusionary motto will not change.

The internal struggle at VA comes at an important time for VA leadership under Secretary Shulkin, and on the heels of a [letter](#) that IAVA sent on behalf of its members to the Secretary outlining a way he could use his authority to change the motto and citing similar changes enacted at institutions including the Air Force Academy. That letter was never answered by the Secretary himself. He and the White House have continued to ignore appeals from veterans nationwide to address this issue. Instead, the Director of VA Center for Women Veterans, responded to the letter on VA's behalf; Cashour later claimed that that letter was not approved nor did it reflect VA's official statement.

"It's abundantly clear that VA and the White House continue to be on the wrong side of history on this issue, and front-line employees within the Department know it," **said Paul Rieckhoff, Founder and CEO of IAVA.** "People who are responsible for serving veterans directly every day at VA know the motto is a barrier that perpetuates the old, outdated way of doing things. Yet, amazingly, leadership has remained dug in. Despite the changing face of America and the veterans depending on using the VA, political leadership is stubbornly stuck in the past-putting politics or personal feelings ahead of the needs of veterans. Public opinion is behind us, and gaining enormous traction nationwide, as more and more people are beginning to understand that women veterans deserve equal recognition and services as their male

counterparts. And that recognition starts at the very top, with the motto at the agency that was created to support *all* veterans. Any arguments of marginal additional costs associated with the motto change are short-sighted and are offset if they could save just one life of a wounded female veteran who might not otherwise come to VA for lifesaving care. VA employees know what's right, and so do most Americans; now it's time for leadership at the agency, and the President, to step up and make this long overdue change."

"By excluding women veterans like me, the VA motto effectively erases the contributions by women in the military, and communicates to women veterans that we are unwelcome outsiders. It would mark a powerful commitment from VA leadership to finally create a culture that acknowledges and respects the service and commitment of not only women veterans, but the female family members and survivors that stand behind them," said IAVA Chief Policy Officer Melissa Bryant. "We call on Secretary Shulkin and the President to answer our collective call to action and show the millions of women veterans, their children, and widowers of fallen female troops that they deserve equal recognition from our grateful nation."

She Who Borne The Battle: More than 345,000 women have deployed since 9/11. They make up 13% of IAVA's membership. Women are the fastest-growing segment of the veteran population and that trend will continue as the number of male veterans simultaneously declines over the next decades. However, many female veterans are left without the proper care to support their needs when they return from their service. She Who Borne the Battle will change this by providing a foundation of public awareness, local support and policy changes solely targeted at supporting and empowering female veterans. Learn more at SheWhoBorneTheBattle.org.

The Deborah Sampson Act: Created in consultation with IAVA staff and driven by quantitative and qualitative data from IAVA's annual [member survey](#), the Deborah Sampson Act will: Change the VA motto; strengthen data and transparency; recognize and support the value of peer support; require coordinated community care and; increase outreach. A full list of the 78 bipartisan House and Senate co-sponsors is listed on our website and updated daily. We encourage all media, veterans and voters to see if their representatives are on the list.

Eighteen powerful organizations have joined IAVA in support of the Deborah Sampson Act: Wounded Warrior Project (WWP), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion, Disabled Veterans of America (DAV), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), American Veterans (AMVETS), Jewish War Veterans (JWV), Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), National Military Families Association (NMFA), Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA), U.S. Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA), Marine Corps Reserve Association (MCRA), Fleet Reserve Association (FRA), Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA), The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA).