

# State Veterans Commission

## Meeting Minutes

October 13, 2017  
 10:00 AM to 12:08 PM  
 Arrowheads Community Club, FTIG  
 Annville, PA 17003

<b>Call to Order</b>	<b>Chairman John Brenner</b>
----------------------	------------------------------

The Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00AM by Chairman John Brenner.

<b>Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance</b>
--

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

<b>Commission Introductions</b>
---------------------------------

Maj 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. Paul Foresman	Commander, AMVETS
Mr. Dwight Fuhrman	Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Edward Hanke	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Neil Appleby	President, Blinded Veterans Association
Mr. William Wright	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	Commander, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Chris Fidler	Representative, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. James Powell	Designee, Marine Corps League
Mr. William Kelley	Representative, Korean War Veterans
Mr. Charles "Chuck" Jackson	Designee, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Kit Watson	Adjutant, American Legion / Vice-Chairman
Mr. Paul Kennedy	Commander, American Legion
Ms. Constance Snavelly	Member at Large
Mr. Edgar Burriss	Member at Large
Mr. John Cyprian	Member at Large / Attended by phone conference

<b>Others Present</b>
-----------------------

Dr. Michael Adelman	VISN 4
Paul DeVincenzo	American Legion
Michael Benham	American Legion
Colleen Washinger	Dauphin County Veterans Affairs
Tony Difrancesco	Dauphin County Veterans Affairs
Brenda Zechman	Schuylkill County Veterans Affairs
Keith Beebe	Military Order of the Purple Heart

Lisa Kaye	Monroe County Veterans Affairs
George Heiges	Lycoming County Veterans Affairs
Frank Passaniti	Lycoming County Veterans Affairs
Brian Querry	Center County Veterans Affairs
Viola C Hertzog	Lehigh County
Jennifer Hogaman	Clinton County Veterans Affairs
William Beadel	Clinton County Veterans Affairs
Gary Stopyra	Disabled American Veterans
Rich Hudzinski	Vietnam Veterans of America
Thomas Brown	Veterans of Foreign Wars
Nicholas Taylor	Catholic War Veterans
Jeffrey White	Vietnam Veterans of America
Matt Zamosky	PACDVA
Gerald Nikolaus	Catholic War Veterans
Justin Slep	Franklin County Veterans Affairs
Dave Cummiskey	DOL-VETS
Nancy Burris	
Jodi Zucco	Office of Attorney General
Tom Minchin	Marine Corps League
Eugene Bell	Naval Enlisted Reserve Association
David Wood	Director of Joint Staff - PANG
Harry Buchanan	Command Sargent Major
Col Mark Schindler	Deputy Adjutant General - Army
Joan Nissley	DMVA-Public Affairs
Dr. Darryl Jackson	DMVA-BVH
Rick Hamp	DMVA-OVA
Andrew Ruscavage	DMVA-BVH
Joel Mutschler	DMVA-PPL
Brian Natali	DMVA-OVA
Chip Gilliland	DMVA-OVA
Michael Barrett	DMVA-CCO
Janette Krolczyk	DMVA-OVA

<b>Oath of Office</b>	<b>Major General Anthony Carrelli</b>
-----------------------	---------------------------------------

General Carrelli administered the Oath of Office to the following newly appointed Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission members:

- Mr. Paul Kennedy, American Legion
- Mr. Paul Foresman, AMVETS
- Mr. Mr. Edward Hanke, DAV
- Mr. Dwight Fuhrman, VFW
- (Mr. Robert Hill and Mr. Sanford Silver were unable to attend)

**Approval of the June 2, 2017 Meeting Minutes**

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Burris made a motion to approve the minutes as distributed.

**Second:** Mr. John Pliska seconded the motion.

The body agreed, motion carried.

**Approval of the 2018 Proposed Meeting Schedule**

**Motion:** Mr. Dwight Fuhrman made a motion to approve the meeting schedule.

**Second:** Mr. Henry Desrosiers seconded the motion.

**Amendment:** Mr. Neil Appleby requested an amendment to the meeting schedule, to set the location of the June 1, 2018 SVC meeting at the Holidaysburg Veterans Home, and also to set the location of the September 7, 2018 SVC meeting at the Delaware Valley Veterans Home.

**Second as amended:** Mr. Henry Desrosiers seconded the amendment.

The body agreed, motion carried.

**Military Update**

**Major General Anthony Carrelli**

-General Carrelli welcomed the new members and introduced his staff that was present.

-The upcoming Veterans Day activities are keeping everyone busy with many functions throughout the state, with many including State Representatives. Each year there appears to be more events, more Vietnam pinning ceremonies, which will hopefully continue.

-The total PA veteran count is around 820,000, which keeps PA ranked at number four in the country.

-Almost 300 troops are currently deployed. Since the first hurricane, our troops have been aiding citizens in Texas, Puerto Rico, Florida, and the Virgin Islands (Medical Detachment), with quick turnaround time, as well as troops arriving in Afganistan.

-General Carrelli touched on the topic of bylaws with the example of not having a protocol in place for the cancellation of the September 2017 SVC meeting. He explained that if bylaws were enacted, policies for various types of organizational structure would be in place, everyone would know the process, resulting in no one feeling left out or their voice unheard. General Carrelli stated that he does want a basic set of bylaws to ensure efficient and fair proceedings of the commission going forward. General Carrelli also suggested appointing a committee that would work on generating bylaws for the SVC.

-General Carrelli was a guest speaker for the Veterans Community Initiative in Johnstown and spoke very highly of the great turnout, the Veteran Organizations involvement and the support that Johnstown gives to its Veterans. He thanked the Committee for staying involved in their communities, participating in their events and encouraged the continued support.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Samuel Petrovich mentioned that a change to the SVC schedule (for example) would be a policy or procedure, and that bylaws would not be needed for that. He also mentioned his surprise to receive the draft bylaws in his packet and asked Chairman Brenner who from the SVC was appointed to generate the draft. Mr. Petrovich felt that the Commissions input should have been asked for.

-General Carrelli stated that not having procedures in place is a problem when an issue may arise. Whether they are called policies, procedures, bylaws, guidelines, etc., they are necessary to ensure proper functionality. He referenced the previous discussion about possibly having a set of bylaws, which the Commission didn't feel was needed. General Carrelli asked his team to draft something to get things moving in that direction, which can be molded as necessary with the Commissions assistance.

-Mr. Petrovich expressed the need to develop things jointly, considering that the members voted down bylaws in the first place, not to mention that The Adjutant General will have the final say to a change to the bylaws once they go into effect.

-General Carrelli explained that he does want input from the Commission, and the members' thoughts are very important to him. However, the motions carried out within the SVC are all pieces of advice to The Adjutant General, and it's his responsibility to answer to the Governor. There will be instances where the advice or wishes of the Commission will differ from the best possible advice that The Adjutant General gives to the Governor.

-Mr. Petrovich suggested that the Chairman should appoint a committee to use the draft bylaws as a starting point to develop a full set which can be brought before the body to be voted on.

-General Carrelli agreed that was the purpose of the draft bylaws.

-Mr. John Cyprian (joining by phone) commented on the need to be respectful of the members, no matter what personal views you may have. After reaching out to ask a question regarding the status of the last SVC meeting, he never received a response from Chairman Brenner about the reasoning over cancelling the September meeting. He added that without bylaws, that type of unnecessary behavior will continue. If a better

structure was in place, focus would be given to the right areas. He concurs that the draft should be taken a look at, and adapted, to suit the body.

-Mr. Neil Appleby stated the draft bylaws should be corrected to read “commission” not “council.”

-General Weller commented that he was the “committee” that wrote the draft bylaws, with the hopeful purpose of attending the SVC meetings and instead of members repeatedly discussing trivial items that have nothing to do with Veterans, the focus can be brought back to ensuring Veterans issues are consistently the most important item on the table during every meeting.

#### **Adopting a set of bylaws**

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Burris made a motion to adopt a set of bylaws and for the Chairman to create a committee to work on the bylaws.

**Second:** Mr. John Cyprian seconded the motion.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. John Pliska suggested leaving the topic open-ended, to be discussed under new business, to see if the Commission believes it is needed.

-General Carrelli stated that the name of the guidelines can be changed to whatever suits the group, but he will exercise his prerogative so that some type of structure is in place to properly organize the SVC and ensure every member has a voice.

-General Weller added that in addition to meeting schedules and changes, the other necessary items to properly organize a group of people include committees, assignments, awards programs, etc.

-General Carrelli used the example of awards being an area where the Commission is behind. If there are areas of short-falling, General Carrelli will need to take over those area and make them the work of his department, if they are not going to be fulfilled by the members. He is willing to pick up the slack if necessary, but that is information that needs to be discussed, agreed upon and proven.

-Mr. Robert Cudworth mentioned he has plenty of experience with amending and drafting bylaws, which is not an easy process, but he saw no reason why the current draft couldn't be worked with to generate something that would be pleasing to the body of the Commission.

The body agreed, motion carried.

#### **VISN 4**

**Dr. Michael Adelman**

**Leadership:** Sigrid Andrew is the new Director of the Altoona VAMC. David Cowgill VISN4 Communications Manager is the interim Deputy Network Director. There are two vacancies for Chiefs of Staff for VISN4: Altoona is in the recruitment phase, while Lebanon made a selection that will hopefully start in the Spring.

**VISN 4 Access:** The average wait time remains under five days. More than 97% of appointments are completed within 30 days. In August, more than 212,000 outpatient appointments were conducted.

**Trust:** The goal is to have 90% of Veterans completing a VA survey that they agree or strongly agree with questions related to effectiveness, ease, emotion and trust. About 83% of inpatients and 77% of outpatients trust VA to fulfill our country's commitment to Veterans.

**Community Care:** In August, President Trump signed the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act, which includes \$2.1 billion to fund the Choice program. This is a short-term, temporary funding solution that will enable VA to increase the number of appointments scheduled and ensure payments are made to community providers. VA continues to work with elected officials to secure Choice funding for the remainder of fiscal year 2018 and to establish a single, consolidated community care program that is simple to understand, easy to administer and meets everyone's needs.

**Five Priorities:** Dr. Shulkin's priorities for strategic actions include: greater choice for Veterans, modernized systems, resources focused more efficiently, improved timeliness of services and suicide prevention. Staff is working very hard on the issue of suicide prevention by educating the public about warning signs of suicide risk. Materials are available online and each VISN 4 facility has a suicide prevention coordinator who can easily be reached. Web address is: [www.spreadtheword.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.spreadtheword.veteranscrisisline.net)

**Award:** Dr. Rory Cooper, a Pittsburgh researcher and Army Veteran, received a Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal in the Science and Environment category for 2017 and was recognized last month in

Washington, DC. These awards are known as the “Oscars of Government Service.” Dr. Cooper designed innovative wheelchairs and other assistive technologies that have improved the mobility and quality of life for hundreds of thousands of Veterans and others with disabilities.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Ed Burris asked if the VA expected any influx due to the President’s executive order that was signed yesterday.

-Dr. Adelman responded that there is no estimation of what the impact of the executive order is yet. Any change in income or insurance will impact the number of Veterans that access the care, but there are no estimations or predictions about that yet.

-Mr. Rich Hudzinsky asked the status of the initiative of combining a few VA programs into one.

-Dr. Adelman stated that they are currently working with Veterans Affairs to create new Care in the Community legislation that puts all the money together and has a more simplified process.

-Ms. Constance Snavely asked about the status of hiring a neurologist for Lebanon.

-Dr. Adelman replied that one will be coming on board, but doesn’t know how many additional neurologists they would be looking for.

-Mr. Robert Cudworth mentioned a recurring issue with clinics or review boards is that there is a disconnect between the doctors and patients. The doctors don’t seem to be prepared for their appointments and have a working knowledge of a patient’s record or health status.

-Dr. Adelman replied that VA specialists do have access to the records via an electronic records system with the ability to access selected DOD as well. He added he wouldn’t make excuses for anyone and agreed that the example given is no way to provide care.

-Mr. Ed Hanke commented on his experiences getting his flu shot last week. He is between two health facilities both 25 miles from his home. There is also a clinic a half mile away from his house, where he tried to get his shot. When he explained that he was a Veteran and had been going to a particular facility, the clinic informed him that they only take care of patients from the other facility.

-Dr. Adelman explained that the clinic in question is a contracted clinic. Many of the old contracts did not allow certain practices to take place, even though it would ultimately be easier for the patient. As the older contracts expire, they are being replaced with new language, allowing easier access. The information/records should be viewable. If situations like that occur, it needs to be brought to Dr. Adelman’s attention so that provisions can be made and all staff can be made aware of the change in practices going forward.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **DMVA Chief Counsel**

**Mr. Michael Barrett**

Mr. Barrett was available for questions or concerns.

#### **DMVA Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs**

**Mr. Joel Mutschler**

-Mr. Joel Mutschler briefed that the Governor approved the nominations for the acting Secretaries (Dr. Levine-Health, Ms. Miller-Human Services, Ms. Smith-Drug and Alcohol programs, Ms. Altman-Insurance Commissioner) to become permanent selections, pending Senate approval.

-The revenue package is still waiting to be passed.

-HB 165 provides for a new DMVA medal to be given to Veterans/private citizens that perform exceptional services for Veterans.

-Oct 17<sup>th</sup> –two meetings to discuss various bills: SB 789-to allow one or two star GOs to be on the PA Military Community Enhancement Commission. SR5-current resolution to establish Task Force on Women’s Health Care. HB 1231-Veterans Registry. HB1836-Physical Therapy Licensure Compact Act, which will ease the process for military spouses to obtain a new license.

#### **DMVA Public Affairs**

**Ms. Joan Nissley**

-Ms. Joan Nissley briefed on the Vietnam Veterans Wall of Faces project. Only 61 more photos are needed. A map of PA showing the counties that still need to collect photos will be emailed to Janette (Executive Secretary), as well as a listing of all the outstanding names, for distribution to the members for help in this effort. The information is currently being pushed on social media also.

-WHP 21 wants to do a feature story about a Veteran Helping Veterans, for Veterans Day. Anyone with a good candidate should email them to Janette (Executive Secretary) who will forward on to Joan who will forward on to the reporter.

-Veteran Registry has about 10,000 registrants. A link to the most current Digest has also been added to the Registry webpage.

-Persian Gulf Bonus is being pushed aggressively due to its expiration on August 31, 2018.

#### **DMVA Bureau of State Veterans Homes**

**Mr. Andrew Ruscavage**

-Mr. Andrew Ruscavage briefed on the current licensure status of the Homes. SEVC and SWVC have just completed their Dept of Health inspections, which slides do not reflect.

-PSSH began a construction project on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, which displaced 14 residents temporarily. After construction is finished, those displaced Veterans will return.

-GMVC construction project is nearing completion and will have 40 open beds that need to be filled.

-DVVH will begin a complete renovation in 2018, displacing 41 residents out to other homes temporarily. At the conclusion of construction, the Personal Care beds will be converted to skilled nursing.

-Many events for Veterans Day will happen at the Homes and everyone is encouraged to attend. (Schedule was handed out).

#### **DMVA PIRO**

**Mr. Rick Hamp**

-Mr. Rick Hamp briefed on the impacts of the budget cuts. Continued studies are being done to provide General Carrelli with decision-making materials under these circumstances. At the moment OVA is able to provide the same level of care in the Homes in addition to the Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration and Outreach.

-Governors Advisory Council met in August with committees moving forward with lots of effort. Two new committees were created: Suicide Prevention PEER, and Technology and Innovation – to assist with the collection and handling of information to better serve Veterans. The next GAC meeting will be in November at the Governors Residence.

**Questions/Comments:** General Weller asked if the GAC meeting minutes were able to be distributed to the SVC members.

-Mr. Hamp stated that the minutes are posted on the DMVA website, but they can also be distributed.

-Mr. Ed Burris asked how many Veterans will be pushed out of the Homes if the legislative budget proposal continues down the current path.

-General Carrelli responded that no Veterans will be pushed out of the Homes. He explained that there were many open beds in Holidaysburg and in order to save money, the amount of staff was changed to care for the number of residents they had, not the number they were able to have. There are areas of opportunity where things may need to shift so the care will remain the same. General Carrelli continued to say that a bottom line was generated and justified in order to continue the level of care in the Homes and although he is still waiting to hear back from the Governor's office, he is hopeful that the bottom lines will be met.

-Mr. Jeff White asked how many FTE's would be effected with the loss of beds.

-General Carrelli responded that shifting will have to happen in certain areas to accommodate Veterans. The budget office has also been briefed about the various changes that will happen over the next few years at the Homes, to include the requirement of more jobs in various areas, due to a three-phase initiative by the Dept of Health. More skilled positions will be required once those changes go into effect.

#### **Approval of Programs Reports**

**Motion:** Mr. James Powell made a motion to approve the programs reports as presented in the read ahead.

**Second:** Mr. Thomas Haberkorn seconded the motion.

The body agreed, motion carried.

#### **DMVA Services & Programs**

**Mr. Brian Natali**

-Mr. Brian Natali provided a breakdown of the programs in the handout packet which included Veterans Temporary Assistance, Blind Veterans Pension, Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans Pension, Educational Gratuity, Disabled Veterans Tax Exemption Program, which required a vote.

-Mr. Natali continued to brief about the Persian Gulf Bonus Program and MFRAP for informational purposes only. Almost \$4 million have been paid to Persian Gulf applicants and almost \$800,000 has been paid through MFRAP.

-PA Veterans' Memorial Trust Fund has an ending balance of about \$409,000, which will be decreasing shortly due to masonry repairs that need to be addressed.

**Questions/Comments:** General Carrelli asked what happened to the trees.

-Mr. Natali explained that the trees were dying, so they were removed and a new batch will be replacing them.

-Mr. Kit Watson asked what killed the trees.

-Mr. Natali explained that, in time, the trees out-grow the planters. With no irrigation system in place, the trees choke themselves and will die in time. The new batch of trees should last around 10 years.

-General Weller asked to look at an alternative for the future.

-Mr. Natali responded that he worked with the National Cemetery Association for the best recommendation to go with the design concept of the Memorial. A future alternative will be discussed.

### **DMVA Outreach & Reintegration**

**Mr. Chip Gilliland**

-Mr. Chip Gilliland explained that the updated slide numbers reflect the combination of ODAGVA and Act 66.

-Outreach team had a very busy quarter with an increase of Legislator-attended events.

-Veterans Trust Fund has been doing well and PENN DOT is officially paid off.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Kit Watson asked about PA changing the licenses and if this is an opportunity to increase the validity of the flag program.

-General Carrelli responded that the new licenses are supposed to comply with the real ID law and will supposedly make the new ID's available to anyone who wants one, if an individual is willing to pay for it. He is still unsure if the flag designation will be on the new licenses.

-Mr. Gilliland stated that he and Mr. Natali are in the process of scheduling a trip to PENN DOT anyway, and can certainly inquire about the license information while they are there.

-Mr. Thomas Haberkorn asked about the Act 66 information to verify an amount.

-Mr. Gilliland explained those are the numbers to date.

### **DMVA Organizational Structure**

**Mr. Rick Hamp**

-Mr. Rick Hamp briefed on the structure of the Office of Veterans Affairs. A flow chart was presented listing the job titles that report directly to DAG-VA.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Hall of Fame Nominations**

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Hanke made a motion to induct William J Lucas into the Hall of Fame.

**Second:** Mr. Paul Kennedy seconded the motion.

The body agreed, motion carried.

**Motion:** Mr. Dwight Fuhrman made a motion to induct Vincent H Hoover into the Hall of Fame.

**Second:** Mr. Henry Desrosiers seconded the motion.

The body agreed, motion carried.

**Motion:** Mr. Ed Burris made a motion to induct Fred P Gimbel into the Hall of Fame.

**Second:** Mr. Dwight Fuhrman seconded the motion.

The body agreed, motion carried.

#### **Good of the Order/Announcements**

#### **Election of Officers**

#### **Chairman**

Mr. Michael Barrett opened the floor for nominations.

Mr. James Powell nominated Mr. Ed Burris for the position of Chairman.

Mr. Robert Cudworth nominated Mr. Kit Watson for the position of Chairman.

-Since multiple nominations were made, a written ballot vote was cast. Ballots were collected by Janette (Executive Secretary) and delivered to General Weller and Mr. Michael Barrett for counting.

-Mr. Ed Burris won the election.
<b>Vice-Chairman</b>
Mr. Michael Barrett opened the floor for nominations.
Mr. Paul Kennedy nominated Mr. Samuel Petrovich for the position of Vice-Chairman.
Mr. Ed Burris nominated Mr. Henry Desrosiers for the position of Vice-Chairman.
-Since multiple nominations were made, a written ballot vote was cast. Ballots were collected by Janette (Executive Secretary) and delivered to General Weller and Mr. Michael Barrett for counting.
-Mr. Sanuel Petrovich won the election.
<b>Oath of Office for the New Chairman and Vice-Chairman</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Major General Anthony Carrelli</b></span>
General Carrelli administered the Oath of Office to the newly-elected Chairman (Mr. Ed Burris) and Vice-Chairman (Mr. Samuel Petrovich).
-General Carrelli, Mr. Kit Watson, Mr. Dwight Fuhrman and Mr. Ed Burris all thanked Mr. John Brenner for his service as Chairman.
-General Weller thanked Mr. Kit Watson for his service as Vice-Chairman.
<b>Destroying of the Ballots</b>
<b>Motion:</b> Mr. Thomas Haberkorn made a motion to destroy the ballots.
<b>Second:</b> Mr. James Powell seconded the motion.
The body agreed, motion carried.
<b>Next Meeting</b>
Friday, December 1, 2017 Arrowheads Community Club Fort Indiantown Gap Annville, PA 17003
<b>Adjournment</b>
Chairman Brenner adjourned the meeting at 12:08 PM.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Maj Gen (Ret) Eric G. Weller  
Deputy Adjutant General  
Veterans' Affairs