

# State Veterans Commission

## Meeting Minutes

June 2, 2017

10:00 AM to 11:58AM

Arrowheads Community Club, FTIG

Annville, PA 17003

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

### Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was opened with an invocation by Mr. Nicholas Taylor, who honored Mr. Harold A. Gennaria, a 30 year member of the State Veterans' Commission, who passed away April 29, 2017. Vice Chairman Kit Watson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 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. John Getz	Adjutant, VFW
Mr. Michael Iacavazzi	Commander, DAV
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	Adjutant, DAV
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. James Powell	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
Ms. Constance Snavely	Member at Large
Mr. Edgar Burriss	Member at Large
Mr. John Cyprian	Member at Large

### Others Present

Dr. Michael Adelman	VISN 4
Raul Rios	VISN 4
Larence Kirby	Executive Director, Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs
Kenneth Walters	KPVA
Belinda Albright	Northumberland County Veterans Affairs
Tim Cleveland	Tioga County Veterans Affairs
Colleen Washinger	Dauphin County Veterans Affairs
Tony Difrancesco	Dauphin County Veterans Affairs
Keith Beebe	PA War Veterans Council

Robert Gray	MOAA
Charles Jackson	Adjutant, Military Order of the Purple Heart
William Van Saun	DMVA
Rich Hudzinski	VVA, LVMAC
Bruce Foster	American Legion
Darren Jennings	Guest
Eugene Bell	Keystone NERA/VFW 845
Nancy Burris	
Kenneth R. Walters	Keystone Paralyzed Veterans
Jodi Zucco	Office of Attorney General
Don O'Shell	PA ANG HQ
Tom Minchin	Marine Corps League
BG David Wood	DMVA
Joel Mutschler	DMVA-PPL
Brian Natali	DMVA-OVA
Debra Brown	DMVA-BVH
Dawn Groff	DMVA-OVA
Eugene Mizdail	DMVA-BVH
Andrew Ruscavage	DMVA-BVH
Rick Hamp	DMVA-OVA
Chip Gilliland	DMVA-OVA
Michael Barrett	DMVA-CCO
Joyce Gibson	DMVA-OVA

#### **Awards Presentation**

Chairman John Brenner, Brigadier General Anthony Carrelli and Major General (R) Eric Weller presented a certificate of appreciation to the following members for valuable contributions to the Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission:

- James Powell, Marine Corps League Designee/PDC
- Jerry Frank , Jewish War Veterans Commander (A)
- William Kelley, Korean War Veterans' Representative
- Tom Bremer, Italian American War Veterans Commander (A)
- Michael Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart Commander
- Carl Olshefskie, The American Legion Commander
- Boyd "KC" Simpson, American Veterans Commander
- Thomas Brown, Veterans' of Foreign Wars Commander (A)
- Michael Iacavazzi, Disabled American Veterans Commander
- Neil Appleby, Blinded Veterans' Association President
- Henry Desrosiers, County Directors of Veterans Affairs President
- Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans Commander
- Thomas Haberkorn, Vietnam Veterans of America President
- Chris Fidler, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America Representative

#### **Approval of the April 7, 2017 Meeting Minutes**

**Motion:** Mr. Richard Fine, JWV Designee, made a motion to approve the minutes as distributed.

**Second:** Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, seconded the motion.

**Discussion:** Mr. Bob Cudworth questioned why we take a vote on the previous minutes. Chairman Brenner replied it's something we've always done and we want to make sure everyone is satisfied with the minutes. General Carrelli replied generally the purpose is to correctly capture and attribute the discussions that happen.

**Commission:** The body agreed, motion carried.

<b>TAG Remarks/Military Update</b>	<b>Brigadier General Anthony Carrelli</b>
<p>Currently about 250 airmen and soldiers are deployed. Units scheduled for deployment throughout next year and the following year.</p> <p>Captain Arthur Halfpapp, WWII Veteran killed in action, was recently returned to Pennsylvania last year, was inducted into Pennsylvania's Hall of Valor in May. General Carrelli proudly represented Capt. Halfpapp's family, who was unable to attend the induction ceremony, in Pittsburgh. A presentation to Capt. Halfpapp's family will be conducted soon to provide them a copy of the flag and memorabilia presented at the induction ceremony.</p> <p>Next month is the last big push for budget. The Governor's announced budget was tight that included a plus of the \$500,000 for Act 66, the House proposal took out the \$500,000 and some additional monies out of the GGO account, which would force furloughs. We continue to plead our case and ask you to continue as well so they know how important those funds are to us.</p>	
<p>Mr. Chuck Jackson asked if DMVA is forced to take manpower cuts, will they inform the DMVA and SVC who will be cut? General Carrelli replied they just pull the funding and it will be up to the DMVA to decide who to furlough.</p> <p>Mr. Richard Fine asked if it would be sensible to reach out to federal legislators. General Carrelli replied the federal government pays most of the training site salaries, they pay for equipment and supplies. Fort Indiantown Gap is a state entity, and it is the busiest training center in the country there are state costs involved such as utilities and maintenance. The state cost is very little compared to the federal government funds.</p>	
<b>VISN 4</b>	<b>Dr. Michael Adelman</b>
<p><b>Leadership:</b> Charles Thilges is serving as the interim director of the Altoona VAMC, Vince Kane has taken on the role of director at Wilmington VAMC.</p>	
<p><b>VISN 4 Data:</b> Over 90% of Veterans are receiving appointments within 30 days. Trust data is above the national average but not where we want to be. Currently have 1,376 provider agreements with 29,834 care in the community appointments completed. Overall, VISN 4 is above National levels on trust. All of the VAMC continue to work with providers in their local communities as well as the Choice Program. About 1/3 of care is being provided in the private sector.</p>	
<p><b>Dr. Shulkin's 5 Priorities for Strategic Actions:</b> Greater choice for Veterans, modernize our systems, focus resources more efficiently, improve timeliness of services and suicide prevention.</p>	
<p><b>Access &amp; Quality Website:</b> Released on April 12<sup>th</sup>, the new site shows how long patients are waiting for care, how Veterans rate their experiences, availability of same-day services and how VA facilities' quality data compare to local hospitals. Visit the new site at <a href="http://www.accesstocare.va.gov">www.accesstocare.va.gov</a>.</p>	
<p><b>Questions/Comments:</b> Mr. Fidler stated there is no neurologist at Lebanon VAMC nor is there one at the local hospital, Veterans cannot wait until October to see the neurologist. Dr. Adelman responded that is one of the challenges with access. They will be recruiting and other options should be available through the Choice program. Will follow up. Mr. Fidler said it left a lot of patients without their prescriptions filled, they need help before October.</p>	
<b>Special Introducion</b>	<b>Chairman John Brenner</b>
<p>Chairman Brenner introduced Mr. Larence Kirby, Executive Director Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs. Director Kirby thank the chairman and provided a brief overview of the Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs.</p>	
<b>OLD BUSINESS</b>	
<b>DMVA Chief Counsel</b>	<b>Mr. Michael Barrett</b>
<p>Mr. Michael Barrett informed the commission Mr. Steve Bushinski recently retired. He has been replace by Attorney Taylor Walsh, a recent graduate from the University of Pittsburgh who holds a certificate in health law. His time will be dedicated to the Bureau of Veterans Homes.</p>	
<b>DMVA Policy, Planning &amp; Legislative Affairs</b>	<b>Mr. Joel Mutschler</b>
<p>It is currently budget season. On Monday they will attend a bill signing ceremony, the Governor is signing six bills, five of which are DMVA related. Next week the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness</p>	

Committee will meet to consider HB 1231. They will also consider HB 302. On June 6 <sup>th</sup> , the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee will meet.	
<b>Questions/Comments:</b> Mr. Nicholas Taylor asked for the progress on the bill for benefits for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans? It has not moved	
<b>DMVA Public Affairs</b>	<b>Brigadier General Anthony Carrelli</b>
General Carrelli stated they were fortunate to have Governor Wolf come and speak at Boalsburg for Armed Forces day. They had over 115 gold star families and numerous Veterans Organizations attend. On June 8 <sup>th</sup> , the Pittsburgh Pirates will dedicate a POW/MIA Seat in the stadium that will forever be empty. They are also donating the proceeds of the 50/50 raffle to the Veterans' Trust Fund.	
<b>Questions/Comments:</b> Mr. Thomas Haberkorn asked why the newsletter is not available without registering, he would like to see the newsletter as a general publication. Mr. Rick Hamp replied they are working on creating a link that can just be clicked on, the Service Organization will also be able to put the link to DMVA from their website. General Carrelli stated you don't have to be a Veteran to register, family or friends can register and provide a hard copy of the digest. Please get the word out that you can register on behalf of a Veteran. Mr. Robert Cudworth commented he brought the issue of registering to the advisory council a while back and he recommended the county commissioners and the service officers of the organization when they work with Veterans to ask, at that time, if they would like to register.	
<b>DMVA Bureau of State Veterans Homes</b>	<b>Mr. Andrew Ruscavage</b>
Mr. Ruscavage provide a brief update on current licensure status. He also informed the Commission on the upcoming Annual Fishing Event and State Veterans' Homes Week. A blue folder was included with packets has information about the upcoming State Veterans' Homes Week.	
<b>DMVA Programs, Initiatives Reintegration &amp; Outreach</b>	<b>Mr. Rick Hamp</b>
Mr. Hamp stated we continue to assess the impacts of budget cuts. The Governor's Advisory Council for Veterans Services met on 17 May; subcommittees provided great feedback, and there were no outstanding issues or concerns. We talked about a Veterans' Symposium last year but weren't able to get it moving, if we wish to do a symposium this year we need to decide that issue and start planning for it.	
<b>Approval of Programs Reports</b>	
<b>Motion:</b> Mr. John Cyprian, Member at Large, made a motion to accept the programs reports as presented in the read ahead.	
<b>Second:</b> Mr. John Pliska, AMVETS, seconded the motion.	
The body agreed. The motion carried.	
<b>DMVA Services &amp; Programs</b>	<b>Mr. Brian Natali</b>
Mr. Natali provided a summary of what would happen if household income had been counted this last period in the packets. There would have been 20% more denials with household income included. He has been discussing SB 980 the last couple of meetings, which would remove the calculation of Veterans income for calculation of financial need, that bill has not moved.	
<b>DMVA Outreach &amp; Reintegration</b>	<b>Mr. Chip Gilliland</b>
Mr. Gilliland provided the Commission ACT 66 summary, current numbers are YTD Claims Submitted 27,253; YTD Value of Awards \$93,793,845. Mr. Gilliland also provided an update on outreach engagements and Veterans' Trust Fund details. Noting the PennDOT cost of \$194,000 the last payment was made in May and no longer own PennDOT.	
<b>Questions/Comments:</b> Mr. Sam Petrovich commented the information is combined in the reports, this is not a good business practice, previously the Commission was provided a breakout of the reports. He recommended not showing the report until the Vetraspec data conversion is complete, so the numbers are correct. Then he would like the numbers broken out, like they were before. He also suggested meeting with Chip and the Act 66 Committee to go over the numbers, they feel there is an imbalance with the numbers and that something is not correctly reported in the numbers. Mr. Gilliland replied if General Carrelli and General Weller decide that is the way the report should be he will change the format of his report. Chairman Brenner states if it is up to him they would like to see the report broken out. Mr. Gilliland continued the only way to determine if the numbers are correct is to audit the entire program, which they are going to do. General Weller requested a timeframe.	

Mr. Gilliland responded spring time frame, leaders from various organizations cited conventions, Mr. Gilliland said they would sit down and figure that out.

Mr. Rich Hudzinski stated another reason they had concerns with that chart is the SVC is pushing for a \$500,000 increase for Act 66 and one of the justifications is the efficiency and return on investment. If you compare data on the chart you would question that there is something wrong with the program. Mr. Hudzinski asked for clarification; after they paid the last \$194,000 that PennDOT required a \$30,000 a year maintenance fee. Mr. Gilliland responded not to his knowledge. Mr. Hudzinski asked Mr. Gilliland to verify. Mr. Gilliland was able to verify immediately that there is no further maintenance fee.

General Carrelli commented on the value of outreach. If you count up all those signed up in the last ten years that is an impressive number. We only report new sign ups. Mr. Petrovich responded Mr. Gilliland can go back and get those numbers that we ended the years with and that would reflect those years totals to show legislators. Mr. Gilliland said we also need to consider how many veterans receiving those benefits that are no longer with us. Mr. Ed Burris stated if you go to the VA website they report by state how much VA put into each state previously. Mr. Haberkorn responded that's true but it includes all sources and is not a fair metric to compare the value of the program.

**PA War Veterans Council** **Mr. Keith Beebe**

Mr. Keith Beebe provided a brief update of the PA War Veterans Council Legislative Committee. House and Senate VAEP held meeting in April concerning Act 66, two VSO's provided a personal presentation. PAWVC approved writing a letter to the House VAEP committee concerning PA House Resolution 222 which urged the U.S. Congress to enact their House Resolution 303.

PAWVC approved writing a letter to the House VAEP committee to request consideration to establish a PA House Resolution urging congress to write the military surviving spouses equity act. HR 846-Widow's Tax. PAWVC is in support of HB 1415 – Veterans Lottery Ticket. They have concerns on the language and will consult PAWVC members on response to that.

It was mentioned a possible .5M dollar cut that may impact Act 66, they would like to know the impact on Veterans Service Organizations and what they can do to help. General Carrelli responded a lot of it is awareness; make sure to get out there and make your voices heard. I want to make sure the legislators understand it is their responsibility to fund our programs.

General Weller commented each individual organization has a legislative agenda which supports active military and Veterans. You can find them on the organizations' website.

**SVC Act 66 Committee** **Mr. Samuel Petrovich**

They did met with the committee and had a lot of positive feedback from the committee. The Act 66 committee will continue to walk the halls, they plan to meet with the leadership of the committee to find out what their thoughts are and what they feel we need to do to help them.

**SVC RETX Committee** **Mr. Brian Natali**

No meetings were held since the last SVC meeting. Nothing substantial to report.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**DMVA State Veterans' Home Application Process** **Mr. Andrew Ruscavage & Mr. Gene Mizdail**

Mr. Andrew Ruscavage and Mr. Gene Mizdail provided the commission with an overview of the State Veterans' Homes Application Process. They provided information on the admissions criteria, flow charts on the application and denial process and a spreadsheet showing current waiting lists at each home.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Bob Cudworth asked what the average wait time is from the time an application is received? It depends on which home, it can be anywhere from 2 weeks to 1 month. Mr. Rich Hudzinski asked once a person is on the waiting list do you rank them based on economic need or medical need? No, it is first come first serve. Ms. Jodi Zucco asked about the transfer process. Once a Veteran is living in a State Veterans' Home they would go to their social worker on that wing and request they be transferred. Is there an appeal process for that? Yes, they would go through the same appeal process.

**GAC-VS Update** **Major General (R) Eric Weller**

General Weller updated the Commission on the work being done through the Governor's Advisory Council for Veterans' Services. He provided a brief overview of what the GAC-VS committees are working on.

<b>Member at Large Update</b>	<b>Chairman John Brenner</b>
<p>Chairman Brenner provided a brief update on the Member at Large Process. Had initial meeting yesterday. Mr. Rich Hudzinski, Mr. Chuck Jackson, Mr. Sam Petrovich and Chairman John Brenner represent the SVC on this committee. The commission will continue to be updated on this committee.</p>	
<b>Good of the Order/Announcements</b>	
<p>Mr. Thomas Haberkorn asked if there was an organizational chart of committees? Chairman Brenner responded he does not have an organizational chart but there should be one. Mr. Haberkorn continued there are people being added to committees and they're not sure if they're SVC committees or DMVA committees, we would like to know who's doing what on which committee that affect this body. Chairman Brenner responded we will do that.</p>	
<p>Mr. Tom Minchin, on behalf of the Indiantown Gap Memorial Council, thanked organizations that showed up this past Memorial Day. He also extended an opportunity for next season for those individuals that wish to enjoy good family community service and join them at Indiantown Gap for the Veterans' Day program. He will provide more information later this year.</p>	
<p>Mr. Darren Jennings requested assistance from the commission and guests in attendance. Mr. Jennings is searching for his father. He has not seen him since 1976. His father's name is Charles Clarence Wright, he was a Veteran in the United States Army. He was stationed at New Cumberland Army Depot in 1966-1967. Chairman Brenner asked Mr. Jennings to provide all the information on his father and contact information and they will find out if there is someone who can help Mr. James.</p>	
<b>Next Meeting</b>	
<p>Friday, September 8, 2017 Keystone Conference Center Fort Indiantown Gap Annville, PA 17003</p>	
<b>Adjournment</b>	
<p>Chairman Brenner adjourned the meeting at 11:58AM.</p>	

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

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