

[IAVA Outlines Veteran Priorities to Joint Congressional Hearing](#)

Leading vets group urges Congress to increase focus on veterans in this election year

WASHINGTON (March 16, 2016) – Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff testified this morning before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. Rieckhoff presented IAVA's top [policy priorities](#), which is derived based on the feedback from IAVA's robust and diverse membership. As 22 veterans continue to die by suicide each day, veteran suicide remains the number one priority for the post-9/11 community.

As Rieckhoff testified, "As you all know, this time last year we were celebrating the enactment of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act. Despite this historic and bipartisan success, suicide among veterans is still a crisis. IAVA is also very concerned that women veterans die by suicide at nearly six times the rate of civilian women, and we call on Congress to pass the Female Suicide Prevention Act, recently approved unanimously by the House."

IAVA has been on the frontlines of the fight to end veteran suicide, leading the effort to get the [Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans \(SAV\) Act](#) signed into law in Feb. 2015. Following [IAVA's recommendations](#) at the Feb. 2016 national summit, "Preventing Veteran Suicide—A Call to Action," the VA announced last week plans to elevate its Suicide Prevention Office.

Rieckhoff will ask Congress to defend the promise to our veterans by adequately funding and staffing the VA Suicide Prevention Office, as well as fully implementing the Clay Hunt SAV Act and passing the Female Suicide Prevention Act (H.R.2915/S.2487).

Rieckhoff also issued a call to action for Congress to fully [recognize and improve services for women veterans](#), [reform government for today's veterans](#) and [defend veteran and military education benefits](#).

"Since 2009, over one million veterans and their families have come to rely upon the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Among IAVA's own members, 50 percent of member survey respondents have used the Post-9/11 GI Bill themselves or transferred it to their dependents. Ignoring these facts, the House's recent use of the GI Bill as a piggy bank to fund other veterans programs is of great concern to IAVA. While there are initiatives in the omnibus legislation that we have supported, a 50 percent reduction in the housing allowance for veterans' children who will receive transferred GI Bill benefits is a breach in trust," Rieckhoff testified.

IAVA was the [leading veterans service organization](#) driving the passage of the historic Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008 and in championing upgrades in 2010 and

2014. These upgrades simplified and improved tuition benefits, expanded eligibility to the National Guard, included vocational programs and made nationwide in-state tuition rates a possibility for new veterans. IAVA calls on stakeholders in the veteran community to urge Congress not to make cuts to these critical education benefits.

Rieckhoff's full testimony can be found [here](#).