

# Veterans Look to State of the Union for Mental Health Care Help

***President should publicly address veteran suicide and reaffirm support for bipartisan Clay Hunt SAV Act***

WASHINGTON, D.C. (January 20, 2015) – Ahead of this evening’s State of the Union Address, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) – the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that represents post-9/11 veterans and their families – urges the President to publicly reaffirm his support for the bipartisan and popular [Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans \(SAV\) Act](#). Veteran service organizations, lawmakers from both parties and partners such as the American Psychiatric Association all support the vital legislation, named after Marine veteran Clay Hunt who died by suicide in 2011.

Last week, the historic legislation, spearheaded by IAVA, gained serious momentum in Washington. The House version, [H.R. 203](#), unanimously passed the House last Monday. Tomorrow, the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee is scheduled to consider the bill during its [business meeting](#).

“Tonight, veterans expect to hear President Obama clearly state that he has our back by supporting the Clay Hunt SAV Act,” said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. “This is the one night he needs to remind people veterans exist. After more than 13 years at war, veterans and their families want to hear the President take real action on the critical issue of mental health. This is also the first State of the Union since the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs scandal, and the President should use this opportunity to restore trust with our community.”

Rieckhoff continued, “No doubt, the President will repeat his call for Congress to pass bipartisan bills that he can sign into law. No other legislation has Congress more unified than our bill to combat veteran suicide. The administration’s support is the exact kind of pressure we need to implore the Senate to follow the House’s lead and move quickly on the SAV Act. For more than a year, our members have been following this issue closely and are frustrated by the continued delay. Over that time, some have lost battle buddies and friends, while others have personally struggled with invisible injuries. The President has the bully pulpit to announce that the status quo of 22 veterans dying by suicide each day is no longer acceptable. We urge him to sit down and meet with Susan and Richard Selke, parents of Clay Hunt, who have been fighting selflessly for months to make sure not one more veteran experiences the difficulties their son did. With the solution in reach, not one more veteran should have to overcome bureaucracies and red tape in order to access quality mental health care.”

“IAVA also looks forward to Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) delivering the Republican response to the State of the Union Address. As the first female

combat veteran elected to serve in the U.S. Senate, Sen. Ernst is in a unique position to fight for the nation's veterans, particularly the female soldiers who bravely served the country. Sen. Ernst served in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and currently serves as a Lt. Colonel in the Iowa Army National Guard. IAVA urges her to publicly address the veteran suicide crisis and to endorse urgent passage of the SAV Act as well." Rieckhoff concluded.

Tonight, IAVA members are invited to watch the State of the Union live in its New York and D.C. offices. More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Veterans will be live-tweeting the address using the hashtag #SOTUVets.