

VFW Names First Woman Veteran to Lead its National Legislative Efforts

VFW Life member and legislative advocacy expert says she's 'ready for the challenges the future holds'

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WASHINGTON — The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is proud to announce the selection of the first woman veteran as director of the VFW's National Legislative Service (NLS).

Kristina Keenan is a familiar and well-respected face on Capitol Hill. As a member of the NLS team since 2018, her tenacity and dedication have been proven time and again. Most notably, her advocacy efforts contributed greatly to the passing of the PACT Act — the largest expansion of veterans benefits since the Vietnam War. Her legislative victories also include passage of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act and the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act, among others.

Keenan has been recognized as one of the country's top lobbyists by the National Institute of Lobbying and Ethics (NILE) and the Washington, D.C., publication, *The Hill*.

"It is an absolute honor to serve veterans and the VFW. I am thrilled to be the organization's next legislative director," said Kristina Keenan. "I began my advocacy work with the VFW as a volunteer in 2016, focusing on women veteran issues and the Deborah Sampson Act. Two years later, I moved to Washington, D.C., to join the VFW's National Legislative Service. This journey has been incredible, especially being part of efforts over the past several years to advance toxic exposure legislation and the success of the PACT Act. I have learned so much from outstanding VFW leaders, and I hope to continue the organization's century-long legacy of legislative achievements."

Keenan, a veteran of the Minnesota Army National Guard, earned her VFW eligibility during a 2003 deployment to Bosnia. Immediately following her deployment, she volunteered for a second deployment to Bosnia, working as a tactical human intelligence team leader with an allied military intelligence battalion. Keenan finished her military

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service in 2005, with the rank of sergeant.

Following her military service, Keenan completed a bachelor's degree in political science at the American University of Paris in France and later earned a master's in human rights and humanitarian action from the *Institut d'études politiques de Paris* (Paris Institute of Political Studies, commonly known as Sciences Po). Kristina completed a 10-month internship in 2008, at NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), in Mons, Belgium, where she was an intelligence analyst on counternarcotics issues in Afghanistan.

As director of NLS, Keenan's responsibilities include the planning, coordination and implementation of the VFW's national legislative agenda with members of Congress, their staff, and other federal departments, agencies and organizations. Her goal is to work with Congress to create and protect all programs and services provided by the federal government to veterans, service members and their families, and to help defeat proposals that are not beneficial to America's veteran and military communities. This includes executing the VFW's annual Priority Goals, as it pertains to budgets, education, employment, health care, benefits and capital infrastructure as well as working on *The Independent Budget*, which is a comprehensive budget recommendation and policy document created by veterans for veterans.

She says she is ready for the challenges the future holds for the VFW Washington Office. "Together, I know we can successfully push forward the legislative priorities that are so important to VFW members, while also working to strengthen the VA system and fight for policies that uphold the dignity and well-being of those who have sacrificed so much for our country."

Keenan maintains her Life membership at VFW Post 605 in Paris, France — the oldest Post in Europe. She served two years as VFW Post Commander, and has held roles as VFW Department of Europe Chaplain, Student Veterans of America Chairwoman, and was a member of the National Women Veterans Advisory Committee.

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