



PENNSYLVANIA  
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November 7, 2024 MINUTES  
10:00 PM

<b>CALL TO ORDER</b>	John Fritz, President
<b>INVOCATION</b>	Sister Mary Matthias, Chaplain
<b>SALUTE TO COLORS</b>	Troy Michaels, Sgt-at-Arms
<b>PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE</b>	Troy Michaels, Sgt-at-Arms
<b>ROLL CALL</b>	Troy Michaels, Secretary

**THE AMERICAN LEGION**

Woody Hogan, Troy Michaels, Dean Noechel, Robert Black, John Fritz

**AMVETS**

Paul Forsman, Gerald Hawk, Kim Carson (excused), Bernie MacDonald (excused)

**BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION**

Wanda Grover

**CATHOLIC WAR VETERANS**

Michael Rang, Sister Mary Matthias

**DISABLED AMERICAN VETS**

David Gui, Robert Hammaker, William Hines (excused)

**JEWISH WAR VETERANS**

**KEYSTONE PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA**

Chris Fidler (excused), Constance Snavely, Joseph Dunn (excused)

**MARINE CORPS LEAGUE**

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

**MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**

Nicholas Taylor, Keith Beebe, Robert Gray, Ernie Holling (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**

**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS**

John Getz Jr., David Gyger, Barbara Loncar

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC**

Thomas Haberkorn (excused), Richard Hudzinski

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

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**John Fritz (President):** Thank you Woody, everybody's been emailed a copy of the minutes, and I believe they are in front of you. I see them and to entertain a motion to approve the minutes. Dave Gyger (VFW) have a motion Nicholas Taylor (MOAA) second. I have a second any questions on the motion? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? So carried.

## **TREASURER'S REPORT – Report given by John Getz:**

**John Getz:** Good Morning, comrades. Happy Veterans Day to everybody. I want to thank everybody for being here. I have quite an extensive report to do today, so you have to bear with me. I am going to start on our normal stuff with the Honor Guard Account we started a previous balance with \$72,000 we had zero deposits. We had total withdrawals of \$14,750 which comes out to \$57,250 now the report was sent out yesterday. I know was kind of late, so it was all out in email. So I hope everybody received and took a look at it, but it was sent out yesterday in email. Now on the withdrawals of course, we have all the checks that were written out during the month. I do have the bank statement included with it, and then I have a reconciliation of the accounts. There was three outstanding checks after everything came in, which came out to the \$57,250 at the end of it. Now, at the last meeting, I was asked to take a look at the savings account, make a move on that. So which I did. I try and do that as quickly as possible. So what happened there? I went to the bank and I got other things. I went to the bank at that point there took the \$10,351.55 and put that into a CD. Now on this account, you will take a look at it in the October balance. Previous balance was \$10,351.55 there was again a deposit of \$.12 cents and ending balance of \$10,351.59 of course we got 16 cents in for interest. That really moved up this time and we got a four cents on the tax for whatever reason, and they couldn't figure that out either. Then there was a withdrawal of \$10,351.55 so I have to get this squared away with the bank. As far as that \$.12 cents left in there and also a bank statement is there with that. So with that being said when I was getting ready to leave last month, I said something to Mr. Hogan that I said I am going to move money out of the savings account, we have money sitting in the checking account that we are not doing anything with just sitting there. That is all done just sitting there. Sat down with the bank and I will go over the account right now. Previous balance was \$29,949.59 we had total positives of \$600 we had a withdrawal of \$24,748.45 we have an ending balance of \$5801.14. I put a new CD and the reason you see odd numbers there, we tried to make it an even CD and we took out a \$35,000 CD with both accounts and the CD itself is an one year CD under a nonprofit organization one year CD is all we could take out. The best rate they had for me at that time was 3.49% maturity dates going to be October 29, 2025, with that being said, we have a couple of things that need to be squared away and I thought we would try to get that squared away before but did not happen yet. If you take a look at the accounts. Mr. Watson is still on the signing as a signer, we need to make a motion to remove Mr. Watson from the signing of the account.

**Gerald Hawk (AMVETS):** I will make that motion

**John Fritz (President):** I have a motion to remove Kit Watson from the account. We have second David Gyger (VFW) any questions on that motion? Yes Sir. Question?

**Nike Taylor (MOAA):** Is Kit just going to be replaced or just removed from the account?

**John Getz:** I did not get that far yet.

**John Fritz (President):** Any other questions? All in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? So carried.

**John Getz:** Okay now the second part of it is again, is trying to get somebody to replace them. I really feel that person that should take Mr. Watson place Woody should also be put on the accounts. I mean that would be a motion that need to be made.

**John Fritz (President):** Need a motion to replace Kit with Woody. Diana Henry (MCL) makes that motion. We have a motion Sister Mary Matthias (CWV). Everybody loves Woody. I can see that already. Any questions on that motion?

**Woody Hogan (TAL):** I am okay with that.

**John Fritz (President):** I think he looks excited about it. Any other questions? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? So congratulation Woody.

**Woody Hogan (TAL):** Everybody know the Legion doesn't pay me very much right?

**John Getz:** Now another issues with that, I told you I took out a \$35,000 CD so in doing that, I guess I kind of did it on my own. So what I need a motion to take out a \$35,000 CD. We didn't discuss the second part when I got there. We have that money in that checking account just sitting there, doing nothing just like the other thing was so why not do that. If I am going to move something let's get it moved.

**John Fritz (President):** We need a motion to move \$35,000 CD Nick Taylor (MOAA) we need a second Woody Hogan (TAL). Any questions on that motion? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? So carried.

**John Getz:** Now for some odd reason I don't know what that is I can't believe it I don't know if Mr. Hawk had the same issue when he was the Treasurer of his organization but they looked at me and they said well whose address is on there. I said well, it's got to be a War Council address, but now it is yours on everything. I said what do you mean? It's fine. Well, it's your address. So I don't know what the official address of the War Council is. I think we need to discuss that and find out exactly what it is and I think we need a motion to get the address changed from my address to the War Council address for everything to go there.

**Nike Taylor (MOAA):** It is a PO Box. The question I think the question would be does it have to be a street address versus a PO Box?

**John Getz:** They did not tell me.

**Woody Hogan (TAL):** It is more secure than a physical address.

**John Fritz (President):** All those in favor say Aye? Aye. Opposed? Motion carried.

**John Getz:** Now the other thing that we need to do now with all this being said, I'm going to need a copy of the minutes with signatures of all our Officers here on the minutes themselves as soon as we can and then I got to get a hold of Woody, and we got to get over to the bank and make that change okay. I believe that is all. Any questions?

**John Fritz (President):** I need a motion to file the Treasure's Report. Sister Mary Matthias do we have a second Diana Henry (MCL) second. Thank you. Any questions on the Treasurer report? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Motion carried. We will move into the reports and we have the honor having Senator Mastriano with us.

## REPORT

**Senator Doug Mastriano:** Thank you, good morning everybody. It's great to be here with my brothers and sisters. Thank you for your service and continuing. Thank you to serve as well in Pennsylvania here and then we've partnered up and on quite a many events, ceremonies, commemorations over the past couple years, while I've been chair of the committee for Veterans Affairs Emergency Preparedness, we couldn't do it without you guys, whether it's providing Honor Guard or speakers. I think it brings a lot of value added here. My goal of course, as a Chair is really to make a difference. After I retired from the Army, I was going to get one of those jobs at the War College. No Colonel left behind had a sweet job lined up. It's true making a lot more money than Senator does and kind of just going to ride off to the sunset, like MacArthur said right? Old Soldiers never die. They just fade away. I was really worried about the direction of our Country and while I was complaining about the country, and after all my service and combat tours, and I am not here, just my perspective at the time, I was like what was that service all about? Because the country really doesn't seem any better off with my generation at the helm and I was talking to a young man around 20 some years old, and he looked over at me, I was still in uniform, not retired yet, and he goes well, Colonel do something about it and it really hit me hard, this kid and now he is Special Forces by the way, he is somewhere around the world here chasing down bad guys, this young guy and got into politics, didn't want to do it, but I hope you guys are pleased with our outcomes here, because I don't want to waste anyone's time. I don't like a lot of talk. I want action, just as everyone in this room here that wore the uniform, we are about delivering results, right? And we don't want talk. We want action and it's a bit difficult at times in politics because there is so many people that have their hands in the pot, but as chair of the committee that directly affects Veterans and our First Responders here, I think we made a bit of difference here. So the first thing though, if you note on my Senate page every day we list Pennsylvanians and occasionally some out of stators as well but usually Pennsylvania's that lost their lives on this day and today we commemorate Special Dale Kridlo of Hughestown, Pennsylvania who died on this day in 2010 in Afghanistan, gave his life for our Country in Afghanistan on this day. On this day in 2009 Marine Sergeant Charles Cartwright gave his life for us and our freedoms and finally, the last commemoration that I have on today's page is Corporal Benjamin Harris of Marcus Hook Pennsylvania, lost his life in Vietnam gave his life in 1966 for our country and when I go through these, occasionally fellow Service Members or family members will write something in the comments and you read and you know this was my friend, this was my brother and it just brings me to tears because it brings to life that person who otherwise would be forgotten and I think that is your ultimate goal here, that we don't lose sight or forget our brothers and sisters that we served with here, who gave their tomorrows for our todays and that is ever before me. So as such, I am going to give you a brief report here. I am not going to cover all the Bills that we punched out of Committee, but we are going to hit a couple of key ones here that really help and hopefully you are already aware of most of these. So one of the first Bills we introduced that actually it was my Bill Senate Bill 126 now this Bill was not originally mine it has been circulating. Mike Regan had it before me but we finally got to sign the law Senate Bill 126 exempt 100% of Veterans, federal disability compensation from calculations for state benefits and so that means in the calculations for real estate, property tax exemption, education, gratuity program, Veterans Temporary Assistance Program and Military Relief Assistance Program at the state level, their federal money is not counted against them. I talked to Stan Clark, the VSO at Adams County just a couple days ago. Stan says as a result of this Bill passing, he had a 50% increase of eligibility of Service members applying for these benefits that they are not able to receive. So I am glad. I didn't realize it was going to make such a big difference, I got to be honest. He said it was huge. The next one is Senate Bill 447, that was signed into law and you will notice, we are in a split government here. The house is Democrat, Senate, Republican of course, Democrat as Governor and despite a split government, we are able to get results down and make things happen, which is really fantastic. I have a really good working relationship with my counterpart in the House, Jared Solomon who is an Army JAG Officer in the reserves and so we were able to put aside, you know, our divergent political views here to look out for our Veterans and First Responders. It is really a joy to be Chair of a Committee where there is rarely any disagreement. It is really kind of fantastic. Occasionally there is but I am hearten to say despite being you know left, right or middle or nothing at all

here, we are able to agree on what is most important and taking care of Veterans and First Responders clearly is one of the most important issues we have in the state, especially in the state as you know, that is one of the most patriotic in the nation with about 700,000 Veterans which is huge. It's incredible. Population could not be proud of Pennsylvania. So Senate Bill 447 simply codified into law the Military Vet Connect program that online program which I've used just a couple clicks and you find out what you are eligible for at the State and Federal level. That means more of our Veterans now since it's codified into law will be directed to that program, receive more benefits. So far, over 17,000 connections have been made at the State and Federal level, which is fantastic. My first experience with the VA about a month after I retired from the Army. So they do a head to toe exit physical these days and anyway they missed my knees. You know something that is pretty obvious. I called up and said Hey, I need to have my knees re-evaluated. I spent an hour on the phone talked to about 7 or 8 different agents. After an hour, I was back with the first person. Think of the odds. I just spoke to you an hour so. I said I always had a big beef. When I was a Commander, if my Soldiers went down to department Army civilians or the Admin Office, some Specialist or E5 or a Captain would jerk my Soldiers around and I would always have my Soldiers come to Captain Mastriano and we will fix that problem. So my statement was, so here you are treating a Colonel retired this way? How are you treating my Sergeants? I said I am thinking about a Congressional against you guys. Oh, no Sir we will take care of you right away. These Bills in a small way not Federal or VA, I hope they cut the bureaucracy and help our men and women that wore the uniform. I am not going to go over many more, except just one, because it was actually birthed in the War Council here Senate Bill 1160 was signed into law, and the Bill simply codifies into law March 29<sup>th</sup> that Pennsylvania recognizes Vietnam day in Pennsylvania, so we have Desert Storm day you know we commemorate on March 6, October 7 the Global War on Terror. You know all the Wars I was involved in, we recognize and Nate if Nate could raise your hand. I know everyone knows Nate Silcox. Here he is, my Director of the Committee. Nate was here about a year ago when this all happened and Nate was approached by Rich Hudzinski and Rich said, you know what? When are we going to have a Vietnam Day in Pennsylvania and when they came back and told me, I am like we did it for Vietnam era Veterans again we got all modern wars, I got career skipped you guys. Although it seems symbolic to me, it means a lot because my dad was a Vietnam Era Veteran, a Navy man that now Pennsylvania this coming March will be the first time that we recognize at the state level that day and so I hope it means something you guys. I know it does to me, because I watched how my dad was treated and the other Vietnam Era Veterans in the early 70's and I hope this is one way to bring a little bit more healing to them. So Sir, thank you for your indulgence here at War Council. Thank you for your service.

**John Fritz (President):** Thank you sir. Our next report will be filed by Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs.

**Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs:** Good morning everybody. Happy Veterans Day. Unfortunately, Maureen couldn't make it today, so you got me instead. So I am just going to go through a couple things real quick, talking about the homes. The six homes in Pennsylvania, they are all doing fantastic. A couple things. Department of Health was in the Delaware Valley conducting their annual surveys. We did have an elopement there. However, they are going to hold on to their 5 star rating, because everything was handled. Everything was handled perfectly. So that is good news. Hollidaysburg, we have DHS in this week based on two complaints from residents, both those complaints have come back unsubstantiated. Upcoming surveys over at Delaware Valley will be inspected by the Federal VA at the end of the year this year, so that will complete the compliance checks for all the facilities at the Federal level. Covid update for you currently there is zero Covid positive. We have two Covid positive staff and no staff or residents with influenza. The infectious program is working outstanding. Right now we currently have 1115 residents in the State Veteran homes. We are sitting at about 73% we are not going to be able to dive much higher than that, which is creating a wait list and that is simply based upon staffing. As everybody's aware in the healthcare industry, specifically the long term care industry, it is very difficult right now to find staff. The good news side of that is we were able to work with the Federal VA and get a grant. This grant actually allows us to give a bonus to

people that sign up and a bonus to people that refer to them if they are in the nursing home and in the profession. We are hoping that we will see some progress from that. It's a good news story. Right now Delaware Valley, Gino Merli and Southeastern Veteran Center all 5 stars. Soldier and Sailors home up in Erie is sitting at a 4 star and Hollidaysburg is at 3 star which is higher than the rating of all the facilities in the areas around them. So good news story there, construction update Hollidaysburg problems continue there. We are running into a delay with transfer switch. It looks like fourth quarter of 25 is when we are going to have all the materials. There is not a whole lot we can do about it, just the way the systems are working right now. So that completes the homes update programs and services. Just a couple things to hit real quick, VTA we have seen an increase in the Veterans Temporary Assistance Fund based on the storms that we had earlier in the year, specifically up in the north central part of the state. So we process the record number of them this year, I think we are going to be okay on the funding line for this year, so no major concerns or issues, as long as we don't have any other major storms, educational grant or gratuities. We have seen a significant increase in the educational gratuity. We actually asked for an increase of \$150,000 for that program this year, which we received, but we've blown right through that as we are going back and doing forensics, 20 years of persistent conflict creates a lot of Veterans, a lot of Veterans get their ratings. The Pact Act comes into play so just slowly increase that margin. We are going back requesting more funds for that. I don't see any problems or issues with that. Now we are requesting another \$150,000 on the line for next year for that program. I am heading down with Maureen on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> we are going to be meeting at the Federal VA and also Department of Labor for the Federal VA, we are going to focus on data sharing. They have a lot of data and it's difficult to share data between government, and it shouldn't be. So we are going to continue to work on that and see what we can do for data sharing. I think that will be really complimentary for everybody in this room, to really hone in on where people are and what they are doing. Health care will be another big focus. Our homes teams down there and then kind of a personal project for me that I've taken on is claim sharks. I saw it on your list. I am going to talk a little more about that her in a little bit. So claim sharks have been a problem for us. There is legislation out there at the Federal level, the Guard Act. Other states have passed some legislation. Pennsylvania has some legislation as well, that they are looking at temporarily passing or passing at some point in time. One of the most frustrating things about claim sharks is the fact that they are charging Veterans for services that they could otherwise get for free. Now I am not going to stay up here and say that we have enough VSOs. We don't have enough VSOs. There is a complimentary program the Guard Act at the Federal level that would give more funding to the states to provide VSO support. So we are and ACT 66 state, so that would transition through us out to the Veteran Service Organizations. We are going to go down and we are going to push that really hard. I am making a full court press with my team. Mr. Nate is back there. I think everybody knows Brian and everybody out there to hit as many Veterans events as we can without outreach team, we do literally 10s of 1000s events a year, and we are trying to cover this claim shark stuff in depth. One of the most frustrating things about it is its brothers eating brother's right? A lot of them go to VSOs get their rating, get everything fixed, and then they go work for one of these companies. I won't call them claim shark. They are not VSOs, they are not accredited. They can't put the paperwork in all they can do is coach and mentor and send you to their medical providers, of which you will be paying them five to six times whatever they benefit you. There is better ways for us to take care of our Veterans. Some initiatives here in the state, we are working with the PA Department of Aging on aging our way. Obviously the State Veterans homes are a great thing. If we can keep Veterans in their homes that is even better for everybody. So we are working with the Department of Aging on that. We are working with DC ED on some HUD VASH type stuff as well as housing to make sure that those are getting pushed through and that we are not running into any problems and a myriad of other state agencies on other stuff. If you have specific questions about programs please come up and talk to me afterwards. VET CONNECT, Senator thanks for the plug. So we have migrated VET CONNECT off of Service Now's platform and we now have it on pa.gov we have incorporated a tool called PA Navigate is actually a program that was entered into by Health and Human Services. It is absolutely fantastic. All you have to do is put in your zip code, and it will give you like 3000 resources in your area and then you can filter by housing, by legal. If you are interested in things that are only for Veterans there is a little box you can check for Veterans. I encourage you never to check that block first

look at everything that is available before you start limiting yourself to other stuff. That is out there for people, we do have some backend capability on that. For our VSOs out at the counties and in our teams which we are working on distributing this is a new program so we are working through some of that stuff, some changes you are going to see with this program, an interactive map of all the counties in Pennsylvania. There is no reason that you should have to find an excel spreadsheet. It is going to take us a little while to build it but you should be able to mouse over your county, click on it and it tells you what R POC region is, point of contact. There is DMVA points of contact. Also you're County VSOs and the service org VSOs in that area. So it is just quick easy reference for people long term, and I say long term greater than one year, we want to build applications onto that platform. This is a little bit tricky for us, and I bring it up here because I need everybody to understand what we are going to do is you can fill out your initial application for real estate tax exemption, Blind and Paralyzed any of the six programs that we manage, you are going to have to put your county in because I have to send it to your County VSOs. I have to keep separation from an adjudication standpoint and an advocate standpoint at the state level to make sense to everybody. We are trying to streamline processes to make things even easier. Another thing we have instituted is kind of a redundancy check. So if somebody applies for real estate tax exemption, it's checked again. It's all the six programs to see if there is something else that we can provide. We caught about 125 in the last month. Brian, about 125 people screened through for additional benefits that they didn't apply for. So it is a great news story. Last but not least, we are having an open house at Fort Indian Town Gap on November 16. I encourage everybody to attend so obviously the National Guard will be out there with all the equipment. We will also be out there set up taking applications working with everybody to get them in. Any questions?

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** A couple questions, first one the PA navigate so you gave up on having your own website, and you've been directed to put the DMVA information on PA Navigate. I get that.

**Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs:** Let me clarify a couple things. Nobody directed us to do anything. I looked at the PA Navigate and worked with leadership because it was a far better tool than we were capable of building and I didn't want to spend PA taxpayer dollars building a tool that already existed.

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** That is why it occurred. I thought it was a directive. That is what I was told. The problem that I had with PA Navigate and you mentioned it. The map idea is great but the system is based on like findhelp.org. The problem is all these databases are based on the zip code and you mentioned sometimes you want to look at your county and see what is in your county. The zip code doesn't necessarily tell where you are. It is a mailing route. Are they going to add a county feature?

**Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs:** No I do not think so. I don't think they need to Richard, because there is a mileage range that you can set around your zip code.

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** When I am doing research for what resources are available to my people. Sometimes it goes beyond just using the zip code. I am looking in the county what resources are available to them, because they are county residents and I think there should be a county filter on these systems, all right you can if you use your zip code, I will talk to you afterwards. I will open up the group, I think there is a need for that and it's come up in the research working with Wilkes Barre Veterans community partnership on an effort to do aging in place in rural areas. The other question I had was your mentioned the DOD database. You are going down for a meeting. Are you talking about VA doors? Because I thought you had that.

**Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs:** We do have some access to VA doors. However, there is multiple databases at the VA has so there is a scorn out there. Everybody was scorn. The scorn is basically when the federal government publishes a document that denotes what something is, the scorn is who is applicable to be shared and all those things. So there are things at the Federal level that in the scorn list

State Agencies as partners that they should be sharing data with. However there is technological challenges with that, is what we are being told. So we want to figure out what those technological challenges are and see how we can do that.

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** I get that and then the claims work you mentioned. The DOD funds are available that might be used towards ACT 66.

**Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs:** No, no you misunderstood. So the Guard Act is an act that will allow the VA prosecutorial capabilities against claim sharks. They took that away years ago. I don't want to get all the history of it so that will reinstate that. There is another act Brian do you remember the name of that one off the top of your head.

**Brian Natalie:** The VSO funding app at the Federal level? I don't remember the Bill number but it comes out to where they empower states to issue grants out to County Veterans Offices.

**Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs:** More money would come back in and then we could put money back out through the common.

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** We would like to get the Bill number for that because that is something we could support.

**Keith Graham, Executive Director of Veteran Affairs:** Yeah I think I have it in my bag. Any other questions?

**John Fritz (President):** Next report will be from Mike Hillman. He is going to report via zoom.

**Michael Hillman, Executive Director Veterans Affairs & Emergency Prep Committee:** Hey everybody. Nothing much to report Senator Mastriano covered the big items. The partnership we have had for this session, looking forward to continuing to end the new session. Thank you all for everything you have done to support Veterans and to help us out over the last two years. Happy to answer any questions.

**John Fritz (President):** Any questions? None heard. Mike thank you. Next we will have a report of our Committees. The first one will be Constitution and Bylaws Mr. Jerry Hawk.

## **REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

**Constitution and Bylaws: Gerald Hawk (AMVETS) –** No report at this time. I would like to know we have some new members here, if they would like a copy of the Bylaws maybe Woody could email them out to them just so that everybody has a copy of it.

**Woody Hogan (Secretary):** One thing also, last meeting we eliminated Jewish War Veterans from a seat at the table here. We are going to update the Bylaws obviously to reflect that change.

**John Fritz (President):** Thank you Jerry. Motion to receive and file Jerry's report. John Getz (VFW) makes a motion seconded by Sister Mary Matthias any questions? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Ayes have it.

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

**Membership: Chuck Jackson (MOAA) –** No report



**Legislative: Robert Gray (MOAA),** – Good morning. You had a draft Legislative goals that we put together from the Legislative Committee. I just wanted to go over and see if there is any questions. The first thing we have on the list is protect Veterans, guns, claim sharks. There was a Bill actually I found out there were two Bills one in the House also. So we definitely want to go forward in the next session to reintroduce a Bill to get that passed in the state, so that at least there is some action we can take once we find out there is someone that is violating Federal law and what they are charging Veterans. The second item is Blind and Paralyzed Veterans pension, as far as getting an increases and requesting cost of living adjustment be included in that Bill, other than the comments that we heard from Senator Mastriano. From one of the County Veterans Affairs Officers, we didn't know what the effect of removing the income from state programs would be but apparently it is going to have an impact. So that is some good news but we still want to look for an increase in Blind Veteran pension and the Paralyzed amputee Veterans pension in the next session of the Legislature. Current Era, War bonus, Global War on Terror bonus, Legislation did get introduced through Senator Mastriano and the last part of this session of the legislature, so want to keep that up and carry it on after the first of the year and continue pressing to get some action on that and that is going to take some time once it does get rolling, so we want to try to initiate that as soon as possible. Disabled Veterans real estate exemption thank to Mike Kelman and his staff. We did get some revisions on that Bill, but it never made it that far. So that's something we will be working on with the new Legislative, new Legislature as far as reviving that reintroducing it and pushing that to where we can get the widows of Veterans that have passed away eligibility to pick up that as benefits, Veterans transportation, proper maintenance as we are calling it now. As far as the DAV van program they did make some end roads this year. As far as getting a onetime federal grant to increase the number of vans that they were going out, specifically this time, to hospitals that had high mileage vans or ones that have been sidelined that they were finding out about, to replace those with the new van. So we are still working with the VA. VA has a project going on with the hospitals to find out what the usage is for VA own vehicles, VTN vehicles and other vehicles from other organizations and certain hospital areas and once that studies completed will have more ammunition, I guess you would say to take to the state legislation. As far as you know these are the areas that we need to get additional vans for transportation for our Veterans. That process is in the works right now and we are coordinating with Vision 4 and have quarterly meetings on how that is moving forward, Veterans, justice, fairness, and improvements. That is a work in progress to try to do something administratively, but we more or less have to take with the state Supreme Court Justices and also the Senator Resolution 1196 that was doing a study on TBI and PTSD effect with the Justice system, that report is due next September and so what we find out from that would be some additional information not to perhaps move things along there. One thing that is picked up the State Veterans Commission is support reorganization the Department of Veterans Affairs and I think we can do to organize, make more efficient the running of the organization would be appreciated and we welcome your appearance on the scene to try to keep things going. There was a couple things I mentioned here, as far as Act 66 I know it has been discussed years previous, as far as the report, information that comes in, trying to put in all of the interactions for state benefits, as well as Federal VA and then actually having be able to take from that report in January, report showing all of that at one time. So that is the least you are starting to get, I believe some help on the design and as far as electronics and those kind of things. So that is a work in progress. Then we have some organizations also are in favor of having a separate Veterans office of Veterans Affairs. There was a legislation changing titles and opening up the position Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs to more than officers and there is movement. It all takes time but we thank you for your efforts. One thing that I didn't put on there some Federal initiatives that we have talked about the last meeting that was Richard Starr Act, there has been a House Bill for a Senate House resolution supporting the Richard Starr Act sent to Congress and this next session that is still an issue and we went to look at having a joint House Senate Resolution to send to our Legislators in Washington to support that bill to help Veterans receive the income that they work for during their service and also there is Rich you want to talk about the VA DIC issue that Len Johnson brought up.

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** Dependency, indemnity, dependence and compensation that is the survivor benefit for those who their spouse have service connected at 100% for typically it is 10 years or died as a result of their service connected disability or the VA killed them. Okay, the issue that Len Johnson brought up, and what we are trying to push is the VA has all the data on these spouses and the income so when the spouse dies, why can't this be done automatically rather than the spouse learning about the system? Sometimes the survivor learning about the system and then applying and then waiting months and month and many of these families depend on this compensation to make ends meet. Sometimes it can take up to a year. Some cases are just apparent. The other complex cases we understand. We would like to get with the VA. We don't know how to approach it right now. We want to discuss this, but we want to approach the VA and ask them if they can automate this system in certain instances. That is the summary of the issue and that is what Len Johnson brought up at the State Veterans Commission and here and there has been no movement on it. DMVA said it was going to talk to VA, some meeting nothing came back. Nothing was reported when Len inquired.

**Robert Gray (MOAA):** The other issue that is started moving a little bit is Medal of Honor Highway

**Keith Beebe (MOAA):** Thanks Bob. What has happened is of course we had the Senate Bill this is the US Senate Bill got passed within their particular organization and got sent to the House. The House Bill just got passed out of Committee. In other words, it hasn't gone to the entire House, but it got passed out of the Committee and that is where it stands. In other works, it's literally you know kind of locked there in Congress. Not much more you can really do. We are keeping on it. We have very, very good support to it but it's literally the administration of United States Congress and do it. So we have done as much as we can with the thing. If something happens, doesn't get passed in this particular session, we've got all kinds of good support we can start doing this thing again. Appreciate obviously all of your help and all of your support for that but that is where we are at the United States Congress and we are just been in a hold until we find out what is going on with that. Thank you.

**Robert Gray (MOAA),** Thank you Keith and if you get as far as take time to review these and well, reformat them and add a little more information and send them out before the next meeting. As far as voting at the next meeting, make the more official goals for the next 24/25 Legislative session, we kind of limited them past year or two, but we have some issues that a lot of issues that we think we can make some movement on. So that is why we increase the number of action items on here, and we have someone that is listening on the other side. So we hope to make some advances in this next calendar year? Any other questions?

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** There is one other item that we talked about at Federal level, is pushing the Molly Loomis Act, which deals with the epigenetic passing on birth defects to your children as result of toxic Agent Orange and now toxic exposure. That stalled, they tried to get it into the Defense and Department of Agriculture Appropriations. EPA that went now where. It needs to move along because the Secretary of the VA is actually in violation of the law, as stated in the Mission Act and this is a work around to that problem. Study problem, figure out what needs to be done before we talk about cost. The point we need the General Assembly possibly to send a Resolution or talk with the US Senators and Representatives. I know they do push this along. This is stalled. This is years and years we are talking about.

**Robert Gray (MOAA),** The other thing I found on the back page, there are some studies coming to fruition this year on long term care console is going to have the study completed in May and women's issues study at the end of December 24, Agent Orange study in Pennsylvania is due in January and then we can add.

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** That aging study is out September time period.

**Robert Gray (MOAA):** That is all I have

**Robert Gray (MOAA):** As far as the website, I sent the minutes from September up through last month sent to be posted to the website and we will get a copy of the updated Bylaws to send that and then the Officers and other information to update the website. Someone is looking at it. We did get an inquiry that the webmaster sent along that AL sent to Constance Snavelly. It was the member of the Veterans Affairs Federal VA asking what the steps were to institute and Honor Guard at a National Cemetery. I will send that along to Constance to see if she was able to provide some information to that representative. Any other questions on website?

**John Fritz (President):** A lot of information there. Motion to receive and follow this report please. John Getz (VFW) makes a motion we have a second as well. Any questions, all those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Motion carried.

**Honor Guard: Constance Snavelly (KPV) –** No report

**Troy Michaels (TAL):** Good morning. The following are the nominations and the reappointments. I will do those first, then we will go over the list as usual. First one for Delaware Valley Veterans Home. Barbara Loncar VFW Commander request the reappointment of Benjamin Mastridge whose term expired November 1, 2024. Paul Forsman Commander of the AMVETS request the reappointment of Richard Fine whose term expired November 1, 2023 and John Fritz, The American Legion Commander request the reappointment of Daniel McCollum whose term expired November 1, 2024. Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home Philip Arnold Commander of Military Order of the Purple Heart request the reappointment of David Price, whose term expired July 23, 2024 and last one Hollidaysburg Veterans Home Paul Forsman Commander of the AMVETS request the reappointment of Henry Gaunt whose term expired May the 16<sup>th</sup> 2024, any questions on the nominations and reappointments? Seeing none. Mr. President, I make the motion to accept these appointments.

**John Fritz (President):** We have a motion second Jerry Hawk (AMVETS) all those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Motion carried.

**Troy Michaels (TAL):** Thank you. Going over the Advisory Council appointment and those that need to be taken care of, we are in better shape and we keep getting more and more ahead of time. I think the new process by submitting names who want to continue without the process of resubmitting a bio and all of that seems to be working. So again, it seems to be helping the situation as a whole. There are a few of them that we still need to take care of. First one, Delaware Valley Veterans Home Allen Abramson Jewish War Veterans that term ended on 11/1/23 and we also have on that is still hanging out there. I know Diana has been working on it. I've left it vacant it is for the Marine Corps League and that term expired 11/1/23 and the last one is Larry Holman Jewish War Veterans 11/1/22. Any questions on Delaware Valley? Gino J Merli is in great shape. We need one there that I brought up before and again, it can be another organization if the Blinded Veterans Association doesn't have anybody. If someone can get me an appointment that would be great and that term expired 4/5/23. Questions on Gino J Merli? I need one for Hollidaysburg Veterans Home and that is Timothy Susengill Vietnam Veterans Association and that term expired 5/16/22 so we are looking good there as well. Any questions on Hollidaysburg? Pennsylvania Soldiers and Sailors Home is in great shape as well. One needs to be taken care of and that is Raymond Chambers Marine Corps League and that term expired 7/27/24. Any questions on Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home? Southeastern Veterans Center we have got one and that is Barry Amole Vietnam Veterans Association and that term expired 1/9/22. There are a couple here that just keep in mind will be rapidly approaching again. They are not expired yet, but they expire January 2025 that is Robert Stone The American Legion, Thomas Applebach Pennsylvania County Directors of Veterans Affairs Association, John Getz VFW and Richard Doherty Military Officers Association of America again, they expire the beginning of the year and last Southwestern Veterans Center

Rommel Dacanay his term expired 6/1/20 and I do have one vacancy again so that one needs to be looked at as well. Are there any questions on Southwestern Veterans Center or any of the homes at all that I can answer?

**Barbara Loncar (VFW):** Is there no meeting in December? Is it okay to request reappointment for John Getz?

**Troy Michaels (TAL):** Yes, and we will go ahead and keep those on file and submit them as we get closer.

**Woody Hogan (TAL):** So in Delaware Valley Veterans Home and speaking for the two people for the Jewish War Veterans I am correct to assume we need to fill them with some other organization, since they are no longer part of the War Veterans Council.

**Troy Michaels (TAL):** I would believe that is correct. Woody.

**Woody Hogan (TAL):** Anybody out there that has people that are involved with Delaware Valley or live in Delaware Valley that are members of your organization please consider them and submit them towards your organization instead.

**Troy Michaels (TAL):** There is a couple of Delaware Valley too that expired beginning of the year. Claudette V Campbell Military Officer Association of America, James Ritchie VFW, Leonard Johnson DAV and Douglas Craig Catholic War Veterans. So again keep those in mind as well. Mr. President that concludes my report.

**Woody Hogan (TAL):** I believe with the reappointment since they've already been approved by this committee or this council once we don't need to re vote on them, because we are just reappoint them. So we don't need a motion correct to accept reappointment. So if you have reappointment send them in we will take care of them. Thanks

**Troy Michaels (TAL):** Mr. President that concludes my report.

**John Fritz (President):** Motion to receive his report. David Geyer (VFW) Seconded by William Hines (DAV) Do we have any questions on the motion? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Motion carried.

**ACT 66: Robert Black:** Good morning basically the VSO grants have been approved and the payments are going to be sent out hopefully by November 20<sup>th</sup> according to the DMVA. There will be first and second quarter's payments on those so hopefully fingers crossed that we will be getting those payments. That is all I have Commander.

**John Fritz (President):** Motion to receive his report. David Geyer (VFW) Seconded by William Hines (DAV) Do we have any questions on the motion? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Motion carried.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** I would like to make a motion that we study or find out the cost of adding a Legislative action section to our website. I can explain in the discussion.

**John Fritz (President):** Motion to receive his report. David Geyer (VFW) Seconded by (DAV) Do we have any questions on the motion? All those in favor say Aye. Aye. Opposed? Motion carried.

**Richard Hudzinski (VVA):** Most of your organizations, VFW, American Legion, VVA have a Legislative Action site. You know what I am talking about? You find out what the major issues are. The letter is already prepared for you. You can send it by email, you can download it, modify it or it provides you a telephone number to call on. I think it would be at a National level. I think it would behoove us at state level to do the same thing and what better organization than the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council. I would encourage others to come to the site and see what the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council is about and what it is pushing is good salesmanship. I hate to sound a little petty here about our value. This is a valuable organization this coalition so I think this would help improve our effectiveness. We discussed it in the Legislative Committee. We thought it was a good idea and that is why this proposal.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

#### **CORRESPONDENCE:**

**Woody Hogan (Secretary):** No actual correspondence I just want everybody to be aware that the new calendar for the next year is out and reflects Chairman Nick Taylor's new non meeting dates on the State Veterans Commission side. This is up to date, beautiful for your refrigerator at home so you don't miss any meetings. Thank you.

#### **REMARKS FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORGANIZATION**

**Phil Arnold (MOPH):** This Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup> there is a service at the National Cemetery at Indian Town Gap. You will begin at 2:00 and Military Order is the co-sponsor this year, and as a side light it might be an issue that we are all having, from what I can see is younger members. This will probably be one of the first times I have attended in 20 some years that the speaker will be less than 50 years old.

**Nate Silcox:** For those that aren't tuned in Senator Mastriano is going to hold a press conference today at 12:00 in front of the statues in front of The American Legion to highlight the signing of Senate Bill 1160 the Vietnam Veterans War day. After he speaks he is going to recognize Richard on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans of American, President Fritz on behalf of The American Legion, and John Getz on behalf of the VFW. If any other organizations with members here would like to speak just see me afterwards. I will put you on the list and just highlight the importance here of codifying this into law.

**John Getz:** Something else we discussed at legislative meetings we were kind of looking at last year we did a Legislative breakfast and if you take a look at the turnout that we have it is not real good. Maybe two early morning I don't know what it is. I know we brought up a possibility of maybe looking into something different maybe a Legislative lunch something like that just up for discussion. Maybe think about it till next meeting or try and get some ideas what to do because I guess that time of the morning is pretty early for the Senators and Congressmen to come and then listen to us and give them updates on everything we do. Maybe an afternoon or early afternoon might be a little bit better but that is just something we brought up to discuss.

**BENEDICTION:** Sister Mary Matthias (CWV)

**RETIREMENT OF COLORS:** Troy Michaels (TAL)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Respectfully submitted,  
James "Woody" Hogan, Secretary