

On 11th Anniversary of Iraq War, IAVA Readies to Storm the Hill to Combat Veteran Suicide

WASHINGTON, DC (March 19, 2014) – On the 11th anniversary of the start of the Iraq War, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) announced it will converge on Washington March 22-28 to introduce IAVA's 2014 Policy Agenda and demand action on its top issue: combating veteran suicide. As part of IAVA's 10th annual Storm the Hill campaign, post-9/11 veterans will descend on Washington to share their personal stories and call on Congress and the President to address mental health and take action to significantly reduce the number of suicides among veterans and servicemembers.

The 31 veteran leaders participating in Storm the Hill come from 16 states and represent IAVA's diverse, dynamic and rapidly growing national membership. All have been affected in some way by suicide, including knowing family and friends who have faced mental health challenges. Throughout the week, they will meet with members of Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Defense and the White House, urging policymakers to adopt priorities and recommendations to bridge the gaps in care and ultimately break through the negative stigma that is too often associated with seeking help.

The VA estimates that 22 veterans die by suicide each day. In IAVA's 2014 Member Policy Survey, over 47 percent of our respondents said they knew a veteran who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan who had attempted suicide.

"IAVA is descending on Washington to make combating suicide a priority for all Americans. Our members have told us loud and clear that this is the number one issue for them and their families. Now, these members are leaving behind their families, jobs and studies to focus for one week on changing Washington. We are losing too many of our brothers and sisters nationwide. And we're storming the hill to change history and transform a landscape so that America will truly take care of its own who have shouldered the burdens of war," said IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff.

"Eleven years after the War in Iraq began, veterans too often feel forgotten by Washington. The known rate of suicide among troops and veterans is deplorable. We have reached a point where we need to send up a flare and demand new actions from our elected officials. Over a week of events and action we will call on Washington step up and deliver. It's long past time for America to show our community that they really have got our backs," Rieckhoff added.

One of the 2014 IAVA Stormers is Kristofer Goldsmith, an Army veteran from Long Island, NY. Goldsmith served nearly four years active-duty in the Army and deployed to Iraq in 2005, where he went on more than 300 missions. Kris

left the Army in 2007 with a general discharge after he attempted to take his own life. This type of discharge status made him ineligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and he was unemployable for two years. Kris is now in the process of recovery from post-traumatic stress disorder and attends Nassau Community College under the Voc Rehab program. He currently serves as president of Student Veterans of Naussau Community College. He is coming to Washington to advocate for all those who have served.

Meet the rest of the Stormers [here](#).

Storm the Hill is IAVA's premiere advocacy week and the start of an aggressive, annual push to enact the top priority of IAVA members nationwide. Started in 2005, Storm the Hill puts IAVA's top issue for the year on the map and has jumpstarted historic changes, including the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, advanced funding for health care at the VA, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, and last year, a national focus on the high VA disability claims backlog.

On Monday, IAVA will unveil its 2014 Policy Agenda, a blueprint for combating suicide and addressing other key issues, which is driven by data from member veterans nationwide, partner organizations, and a decade of experience.

This year, IAVA is also calling on Congress to keep the VA on track for Backlog Zero by 2015, protect the Post-9/11 GI Bill, address unemployment and continue fighting against military sexual assault.

In addition to advocating for strong mental health policies, IAVA connects veterans to mental health services, including partnering with the Veterans Crisis Line to ensure that every servicemember, veteran, family member and provider knows that there is free and confidential help available 24 hours a day through phone, text and online. Veterans, or those concerned about veterans, can call 800-273-8255 and press 1 to be directly connected to qualified responders.

Visit StormTheHill.org to learn more about IAVA's efforts to combat suicide, Storm the Hill and our 2014 class of Stormers. All week, IAVA will be posting photos, videos and personal stories on social media and with the #StormtheHill hashtag on Twitter.

IAVA veterans will participate in the following public events during Storm the Hill (please RSVP to Press@iava.org to attend):

Policy Agenda Launch and Mental Health Panel

Who: Paul Rieckhoff, Founder and CEO of IAVA

Terri Tanielian, Senior Social Research Analyst at the RAND Corporation

Loree Sutton, Brigadier General (Ret.) in the U.S. Army and Co-Director of Threshold GlobalWorks, LLC

Caitlin Thompson, VA Deputy Director of Suicide Prevention

When: Monday, March 24 at noon

Where: Capitol Hill, SVC 209

Day of Action to Combat Veteran Suicide

Who: Veterans and supporters placing American flags on the National Mall to represent each of the 1,892 veterans and servicemembers who has died by suicide this year and share the stories of friends and families lost.

When: Thursday, March 27 at 11 a.m.

Where: National Mall, 12th Street between Jefferson and Madison Streets