



PENNSYLVANIA
WAR VETERANS COUNCIL, INC.



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April 4, 2024 MINUTES
10:00 AM

CALL TO ORDER	Spike Gyger, President
INVOCATION	Richard Denison, Chaplain
SALUTE TO COLORS	Troy Michaels, Sgt-at-Arms
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	Troy Michaels, Sgt-at-Arms
ROLL CALL	James Hogan, Secretary

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Steve Lavelle, Woody Hogan, Troy Michaels, William Whitmoyer, Richard Denison, Matt Hollenbeck

AMVETS

BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION

William Albert, Wanda Grover

CATHOLIC WAR VETERANS

Michael Rang, Sister Mary Mathias

DISABLED AMERICAN VETS

David Gui, Timothy Alexander (excused), David Wagner

JEWISH WAR VETERANS

KEYSTONE PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Chris Fidler, Constance Snavely, Joseph Dunn

MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

Diana Henry, Sarah Cook (excused), Victoria McCoy, James Diamond (excused)

MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Nicholas Taylor, Keith Beebe, Robert Gray

MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART

Peter Verbos (excused), Phil Arnold, Nate Thomas (excused), Bob Ardner Jr. (excused)

PA CO. DIRECTOR OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Jesiah Schrader, Justin Slep (excused), Alvin Loveless (excused)

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

John Getz Jr., David Gyger, Barbara Loncar, Fred Hechler (excused), Chuck Jackson

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC

Larry Googins, Richard Hudzinski

It was determined the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council had a quorum in which to conduct business.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): Morning everybody. So I have been asked to put this out when we get up to the podium and speak from our desk. We all have a tendency to speak at a normal rate. Zoom doesn't like that. The people on Zoom have difficulty getting it. I don't know how it works. I am just a grunt. So we got to talk slower is the bottom line. So if everyone could help me talk slower so everybody on Zoom can follow along with us. I am probably guilty as anybody that speaks at 100 miles an hour so we will all work together and maybe they can hear us better.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Spike Gyger (President): At this time everybody has received the meeting minutes I will entertain a motion. Nicholas Taylor (MOAA) moves to approve the minutes as written. Sister Mary Mathias (CWV). Any question on the motion? All in favor? Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it. Our minutes from our last meeting are approved.

Wanda Grover (BVA): The minutes did not include last meeting that William Albert was present or that I was in as a guest.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Report given by John Getz:

John Getz: Good morning comrades. How are we doing today? Good to see everybody. I thought I've saw a UFO in the sky this morning here it was the sun. I couldn't believe that. I am going to go over the reports today. You only have a copy of February out there. I did somewhat cover last time but I didn't have a reconciliation of the bank accounts. I got the March in and got it out yesterday. So most of you just to have it in an email. We don't have any copies up here for you. Anybody needs one, can see us afterwards we can make one for you. Basically, we have everything from what I can see squared away for the next two months

War Council – For the month of February: \$30,171.18, 0 deposits, \$50.00 withdrawal, ending balance \$30,121.18

Honor Guard – For the month of February: \$20,250.00, total deposits \$52,250.00, total withdrawals \$21,750.00, ending balance \$50,750.00.

Savings – For the month of February: \$10,350.49, total \$.16 deposits, \$.04 total withdrawals, ending balance \$10,350.61. We had withdrawal of \$.04 on taxes.

War Council – For the month of March: \$30,121.18, \$300.00 deposits, \$195.00 withdrawal, ending balance \$30,226.18

Honor Guard – For the month of March: \$62,875.00, total deposits 0, total withdrawals \$23,625.00, ending balance \$39,250.00.

Savings – For the month of March: \$10,350.61, total \$.18 deposits, \$.04 total withdrawals, ending balance \$10,350.75. We had withdrawal of \$.04 on taxes.

John Getz: I do have the statement for the website along with \$195 cost to Thrive media and with the statements that we have and everything else as far as dues being paid. Right now we still have the Jewish War Vets that have not paid for a good many years. Of course the Navy Club has not paid for a good many years and the DAV still owes \$100. They gave me a check for \$100 and they still owe \$100. That is my report. Any questions?

Woody Hogan (Secretary): The Navy Club is no longer in our Bylaws so you can cross that out.

Spike Gyger (President): At this time everybody has received the Treasures report I will entertain any questions? If not I will entertain a motion to accept Barb Loncar (VFW) moves to approve the minutes as written. Steve Lavelle (TAL). Any question on the motion? All in favor? Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it.

REPORT

Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General, VA: Good Morning everyone. So nice that you did bring the sun out. So thank you for joining me this morning. It's awesome. First, I want to say congratulations, Pennsylvania is in the top five states for bringing more claims and benefits and increasing our claims and benefits and VA healthcare. VA healthcare has over 400,000 Veterans right now enrolled and just in the last 365 days, which is a 30% increase and PA is in the top five states for all of our claims benefits and that is just because of all the hard work we've all been doing on PACT Act. I know all of your VSO's have been working on overdrive trying to push the claims but we can't stop since March 5th more things have opened. Anytime you are exposed to any toxins anytime in your Military career that is a game changer that is going to open VA health care up. Many people say they make too much money. So they were denied VA healthcare. Now if they can get a 0% disability rating even a 0% because they were exposed anytime in their career, they can now go and use VA healthcare which they really want the hearing aids and the walkers and some of that equipment that their insurance companies might not pay for. So we can't take our foot off the pedal. We have to keep pushing. Thank you we are in the top five. I appreciate that. On the home side, I'll talk about them first since this is about 1100 thankfully the seasons have slowed down with flu, all the other COVID and different viruses we have had in and out of the homes. The homes are pretty good right now. I think overall I have three Veterans that currently have COVID. We are doing really great. Last week we said goodbye to Rich Adams who was with us for about 14 years at Southwest Veterans Center. He was our commandant. We are currently in the process of replacing him we've identified somebody going through the process. Right now Barry Lowen from our office is in Pittsburgh, covering down on the facility but they were doing great. Had a great send off for him. Everybody I think was in tears. I know he will be back out golfing with the team because they built that wonderful putting green out there, so they are excited to kick the golf season open. We are going to have a new doctor coming on board at Hollidaysburg. We had a physician group out there for many years. We are now going to make it like all the other homes where we have a state employee as a medical doctor looking over that facility to be there full time. So probably by the end of May we will have that person on board that is going through the process as well. Gino Merli Veterans Center we had a junior college come in and build them a Tiki Bar outside. So they are very excited for the sun coming out today. They can open up their new Tiki Bar and they are looking for a lot of summer fun up there. Of course, like everybody else, we are getting ready for the Eclipse and Erie is one of the top places to watch it. The Erie nursing home out there is ready, they have their goggles, and they have a lot of events planned. Hopefully it is not cloudy for them because they are very excited about the Eclipse if anyone wants to go up their lawn is huge. They have lots of room. I don't think I have any hotel rooms for you up there. If you have to stay I am sure we can find you a bed. So you are welcome to go up and join them. Pyro side, I talked about the claims. We have over 19,700 connections in PA Vet Connect and we are still growing. One of our new connections we made yesterday is called tunnel to tower. It was started by a firefighter. That was you know right on 9/11 was driving home because his shift was over, saw what happened immediately tried to get to the precinct and get with his group to go over and they had already left, they were already engaged and on their way to go to take care of the towers. So he started driving on his own and of course the tunnels were closed from where he was. So he put on all his gear and he ran five miles through the tunnels to get to his team. Unfortunately that wonderful man was in the second tower when it collapsed. They took that model and they started this tunnel to tower in his honor. So they started taking care of families of the fallen and the first responders. Now they are really looking at Veterans as well. They want to help Veterans with homelessness right here in Harrisburg, where we have the tiny homes project, and tiny homes is just a great way for Veterans that are coming off the street that have been isolated to have their own place, really safe to get used to. Once they got used to being with other people and being involved in a more of a community, they can go

into the Tunnel to Tower facilities, it is going to be apartments and studios and then it's going to have bigger facilities, little homes for people to go into and they are right next to each other. It is on a beautiful area right on the river. That will be a great view. That is coming. It is really exciting. That is our new PA Vet Connect. We keep finding all these wonderful organizations of people who want to take care of Veterans. We just keep adding them to make sure all of you know where to refer our Veterans that are in need. This weekend speaking of Veterans in need as the Veterans stand down, so we will be at the farm show with homeless Veterans making sure they have all the resources. I know a lot of your organizations come down and support that it is a great event. You are all welcome to join us at the farm show. There is hundreds of nonprofit that provide food, clothing, medical care, dental exams, to take care of our Veterans. That is this weekend down at the Farm show on Saturday. General Schindler, myself and General McHugh will be there. We have a GACVS meeting coming in May 1st you are welcome to join us. The Tunnel to Tower groups going to come in and kind of give them a brief and explain to the GACVS what they are doing. You are welcome to join us June 10th and 12th that is Women's Veterans Day week. So June 10th and 12th Senator Pennycuick is having an event she is looking for female Veterans to honor so if you have female Veterans send an email to Senator Pennycuick's office and she usually does a really nice event at the Rotunda of the Capitol to recognize them. June 12th is the Governor's ceremony more details to follow. I don't have all the specifics but I'll share that when I get all the specifics. On June 10th to 12th is also homes week so that is where we have a lot of fun with the nursing homes, you can come out and visit there is a lot of activities. I will be sure once I have the final agenda of all the activities going on at all the homes we will email that out to all of you so you have a copy of that. This month is sexual assault awareness month. So tomorrow Marilyn who is our new women's advisor and General McHugh will be in Carlisle for an event where they are going to read the Governor's proclamation on Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Trying to think what else I forgot to tell you all I know there is a lot of information. We are belonging now to the VA SAMHSA society suicide mortality review and Pennsylvania is one state Rick Hamp has been invited. They have a big conference in June and we are going to be one of the leads at that conference. We will share any information we have with you on that. It has been busy. You know just got over women's history month we've been out talking and of course till my Vietnam Veterans we recognized on March 30th and we were busy celebrating all of you and that is all I have and welcome home. Any questions?

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): You had mentioned the PA Vet Connect the database that you have this database of 19,000 you were working on having it on a website. Where does that all stand?

Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General, VA: That is a great question. So we just hired a brand new IT coordinator in our Department and we are looking at that. So we had a contract that we were working with Service Now. So we are looking at the platform to figure out how we can make it different, user friendly. So right now, it's very user friendly for the VSO's and my staff. Not user friendly for a Veteran who just wants to navigate their own or someone who says hey, you know where the closest homeless shelter in this zip code is? We are working on that user interface so hoping in the next 6 months we will have a better product on that end, right now the system is there and VSO's can see all the information in the 19,000. It is not open yet for everybody. So we are working that and that is TAGS priority.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): One last question. You mentioned Senator Pennycuick's women's event on June 10th. When we got the word we got an email and it would be useful to have a flyer or a PDF.

Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General, VA: Yea I think on her website I will look and see what she has. This is her initiative but I believe it's on her Senate website, but I will go ahead and see if I can pull it off and share it with you. We can do that and we will share tomorrow.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): I went to her website at that time and there wasn't anything.

Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General, VA: I will see if there is something and I will get it out to you all. We will pass it out tomorrow at the other meeting tomorrow. I always get to see you guys two days in a row.

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for having me again. In terms of the Senate Veterans Affairs Emergency Preparedness Committee. First of all, I want to thank the War Veterans Council for holding the Legislative breakfast this past month. Appreciate a couple of the initiatives that you're doing and as you heard there, Senator Mastriano is going to introduce the Global War on Terror bonus. He is working with Senator Ahmed, Senator Baker and Senator Pennycuick as well to introduce that there might be a couple other co primes with him on that front. Right now we are working on making sure we have those folks that are going to be introducing it together, well introduce a co-sponsor memo we will keep you posted as this develops. Senator Baker had taken the lead last session she issued a co-sponsor memo. This Legislation was not introduced, but we are going to start off from there. If there is any thoughts, suggestions on that front, you know keep me posted from your end and I will keep you posted from my end. The Legislative breakfast led right into our Medal of Honor service at the State Capitol it was going to be held at Soldier's Grove which has the names of all the Medal of Honor recipients. Due to the high winds that morning we ended up in the East wing rotunda and appreciate everyone that came out to that and heard from Lieutenant Colonel Walter Joe Marm Medal of Honor recipient who was in Vietnam and during the battle there was portrayed and we were Soldiers. It was a wonderful event. I appreciate everybody that came out. We are having our Vietnam Veterans day service at the Capital a little late it will be on Monday, this coming Monday April 8th that will be at 10:30am on the front steps of the State Capitol. It will feature Senator Mastriano. Obviously State Treasurer Stacy Garrity who is a Veteran as well as Major General James McCormick from the Pennsylvania National Guard, as well as Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Tom with US Vietnam Veteran War Commemoration. If you are able to come out to that we'd greatly appreciate it. Anybody that attends with us and then on Tuesday we are planning to have a Committee meeting. We are looking at three Bills right now. The first is Senate Bill 973 Senator Pennycuick is very popular this morning. It is one of her Bills. That would be for Korean valor to ensure that any Pennsylvania citizen who was Korean and fought in the Vietnam War during that era would get Veterans benefits here in Pennsylvania. Senate Bill 1139 would ensure when a Veteran service member passes away that the funeral directors are in contact with the County Director of Veterans Affairs and make sure that their family members are provided notice and information of burial benefits and other death benefits and then Senator Pennycuick also has another Bill that we are looking at the VFW has brought to our attention to protection from the claim sharks as it is being titled. We are looking at that it doesn't have a Bill number yet, but we are looking at that as well. I will be happy to answer any questions here.

Unknown: Will we be able to get a copy of that to review it.

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: Absolutely I will send you the draft or the Bill as soon as it is introduced here. Could be the end of the week.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Has there been any progress on the pension issued to blinded and paralyzed and amputee pensions?

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: That has been in our Senate Appropriations Committee here for some time. I will touch base with them again. As I had said before, it is a budget issue and it is going to take you know basically a push during the budget time period to get that moving.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): I notice that the administration made an increase to their pension fund. I don't know if it is based on thinking forward that is some Legislation being passed or based on the increase of number of people coming in.

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: I am not a 100% sure maybe the General has a better answer on that. But I do know that there is a proposed increase in that line item, the Legislation would ensure the higher amount for individuals that are receiving that benefit. I don't necessarily believe that they would get an increase in benefit, most likely would be an increased population right now. That would be my assumption. Yes I am getting the thumbs up. So I am right.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): We were curious as to which Bill is going to go through is getting the backing. So we can back it and advocate for it.

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: In that case I would reach out to Senator Martin's office here in the Senate and I am not 100% certain maybe Kerry she is here from the House can speak to where the house version stands at this point. But in terms of Senator Martin's Committee Appropriations Committee has the Senate version by Senator Judy Ward. So by all means, please reach out.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): There are three Bills that I know and we'd like to know which one is going to get the backing.

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: We would all like to know that. But the first part is making sure that we reach out to the Appropriate Committees at this point. Senator Appropriations on that front Kerry will talk to about the House version here as well. As long as one of them gets to the goal line is all I care about.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: Good morning everyone. I am Kerry Vanyo. I am here on behalf of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for Chairman Solomon. As Nate said, thank you all for the wonderful Legislative breakfast that we had at the end of March. I think we had about 20 Legislators there. It was a really nice breakfast and thank you for coming if you were there. I know Spike I think I got an email from you about I think it was about House Bill 1227 which makes changes to the disabled Veterans real estate tax exemption program. So we are working on an amendment for that to include Veterans who are Prisoners of War or missing in action for their spouses to be eligible for the real estate tax exemption. I think it was intended to be included in the Bill and there was a long list of things they were trying to add and it got missed. So we are going to add that in. Make sure we are covering everything that you have been asking for. Which to answer your question. We did hear from the DMVA I think that they are looking to raise the pension to \$200 a month. I believe that is what they said that they could have in their current budget. I am not sure if that is if they are taking into account this budget season, but they told us \$200. We are currently drafting Legislation with Representative Dan Williams, Representative Pisciotano and Representative Jim Gregory so there will be a fourth one introduced because we've been working on that number, but I think they've said about it will be raised to \$200. Which I think it is currently at \$180. If I am not mistaken.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): \$150. One of the Bills has \$180. So as a question you are telling me that DMVA is putting weight on one of the Bills?

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: The Bill has not been introduced yet. We heard from DMVA that \$200 was the number

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Last question is COLA being considered? Is cost of living adjustments so that you don't have to go through this process?

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: Yes, I believe in the Bill there is a provision to account for there is like an inflation provision.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): We were interested in that.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: It is currently being drafted by the LRB right now I submitted it last week. So we should introduce that if not this week probably next week and start certainly circulating the memo to get co-sponsors for that. So that is a little bit of an update there. We passed three Resolution out of our Committee which subsequently passed the House. The first one was which I believe some of you were there for the meeting at the breakfast. So this is what we voted out of Committee and then was passed. So we passed House Resolution 335 sponsored by Rep Takac, which establishes the Pennsylvania taskforce on Agent Orange and other toxins. So that taskforce will study and issue a report on how best to connect Veterans who are exposed to Agent Orange and other toxins and their families with VA benefits for which they might be eligible. The second Resolution was HR 336, sponsored by Representative Pielli which designated March 29, 2024 as Vietnam Veterans Memorial Day in Pennsylvania and House Resolution 347 sponsored by Rep Watro which designated March 25th as National Medal of Honor Day in Pennsylvania. So that was all the update that I had. Is there any other questions?

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Since you mentioned you know memorializing days and things like that. March 29th is a National observance that is Vietnam War Veterans why can't the State do something like that and just institute that the 29th if the state is even required to do it.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: You mean perpetuity? I am not sure. We have lots of Memorials and for some reason we do them every session or every year of each session.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): It diverts attention I noticed this. There is other important issues.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: There is a section in I believe Title 38 which is holidays and observances in which they have, I believe there is about four of them and I can't remember them off the top of my head, what each day is that recognizes those days, I believe in perpetuity. So if you were to do something like that you could amend statutorily rather than doing a resolution. Which I mean we could pursue that if there is an interest in that.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): Yes

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: Yeah, sure if you'd like to I have my card I am sure you have my information already. But if you would like to talk about that with us, we could maybe.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Just do it.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: We would have to talk about it and I am not sure why we don't do that already. I will have to ask Mike, my boss Mike and see if he knows anything and Nate's raising his hand, he might have a better answer for me.

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: I think it was two sessions ago, we added a couple days for the Persian Gulf War Veteran Day was added. Global War on Terrorism day was added, Women's Veteran Day as well as Tuskegee Airman Commemoration day they can fit right in there as Kerry was mentioning in Title 38.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): It is on the same level we've mirrored that.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: Any other questions? Thank you.

Spike Gyger (President): We will be sending a letter out.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): We'll get it approved for the next meeting.

Spike Gyger (President): Thank you I'd like to introduce our guests we have State Representative Alec Ryncavage from the 119th District.

Alec Ryncavage State Representative 119th District: Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for having me. I don't know where you were talking about where the sun was at because when I drove from Luzerne County, there was no sun today. So I don't know what happened there. Thank you very and more importantly thank you all for your service. I recognize that without our Veterans serving in the trenches, I wouldn't be able to serve underneath chandeliers and bring that fight to Harrisburg across the river. So thank you very much. My name is Alec Ryncavage I represent the 119th Legislative District that is in Luzerne County. That is the suburbs of the city of Hazleton, the city of Wilkes Barre in the city of Nanticoke and one of the big issues in our office, or one of the big missions I should say in our office is every month we host two Veterans Service days and during those days we close down our office and we only serve Veterans and family members of Veterans with Brian Stolarski from The American Legion as well as we have a guest from the VFW. When we were going through those days, an issue was presented to us and I'm here today to ask for your support. I am going to be introducing Legislation that I hope I can get support from the War Council and when I came here this morning I had a great talk with Woody about all the different issues we can be addressing such as skill games and smoking in our Posts. This is slightly different. This isn't as hard hitting as Legislation. This is a license plate Legislation along the lines of when we were serving our Veterans, we had a gentleman come in who received the ticket because he had a disabled Veterans license plate and parked inside a handicap parking spot and when we started to look into this issue we discovered that if you are a Veteran in Pennsylvania there are two types of license plates that are available to you. I think we just added a third for women Veterans. For disabled Veterans, you have the severely disabled license plate if you have a 100% service related disability and you have your disabled Veteran license plate, what we learned is with the disabled license plate, if you do not have a service related disability, you do not get the privileges to park in a handicap parking space and that is kind of counterintuitive to me because you have to get a note signed by your doctor that you have some kind of certifiable disability. This license plate by statute does not give you the ability to park in those handicap parking spaces. At the end of the day, you are left with a fancy bumper sticker. Now you might be asking me why I am here today asking for your guys to support another Veteran license plate. Well there are byproducts to this you can say hey Alec, you can go and get a handicap placard for your window and you might be able to park in those parking spaces. In Pennsylvania, if you live alongside a State route. So for example. I live in Plymouth Pennsylvania, our downtown Main Street is State Route 11 municipality cannot offer you a reserved parking space with a disability placard, and you need to have the disabled license plate. So now what we are running into is Veterans who have to choose whether they want to proudly recognize themselves as disabled Veterans, or get a disabled Veteran license plate and there are a subset of Veterans out there that are not 100% disabled because of the service, they may have served, they may have went back to their community, they may have worked their entire life and then maybe got injured on the job or maybe old age does what old age does and now they have a disability. They are left between a rock and a hard place where they have to choose whether to proudly recognize themselves as a Veteran, or get that parking accommodation that they need. So my fix that I am proposing is to simply introduce new Legislation that creates a new license plate that would accomplish both. It would allow you to be recognized as a disabled Veteran and give you those parking accommodations you need so that Veterans across the Commonwealth regardless if they live alongside of State Route, regardless if it was because of service that their disability was originated from. They are all recognized properly and so I have some handouts that I will

pass out to all of our guests here today so that they can read sort of how I came to this issue. It was a gentleman who came into our office with this problem. We've talked about it with Penn Dot, we've talked about it with our Veteran counsel, I certainly don't want to be introducing Veteran related Legislation without the support of our Veterans and so I thank God for having me here today and I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you very much for having me.

Josiah Schrader PA County Directors of Veterans Affairs: Your license plate that you would like to introduce as you are you going to recognize the waiver or the registration fees for one vehicle.

Alec Ryncavage State Representative 119th District: Yes it would not be any cost to our Veterans.

Josiah Schrader PA County Directors of Veterans Affairs: Even the registration fee?

Alec Ryncavage State Representative 119th District: Yes certainly it could be amended and changed when it actually goes to the House, but my intent is to write the Legislation to waiver all fees.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Just to be clear, what you are doing essentially is creating a disabled Veteran license plate that has the same standard as the regular disabled license plate?

Alec Ryncavage State Representative 119th District: Correct. We are simply closing the loophole and the oversight that was created when they created this disabled Veteran license plate.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Got it. Thank you.

Alec Ryncavage State Representative 119th District: We tried to research how this problem came to be when the original disabled Veteran plate was introduced. We couldn't find why that happened. We think somewhere along the way, people just assumed you can have a placard and your plate but then somewhere along the way transportation committees changed the rules and the statutes so that a placard does not qualify for a reserved parking space outside your house simply because where I come from a Northeast Pennsylvania coal mining towns there are a lot of people with placards we wouldn't have enough parking for anybody. So now the new standard is in order to get a reserved parking spot you have to have the plate well, now we have a subset of Veterans that are left out and we certainly want to recognize everybody for their contributions to our country. Thank you very much folks.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Constitution and Bylaws: Gerald Hawk (AMVETS) – No report at this time.

Veterans Affairs & Policy: Chris Fidler (KPA) – No report

Membership: Chuck Jackson (MOAA) – No report

Legislative: Robert Gray (MOAA), – Good morning everyone. Ditto to what Nate and Kerry said and I just came up to show off my tie. We did have a good turnout for the Legislative breakfast and we did get to talk one on one with Legislators prior to the Committee hearing that was held later. We saw this morning there was something that came out of that as far as House Bill 1212. Two things, House Bill 1227 real estate tax exemption for disabled Veterans to try to get that moving along and also the one thing wasn't in our for issues that we presented but it was on the handout. As far as increasing the disabled pensions from \$150 to a higher amount. We also did a presentation as far as the DAV van transportation program and the need to have additional funding to replace more vans quicker due to the high mileage and age of the vehicles that are out

there. There is 128 vans out there that have been given out a long time and some of them are 11 year old and some have 160,000 miles on the vehicles. We found out that VA is doing the maintenance but their theory was you know ride them till they drop and so we are trying to set a new standard is when they should turn them back in and that is going to take a while as far as to get that cycle in place. So we appreciate the work that some of the Legislators are going to take on to try to get an increase in the line item. Also the Veterans Justice Program we did bring that up, there was a hearing on the Bill and that was mainly looking at past convictions of people from the Vietnam era before even the VA started looking at PTSD and TBI and our main emphasis was as far as like Veterans courts, that they are currently screening for Veterans to identify the Veterans and find any treatment that could determine whether or not they have that problem before their sense, so that it can be taken in consideration. That is a slow moving process because of the justice system that they don't go by unnecessarily by Legislation. It is a court procedure. Rich do you have anything to comment?

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): The Bill you were talking about is Senate Resolution 196 follow up and study how effective the current Veterans Court system is but separately, we have been working with a former Commonwealth Court of Common Pleas judge and we've come up with a final draft to change the rule 702 with the idea of talking with the VA reference class, you know how to examine but also to meet with the Supreme Court directly and see if we can sell this matter administratively because under the Constitution, the courts can overrule any Legislation that gets into the area of procedures. The House and Legislation is mainly about what's but what and now sometimes, you know so fine line. That is what happened in the past when pre-sentence a key part of this is about pre-sentence investigations. So it is considered during the trial and your sentencing that section that was in the law, got essentially suspended. Because of this problem there was a Constitutional amendment that occurred in 1976 that allowed the Supreme Court this authority. So we are trying another tactic as well but the SR 196 will also help on the issue of getting Veteran's treatment courts, or what we call Veterans courts here in Pennsylvania more widely distributed, there is what 26 now?

Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General, VA: There is 25 we will have 26 and we cover 38 counties.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Yeah Northampton County is already started and then there is a Regional one that is starting up so that makes about 27 but, still 20 or so counties that haven't signed on and the idea is to get it beyond finding a good judge who cares and wants to set it up. Sometimes a VA makes it happen, so to speak and that is why we need the study for fairness to our Veterans. House Bill 231 I don't see it going anywhere unless.

Robert Gray (MOAA): In its current form it is mainly looking at Post conviction and the Veterans courts mainly are looking at things that are not felony related. All takes time, I guess. That we did have a good audience at the Legislative breakfast and we were able to make a short transit just outside the room to the Medal of Honor Ceremony, so we were able to support that event as well and the Pennsylvania Medal of Honor Highway, we got instituted last year and Keith Beebe has been working with the House of Representatives that try to move the Senate Bill, there was a Bill introduced in the House by Pennsylvania Representative Kelly in Erie County and also Senator Wyden in Senate from Oregon and Senate Bill actually got passed and it is in the House and it's the same identical Bill so we are trying to poke people to kind of encourage them to move the Bill out of Committee and the Transportation Committee and Keith has been able to find some people that the current Route 20 runs through their District and they are also on the Transportation Committee so he contacted them we are going to be looking to try to move that along in the next month's coming up to try to get that passed. Anyone have any questions?

Larry Googins (VVA): Back to the Veteran's treatment courts you don't leave the word out treatment. It is not Veterans court, it is Veterans treatment court, it's very important because that is what it is about. It is

about treatment. It is not about our Veterans getting some special privilege. They are able to be treated through the VA hopefully, so I am just suggesting I know it is just another word but it is critical and if you talk to the Supreme Court Justice she will tell you that and she is a proponent of that very much as General Weigl knows. So it is very important treatment and treatment court. So I just ask everybody if you leave that out it will never go anywhere. Just a small point thank you very much.

Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General, VA: In some states if you do the treatment court, which is a very taxing, it is very, very difficult process to get through they have to do a lot and some states they actually make sure if you do the treatment court which is a few years long your record get expunged and you can go back and get a job. Not every county and not every Veteran court in Pennsylvania does, as a matter of fact the majority of them do not expunge the record. So if you want to dangle the carrot to get these folks to be active and get clean and get healthy an expungement might be a great thing to recommend. Other states have it in law we do not.

Robert Gray (MOAA): We are aware and when I use that term Veterans Court that is the way that Legislation is. It shouldn't be maybe we ought to put a change in for that process. I hadn't thought about that. It is a specialty court of the Court of Common Pleas like a mental health or drug and alcohol court and actually its origins is in drug and alcohol adding mental health to it and that is what became Veterans treatment court.

Website: Spike Gyger (President): On the website is working progress, still have some issues. I will keep pressing on and try to get it right.

Honor Guard: Constance Snavelly (KPV) – No report

Troy Michaels (TAL): Good morning. First one I want to bring up is an appointment that we received to make sure that gets in the minutes and gets voted on and approved before I get into the reappointments and one other issue that cropped up since our last meeting. So the nomination and reappointment got submitted was for Wanda Grover for Delaware Valley Veterans Home Wanda Grover President of the BVA request the reappointment of Samuel Huhn whose term expired November 1 2023. I make the motion this appointment be approved Mr. President I need a second.

Spike Gyger (President): Wanda Grover second. We have a second all in favor say Aye. Aye Opposed? Ayes have it.

Troy Michaels (TAL): Thank you. We have several that appointments that are out that we are waiting on and need to be submitted in or from the Governor's office. But the following are appointments that need to happen. I am also going to bring up keep in mind we do not have meetings in June or July for everybody's edification. We do have some appointments that expire while we are absent from our meeting. So please keep that in mind when I read these off and when you are looking at your sheets as well. So the first one Delaware Valley Veterans Home Allan Abramson from the Jewish War Veterans expires 11/1/23, Larry Holman needs to be appointed or reappointed from the Jewish War Veterans his term expired 11/1/22 those are the only two right now that we need to take care of. Any questions on Delaware Valley? Moving on Gino J Merli Veterans Center we have vacancy was previously filled by the Blinded Veterans Association so we need an appointment there. The other two are reappointments that expired on 4/5 and I know after talking to Josiah Schrader we are going to get the one in for Lisa Kay so I am not worried about that one. But the other one that needs to be take care of is Russell Canevari need to be reappointed from the VFW whose term expired 4/5/24 any questions on Gino J Merli?

Wanda Grover: Our representative passed away so we are working to get another member.

Troy Michaels (TAL): That one has already been submitted Wanda and that will be taken care of. If I am not mistaken I will double check on it but I believe that one was already handled.

Wanda Grover: We haven't done one for Gino Merli.

Troy Michaels (TAL): I will look into it and get back to you. How is that? All right any other questions on Gino J Merli? Moving on to Hollidaysburg Veterans home the following need to be reappointed because they are getting ready to expire in about a month. Michael Hoover from the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Henry Gaunt from the AMVETS, Thomas G Williams from the VFW and the last one Jay Buchanan from Military Officers Association of America. All those terms expire on May 16, 2024. The last one which has been out for a while Timothy Susengill from Vietnam Veterans Association of America that term expired on May 16, 2022. Questions on Hollidaysburg?

Robert Gray (MOAA): When he was replaced, we got a resignation and that was his replacement. Now we have to reappoint them and for a regular term.

Troy Michaels (TAL): Pennsylvania Soldiers and Sailor home the following need to be handled and again a couple of these are coming up as I mentioned, David Price Military Order of the Purple Heart his term expired on 7/24/24, Raymond J Chambers Marine Corps League term expires or will expire 7/27/24 and the last one there is a vacancy from the Blinded Veterans Association. Again that one will need to be fulfilled the term expires 7/27/25. Any questions on Pennsylvania Soldiers and Sailors home? Southeastern Veterans Center the only one that needs to be handled there is Barry Amole Vietnam Veterans Association that term expired 1/9/22. Any questions on Southeastern Veterans Center? The following ones for Southwestern Veterans Center Rommel Dacanay Blinded Veterans Association that term expired 6/1/2020. The ones that are coming up James Lamison from AMVETS 6/1/24 and the last one William Aronson that one is just awaiting a bio. So if somebody from the Military Order of the Purple Heart could get me a bio, we could get that one taken care of. Any questions on South Western Veterans Center? Okay we ran into a little bit of a snag that I need some help on and I am somewhat perplexed based on what I've been told from the DMVA which is they are getting their information from the Governor's Office. We submitted Bernie McDonald reappointment for Gino J Merli Veterans Center ahead of time about a month to a month half in advance. Ironically enough, they kicked it back the Governor's office kicked it back and we were told that we can't submit a nomination until the term has expired. Now here is the real kicker a lot of the appointment letters went through on April the first they got reappointed. His term expired on 4/5/24 four days. So I need some assistance here on what direction to go because quite frankly I don't understand why we can't submit a nomination four weeks or five weeks in advance so that we don't have folks that are expired and then get appointed, knowing that it takes a month, two months sometimes longer to get them fulfilled which means now like as an example, Bernie McDonald can't got to a meeting, can't vote and can't voice his opinion to help out our Veterans in our homes. So I am looking for guidance on this. I will open it up for discussion.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Have we ever sent a letter to the Governor's office over this issue? Before you know getting ahead of the power curve out to compliment you for what you have been doing here trying to get this straightened out. But you are also trying to get ahead of the power curve? It doesn't make a lot of sense. So who do we write to? That is the question as a body who is the person? Who is the change maker?

Troy Michaels (TAL): Being fairly new to the War Council I am not sure I am not sure if any letter has been written. I would imagine and Woody correct me if I am wrong but I would imagine we need to draft the letter and then send it directly to the Governor's office.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): So let me ask DMVA should we be writing a letter to you?

Brig. Gen. (PA) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General, VA: I was not aware of Bernie's situation. So this is the first time that I am hearing of Bernie's there is another one I could talk to you offline on that I got notice on but I will get an answer to you. We'll have that for you tomorrow, my recommendation.

Troy Michaels (TAL): I appreciate that. Thank you.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Also for the future we can get ahead of the power.

Troy Michaels (TAL): Thank you for the compliment Rich. I would like to stay ahead of the power curve. That way we are not falling back in this trap again. Any other questions?

Barb Loncar (VFW): I think something has got to be written, it should be written that we are allowed to submit them at least 3 months in advance of their expiration date, if it's going to take that long for them to approve. It should not be kicking them back for four days.

Troy Michaels (TAL): You are correct. The last we were told, and that is why I've kind of gone in this direction is basically two months and that is what we were told initially. So that is kind of now gone out the window which makes us another point that we need to cover somehow. Thank you. Any other questions on the Advisory Council or what I brought up?

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Is this all done by paper? In this electronic age that it could be done by submission electronically where they could manage stacks and things like that? So it is easier for them to manage. That is part of their problem is management up there.

Troy Michaels (TAL): I am not sure at the Governor's office but we take the letters and then we scan them and get everything sent to the DMVA electronically, but I would imagine they are in the same you know format we are in. They are probably sending it electronically but after it gets to the Governor's office that I am not sure of what transpires Rich.

Rich Hudzinski (VVA): Because the Governor has been pushing you know electronic Pennsylvania. Maybe it is time to consider this, since you've got to be managed as project management of suspense is and things like that are all done electronically.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: Is there a point person that you have been coordinating with from the Governor's office already? I am just curious who that is.

Troy Michaels (TAL): My point of contact is Keith Mensch DMVA and then in turn works with the Governor's office and then relays the information back as to what is happening with these appointments. So I can't answer that question who that is.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): That is how the system works. The War Council submits to the DMVA for their approval, then sends it on to the Governor. There is no direct link from the War Council to the Governor.

Troy Michaels (TAL): Any other questions? Thank you very much.

Spike Gyger (President): Next on the agenda ACT 66.

ACT 66: Matthew Hollenbeck – Nothing new to report.

Spike Gyger (President): I need a motion to accept all Committee Reports Barb Loncar (VFW) we have a first do we have a second? Diana Henry (MCL). Any questions on the motion? All in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

William Albert (BVA): You have me down as President. I made them aware of this last month. Wanda Grover is now President of the Blinded Veterans Association. So if you could please get that put in notes and we will send a letter again.

Spike Gyger (President): We have not received your letter yet and we need that as soon as possible to make it effective

Woody Hogan (Secretary): It does not go to Mr. Holler that is the State Veterans Commission totally different then the Pennsylvania War Council.

Spike Gyger (President): It needs to come to Woody Hogan you sent to the wrong person.

Wanda Grover (BVA): We also sent it to them and Kristen and that is how you have me listed now. Just didn't change it to President and delegate.

Spike Gyger (President): We will take care of that thank you for letting us know.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

REMARKS FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORGANIZATION

Woody Hogan (Secretary): President so the Jewish War Veterans we've been pushing this can down the road I proposed as the Secretary of the War Council I really hate to see them go. I think their voices are important. All Veterans voices are important. They've been with us since the beginning. I didn't email the new Commander. I haven't had anything legally in writing from him since February sending him everything he needed to do to get reinstated in full. I heard nothing since February 16. I suppose we let them ride until over the summer so they can get whatever the organization problems that they are having figured out. If they are not here at the September meeting ready to roll then we've looked to remove them if that is what you wish.

Spike Gyger (President): With the dues paid.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): If you want to make them pay dues that is fine with me. I think they have organizational issues and are really a small group now and I don't know what their money situation is looking. I mean if we waive their dues that would probably help. I don't agree with doing that since simply because everybody else in this room is paid. But that is entirely up to you as a group what you want me to do if that sounds agreeable, we can regroup and the first meeting in September after the summer break we can discuss it again.

Richard Denison (TAL): Should we send them a letter telling them we are giving them one more chance.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): I will do that

Richard Denison (TAL): I think that is only fair

Woody Hogan (Secretary): Everybody good with that? Do I need to make that as a motion?

Larry Googins (VVA): I will make the motion you want to postpone the elimination of Jewish War Veterans Council from participation in the Pennsylvania War Council until after the summer break to give them time to get their organization back on track and then we will decide what to do with their status as a War Council member in September.

Sister Mary Mathias (CWV): I will second the motion

Spike Gyger (President): Any questions on the motion? All in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it. Any other remarks for the good of the organization?

BENEDICTION: Richard Denison (TAL)

RETIREMENT OF COLORS: Troy Michaels (TAL)

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully submitted,
James "Woody" Hogan, Secretary