

# Where they stand

**As Election Day approaches, see how the 2020 presidential candidates view the issues most important to you**

*DAV—which is a nonpartisan organization—believes its members deserve to know where incumbent President Donald Trump and Democratic nominee, former Vice President Joe Biden, stand on key veterans issues ahead of the general elections Nov. 3. DAV asked both candidates to discuss specific policies they would propose regarding particular issues. Their responses are presented below as a way for our members to compare the candidates' positions on issues affecting America's veterans and their families. The cooperation of both candidates and their campaign staffs is greatly appreciated.*

**1. What would be your top priorities as president next year to address the many challenges facing veterans, particularly those who have become injured or ill as a result of their service?**



Trump

**Trump:** From day one, my administration has been on a mission of historic scope and scale to deliver results for our great

veterans. After years of shameful scandal and neglect under the Obama-Biden administration, we have fundamentally reorganized the VA from top to bottom and reestablished a crucial principle: American veterans deserve the highest standard of care anywhere in the world, and that's what they're getting.

The number of veterans who say they trust VA services has increased 19% under this administration, the highest in the history of service. That's a tremendous increase but there's more work to do.

In addition to our bold actions that reformed the VA, established permanent veteran choice and hold bad VA employees accountable, we are committed to ending the tragedy of veteran suicide which demands audacious action at every level of society.

Twenty veterans and service members take their own lives every single day. They fought our battles overseas, and now we must join them in winning this new battle at home. We're expanding our partnerships with military and veteran organizations, universities, faith-based leaders, businesses, nonprofits at all levels of government to establish specialized support systems for our veterans.

These partnerships will allow veterans flexibility in their care and treatment. We know that some veterans want to go to the VA and some don't—by empowering civil society groups already doing impactful work we will bridge that deadly gap.

The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) task force has already partnered with 30 large corporations to help them prioritize the mental health of their employees, and we will continue adding to that number.

We're also launching a national research strategy. The PREVENTS Office will work with the greatest scientific minds

across our nation to evaluate research to better understand the trauma service members face; identify effective treatments; and communicate their findings to the public.

My administration is marshaling every resource to improve VA health care, evaluate and address emerging critical issues like toxic exposure, and stop the crisis of veteran suicide.

No one is more committed to protecting our nation's most treasured heroes and keeping faith with them than my administration and me.

To see the full list of our accomplishments for our great veterans, I encourage you to visit <https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/veterans/>.



Biden

**Biden:** I have long believed that we as a nation have one sacred obligation: to properly prepare I have long believed that we as a nation have one sacred obligation: to properly prepare and equip our troops when we send them into harm's way, and to care for them and their families—both during their service and after. As President, my Administration will fulfill that obligation and ensure that veterans and their families have the support they need to thrive in their lives

post-service. This is a personal commitment for the entire Biden family. Jill and I know what it means to have a loved one serving far from home, and the Bidens will always have the backs of our veterans and their families.

While in the Senate, I fought to improve prosthetics programs for our wounded veterans, expand mammogram coverage for our female veterans, and advocate for Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and other toxins to have access to the care and benefits they deserve. Then, during the Obama-Biden Administration, we led efforts to expand coverage for exposure to Agent Orange, cut veteran unemployment by half, and reduced veteran homelessness by almost 50 percent. We cut the VA claims backlog by nearly 90 percent in just over three years, increased funding for veterans mental health by more than 70 percent, and saw the number of veterans accessing mental health services through the VA increase by 80 percent. We also implemented the Blue Button access program for veterans to view and download their personal health records. Together with First Lady Michelle Obama, Jill created and led Joining Forces, an initiative to raise awareness of the challenges veterans, service members, and their families face, and support them with educational, employment, and wellness opportunities.

But more needs to be done. My priorities going forward are:

- *Providing Veterans World Class Healthcare to Meet Their Specific Needs:* In a Biden Administration, ALL veterans will receive the care they have earned, and I will ensure that providers in VA facilities and community care settings are prepared and equipped to provide high quality, culturally competent care to women veterans and LGBTQ veterans. Additionally, I will ensure that each VA facility has at least one full-time women's primary care physician; and, within 200 days of taking office, make available a women veterans training module for community healthcare providers. I will expand the list of

presumptive conditions, increase access to VA care, increase research funding for emerging service-connected health conditions, and ensure those with prosthesis are able to upgrade their equipment at no cost. I will also ensure that the caregivers of these veterans are fully integrated into the care team and are supported appropriately. I will expand eHealth and Behavioral Healthcare programs to improve access to care and address the surge in demand for treatment of veterans suffering from homelessness, substance use disorder, and PTSD.

- *Driving Progress to Eliminate Veterans Homelessness and Bring Down Suicide Rates:* □ Within my first 200 days in office, I will publish a plan to improve access to care, lower veteran homelessness, and bring down the rate of veteran suicides. I will create a Center of Excellence to collect and share information and best practices, and partner with Congress to provide the resources to make it a reality. Within my first year in office, we will eliminate wait times for those veterans experiencing suicidal ideation so that they are immediately taken into treatment.
- *Creating Meaningful Employment and Educational Opportunities:* □ I will focus on creating tangible economic opportunities for veterans and their families by strengthening the Transition Assistance Program; improving access to job training, and ensuring proper implementation of the Forever GI Bill.
- *Improving VA Management and Accountability:* □ Outdated tools and management processes have hindered VA's ability to fulfill its mission to our veterans. A Biden administration will increase the VA's capacity and oversee a generational upgrade of systems, using best practices and modern technology. I will invest in human resources to ensure that efficiency and quality of care is optimized. Across the department, we will focus on cultural competency to make sure that veterans are

receiving best-in-class, patient-centered care. A Biden Administration will also root out the causes of undue delays and errors in claims processing so that veterans can get the care and benefits they have earned as quickly as possible.

- *Addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic*: COVID-19 has exposed critical weaknesses in the VA healthcare system. I will ensure that our veterans have access to COVID-19 tests and that our VA healthcare workers have the necessary PPE to administer care to our veterans safely. I will use the federal government's full power to directly address the implications of COVID-19 for veterans and their families. I will protect the health and safety of our front-line healthcare and essential workers, but also older and at-risk Americans, including millions of veterans in the VA health system.

## **2. What is your vision for strengthening veterans health care and the VA health care system over the next decade, particularly in light of the national health emergency we are currently experiencing?**

**Trump:** The VA played an absolutely pivotal role in responding to this pandemic, and we want it to be strong and capable. Unfortunately, much of VA's infrastructure was built decades ago and it doesn't capture the current laydown of where veterans are in the nation.

This is why the VA Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission is critical. My administration remains focused on reducing waste, cutting bureaucracy and streamlining access. We must ensure our incredible resources are brought to bear where they are needed most, understanding that reallocation of resources does not mean a reduction of care for those who need and deserve it.

Tragically, the share of our population with military experience is declining and the veteran population is decreasing as our older generation of veterans enter their twilight years. We have the dignified responsibility to care for them and be agile for the future and ensure the VA is where it needs to be.

This is why community care is imperative and has been a cornerstone of our approach to veteran care and veteran choice. Our veterans in rural areas and away from VA hospitals have not been forgotten, and we recognize they must have ready access to quality care that does not burden them.

Our dramatic expansion of VA telehealth early in my presidency established a growing solution, proved its efficacy and served us well during the pandemic. This service significantly expanded access to care and simplified patient access.

Satisfaction with the VA outpatient care has reached 89%, and we're not going to rest until we have it at 100%. We will continue to build on our success, and by the end of this fiscal year, all primary care and mental health providers will be able to deliver care to patients, both in-person and via a mobile web-based device.

**Biden:** More than 85% of the VA's discretionary budget goes to health care. As president, I will fight for the budget resources that the VA needs to fund safe, effective health care for our veterans. I will also make sure that VA leadership knows that they will be accountable to the American people, to veterans and to me. This starts by making sure that we have a VA management team that understands and delivers on our veterans' policy priorities. When I am president, the measure of our success will be veterans in their local communities seeing and feeling on-the-ground services that meet or exceed the highest professional health care standards.

The VA's most valuable asset is its people. I promise to invest in the people and systems that provide VA services—about 250,000 of which are union members and over 100,000 of whom are veterans themselves. It is essential that we also complete a comprehensive and timely assessment of staffing to ensure that we are incentivizing, recruiting and retaining talented health care professionals. With this assessment in hand, we will be able to build new and innovative programs to attract the staff we need to provide the highest quality care possible. I will also make sure that health care workers are working to the full scope of their licenses.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown how much we depend on the VA to have the capacity to deliver care under challenging conditions. I will always ensure that our VA employees and patients have the necessary personal protective equipment to provide safe services and care.

Undoubtedly, VA capacity for direct care has been weakened over the past several years as the current administration has worked to aggressively outsource health care services. I will find the right balance between care delivered in the VA system and the convenience of accessing care in our communities closer to home. More important, I'll do it transparently and with the help of veteran service organizations (VSOs) like DAV.

Implementation of the VA's new Electronic Health Records—central to modernized care—has been slow, plagued by delays, mismanagement and perpetually missed deadlines. I will be certain that we have the right people—VA officials and contractors—that place the interests of veterans and clinical staff above any other consideration, and approach the challenge with the serious focus and attention it deserves.

We need to pay special attention to the upcoming infrastructure review, mandated by the MISSION Act, to ensure

that critical VA facilities are not shut down and that veterans have a voice in this decision-making process. I will make certain that VSOs have a seat at the table, as required by law, because only by working together do we find the right solutions for our veterans.

**3. What is your vision for ensuring veterans receive all the benefits they have earned, including those based on exposure to Agent Orange, burn pits and other toxic substances?**

**Trump:** All veterans who are injured because of their service merit our nation's honor and care. We are looking carefully at multiple legislative proposals surrounding toxic exposures to ensure the solutions are guided by science and in the best interest of our impacted veterans. Just as we have examined other veteran issues and attacked them with vigor and dedication, we are doing the same here.

We do not want and will not have another Agent Orange scenario where our wonderful Vietnam veterans suffered for years without options or recourse. My administration has never abandoned our veterans and I don't intend to on this important issue. We've made a promise to the men and women who have courageously fought for our nation and we will keep it.

**Biden:** For decades, I have supported concurrent retirement and disability pay, and a Biden administration will expand the list of presumptive conditions to make sure that veterans who experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI) or were exposed to burn pits or other toxins are able to access care. I will also increase research funding for burn pit exposure and TBIs.

We simply cannot experience another Agent Orange-like crisis. We cannot ask veterans who have been exposed to toxic substances in the line of duty to wait for vital health care.

Veterans deserve better.

Veterans seeking treatment for conditions related to toxic exposures have encountered far too many barriers to care, despite legislation designed to ease these challenges in the past several years. The Caregiver Support Program has suffered the same fate: a clear legislative requirement but a flawed implementation by the VA. These programs have lacked the leadership, transparency and necessary collaboration with VSOs to get the job done. In a Biden administration, I will ensure that VA leadership is open, inclusive and focused on delivering concrete results in these critical areas.

In addition to making sure that we extend benefits to needed areas, I will improve our efforts to cut claim review and adjudication wait times through improved staffing and technology.

With your support, we can get this done.