BPTL Webinar on Vision for Veterans Outreach to Congressional Candidates

May 15, 2020
Vision for Veterans Campaign

• Share DAV policy priorities with all federal candidates and officeholders

• Provide both principles and concrete action items for each issue

• Seek written campaign promises

• Infuse DAV policy priorities into national campaigns & party platforms
Develop an Outreach Plan

- Department Commanders, Adjutants & BPTLs develop outreach plans that are appropriate for each state
- Use DAV members who have existing relationships with particular candidates and officeholders
- Have at least one resident in each congressional district for meetings with House candidates
- Meetings can be in person, if appropriate, via virtual web-based platforms (Zoom, Skype, etc.) or by phone
- Share **Vision for Veterans** materials ahead of meetings
Identifying Congressional Candidates

- Most States Still In Primary Campaign Phase
- Ask Incumbent’s Congressional Office for Campaign Contacts
- Contact County or State Political Parties for Campaign Contacts
- Find Contact Info from Campaign Websites
- Search Internet for Campaign Contacts
BEFORE Candidate Meetings

- Request Meeting (or Phone Call) with Candidate or Campaign Staff
- Can Use Sample Meeting Request from DAV
- Email or Deliver *Vision for Veterans* Package Before Meeting
- Determine Who Will Lead Discussion
DURING Candidate Meetings

• Provide Overview of DAV National, Department and/or Chapters
• Briefly Present Vision for Veterans Issues
• Refer Questions to DAV Legislative Team
• Seek Firm Commitments – *in Writing* – for Action Items
AFTER Candidate Meetings

- Follow Up with Thank You Message
- Report Meeting Results Back to DAV Legislative Team
- Complete and Return Feedback Form
- Continue to Follow Up with Candidates
Protect and strengthen benefits for injured, ill and disabled veterans

- Oppose COLA round down, taxing VA benefits or limiting eligibility for TDIU
- Create new disability presumptions for the four (4) pending Agent Orange conditions
- Eliminate concurrent receipt penalty for less than 50% disabled veterans
Ensure timely and accurate delivery of all earned veterans benefits

- Enact legislation (S. 2950) to concede exposure to burn pits
- Allow appellants to participate in Board telehearings from any location
- VA must establish metrics that emphasize quality & accuracy, not just speed & timeliness
Sustain a comprehensive, high-quality veterans health care system

- VA must remain the coordinator and primary provider of care for veterans
- Eliminate all copayments for service-disabled veterans utilizing CCN urgent care facilities
- Implement a 3-year plan to eliminate vacant health care positions throughout VA
Improve veterans mental health care and suicide prevention efforts

- **VA must remain the leader of national efforts to address the veterans suicide crisis**
- **VA & DoD must expand research, raise awareness and lower stigma**
- **Veterans must have timely access to family-centered mental health care services, including family therapy and marriage counseling**

**OVERVIEW**
Veteran suicide has become a top priority for the VA and congressional leaders in recent years, yet despite increasing staff, adding new programming, and creating new ways to identify and monitor at-risk veterans, measurable effects are proving elusive. The VA's 2019 report on suicide shows that veterans are 1.8 times more likely to commit suicide than non-veteran peers. Women veterans are 2.2 times more likely than non-veteran women peers to take their lives. The VA reports that about 17 veterans and three members of the National Guard and Reserve take their lives each day.

**PRINCIPLES**
- In order to implement an effective public health plan to reduce veteran suicide, the VA must remain the leader of national efforts to address the crisis and the coordinator of care for veterans who rely upon it for care. Ensuring interagency cooperation with the VA in addressing the crisis must be a priority of our national leaders, similar to the manner in which the VA has effectively reduced homelessness through coordinated interventions at all levels of government and with nonprofit agencies.
- The VA must submit robust funding requests that reflect demand for services, and Congress must appropriate sufficient resources, to effectively implement mental health and suicide prevention programs and deploy prevention resources, including the VA’s use of predictive analytics to identify and treat those most at risk. In particular, the VA must be fully empowered and funded to develop and use effective recruitment and retention measures to fill critical vacancies for psychiatrists, psychologists and peer specialists.
- The VA and Department of Defense must expand research into suicide prevention to raise awareness and lower the stigma for veterans seeking mental health treatment; identify effective behavioral solutions for different populations, including improving lethal means safety efforts; and identify and deploy the best evidence-based treatment strategies for veterans at risk of suicide.

**ACTIONS ITEMS**
1. Veterans must have timely access to family-centered mental health care services, including family therapy and marriage counseling. Marriage and social connectedness are critical protective factors against suicide and suicidal behavior.
2. Non-VA mental health providers must be required to complete training in delivering evidence-based clinical protocols comparable to those VA providers use and develop cultural competency to best serve veterans. The VA has clinical and cultural expertise lacking in the private sector, which is essential to providing services to the most at-risk veterans. As a result, VA participating in the new Veterans Community Care Network must meet the same quality standards and training requirements as VA providers for delivery of effective care.
Provide equitable benefits and services for women and minority veterans

- VA leadership must change the culture to create an environment welcoming to ALL veterans

- VA’s Women’s Health program should be elevated to an Office of Women’s Health

- VA must hire additional women and minority peer counselors to better match changing veteran demographics
Expand support for families and survivors of disabled veterans

- Expand the caregiver program to include veterans seriously disabled due to illness.
- Increase DIC rates to 55% of disability compensation and index them for inflation.
- Change DIC to a graduated benefit beginning at five years for 50% of the full benefit amount, increasing proportionally to 100% at 10 years.

OVERVIEW

Families and survivors of disabled veterans often have significant financial and emotional burdens and challenges. The VA provides limited support to some families of disabled veterans, most notably through its Program of Comprehensive Assistance for caregivers created in 2018. As part of the VA MISSION Act, Congress required the VA to begin expanding its caregiver program on October 1, 2019, to eligible seriously disabled veterans who served during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam War era; however, the VA failed to meet this deadline. For surviving spouses of disabled veterans, the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program offers modest financial support following the death of their loved ones; however, this benefit is not adequate to meet the needs of many survivors.

PRINCIPLES

- Our nation has an obligation to ensure that families and survivors of those who served, particularly those who suffered serious injuries or disabilities, receive benefits sufficient to honor and support them.
- All family caregivers of seriously disabled veterans, regardless of the era the veteran served in or whether their disability was caused by injury or illness, deserve equal access to the VA's caregiver assistance program and benefits.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Expand eligibility for the VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Caregivers to include all seriously injured AND II veterans from all wars and eras. The VA must comply with the congressional mandate to include veterans from all wars, and Congress must enact legislation to expand the program to include veterans whose disabilities are the result of service-related illnesses.
2. Increase DIC rates to 55% of disability compensation and index them for inflation. Currently, DIC provides a surviving spouse only 60% of the disability compensation provided to a 100% disabled veteran, even though many survivors, particularly those who also served as the veteran’s caregiver, reported they had no source of income other than the veteran’s disability compensation.
3. Change DIC to a graduated benefit to make survivors eligible at nine years for 50% of the full benefit amount, increasing proportionally to 100% at 10 years. The DIC program would be more equitable if survivors were eligible for a partial DIC benefit starting after five years of the veteran’s being totally disabled, and proportionately increasing to full DIC entitlement at 10 years.
4. Reduce the remarriage age for a surviving spouse to remain eligible for DIC to 53. The Civil Service Retirement System and Department of Defense Survivor Benefit Plan program both allow survivors to remain eligible for survivor benefits if they remarry at age 65 or older, the DIC program should do the same.
5. Provide family members of veterans suffering from post-deployment mental health challenges or other service-connected conditions access to psychological support and mental health counseling services. Providing access to psychological services for families of disabled veterans not only helps their mental health but also supports the recovery and rehabilitation of the veteran.
Enhance veterans transition, employment and economic empowerment

- Create a Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration
- Establish a federal work projects program to guarantee jobs for service-disabled veterans
- Expand veterans’ eligibility for VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program beyond 48 months and eliminate the 12-year delimiting date
DAV’s Election DOs and DON’Ts

DAV encourages you, as an individual, to register to vote, to vote in elections and to actively support the candidates of your choice. However, as a member of DAV, you have the responsibility to ensure your activities as a private citizen do not give the appearance that DAV supports or opposes any political candidate. To do so would violate our congressional charter, national Constitution and Bylaws and the law and regulations governing DAV’s tax exempt status.
Dos and Don’ts

**DO** get involved in political campaigns, rallies, forums and town hall meetings, as an individual. It’s your right as an American citizen—and a disabled veteran—to support the candidate of your choice.

**DON’T** support a candidate, or attend political events in support of a candidate, in the name of DAV, nor should you give the appearance that DAV is supporting a particular candidate. Wearing DAV caps and shirts can give the appearance of support by the organization.
DAV’s Election DOs and DON’Ts

**DO** hold open candidate forums or town hall meetings so the candidates can discuss their positions on issues affecting disabled veterans, their families and survivors.

**DON’T** forget to invite all candidates to the open forum/town hall meeting and make reasonable attempts to accommodate their schedules. It is not necessary that all candidates accept the invitation or attend for you to hold the event or that the candidates appear on the same day or at the same time.
DAV’s Election DOs and DON’Ts

**DO** make candidates aware of the issues facing wounded, injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors, either as an individual or as a member/leader of DAV or its subdivision.

**DON’T** forget to review DAV’s national resolutions to ensure your position is in line with—and not contrary to or unsupported by—DAV’s adopted resolutions when speaking on behalf of the organization.

**DON’T** forget that, while DAV provides services to all veterans, our legislative goals focus on the betterment of wartime disabled veterans their families and survivors.
For info or questions about DAV’s *Vision for Veterans* Congressional Candidate Outreach initiative, contact our Legislative Department at:

[legislativepublic@dav.org](mailto:legislativepublic@dav.org)

(202) 554-3501