

[Women Veterans Still Badly Under-Recognized and Under-Supported By Washington](#)

New York, NY (October 5, 2018) – Today, as the world watches the Kavanaugh vote, and continues to debate issues relating to women and survivors of sexual assault, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the leading advocacy voice for post-9/11 veterans, after a week of generating headlines for our Big 6 Advocacy Priorities, ended a historic [“Storm the Hill”](#) grassroots advocacy activation week in Washington with a focus on women veterans and the groundbreaking #SheWhoBorneTheBattle campaign.

The bipartisan *Deborah Sampson Act*, sponsored in the House by Representatives Elizabeth Esty (D-CT) and veterans Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) and Martha McSally (R-AZ), and in the Senate by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and John Boozman (R-AR), is named for a Revolutionary War soldier who disguised herself as a man to fight in the war. The historic bill now has [75 House cosponsors](#), [plus 29 in the Senate](#).

“After the last few weeks of a national discussion focused on sexual assault, the *Deborah Sampson Act* for women veterans is more urgent than ever. Plenty of politicians say they support women veterans. If they really support women veterans, they should show it now by signing on to this critical legislation. And any candidate running for office should show they are committed to our community by focusing on the critical moral, social and national security imperatives of this campaign,” said [Paul Rieckhoff](#), IAVA’s Founder and CEO. He continued, delivering a message directly to Members of Congress: “Many of you are stuck in Washington right now waiting for a possible Kavanaugh vote. While you’re still there, waiting, please stop talking and show women troops and vets that you are committed to their health, safety and well-being by signing on to support the *Deborah Sampson Act* now.”

Over 345,000 women have deployed since 9/11. While the number of male veterans is expected to decline in the next decades, the population of women veterans will increase. Women continue to take on new roles and responsibilities throughout the services. Yet, their service and sacrifice is often overlooked, to their peril. [New suicide numbers released last week by the Department of Veterans Affairs showed that in 2016, the suicide rate for women vets was 1.8 higher than for civilians.](#)

Though the quality of care and services provided by the VA for all veterans needs to dramatically improve, this is particularly critical for women veterans. **From 2003 through 2012, women’s use of VA health care services [increased 80 percent](#), with women veterans proportionately using mental health services more intensively than men.** Not only do women veterans encounter barriers to care and benefits, they do so in a culture that often does not accept them or fully recognize them as veterans. [They also face stunningly](#)

[high rates of sexual assault.](#)

Despite calls from IAVA and dozens of leading allied veterans and military organizations, President Trump has remained silent on calls for the VA to change its motto and support the *Deborah Sampson Act*.

The time to act is now. Improving access to care and benefits while changing the underlying culture to one inclusive of women is imperative to the success of the VA. This glaring problem is best exemplified in the gendered and outdated motto that greets every person, male and female, who walk into the VA: "To care for *him* who shall have borne the battle and for *his* widow, and *his* orphan."

IAVA's [She Who Borne the Battle](#) campaign is focused on righting this wrong and transforming the landscape for women veterans in our country forever. We need to take the American people to a place where women vets are envisioned just as readily as men. Congress must act to not only bring equality to VA healthcare for women, but also resource-sensible services like childcare. "Access to Quality Care for Our Veterans" should be gender blind, which in the case of supporting single parents, can impact men just as much as women.

OUR GOALS INCLUDE:

1. Foster Culture and Leadership Change in the VA
2. Strengthen Data and Transparency Through Research
3. Support Women's Peer Programs
4. Increase Initiatives to Better Inform on Existing Programs
5. Require High Level of Community Care Cooperation

Time Magazine has called IAVA "...the most important organization representing the new generation of veterans."