



U.S. REPRESENTATIVE  
New York's Fourth District **Kathleen Rice**

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## **Rep. Rice Condemns Refusal to Debate Amendment to Revise the Department of Veterans Affairs Motto**

*The Amendment Would Change the Department's Motto to be More Inclusive of Women  
Veterans and Survivors of Women Servicemembers Killed in Action*

**WASHINGTON** – U.S. Representative Kathleen Rice condemned House leadership today for their refusal to allow debate on her proposed amendment to the Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act (H.R. 5895), which would change the motto for the Department of Veterans Affairs to be more inclusive. The current motto is a quotation from President Abraham Lincoln that reads “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan,” which fails to recognize the service and sacrifice of so many women in uniform. The number of women serving on active duty has grown substantially in recent decades – from approximately 55,000 in the 1970s to over 200,000 today – and as a result, the number of women veterans is expected to reach a record high.

“As women continue to play an increasingly prominent and vital role in our armed forces, it’s unfathomable to me that any Member of Congress would refuse to even debate this amendment,” said **Representative Kathleen Rice**. Each year, women become a larger part of our veteran community and the Department of Veterans Affairs motto simply does not reflect that reality. The brave women who have worn our nation's uniform and their families deserve to be part of an organization that recognizes their service and sacrifice. Anything less is unacceptable.”

“It’s not surprising that millions of women veterans feel that they’re invisible when the motto of the very agency Americans intend to support them purposely excludes them and their families,”

said **Allison Jaslow, a former Army captain who served two tours in Iraq and the former executive director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.** “It’s extremely disappointing to hear that a simple step to allow Congress to show its support for women veterans by ensuring the VA motto reflects reality was blocked. Rep. Rice should be commended for her leadership, which tells women veterans not just that they’re seen, but after almost 17 years at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, that their service and the sacrifice of their loved ones is respected as much as the men they’ve served alongside.”

The VA’s current motto underscores larger feelings of disenfranchisement and inequality among women veterans. A study recently published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on mental health care services at VA provided insight into women veterans’ experiences at VA facilities and the challenges they face in accessing mental health services. The study found that women veterans:

- Are significantly more likely to believe that they are not entitled to or eligible for VA mental health services;
- Face unique barriers to VA care, largely related to challenges associated with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated system, as well as issues that are specific to military sexual trauma (MST); and
- Experience frustration with both having to prove they are veterans and combat veterans to VA doctors who question or belittle their war experience.

Blocking Rep. Rice’s amendment is part of a continued practice by Republican House leadership of preventing Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle from having their amendments debated and voted upon, making this Congress the most closed in history.

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