



PENNSYLVANIA
WAR VETERANS COUNCIL, INC.



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February 1, 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

Bern McDonald (excused), Gerald Hawk, Kim Carson, Paul Forsman

BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION

William Albert

CATHOLIC WAR VETERANS

Michael Rang, Sister Mary Mathias

DISABLED AMERICAN VETS

David Gui, Timothy Alexander (excused)

JEWISH WAR VETERANS

KEYSTONE PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Chris Fidler, Joseph Dunn, Constance Snavley

MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

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

MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Nicholas Taylor, Keith Beebe, Ernie Holling (excused), Robert Gray (excused)

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 (excused)

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC

Larry Googins, Richard Hudzinski (excused)

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Spike Gyger, President: Everybody received the minutes from January 11 2024. I will entertain a motion. Nicholas Taylor (MOAA) moves to approve the minutes as written. Barb Loncar (VFW). Any question on the motion? All in favor? Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Report given by John Getz:

John Getz: Happy New Year everybody. I hope everybody has been receiving the information monthly.

War Council – \$30,121.18 total, \$100.00 deposits, \$50.00 withdrawal, ending balance \$30,171.18

Honor Guard – For the month of December: \$32,500.00, total withdrawals \$13,750.00, ending balance \$18,750.00.

Savings – \$10,350.22, total, deposits, total withdrawals, ending balance \$10,350.35.

John Getz: I was asked to let everybody know who has not paid their dues. What I have so far and what I put in the bank and I will give you dates and everything else. On 10/12 I put \$700 in the bank and that organization, Military Officers, Blinded Veterans and the VFW. On 11/12 a deposit of \$600 and that was Marine Corps, AMVETS and Purple Heart. On 1/10 I put in \$600 and that was The American Legion, VVA. 1/29 I deposited \$100 for the County Directors. So with that being said at this point right now I don't have any record of payment on Catholic War Veterans, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans, DAV, Jewish War Veterans and the Navy Club.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): Navy Club is no longer in the Organization.

John Getz: Basically Jewish War Veterans they have not paid for a few years and the other ones are all up to date as far as my record time. Any questions on that? One other thing I wanted to bring up while we are here. You know we have what 30-40 thousand dollars sitting in the bank. What are we going to do with all the money we have? I know we used to go down to the Capitol and do different things at the Capitol to try and get to Legislators to get on board with different Bills. I guess I have a question with all that money sitting there we never touch it for anything else? What are we going to do with it? Just think about it. That is basically all I am asking.

Spike Gyger, President: Can I get a Motion and a second to accept the Treasurer's Report as given? Woody Hogan (TAL) I have a Motion do I have a second Diane Henry (MCL). Any questions on the motion? All in favor say Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it.

REPORT

Joel Mutschler Director, DMVA, PIRO: Good Morning everyone. How are you? So since our last meeting, we've only had a couple of weeks in between. So I don't have a whole lot for you. I want to remind everyone about the Woman Veterans magazine so that the nonprofit that is putting that together, deadlines coming up here on the 1st of March for any ladies that would like to have their information, pictures, stories, anything like that included in that publication. We have put that information out. If you like to give me your email and I will push that out today. We've mentioned the State Veterans Commission this last time General Weigl brought up our Pennsylvania Vet Con. Veteran's conference that we are looking to do coming up here in the fall. So we are looking for a venue now out of the Pittsburgh area. That conference is going to bring in all of our stakeholders, Service organizations, The GAC VS members, network partners under PA Vet Connect, the federal VA and others to talk about specific issues affecting our Veterans community keep an eye out on that and as soon as we have date and time on that we will get that information out to everybody. Social media so

just ask your organization to check out our increased social media presence across all the platforms and cross share that content and know that we are definitely watching both from our personal accounts. Not watching but you know taking a look at those posts as well. So I have been following the Commander Heirs he has been crisscrossing the Commonwealth and it's just exciting to see the great work that is being done out there. So just make sure on social we just ask that you cross share information across all of our organizations for the betterment of the community. Our Veterans homes our census right now sitting at 1078 so that is 71% occupancy and we are taking new admissions across all of the homes. There are a waiting list at some of the facilities but new admissions are occurring. We have no current outbreaks of COVID with our resident population, and we are still amid that winter virus season. So flu and everything else going around. Taking care of our residents making sure they are happy is certainly the key, and we welcome any visitation from your organizations across all six homes. On my side of the house, so very excited about our professional development opportunities happening this Monday, open forums we are averaging over the last three sessions about 60 participants from all of the organizations, so County Directors, American Legion, DAV, VFW, VVA all of you are participating in those. So we are very excited about that. This last time we had someone from the pension center presenting to us and we will continue to make those offerings available every Monday. So if you are interested in a particular topic, or your Veteran Service Officers are interested in particular topic for those engagements certainly let us know. Burial Honors, just wanted to give a shout out so over 1600 interred so far, the state fiscal year that your organizations are supporting and honoring our Veterans as they pass and are being interred so just thank you for that volunteer service and making sure that we are doing the right thing by those Service members and Veterans. PACT Act we are continuing to get after it across the board. We are seeing over 40,000 PACT Act claims and over 50,000 non PACT Act claims that across the organization that we are pushing forward to the Federal VA, there is still a backlog. So we are all very familiar with the claims backlog. Our compatriots on the Federal side the trend lines starting to slowly start to go in the right direction. We look forward to getting those claims through the pipeline and adjudicated. That is all I have is there any questions?

Nathan Silcox, Exec. Dir., Senate VAEP Committee: Good Morning everyone. Thank you for having me. Just a couple quick updates since last month. The Governor is going to be presenting his fiscal 2024-2025 budget here on Tuesday before the General Assembly. The Senate and House Appropriations Committee will commence their budget hearings. Department Military and Veterans Affairs will be coming before the Senate Veterans Affairs Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday February 22 at 1pm. A couple of events that are coming up on Wednesday of next week. We are going to hold our Desert Storm commemoration it will be held at 10am at the main rotunda of the State Capital. You are certainly welcome to attend that. I appreciate The American Legion Linglestown Post will be putting forth the colors here for the event and appreciate that we will have several speakers from Senator Rothman, Senator Pennyquick, Senator Mastriano all served during that time period. We will be speaking with a couple other folks. We will also have a Medal of Honor service on Wednesday March 20th at 10 am in Soldiers Grove as you know, Soldiers Grove has the plaque with the recipients of the Medal of Honor we are planning on having Walter Joe Marm Pennsylvania lone living recipient will be with us again. Keith Beebe will be with us as well to talk about the National Highway efforts and where that is going. Finally, we will have Vietnam Veterans Welcome home service on Monday April 8th that will be at 10:30 am in the main rotunda and that is still in the planning stages. One more item here I was asked to look into the appointments to the State Veterans homes Advisory board 19 of the 21 that were pm the list from last month. It is my understanding that they have been squared away and that the administration is working on the rest of this. I know you guys had you concerns about Senate Bill 933 we will continue to work with the House and try to address that and make that something that you guys are aware of The War Veterans Council, the Veterans Commission can agree upon.

Spike Gyger, President: At this time I would like to introduce our guests. Search for Common Ground we will have Mr. Bob DeSousa and Will Fuller would you please come up.

Bob DeSousa Search for Common Ground: Commander, fellow Vets I am Bob DeSousa excuse me for not wearing a cover today because of the 5 organizations that are all in this room that I belong to I couldn't decide which one I should wear. Should I wear The American Legion? Because I am here? Should I wear Catholic War Veterans? Should I wear the VFW because that is the first one I joined? Should I wear MOAA no they don't have a hat. So we are here I am here with my friend Will Fuller to talk about a project Search for Common Ground and it is resilient State program and specifically it is desire to involve Veterans is with the November election, that whatever happens in November election, that if it's done peacefully done and that we have faith in our institutions and specifically the outreach here to Veterans is because everybody in this room took an oath as Chaplain mentioned in his opening prayer, to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States against all foes foreign and domestic. So that is the number one thing, number two thing Veterans are natural leaders in their community and interestingly, while I've been working with Will in the group, I thought it was very interesting in this month's American Legion magazine on page 5 there is a letter to the editor that talks about getting Veterans involved as election workers, because of the respect we have in the community. It is another way to serve. Then sure enough in the VFW's Action corps weekly email it has the exact same thing volunteer to do this. So it's something that is of concern of our National Veterans Organizations. It is a concern here in Pennsylvania and you know because of that Will and his team are looking to evolve that is why we are being hosted by the effort of The American Legion, on the 15th of this month from 8 to 10 we are really going to do a round table from 8:30 to 9:30. A little time beforehand have some coffee, etc. We are looking at Lancaster area so if you have members of your Posts in that area, and they are interested reach out to me, if you don't have my contact reach out to Woody they will get it to me. We'd like to have a good discussion there so what I am going to do is I am going to turn it over to Will he I going to talk a little bit about the program, I am going to hand out a flyer that we presented and then what we'd like to do is not take a lot of time but any observations or things that the group has that will be helpful for them in this project.

Will Fuller Search for Common Ground: Thank you to each one of you for inviting us to speak today. Appreciate it, grateful for that. As Bob mentioned, my name is Will Fuller, I am the Pennsylvania State Lead for the resilient states project with common ground USA. I am a native of Kentucky moved here in 2015, still trying to work on being considered a native of Pennsylvanian, but been here long enough to love the state and am concerned over the health and stability of our institutions and our overall situation. So I want to draw your attention to as Bob is passing that out sort of the front page with the three bubbles, to talk a little bit about our project and what we have to do, first of all who we are. So Common Ground USA, we are an initiative of Search for Common Ground. Search for Common Ground is an international Organization that began in the 80's and since the 80's has been involved in doing peacebuilding efforts and collaborative work in some of the hottest zones across the world. So we've been working for a long time internationally, a lot of that work has been in places where conflict is active and ongoing. We decided a few years ago to come to the states and to start a project here to try to approach it ahead of time seeing some of the things that we saw here. We are concerned about the direction that the country was going and so we tried to get ahead and do some preventative work to build peace here in the States. So we truly believe that conflict is inevitable in some ways in communities, because we are all people with different opinions different thoughts on how our country should be governed, our local municipality should be governed. But that doesn't have to lead to violence, that actually we can take conflict and disagreement and find shared values and identities at the base of that and transform that into collaborative work. We have seen that happen in other countries across the world and we believe that it can happen here too. So that is who we are and what we are about. What we hope to do is to keep the United States as a place where violence threats, intimidation, harassment are kept out of our public life where people are free to participate fully and civically engaged. We are doing this through approaching different sectors of society. So the Veterans community as Bob mentioned, we are also trying to speak with folks in the education sector, the business sector and the faith community, because we believe those folks are trusted messengers. They are people that people respect they look to and they can be active agents and sowing seeds of peace in our communities. We are currently active in both Texas and Pennsylvania. What we are

doing is trying to create rooms of exchange, places where people leaders can get together and they can talk about ideas. They can talk about what they are seeing in their community, the concerns they have, what they are noticing, where they can exchange hopefully solutions on how to combat or how to sow seeds of peace in areas of violent conflict or potential violent conflict. We want to provide thought partnership for people in local areas to be able to do that we have models for what has worked across the world. We've built out early warning, early response networks and other places, we have resources to offer how to deescalate dialogue or promote civility. We hope to partner with people across the state, give them ideas and hear back from them to leverage their experience and their wisdom in trying to do that locally. The last thing I would say is we also provide training. So we hope to train monthly on some of those piece building skills and open that up to people across the state for them to participate. We believe that getting people in the same room whether virtually or here is the best place to build trust, to exchange ideas and prevent violence from happening. I want to draw your attention to the back of the document is really a place where we are still working out some of the specifics. Part of why we wanted to come today was to lean on your experience and your wisdom being Veterans and being active in the Veterans community on what are the things that you believe folks can do locally, to help build peace, we have some ideas here. We believe that there are opportunities for Vets to serve here at home, as was mentioned serving as poll workers. Writing op eds, being active in the local community we think is the best thing for people to do. In addition to that, we believe that providing community support across the board is also essential to building peace and preventing political violence. Then lastly, defending other Veterans being involved in VSO's, being active in the community all these things we think are essential. We are coming to you today with a plan with an objective, with an approach but we also want that to be an exchange. So we wanted to open up an opportunity for you all too give us feedback on these bullet points or on other things that you think might actually need to be included, as we go throughout the state and speak with Vets about building peace.

Bob DeSousa Search for Common Ground: Bottom line, all of us have served or wouldn't be in the room. You know when you are in a Unit, your people have different views, and you work it out, because you are moving to a goal. What we've seen across the board, you know for me personally anybody knows me, I am a Conservative Republican, I have lots of friends who are Liberal Democrats, they are just wrong. We believe we have a great system here in this country and yet it is starting to pull. So this is their first step here with Veteran community, if you do not have them now you can email them. Just some of the points of how we can get Veterans involved and saying look we have processes, you know, you don't agree with which way the election goes, I mean they don't care which way it goes. We have processes, we have a court system. As you know in Pennsylvania for example, I think most people don't really realize that just like for the Federal election is Pennsylvania's vote that gets him in Pennsylvania, it's the counties, Dauphin County meets in votes, Cumberland County is certified by those commissioners and all the rest of the court process that if you think there is something wrong, there is a process, but it doesn't mean you have to resort to means beyond that. So that is kind of the gist and why I wanted to be here today was if you got stuff right now and right here Will and I would love to hear and to incorporate it. If you think of something else I can send you if you don't have my email many do. You can always email Woody. Don't email Spike he won't get it. We would like to hear any suggestions that you have of how these guys can approach it.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): How can we get an offices that search for common ground on Capitol Hill? That is where a lot of common ground is devising us and I think it's an outstanding effort. If the Legislators can agree, that is what riles everybody else up. So any thoughts on that?

Will Fuller Search for Common Ground: That is where our Headquarters is. I was actually just there last week meeting with my colleagues there. I think you are right. I think we all know that. That ultimately it has been interesting as I've gone around the state and talked with people the frustration always seems to come back to dysfunction in Legislation and getting things done for people. So it's about the product. We are working on that. We typically work in sectors of society, because we want that change to come from the people who those folks represent. As Bob mentioned we are not interested in trying to tell people to Vote one way or the other but we do believe that

the systems and institutions, the more stable and supportive they are, the more they can actually work effectively for the whole. So I would say the short version of that is we are working on that and we are trying to do that locally in states too.

John Getz (VFW): So then you do not go out and outright and stay that you are supporting a certain candidate or anything like that?

Will Fuller Search for Common Ground: Yes Sir. No we are a 501C3 so we do not endorse or support any specific candidate for office.

Bob DeSousa Search for Common Ground: Just like the Service Organization. Will and I am going to vote different.

David Gui (DAV): You mentioned you are currently active in just two states. Is that because it is a larger activity by Common Ground in just two states, even though you mentioned that there were some other states.

Bob DeSousa Search for Common Ground: It is sort of from my perspective you start to crawl before you walk before you run. So they looked at basically swing states and other ones, South Dakota, you know I could be the other Republican ticket and I would get all South Dakota. That is just the way. So Pennsylvania is a swing state, you know that is why they are looking at. This is the first time they are doing this here and so they had to look at resources.

Will Fuller Search for Common Ground: If I can just add to that, we do have a sister organization called Over Zero that has a similar project in Ohio and Arizona, again, focusing on states where because of tension specifically around the election there is more potential for political violence. In addition we also ally with even if we don't work completely in parallel with the Carter Center is Georgia, Florida, Michigan and Wisconsin and the Western States Alliance is California, Oregon and Washington.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: I was just wondering you said you've worked in other countries overseas. I was wondering what are some of those other countries were. I lived in Northern Ireland for two years and Belfast so the message you are saying is a message we've heard often over there. I studied violence, terrorism insecurity over there. I was just curious as to what Countries you've been in and what maybe were some of the takeaways?

Will Fuller Search for Common Ground: Every time zone across the globe, we have a pretty strong presence currently in Central Africa. So several countries there. We have been monitoring things that have been going on in the DRC, Nigeria, we have people on the ground in Palestine right now. In Israel/Gaza conflict, we are trying to build peace. We have folks in Southeast Asia, we have a couple of projects that have closed out. One specifically in Rwanda, which was begun pretty shortly after the genocide. One of the things that we did there because if folks know the history of Rwanda, Burundi has very similar dividing lines along tribal and ethnic identity. So what we did is work with local radio stations to try to promote messages of peace through radio, since that was the tool that was actually used for the genocide as well. So we are actually just closing that project down, which has been a long term effort to try to rebuild, you know the social cohesion there. I was privileged to be on that call and it was really special. I think it is hard sometimes on projects to end them. The spirit of celebration and camaraderie that was present on that was really meaningful for me and frankly, inspirational for what we are trying to do here. I will say stateside, part of the difficulty is we're attempting something that organizationally is new to us. We don't typically do preventative work, we do active work when something already going down. Some of this is experimental which can be exciting and also really difficult to figure out, which is why we are here, you know, asking for your help because we want to involve people in that process for us to learn as an Organization as well.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): All of us have Department Conventions would you be willing to come to speak with a larger group? Talking with us is good we are the leaders of those organizations but to hear from you would be better and I think if we invite you to our State Conventions that are happening before the November elections.

Will Fuller Search for Common Ground: My contact information is on that one page I am very responsive, so please feel free to reach out to me at any time. I would also love to follow up individually. A lot of this is one on one conversations with people building trust, building support and hearing from you what you are seeing in your community. Thank you very much.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Constitution and Bylaws: Gerald Hawk (AMVETS) – Good morning everyone. Earlier it was stated in the Finance report that we had four organizations who had not paid dues for this year. According to Article 4 Section 1 of our Bylaws, dues not paid by December 31st of any year will cause the suspension of that Organization. The Organization suspended shall have no voice or vote in any meetings until reinstated according to Article 12 Reinstatement. That is all I had Commander.

I'd like to make a motion everybody should have a copy of the revised Bylaws. We made revisions with the last meeting. I would like to make a motion that we accept these as printed and handed out to everyone.

Spike Gyger, President: We have a motion to accept the Bylaws as printed. Nicholas Taylor (MOAA). Any questions on the motion? All in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it.

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

Membership: Chuck Jackson (MOAA) – Not in attendance

Legislative: Keith Beebe (MOAA), –Pennsylvania Senate Bill 933 this bill concerns among other issues the composition to the State Veterans Homes Advisory Councils and the selection of the individuals to serve on a specific homes council. Quite frankly, the Bill wanted to remove the PAWVC from the selection process. The PAWVC and its entirety Senate sent its letter on January 11th. The majority and minority chairs of both the Pennsylvania Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees copies were sent to the Executive Directors of each Committee. In this letter we demonstrated that the PAWVC has maintained a very effective role in staffing these councils with attention by local chapters and even posted its organizations being involved in the staffing selection process. Quite frankly, we should remain a vital part of that process and we just heard from Nate Silcox, standing back there he is aware of this. The Pennsylvania Senate Veterans Affairs Committee will be working with us and thank you very much Nate. We appreciate that we have also sent out a list of our approved Legislative issues for 2023 and 2024. One of these issues, we expect a presentation from the DAV to our Pennsylvania Legislative Committee when it meets later this month on the funding to seek this Legislation session for the proper maintenance of the Veterans Transportation Network. A Committee studies on the subject essentially confirmed the total number of vehicles needed in the system recommended by the VA. Over 20% of these vehicles need immediate replacement. We are on the verge of solving replacement standards statewide, which affects the annual funding level required. We want to go to the State Legislature and get attention to this important issue of service to Veterans in need of transportation incidental to their health care. On the Veterans justice front, we expect to hear in the second week of February on the progress of SR 196, which would review how well the unified judicial system is attending to Veterans appearing before them. Whether that happens in the standard courts of Common Pleas or their specialty court known as Veterans Court, or the Veterans Treatment Court, we consider the House Bill 231 initiative to pass Legislation on the subject. Unfortunately, that seems to be going nowhere for the moment. We are proceeding a little bit differently. We got an initiative to go directly to

the court system to discuss procedural changes. Why? Because in light of the discovery of constitutional power of the courts, to overrule legislation affecting them, when that's a procedural nature, the legislature unfortunately has failed to move this issue first presented them about 7 years ago, we found a form of Common Pleas judge interested in assisting beyond giving just advice. In other words we are working on this trying to get things squared away, we await progress on the real estate tax exemption legislation in particular HB 1227. We know that the county commissioners association has testified noting their concerns, we've made our desires known, it is up to the General Assembly to include the revisions we've argued for. Finally, we are in the process of reviewing the new Legislative tracking system that is going to help us out called ledger scan and that basically is a good searching type of device. It gets kind of figures out the spurious from the real efforts to make advocacy focused on sometimes difficult. This system will help us keep our focus on it. That is what we are working on.

Website: Robert Gray (MOAA): No report

Honor Guard: Constance Snavely (KPV) – No report

Troy Michaels (TAL): Good morning. Several things to go over. One of the most important ones though, as we talked last month. Thank you Nate Silcox and Michael Holloman I appreciate all the support. We did get 19 I believe out of the 21 appointments through the Governor's office. The report that I hand out look a lot better than what it had been. I appreciate and applaud everyone's efforts in this room as well as getting those reappointments and appointments to get our homes and our Advisory council covered. Before I go into the homes and some other issues. I want to get the reappointments and appointments out of the way so I don't forget then. The following are the nominations for appointments and reappointments. As of today, Southwestern Veterans Home, Michael Rain Commander of the Catholic War Veterans to request the reappointment of Robert Chuey whose term expired 6/1/23. Gerald Hawk Executive Director for the AMVETS request the reappointment of James Lamison whose term expires on 6/1/2024. Just a side note on that when we are going to probably hold off on it as it gets closer we will resubmit but at least we can get the process started. Delaware Valley Veterans Home Diana Henry Commandant of the Marine Corps League requested the reappointment of Charles Trainor whose term expired 11/1/23. Michael Rang Commander for the Catholic War Veterans requested appointment of Douglas Craig to replace Charles Petronis who resigned due to medical issues. Soldiers and Sailors home Michael Rain Commander of The Catholic War Veterans requested reappointment of Richard Supak whose term expired 7/23/23 and the last one Gino J Murli Veterans Home Gerald Hawk Executive Director for the AMVETS request the reappointment of Bernie McDonald whose term expires 4/5/24. Mr. President I need a motion and second to accept these appointments.

Spike Gyger, President: Any questions? I will accept a motion. Gerald Hawk (AMVETS) makes a motion to accept that reappointment, Seconded Steve Lavelle (TAL). All in favor aye opposed? Ayes have it.

Troy Michaels (TAL): I am going to go over the ones that are needed and then we will get into a couple of open items that have cropped up since our last meeting. The following are reappointments that are needed. Delaware Valley Veterans Home Allen Abramson (JWV) term ended 11/1/23, Sam Huhn (BVA) 11/1/23, Larry Holman (JWV) term expired 11/1/22 and last one Bruce Boice (DAV) term expired 11/1/22. Any questions on Delaware Valley? Moving on to Gino J Merli Joseph D Sylvester (DAV) term expired 4/5/23 and we have one vacancy term ended 4/5/23. Any questions on Gino J Murli? Hollidaysburg Veterans Home I am going to skip over David Wagner for the moment and I will talk about that at the end. However, we do have another one Timothy Susengill (VVA) term expired 5/16/22. Any questions on Hollidaysburg?

Barb Loncar VFW: This is just a question in general, the ones that are on here that need to be either reappointed or replaced, do we actually reach out to the organizations that are responsible to make sure other

than this meeting? Because some of these I know that Jewish War Veterans they don't really show up. So is anyone reaching out to them to let them know or separately or is it just in this meeting?

Woody Hogan (Secretary): All the information you do prior to this meeting they are informed but I agree with you we need to do something about that.

Troy Michaels (TAL): Also to Woody's point we also put it in the minutes so they also get a copy of the minutes knowing that these appointments need to take place. Any other questions on all these? Moving on to Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home Karen Foust (DAV) term expired 7/27/23 and the last one is the Blinded Veterans Association. That one is vacant, so we have a vacancy there. Any questions on Soldiers and Sailors Home? Southeastern Veterans Center Douglas Forsythe (DAV) term expired 1/9/22 and the other one is Barry Amole (VVA) expired 1/9/24. Any questions on Southeastern Veterans Center? Last one Southwestern Veterans Center Rommel Dacanay (BVA term expired 6/1/2020 and the last one is Edward Hanke (DAV) term expired 6/1/22. Any questions on Southwestern Veterans Center. Those are the ones that we need. I skipped over David Wagner on purpose because for months we have been questioning whether or not the Governor's information is correct and lo and behold he provided me this morning which we will look into. I've already talked to Joel Mutschler with the DMVA we are going to look into this further.

Seth Bengel, PA Department Military and Veterans Affairs Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs: I have been working on kind of like fixing some of tracking on these appointments here. Like with Wagner with swearing in, I think this was part of the confusion was at the time. Some of these were reappointed late and although he was sworn in 2023 his appointment goes by his seat. So he may have just been appointed sworn back in and that is why they are tracking different dates. So that could be the case.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): We couldn't understand a word you said you are echoing and something going on, on your end.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: He said he might have been appointed late and then sworn in again. So they might be tracking a different date from the appointments.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): This list is still wrong.

Kerry Vanyo, Policy Research Analyst VAEP Committee: I am just telling you what he said.

Troy Michaels (TAL): Like I said we will look and continue to investigate it, hopefully figure something out. I would like you know again to Woody's point will continue to look at it and figure something out. Obviously there is a disconnect, unfortunately at the Governor's office. Any other questions on that part? Lastly, there was again some information that I've been opposed to since taking this position over. As I pointed out several months ago, title 51 doesn't specifically state that there needs to be one member on the Advisory Council for each Organization, i.e., you know again, Marine Corps League, American Legion, DAV, Military Officers Association etc. There is nothing that stipulates The American Legion can't have two appointments, Catholic War Veterans can't have three appointments. There is absolutely nothing states and just to remind everyone Article 14 of our Bylaws doesn't eliminate or doesn't spell out the fact that there can only be one Advisory council member for each Advisory home it can be anyone. So if the Catholic War Veterans and the Marine Corps League want to submit three nominations, to have these appointment filled. Please do. Again there is no spell out of each Organization. Any questions on that part?

Woody Hogan (Secretary): That addresses your situation Commander Loncar that we all know who the people are, our people in those homes. I know the Legion has a Representative and a Deputy if that Deputy is

willing and able to fill in an Advisory Council role. Let's fill all the roles. We are not going to hear anything from the Jewish War Veterans so let's replace them with people that are able and willing to do the job.

Troy Michaels (TAL): Any other questions on the Advisory Council appointments and information? Thank you Mr. President.

ACT 66: Matthew Hollenbeck – Morning everybody. A couple quick things the Act 66 members currently finishing up their grant requirements to turn in to DMVA which is due next week. I am sure we are all stressed out about that. It will be done and over with next week. SVC's go I kind of hinted at something that we should keep our eye on that is happening at the Federal level. When it comes to Veterans benefits a little bit of contextual history. Most people know that there are companies out there that are preying on Veterans and getting them disability claims and making them pay for it. Now technically by law, that is illegal. However back in 2006, the laws that govern that were stricken from the rolls. So the only thing that the VA can go after people who are doing that who are already accredited. These companies are no longer accredited. They never work, however, there is going to be a pathway and that is under HR 1822. It's currently in the subcommittees in both the House and the Senate. It does have a Senate counterpart which has a different number. I just didn't look it up this morning. What this will allow these companies to do is have a pathway to accreditation. So really the actual words are the Secretary shall determine whether to recognize under subparagraph K and this refers to 38 CFR, an agent or an attorney who applies for such a resignation no later than 90 days after Secretary receives an application and basically if the VA doesn't answer that application in 90 days you get automatic accreditation. Now this, a lot of people come up to me saying. Well, hey, no that is not what it is. They are saying they are going to in act these laws and stuff like that. Well yeah they do. They say that in the beginning. It kind of distracts you from what this is going to say. The Secretary may not refuse to recognize under subparagraph, a an agent or an attorney solely on the basis that such an agent or attorney charges a claimant a fee for services rendered and the preparation, presentation and prosecution of a claim. They are sneaking in saying that basically these companies will be allowed to become accredited, and they will be allowed to charge. Now there are going to cap it in a way that VA already has an existence for attorney and claim representatives who can legally charge for their services, but they are capped heavily. Right now, I believe the total cap is 12,900 and some change is as much as they can cap. However, this will also say that it change per year, by the consumer product review. I can't remember which company it is. Whoever sets the consumer product numbers, that entity whenever they change, it will allow for more money to be taken from Veterans. Again it is not moving forward yet in the House or the Senate for voting. It's just in some committees, but it is something that we really need to keep an eye on, if it does move forward. In my quick research of it, is there backing for this? Absolutely, there is there are actually other service organizations, none of the major ones, but some a lot of the smaller ones are backing this Legislation. The reasoning behind it, their logic behind that is because it is a service gap filler. Here in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we don't have this problem, we have a robust Service Organization, but Service Officer Structure we have the availability of Service Officers is great here in this Commonwealth. However, that is not true in other states. Some states may only have to Service Officers. What this is trying to do is fill those gaps and that is what the Service Organizations and other entities are saying is that they are going to provide a service that no one else is filling. So it has backing, it will I believe from what I read it will have legs once it reaches actual vote if it makes it to that point. The other aspect of this is that the Better Business Bureau predicts this to be a \$3 billion dollar business if this were to come alive. That is a hard thing to walk away from especially for people who want to make money. They are going to lobby to push this and these groups are lobbying to have this pushed forward. As Service Organizations have our ability to talk to our Representatives here in Pennsylvania to say, hey we don't need this. It is not a great idea. This is only going to harm Veterans. There is however a counter to this and its call the Guard Act. What the Guard Act will do is introduce those laws that I said were stricken in 2006. It would basically say anybody who tries to do this that is unaccredited will be charged by Federal law. That is something that I know that The American Legion we back that law right now. I believe the VFW

does too. I saw on the news to stop this predatory practice that is starting to come up. Basically the privatization of disability compensation. So with that we can influence our Federal Representatives and Senators to not back this would be in the best interest of Veterans. Unfortunately, everybody here today you are going to get the same speech tomorrow. That is all I have today.

Rich Hudzinski VVA: I know you said it twice but I did not hear it. What is the Bill number?

Matthew Hollenbeck: HR 1822

Woody Hogan (Secretary): Mr. President I make a motion we accept all Committee reports.

Spike Gyger, President: So we have a Motion? Do we have a second for our Committee reports? Barb Loncar VFW. All in favor say Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): Mr. President, just one thing we are aware the Jewish War Veterans have not been attending, they haven't been paying dues. The next month we need to address what they do. If I cannot get a hold of them and I have been working with Mr. Hillman to see if we can get somebody to step up and say The Jewish War Veterans are still viable Organization. They are not participating. We need to do something. Thank you

Spike Gyger, President: Thank you very much. We have some new business? Do we want to talk about the money in the account?

John Getz (VFW): Just a question I have we have these accounts have been sitting here for many years. I mean, many years.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): I know when we had the terrible COVID-19 pandemic we start meeting with them having breakfast with the Legislative, I think it's a good idea to bring back. It puts all of us in a room in a casual setting with our Legislators and it's not going to cost us that much money.

John Getz (VFW): It don't cost much at all.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): I will spearhead that to make that happen. The problems is all of our schedules. It is hard to get one day and everybody can be there. But I will work on that.

John Getz (VFW): The Legislative Committee, they want to work it out. Also, I think it would be a good idea.

Woody Hogan (Secretary): Go through Nate in the back there. I also had a suggestion last month when Snavley said they are rebuilding the guard shack, we should probably support that because we all we all are going to be there some day.

John Getz (VFW): We are working on a couple of suggestions. I don't know, I think we need to take it back and take a look at it and decide what we are going to do. Like I said we do have quite a good balance in some of the accounts and you know when I take a look at our savings account there was no movement on anything at all. Something that we need to take a look at and make sure that we can distribute money to help Veterans. We are here to help Veterans.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

CORRESPONDENCE: None

REMARKS FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORGANIZATION

Richard Denison (TAL): February 2 is an important holiday in Pennsylvania. What is that holiday? Did you know that Groundhog Day has a Christian's origin? February 2 is 40 days after Christmas and traditionally that was a Christian feast known as candidness or the presentation of our Lord. That is when Mary went to the temple with Joseph and Jesus and she gave thanks that the Lord saw our safety through childbirth and had to make sacrifices and so forth. It became known as Candlemas because it was celebrated by lighting a lot of candles in the church on that day. Centuries later, in Germany there became a legend that on Candlemas bears came out of hibernation and if they could see their shadow, you see where I am going with this. Then all of the bears got hunted out in Germany. So they switched from having bear day to having badger day. All of a sudden Pennsylvania Dutch came here and there were no badgers in Pennsylvania. So guess what? It badger in Pennsylvania. So guess what? It became Groundhog Day. So just as your Chaplain I thought I should let you know that Groundhog Day actually does have a religious significance.

Spike Gyger, President: Do we have anything else for the good of the order?

BENEDICTION: Richard Denison (TAL)

RETIREMENT OF COLORS: Troy Michaels (TAL)

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully submitted,
James "Woody" Hogan, Secretary