

State Veterans Commission

Meeting Minutes

February 3, 2017

10:00 AM to 11:56 AM

Arrowheads Community Club, FTIG

Annville, PA 17003

Call to Order	Chairman John Brenner
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The Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 9:58AM by Chairman John Brenner.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was opened with an invocation and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by Vice Chairman Kit Watson.

Commission Introductions

Brig Gen Anthony Carrelli	The Adjutant General
Chairman John Brenner	State Veterans' Commission
Maj Gen (Ret) Eric Weller	Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs
Mr. John Pliska	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. Boyd "KC" Simpson	Commander, AMVETS
Mr. Thomas Brown	Commander, VFW
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, VFW
Mr. Michael Iacavazzi	Commander, DAV
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	Adjutant, DAV
Mr. Neil Appleby	President, Blinded Veterans Association
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	Commander, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Henry Desrosiers	President, County Directors for Veterans Affairs Association
Mr. Robert Cudworth	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Thomas Haberkorn	President, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Chris Fidler	Representative, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. Gordon Sheriff	Designee, Marine Corps League
Mr. Richard Fine	Designee, Jewish War Veterans
Mr. William Kelley	Representative, Korean War Veterans
Mr. Michael Mescavage	Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Kit Watson	Adjutant, American Legion
Mr. Carl Olshefskie	Commander, American Legion
Mr. Dominic Difrancesco	Member at Large
Ms. Jeannine Botta-Guth	Member at Large

Others Present

Michael Adelman	Network Director, VISN 4
Nate Silcox	Senate
Dwight Fuhrman	VFW
Belinda Albright	Northumberland County Veterans Affairs
Tim Cleveland	Tioga County Veterans Affairs
Colleen Washinger	Dauphin County Veterans Affairs
Tony Difrancesco	Dauphin County Veterans Affairs
Robert Gray	Military Officers Association of America
Keith Beebe	PA War Veterans Council

William Wright	Catholic War Veterans
C. L. Jackson	Adjutant, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Rich Hudzinski	Vietnam Veterans of America
Constance Snavelly	Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Paul DeVincenzo	American Legion
Bruce Foster	American Legion
Dan Osten	American Legion
Scott Sheely	PA Department of Agriculture
Brian Natali	DMVA-OVA
Ed Beck	DMVA-OVA
Chip Gilliland	DMVA-OVA
Mike Barrett	DMVA-CCO
Joyce Gibson	DMVA-OVA
Approval of the December 3, 2016 Meeting Minutes	
Motion: Mr. Difrancesco, Member at Large, made a motion to approve the minutes as presented	
Second: Mr. Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart, seconded the motion.	
The body agreed. The motion carried.	
Military Update	Brigadier General Anthony Carrelli
Brig Gen Carrelli introduced the new senior enlisted leader for Pennsylvania, CSM Harry Buchanan and Director, Joint Staff, Col David Wood.	
Total ARNG mobilized, 395; Total ANG mobilized, 82; Total PA NG mobilized, 721	
Large group returned from Kosovo recently and another group will return shortly from Jordan and Kuwait.	
Major warfighter exercise going on this year, our Armor Battalion going to Texas this summer along with all their equipment. Striker Brigade will go to Virginia with all their equipment. 5000 soldiers plus all of their equipment will be moving out of state for major exercises.	
Captain Arthur Halfpapp, WWII Veteran whose remains were found in Italy, will be inducted into the Pittsburgh Soldiers' and Sailors Museum, Hall of Valor on March 26, 2017. We will provide more information as available.	
The Governor's budget address is on February 7, 2017. Increasing Act 66 has been on our budget agenda the past couple of years, this year we went with a different strategy. Feedback indicates success. As part of the budget cuts all state agencies had a budget freeze. Essentially all open position were to remain open. The homes had about 90 openings and we were able to get some of those back but will have to operate without the rest for the foreseeable future.	
VISN 4	Dr. Michael Adelman
Leadership: Bob Callahan continues to serve as the interim director at the Wilmington VAMC; Margaret Wilson is serving as acting director at the Lebanon VAMC. Charles Becker continues to serve as acting director at the Altoona VAMC. Bob Snyder is serving as the Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs.	
VISN 4 Access: Continue to provide 97% of appointments in less than 30 days. Average wait time is 3-5 days. Provided more than 45,000 appointments outside of the VA system. Nationally, Veterans received more than 25.5 million community care appointments. The Choice program helped to complete nearly 6 million of those. The Veterans Choice Program will end on August 7, 2017. Representative Phil Roe, chair of the House Veterans Affairs Committee has signed off on extending the Choice Program.	
Prescription Copays: There is a change in the prescription copays ranging from \$5 to \$11 starting February 27 th . This change also reduced the annual cap for prescription copays to \$700.	
Questions/Comments: Mr. Cudworth stated Choice is doing well with getting people in the community signed up, the disconnect comes when the doctors go looking for their money. Dr. Adelman replied the backlog in payment has had a negative effect. Mr. Petrovich stated months ago it was mentioned about the retention of driver's, thanks to Dr. Adelman's efforts in facilitating conversations Pennsylvania finished 2 nd in miles driven for Veterans.	

OLD BUSINESS

Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs

Mr. Dusty Durand

Bills: Memorial Trust Fund Bill, which will allow for a separation from the Veterans Trust Fund; State Achievement Award, will allow us to award Veterans for the hard work they are doing; Stolen Valor Act, provides more guidance to ensure we hold people accountable; HB 215, women Veteran license plate.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Foster stated he sent the bill to female members regarding the female Veteran license plate and they don't feel strongly about the license plate. Mr. Durand responded there is enough support from female Veterans and it does provide a choice for those Veterans. From our stand point we will support this. Mr. Foster asked to survey female National Guard service members.

Ms. Zucco, chair for the GAC-VS Women Veteran Committee, stated opinions vary based on branch, rank, age, etc... There is enough support and the option should be available for women Veterans.

Public Affairs

Ms. Joan Nissley

Veterans Registry: Ms. Nissley presented the Veterans Registry business cards and emphasized it is not just for Veterans, family members and those that assist Veterans can benefit from the information provided as well. Ms. Nissley asked that this information be taken back to the service organizations and shared in their newsletters, social media and websites. Quality content is also needed. Service Organizations can submit Veteran related events and job opportunities. Submission can be done through our website.

Wall of Faces: There were 3,551 Vietnam Veteran photos needed, currently we are down to 126 photos still needed. Ms. Nissley provided a map showing counties still needing photos and asked for the Service Organization to help locate these photos.

Wall That Heals Tour: The Wall That Heals Tour will make one stop in Pennsylvania at the Swoyersville American Legion Post 644 week of June 8 -11. Please help by sharing this information on your websites, social media and newsletters.

Bureau of State Veterans Homes

Mr. Ed Beck

County Home Partnership: This partnership will allow us to take over units in their homes and create a State Veterans Unit. 20 County Homes still operate in the state; by partnering with county homes we can increase our coverage. Target area is where there is a County Home but no State Veterans' Home.

7th State Veterans Home: In 2008, there was legislation to provide funding for a state Veterans Home in Dauphin or Lebanon County. That plan was put on the long-range plan and we did request release of the funding; but was denied. Plan is not off the table but is on hold.

Questions/Comments: Gen Carrelli stated a 7th home is still an option. A partnership would allow us to assist Veterans better geographically. Adult Day Care is also an option. These are needed discussions.

Mr. Hudzinski would like to see a report/business analysis on this. The commission cannot advise without seeing how the problem is analyzed. Gen Carrelli agreed, the commission is the eyes and ears as to what the need is out there and there is a need for further discussions. If a county home partnership is legal and doable then we'll come back to the commission to figure out the best execution process. Gen Weller stated action will be taken starting with a bullet paper and follow up with business case analysis. We do need your guidance and input.

Mr. Haberkorn informed the commission Cameron County sold their home to a private contractor. It would be worth looking into private homes as well.

Mr. Jackson asked if County Homes are held to the same standards for licensing. Mr. Beck replied yes they are. In addition to state licenses state veterans homes are inspected by the Federal VA. County Homes would be held to that standard also.

Mr. Appleby asked if the number of licensed beds will stay the same or increase. Mr. Beck replied the federal VA authorizes us over 2,000 beds. We will not need to ask for additional beds.

P.I.R.O.	Mr. Rick Hamp
Mr. Hamp reiterated Veterans Registry is a great tool for Veterans and their families.	
Mr. Hamp provided an overview of Veterans Day at the Farm Show. This was a great success and our intent is to continue this partnership.	
Questions/Comment: Mr. Cudworth stated a lot of people did not know there was a veterans section at the Farm Show and more would have stopped by had they known. He also stated we need to do a similar program with the Sportsman Show. Mr. Watson suggested the Great American Outdoor Show as well.	
Approval of Programs Reports	
Motion: Mr. Haberkorn made a motion to approve the programs reports as presented in the read ahead.	
Second: Mr. Taylor seconded the motion.	
The body agreed. The motion carried.	
Services & Programs	Mr. Brian Natali
Property Tax Exemption Program: Recommendations were made for the program in the October meeting. Mr. Natali respectfully requested that the work group be reorganized. Chairman Brenner agreed and will make those committee appointments later in the meeting.	
SB 156 talks about household income, this would be a good opportunity for us to advocate for an amendment to that bill that talks about what income is counted for the Property Tax Exemption Program.	
Research was done on household income and how that would affect the program. Specifically the question was asked what the negative impact would be on the program. In the last cycle, 287 new applications were approved, 15 were denied for financial reasons and 29 were ineligible for other reasons. If household income was evaluated, 74 of that application would have negatively been affected.	
Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial: Repairs for the Veterans Memorial at the National Cemetery have been completed with the exception of the sod, which needs to be re-laid as the weather gets warmer.	
Questions/Comments: Gen Weller asked for a paper to be written on the Real Estate Tax Exemption that was spoken about.	
Outreach & Reintegration	Mr. Chip Gilliland
ODAGVA/Act 66 Summary: The Vetraspec combined data is not available at this time. The Act 66 data is year to date claims submitted, 16,662; year to date value of awards, \$40,946,914. This information is available on our website through Act 66 reports.	
Outreach Engagements: The second quarter for engagements went exceptionally well, primarily due to participation in the Farm Show.	
Veterans' Trust Fund: Mr. Gilliland provided updated information in packets.	
Questions/Comments: Mr. Petrovich asked if the reported claim referrals to county directors and service organizations can be expanded on to show how many actual claims were developed. Mr. Gilliland responded we currently track with the county directors, if the organizations would like us to start we can.	
Mr. Hudzinski stated the Veterans' Trust Fund Grants are prepared to be released, but they are being held, is there any update on that? Mr. Gilliland stated the press released went from the department went downtown on Tuesday and we are waiting for them to act. General Carrelli doesn't anticipate any issues.	
PA War Veterans Council	Mr. Keith Beebe
The legislative committee determined its key legislative issues. These issues will be presented to a joint session of the House and Senate VA&EP committee on February 8. An overall list of Veterans issues to focus on in 2017 has been voted on.	
NEW BUSINESS	
SVC Act 66 Committee	Mr. Samuel Petrovich
The committee decided to get behind the additional \$500,000 the DMVA has put in the budget. The committee has been active with meetings with the governor's office and key legislators and will continue to meet with key supporters.	

Act 66 Brief	Mr. Rick Hamp
Mr. Rick Hamp provided a brief presentation on the Act 66 of 2007, Veteran Service Officer Grant Program.	
Questions/Comments: Mr. Foster stated it was mentioned what the grant can be used for but one thing that is not mentioned is advertising. Mr. Hamp replied in that grant there is no allowance for advertising. We have asked for a communications budget to be able to advertise. Mr. Foster asked how do Veteran Service Organizations advertise, how can we change the grant so advertising is included? A request for an amendment to Title 51 is needed.	
Mr. Hudzinski asked if the TAG can recommend that or can it be modified through administrative code? Gen Carrelli responded as it is now being brought up we will look into that. Gen Carrelli asked Mr. Barrett, Chief Counsel, if there is any room for interpretation to say that advertising is included? Mr. Barrett responded this would require a change to the code. We don't usually pursue amendments; if an organization wished to change something we can support them.	
Mr. Hudzinski stated one of the things that seem to be lacking is a consolidated report, looking at the overall dispersal of money and how it is used. The reports required that are sent to the VA&EP committees are the reports on the individual organizations, but a consolidated report will make them more aware and supports our arguments for increased funding.	
Veterans Trust Fund Brief	Mr. Rick Hamp
Mr. Hamp provided a brief presentation on the Veterans' Trust Fund.	
Questions/Comments: Mr. Foster commented both programs briefed today are outline in the law. The concept for both programs came from the folks sitting around the table.	
Mr. Hudzinski asked if the interpretation on the contributions includes corporate sponsorship. Mr. Hamp replied it talks about any public or government entity.	
Committee Appointments	Chairman John Brenner
Act 66 Committee: Chair, Samuel Petrovich, representatives will include organizations receiving Act 66.	
Legislative Concerns: Keith Beebe	
Veterans Symposium: Need volunteers or Chairman Brenner will appoint.	
Awards Committee: Need volunteers or Chairman Brenner will appoint.	
RETX Committee: Chairman Brenner appointed the previous committee representatives. Chair, Nick Taylor, Rich Hudzinski-VVA, Bruce Foster-TAL, John Cyprian-CDVA.	
Remember My Service	Mr. Dusty Durand
Mr. Durand provided a brief overview of the Vietnam Commemorative Book. They are trying to raise money to ensure every Vietnam Veteran receives a book free of charge. Is this something the State Veterans' Commission wishes to pursue?	
Chairman Brenner asked it be mentioned at the next meeting. Gen Carrelli stated it is essentially a coffee table book. The beginning of the book will contain state specific information and the rest will contains historical information on the Vietnam War.	
Mr. Durand stated if there is a level of interest, he can invite Sharon Hawks to provide a brief on their efforts. Chairman Brenner asked feedback be provided to Mr. Durand.	
Remarks from DAG-VA	Maj Gen (Ret)
Gen Weller expressed thanks to the organizations he was able to meet with over the last month and hopes to meet again in 6-9 months. As a result of those meetings, a few briefs were presented to the commission. Another item that came up during those meetings is what your staff does. We will put out a paper highlighting what each individual in the office does. Our goal is to provide read-ahead material so you are prepared with questions during the meeting. We also intend to call for topics about two to three weeks prior to the meeting.	

Action Items	Person Responsible	Deadline
Bullet Paper on County Home Partnership	DMVA	
Business Case Analysis	DMVA	
Look at Outreach for the Sportsman Show	DMVA	
Paper on Advertising Dollars	DMVA	
RETX Paper	DMVA	
Good of the Order/Announcements		
<p>Mr. Watson asked if anyone has an update on the Lieutenant Governor's Veterans Committee. Gen Carrelli stated they have been invited to present at an SVC meeting but have not agreed yet. Occasionally Mr. Durand is notified of meetings and has attended one or two.</p> <p>Mr. Getz informed the commission of the upcoming Great American Outdoor Show and that the VFW will be there.</p>		
Next Meeting		
Friday, April 7, 2017 at 10:00AM Arrowheads Community Club Fort Indiantown Gap Annville, PA 17003		
Adjournment		11:56