

Seattle Post-9/11 Vets Unite Ahead of 11th Anniversary of War in Iraq

Seattle, WA (March 17, 2014) – One day before the 11th anniversary of the start of the Iraq War, members of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) will come together in Seattle to highlight the needs and leadership of area veterans. IAVA is connecting with veterans in the community, as well as meeting with supporters and local media about important issues, including combatting veteran suicide, which will be the focus of next week's Storm the Hill advocacy event in Washington, DC. On Tuesday night at 6 pm, IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff will host a membership event with local veterans at Black Bottle Gastrotavern. Also speaking will be Jason Hansman, IAVA's Senior Program Manager for Health – a Washington State native who served in Iraq and was stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

“As we approach the 11th anniversary of the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan begins to draw down, we never should forget Americans who sacrificed the most during these past 12 years,” said IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff. “Seattle has a vibrant veterans community that is on the front lines of our fight to improve the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families.”

On Wednesday, Rieckhoff will attend the Starbucks Annual Meeting of Shareholders as a guest of the Schultz Family Foundation.

There are more than 31,000 Seattle-area veterans, including more than 4,000 who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Seattle veterans face a number of critical challenges. More than 368,000 veterans are stuck in the VA backlog, including more than 13,086 in the Seattle regional office, who are waiting more than 125 days for a claim. The Seattle office has the fifth largest amount of backlogged claims among the 57 regional offices in the nation. The average wait time here is 156.8 days. Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor statistics reported a 9.2% unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans during the month of February – a jump from 7.9% in January. Washington post-9/11 veterans face a staggering 16.4 unemployment rate.

Suicide is a top concern for new veterans: at least 22 veterans commit suicide every day, and a recent study found that the suicide rate among young male veterans rose by 44 percent in the past three years. Last week, Rieckhoff [testified](#) before Congress demanding action to combat suicide.

To advance IAVA's public policies, including combatting suicide, IAVA will be holding Storm the Hill March 22-28. Storm the Hill is IAVA's signature advocacy and leadership development program that brings the stories of the more than 2.5 million veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan to Washington, DC.

Note to media: Please contact press@IAVA.org to attend Tuesday night's membership event or schedule an interview with Paul Rieckhoff or Jason Hansman.