**ARROWHEADS COMMUNITY CLUB**

**FORT INDIANTOWN GAP**

**ANNVILLE, PA 17003**

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The Pennsylvania State Veterans’ Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00AM by Chairman John Brenner.
2. **INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The meeting was opened with an invocation and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by Vice Chairman Kit Watson.
3. **COMMISSION INTRODUCTION:** Commission members introduced themselves and their guests in attendance.
	1. **Members Present:**

Mr. John Brenner, Chairman, State Veterans Commission

Colonel Michael Regan, Designee for TAG, Deputy Adjutant General for Air National Guard

Mr. Paul Foresman, Designee, AMVETS

Mr. Tom Brown, Commander, Veterans of Foreign War

Mr. John Getz, Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign War

Mr. Neil Appleby, President, Blinded Veterans Association

Mr. Henry Desrosiers, President, County Directors of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Keith Beebe, Designee, Military Officers Association of America

Mr. Nick Taylor, Commander, Catholic War Veterans

Mr. Tom Haberkorn, President, Vietnam Veterans of America

Mr. Ken Walters, Designee, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America

Mr. Michael Iacavazzi, Commander, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. Jim Powell, Designee, Marine Corps League

Mr. Bill Kelley, Representative, Korean War Veterans

Mr. Michael Mescavage, Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Mr. Kit Watson, Vice-Chairman, State Veterans Commission

Mr. Carl Olshefskie, Commander, The American Legion

Mr. Dominic DiFrancesco, Member at Large

* 1. **Others Present:**

Mr. Rick Hamp, Designee for DAG-VA, Director, P.I.R.O.

Ms. Belinda Albright, Northumberland County Veterans Affairs

Ms. Colleen Washinger, Dauphin County Veterans Affairs

Mr. Tony DiFrancesco, Dauphin county Veterans Affairs

Mr. Raymond Green, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. Frank Homme, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. Chuck Jackson, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Mr. Bruce Foster, The American Legion

Mr. Paul DeVincenzo, The American Legion

Dr. Michael Adelman, Representative, VISN 4

Mr. Brian Natali, DMVA

Mr. Rich Hudzinski, LVMAC

Mr. Ed Beck, DMVA

Ms. Constance Snavely, KPVA

Mr. Tom Minchin, MCL

Mr. Dave Cummiskey, USDOL-VETS

Mr. Michael Barrett, DMVA

Mr. Thomas Davis, DMVA

Ms. Joan Nissley, DMVA

Ms. Katie Johnson, TAA

Ms. Joyce Gibson, Executive Secretary, DMVA-OVA

1. **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 9, 2016 MEETING MINUTES:** The minutes from the September 9, 2016 Pennsylvania State Veterans’ Commission meeting was presented for approval. Mr. Dominic DiFrancesco, member at large, made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Michael Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart, seconded the motion. The motion carried.
2. **MILITARY UPDATE:** Colonel Mike Regan provided the Commission with an update on current and future National Guard deployments and returns. Averaging about 500 Army and Air mobilized each month. If there is specific information the Commission would like included in the Military Update, please make them known and the update will be revised to include that information.
3. **VISN 4 UPDATE:** Dr. Michael Adelman presented the following brief:

Leadership: Currently waiting on official notification for Altoona and Coatesville Directors.

Access: Dr. Adelman briefed on current access to VA care and non-VA care.

Audiology and Optometry: Veterans who receive care in VA will now be able to schedule routine ear and eye appointments at local VA clinics without a referral.

MyVA Committee Meeting: One of the primary topics of the meeting was the transition to a new presidential administration. The intent for the transition is that the process will be transparent for VA employees and the VA will continue to provide uninterrupted access.

Service Dog Benefits for Veterans with Mental Health Disorders: VA announced it is piloting a protocol to implement veterinary health benefits for mobility service dogs approved for Veterans with a chronic impairment that limits mobility associated with mental health disorders. To be eligible, the service dog must be trained by an accredited organization. Additional information can be found at [www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp](http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp).

1. **OLD BUSINESS**
	1. **Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs Update:** Mr. Joel Mutschler presented House and Senate bills they are currently tracking. HB 1226 aligns the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) and Veterans Temporary Assistance together is now Act 109 of 2016. SB 1155 relating to license plates for active duty military is now Act 108 of 2016. They continue to monitor SB 1727 relates to Pennsylvania Achievement Award and a Veterans Service Awards. HB 2304 changes the VTF to remove memorials and put them under one Memorial Trust Fund. SB 1109 pertains to the Real Estate Tax Exemption Program to include spouses of KIA.
	2. **Public Affairs Update:** Ms. Joan Nissley briefed on the VVMF’s Wall of Faces program. Of the 3,148 Pennsylvanian’s on the wall in Washington D.C. only 258 photos are still needed.

The Veterans Registry, which offers the weekly DMVA Digest is looking for information to use in the digest. Please submit job opportunities, events and other information for the weekly DMVA Digest. Encourage your members to sign up for this valuable information for Veterans.

A business card has been created highlighting the Veterans Registry and general phone numbers and websites. Once finalized, quantities will be printed for each organization.

Chairman Brenner encouraged Commission members to share this information and let DMVA know how many you would like printed.

* 1. **State Veterans Homes Update:** Mr. Ed Beck briefed the commission on the Nursing Home Quality Improvement Task Force Report by the Department of Health (DOH). As a result, DOH announced they will update their policies to include increasing enforcement of regulatory sanctions.

Based on the DOH inspection in July 2016, Southwestern Veterans’ Center was issued a provisional license. The plan of correction has been executed. That decision is being appealed and they are waiting for a hearing date.

SEVC and PSSH have new Deputy Commandants. Deputy Commandant at GMVC will be leaving next week.

The Hershey Bears provided tickets for their home game for Military Night on November 13th at the Giant Center. If anyone is interested in tickets please see Mr. Beck.

* 1. **Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration & Outreach Update:** Mr. Rick Hamp provided an operational highlight to the commission. Funding Notice for the Act 66 grants was released on September 20th. Applications are due back no later than November 18th.

Veterans Day at the Hershey Bears hockey game is on November 13th. If you would like tickets please see Mr. Ed Beck.

Veterans Day at the Farm Show will be on January 12, 2017. If organization would like to take part let us know and spaces will be reserved.

Does the State Veterans’ Commission wish to hold a Veterans Symposium this year? If so, planning needs to begin now. Many female Veterans expressed a desire to have a separate Women Veterans Symposium, in the past we’ve held break-out sessions specifically for female Veterans. The State Veterans’ Commission should provide recommendations. Mr. Hamp and Mr. Gilliland are available to help plan this event.

Last meeting operational action plans were presented to the Commission. What does the SVC wish to be involved in?

Questions/Comments:

How many female Veterans attended previous symposiums? About 3 years ago a Women Veterans Symposium was held and it is estimated that 150 women attended that symposium.

Are there links posted about Veterans Day at the Farm Show? Yes, the Vets to Ag initiative is an active initiative cosponsored by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Department of Agriculture. Both Department websites have links to that program. Ms. Nissley added they are working with the Department of Agriculture to upload an itinerary but it will not be posted until the end of November. Mr. Hamp informed the Commission there will be a planning session in late October between both departments to lay-out the events of that day.

* 1. **Review and Approval of Veterans’ Programs Reports:** Mr. Brian Natali presented the reports needing a vote from the Commission.
		+ **Veterans temporary Assistance:** Expended $213,000, expect to expend $386,000 with 157 claimants on the programs.
		+ **Blind Veterans Pension:** Expended $48,000, expect to expend $173,000 with 110 Veterans on the program.
		+ **Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans Pension:** Expended $830,000, expect to expend $2.7 million with 1,809 claimants on the program.
		+ **Educational Gratuity:** Expended $14,500, expect to expend $86,500 with 39 claimants on the program.
		+ **Disabled Veteran Tax Exemption Program:** Approved 258 applications, denied for financial reasons 26 applications and 20 applications did not meet eligibility requirements. There are 10,655 Veterans on the program.

Mr. James Powell, Marine Corps League, made a motion to accept the reports as presented. Mr. Michael Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Mr. Natali presented for approval the new form MV-VA 40, combining new and review application into one form. Mr. Natali also informed the Commission the rebuttable presumptive amount will increase in January 2017. The new amount will be presented to the Commission at the December 2016 meeting.

Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, made a motion to accept the new form as presented. Mr. James Powell, Marine Corps League, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Mr. Mescavage questioned if the applicants requiring a renewal are still sent a reminder. Yes, reminders will still be sent out according to policy.

* + - **Persian Gulf Veterans Benefit Program:** Received nearly 12,000 total lifetime applications, sent out over 9,300 payments, with an average payment of $424.20 and 5.5 days for processing. Reminder: This program ends in a couple of years, inform your organizational members of this benefit they may be eligible to obtain.
		- **Military Family Relief Assistance Program:** Received nearly $1.7 million in private and PIT donations, approved grant application payments - $780,000 with an account balance over $900,000.
		- **Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial:** Repairs are continuing. A sight visit, due to safety issues, was conducted with the contractor last week. Those repairs are set to begin on November 7th and will be completed by December 17th. Total receipts of $4,085, total expenditures of $20,000 and a current balance of just under $550,000.

Mr. Bruce Foster questioned why there is a 23% disapproval rate for the Persian Gulf Bonus. Many applications are denied due to documentation of the area of operations served.

* 1. **Outreach & Reintegration Update:** Mr. Chip Gilliland presented the current Act 66 summary. Mr. Gilliland noted the outreach engagements and some upcoming legislative events. Mr. Gilliland provided a briefing on the Veterans’ Trust Fund and the cumulative totals.

Veterans Affairs has received a shipment of Kuwait Liberation books and one box has been provided to each organization represented on the Commission.

Mr. Rich Hudzinski asked if more books will be made available. Veterans Affairs does not anticipate more books being shipped, if that changes the Commission will be made aware.

* 1. **RETX Committee Update:** Mr. Nick Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, presented the RETX Committee update. The RETX Committee recommends granting eligibility to surviving spouses of those that were killed in action (current SB 1109) and eliminating the wartime service requirement. Both of these recommendations are long term and would require a constitutional change. Lobby to repeal the portion of Act 161 of 2006 that effect §8904(a)(1) and lobby to mandate that §8903 be amended to require County Boards of Assessment to recognize the date stamp on the claim as the date the exemption is effective, also long term and would require a legislative change. Implement the adoption of the American Community Survey Data table and apply a 1.61 multiplier to increase the presumptive amount for counties with a higher disbursement of wealth, add the definition of household income and consider household income.

Mr. Michael Iacavazzi asked is there many application where the spouse makes more than the Veteran? There are a few but we cannot quantify because we do not look further if the Veteran qualifies.

Mr. Chuck Jackson asked if the HUD data table was considered. Yes, the committee did consider the HUD data.

Mr. Nick Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, made a motion that the State Veterans’ Commission adopt the recommendations as shown here on this slide, minus the adoption of the single form, both the new and review applications because that was previously voted on this morning. Mr. Taylor restated; he makes a motion that the State Veterans’ Commission adopt these changes as recommended by the tax exemption committee.

Chairman Brenner recognized the motion and asked Mr. Taylor to read each recommendation again.

The Real Estate Tax Exemption Committee recommends two constitutional changes; one would grant eligibility to surviving spouses of those that were KIA and eliminate the wartime service requirement. The legislative changes lobby to repeal a portion of Act 161 of 2006 and mandate §8903 be amended to require County Boards of Assessment recognize the date stamp on the claim as the official date. Immediate implementation include vacate the 5 acre rule; done, adopt a single form; done, the adoption of the American Community survey Data to apply that factor to make it fair and equitable to all Veterans in all the counties, to add the definition of household income and consider household income.

Mr. Tom Brown, Veterans of Foreign War, seconded the motion.

Mr. Tom Haberkorn, Vietnam Veterans of America, moved to lay the question of tax exemption on the table. Chairman Brenner asked Mr. Haberkorn to state a reason. Mr. Taylor asked that the Commission move forward on the motion. Chairman Brenner called for a second on the table motion, seeing none, the move to lay tax exemption on the table was denied.

Seeing no further questions, Chairman Brenner called for a vote on the RETX recommendation motion. With one opposition the motion carried.

* 1. **PA War Veterans Council (WVC) Legislative Update:** Mr. Keith Beebe, Military Officers Association of America, presented the key legislative issues the WVC discussed at their meeting. Veterans Day at the Capitol, being held October 26th, is a key event because the House and Senate VAEP Committee will be in attendance. Issues they want to mention include increasing funding for Act 66, increase the number of state Veterans home or provide a suitable alternative, payday lending; opposition to any legislation that would increase interest fees, establish a one-time bonus for those deployed in combat zones for operations related to the War on Terrorism.

Questions/Comments:

Mr. Michael Mescavage asked if the one-time bonus would also include inside the United States? Mr. John Getz stated he is still investigating. Mr. Chuck Jackson stated it is specific to those deployed into combat zones. He does not believe there have been any declared combat zones in the U.S.

Mr. Bruce Foster asked if drone pilots are awarded a campaign medal? Col Mike Regan answered at this point in time that is true. It is currently being debated and there is no final answer at this time. More on this will follow.

1. **NEW BUSINESS**
	1. **Election of Officers:** Mr. Michael Barrett, Chief Counsel, presided over the Chairman and Vice-Chairman voting. Mr. Barrett called for the Chairman nominations. Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, nominated Mr. John Brenner. Mr. Barrett asked for a motion to present Mr. Brenner as a candidate. Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, so moved. Mr. Mike Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart, seconded. Mr. Rick Hamp called for a vote. The motion carried.

Mr. Barrett called for the Vice-Chairman nominations. Mr. Carl Oleshefskie, The American Legion, nominated Mr. Kit Watson. Mr. Barrett asked for a motion to present Mr. Watson as a candidate. Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, so moved. Mr. Carl Olshefskie, The American Legion, seconded. Mr. Rick Hamp called for a vote. The motion carried.

* 1. **Installation of Officers:** Col Mike Regan issued the Oath of Office to Mr. John Brenner, newly elected Chairman of the State Veterans’ Commission, and Mr. Kit Watson, newly elected Vice Chairman of the State Veterans’ Commission, for the 2016-17 term.
	2. **SVC Veterans Appreciation Day:** Chairman Brenner thanked CPT Matt Pochak for his help in putting the Veterans Appreciation Day together. He is asking for each organization to complete a fact sheet for the briefings.
1. **GOOD OF THE ORDER/ANNOUNCEMENTS:**
	1. Col Regan informed the Commission USO is back on Ft. Indiantown Gap. Please help spread the word.
	2. Mr. Dominic DiFrancesco informed the Commission Senator Toomey will be at Post 730 in Pembrook to speak on Veterans situations this afternoon.
	3. Chairman Brenner was contacted by Meineke, they are interested in supplying vehicles to homeless Veterans or Veterans in need. There was much interest and questions included; Will insurance will be paid for? Can the vehicle be modified for wheelchairs or disabled Veterans? Is this state-wide or local? Contact Meineke for answers.
	4. Mr. Watson thanked Mr. Beebe and the WVC legislative committee for the work they are doing and for informing organization of payday lending.
	5. A State Veterans’ Commission group photo will be taken for the website after the meeting.
2. **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MEETING CALENDAR:** A proposed meeting calendar was submitted. Mr. Michael Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart, made a motion to accept the meeting calendar as proposed. Mr. Nick Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, seconded the motion. The motion carried and the meeting schedule was approved. The 2017 State Veterans’ Commission meeting schedule can be found at [www.dmva.pa.gov](http://www.dmva.pa.gov)
3. **NEXT MEETING:** Friday, **December 2**, 2016 at **10:00AM**

**Arrowheads Community Club**

Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, PA 17003

1. **ADJOURNMENT:** Chairman Brenner adjourned the meeting at 11:30AM.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Richard C. Hamp

Director, Bureau of Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration and Outreach

Designee for Deputy Adjutant General

Veterans’ Affairs