

[Southern Florida Vets Unite to Combat Suicide](#)

Fort Lauderdale, FL (April 5, 2014) – Florida veterans and supporters of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) will unite at a membership event Monday night hosted by IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff. The event will take place on Monday, April 7 at 6 p.m. at YOLO, located at 333 East Las Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale. Local vets who would like to attend can RSVP [here](#) to the event.

Last month, IAVA launched a yearlong Campaign to Combat Suicide during the 10th annual “Storm the Hill” week of advocacy in Washington DC. In meetings with White House officials, Members of Congress, and leaders at the VA and the Pentagon, veterans had the chance to share IAVA’s recently released 2014 Policy Agenda for veterans. The agenda lists important issues and proposed solutions for some of the main challenges facing veterans who have returned from war over the last decade, including the group’s number one issue of veteran suicide. Read the 2014 IAVA Policy Agenda [here](#).

“As one of the states with the largest military and veteran communities, Florida is on the front lines of our fight to improve the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families,” said IAVA Founder and CEO Paul Rieckhoff. “Our vets are facing numerous challenges – from gaps in mental health care to waiting for disability benefits. As the Afghanistan War continues to draw down, and more of our brave men and women return home, it is crucial we meet their needs.”

There are more than 1,559,000 Florida veterans, including more than 171,000 who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Florida veterans face a number of critical challenges. More than 350,000 veterans are stuck in the Veterans Affairs disability claims backlog, including more than 25,000 in the St. Petersburg regional office, who are waiting more than 125 days for a claim. The average wait time in Florida is 177.3 days.

In Florida, as well as across the country, 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.

As part of the “We’ve Got Your Back: IAVA’s Campaign to Combat Suicide,” IAVA is calling on Congress to pass comprehensive legislation expanding mental health care for veterans and ensuring that they have extended access to that care. IAVA is pushing for bipartisan support for The Suicide Prevention for America’s Veterans Act (SAV Act) – historic legislation introduced in late March by U.S. Senator John Walsh of Montana, the first Iraq War combat vet ever to serve in the Senate.

IAVA is also demanding President Obama issue an Executive Order addressing

the often problem plagued coordination of records and care between the Department of Defense and the VA and to appoint a National Director of Suicide Prevention. Mr. Rieckhoff will speak to these issues and more at Monday evening's event.