



Nov. 29, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Speaker Ryan and Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America's (IAVA) more than 425,000 members, I thank you for the work you and your colleagues have done to improve the lives of veterans. We look forward to building on our past successes to find common ground between your caucuses in support of the post-9/11 generation of veterans as we embark upon the 115th Congress.

As you're aware, the percentage of Members of Congress who have served in the military has decreased dramatically in the last several decades to only about 20% today, down from a peak of more than 70% in the House and Senate in 1971. Reports also suggest that the share of veterans serving on Congressional staffs is now less than 1%.

We applaud the many in Congress who have not served in uniform and work tirelessly on behalf of veterans, but believe that the Committee on Veterans Affairs should be led by veterans whenever possible. Military service understandably gives one a unique perspective, not only on the defense of our nation, but how we care for those defending it when they return home. And with so few veterans in halls of Congress to help shape the debate, it's essential that we at least have veterans guiding the agenda for the work before the Committee.

We are incredibly optimistic about the work we'll be able to get done together on the road ahead and thank you in advance for having our backs on that journey. Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Paul Rieckhoff
Founder and CEO
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)