

Wilkie's Confirmation Hearing Disappoints

New York, NY (June 27, 2018) – Following the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs confirmation hearing for Mr. Robert Wilkie to be the next Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the leading voice of the Post-9/11 generation of veterans, was disappointed that many of the biggest issues impacting the post-9/11 generation were not given their due diligence.

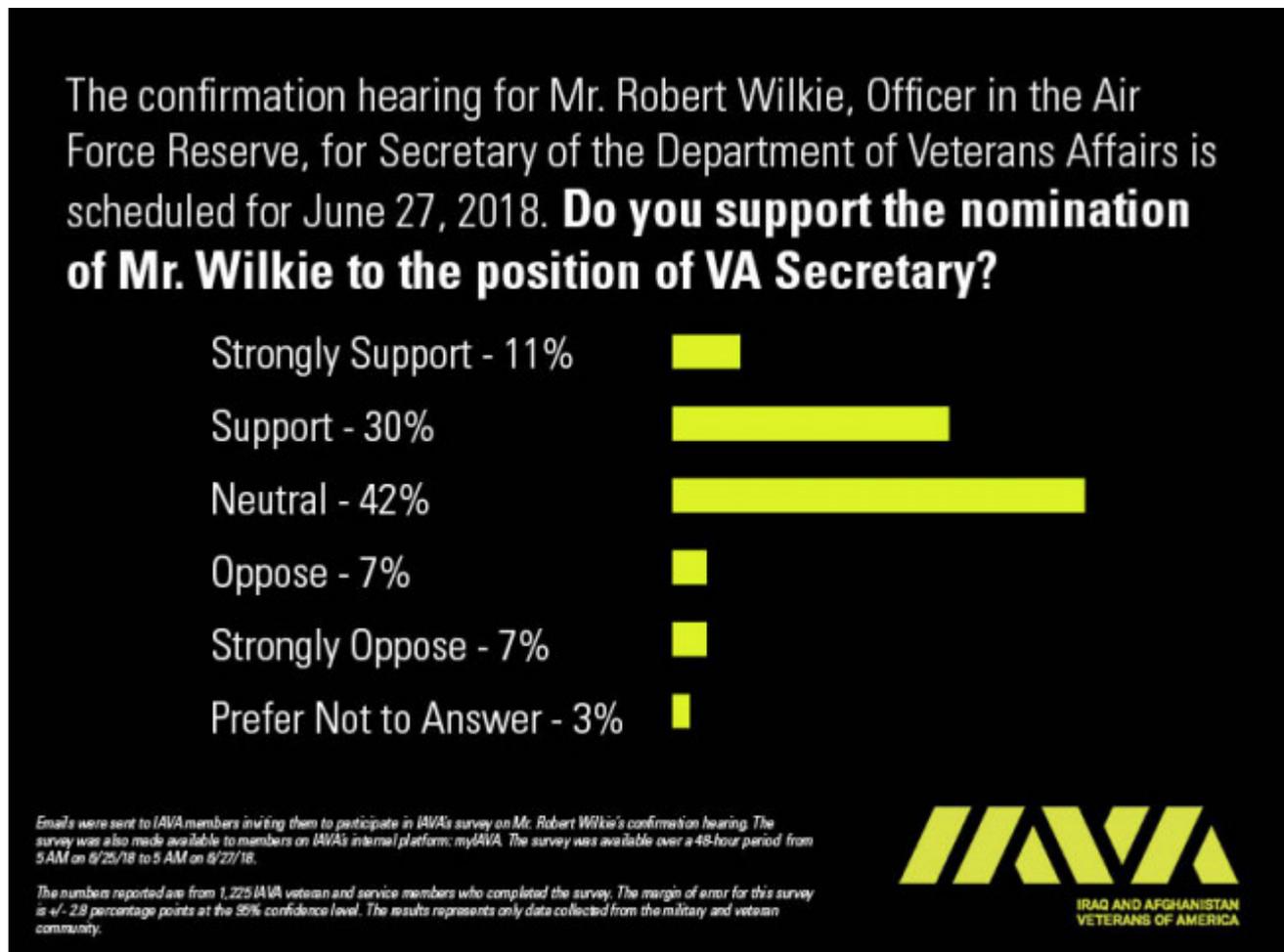
IAVA's [Big 6 Priorities](#) are the biggest issues impacting the post-9/11 generation as defined by our members. [The day after a veteran tragically, intentionally set himself on fire at the Georgia Capitol](#), IAVA looked to the nominee to focus remarks specifically on them—in addition to the many additional issues outlined in the [IAVA Policy Agenda](#):

1. Combat suicide among troops and veterans
2. Recognize and improve services for women veterans
3. Defend veteran and military education benefits
4. Defend and reform government support for today's veterans
5. Support injuries from burn pits and other toxic exposures
6. Empower veterans who want to utilize cannabis

However, throughout a relatively collegial confirmation hearing, IAVA was disappointed that our Big 6 Priorities received very little focus. While reforming VA and improving services for women veterans were given broad and often sweeping responses, veteran suicide, the GI Bill and cannabis for veterans received almost no attention. On PTSD Awareness Day, the issue and a plan to tackle it was hardly mentioned. Thanks only to a question from Senator Sherrod Brown (OH), Mr. Wilkie briefly addressed the critical issue of burn pits.

IAVA's Founder and CEO, Paul Rieckhoff, attended the hearing with IAVA members and staff and said, "As we've seen for the past decade, the confirmation hearings for VA Secretary is unfortunately and consistently the easiest in Washington. That's a disservice to the VA and to veterans nationwide. The position of VA Secretary is one of the toughest in the nation, and requires a dedicated leader ready to step up to serve the millions of veterans around the nation that depend on the VA. Veterans deserve more and it's disappointing that the hearing was not more rigorous. Especially after all the recent tumult at VA and the Dr. Ronny Jackson debacle. IAVA calls on Mr. Willkie today to address IAVA's Big 6 Priorities in writing or whatever way he can. Our members want to ensure they've been heard. There is obviously a lot going on in Washington, but Senators still need to do their homework on our newest VA Secretary nominee. And days before July 4, we hope members of the media will do the same. We look forward to continuing the conversation with Mr. Wilkie and to seeing members of Congress address the issues impacting the post-9/11 generation of veterans."

Prior to the hearing, [IAVA released an exclusive poll](#) of IAVA veterans' member views on Mr. Wilkie's nomination. The poll was taken over a 2 day period prior to the hearing and surveyed more than 1,200 IAVA veterans and servicemembers. It found that 41% of veterans support Mr. Wilkie for the role of VA Secretary, 14% did not and 42% were undecided about him for the critical leadership position.



IAVA members were also able to submit questions to Mr. Wilkie; [thousands have responded and many are featured online at IAVA.org here](#). This is a visual representation of responses to an open-ended question asking what IAVA members would like to see asked of Mr. Wilkie.

