

**Board of Veterans Services  
Meeting Minutes  
April 17, 2008**

A meeting of the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) was held on Thursday, April 17, 2008 at the American Legion Department of Virginia in Richmond.

**Members Present**

Vince Burgess; Mark Cole; Kirk Cox; Paris Davis; Paul Galanti; Pat Green; Thad Jones; Vivian Watts; and Sam Wilder.

**Members Absent**

John Anderson; John Edwards; Samuel Metters; Al Sample; Bettye Simmons; Judson Stanley; Max Taylor; and Frank Wickersham.

**Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present**

John Anderson, Benefits Services Manager, Department of Veterans Services; Anne Atkins, Communications Director, Department of Veterans Services; Bert Boyd, Chief Operating Officer, Department of Veterans Services; Steve Combs, Director of Policy and Planning, Department of Veterans Services; Rhonda Earman, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services; Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General; Robyn Jennings, Director of Nursing, Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center, Department of Veterans Services; Dan Kemano, Cemeteries Director, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Bill Leighty, Virginia Commonwealth University; John Marshall, Secretary of Public Safety; Tracy Morrison, Financial Manager, Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center, Department of Veterans Services; Armistead Ransone, Finance and Administration Director, Department of Veterans Services; Judith Reid, IT Program Assistant; Mike Rogers, Internal Auditor, Department of Veterans Services.

**Others Present**

Roger Sullivan and Tom Briggs of the Virginia Veterans Coalition.

**Materials Distributed**

Meeting agenda; draft minutes of the January 7, 2008 meeting; FY 2007 APA Audit Plan of Correction Status Report; Commissioner Burgess's Cover Letter and Lessons Learned Outline with respect to the opening of the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center; draft policy for inter-relationships between DVS boards and councils; Benefits Subcommittee Report; Care Centers Subcommittee Report; Cemeteries Subcommittee Report; Budget and Strategic Planning Subcommittee Report; DVS FY09/FY10 Operating Budget as Agreed to by the House/Senate Conference Committee; DVS 2008 Bill Tracking Matrix; Possible State Legislative Objectives for 2009 from the JLC Chairman; and Veterans Services Foundation Report.

**Call to Order**

With 8 of 17 members present, Chairman Galati called the meeting to order at approximately 11:20 a.m. Delegate Cole arrived after the meeting began. The membership and guests recited the pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

**Approval of Minutes**

A **motion** was passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the January 7, 2008 meeting, as drafted.

### **Department of Veterans Services Report**

Commissioner Burgess began his report by introducing Secretary Marshall. Secretary Marshall emphasized that he not only works with veterans, but for veterans and noted that he shares Governor Kaine's commitment to addressing the needs of Virginia's veterans. Secretary Marshall also thanked the Board for its ongoing dedication and service to veterans. Commissioner Burgess noted that Secretary Marshall has attended the 2008 DVS Town Hall meetings in order to improve his awareness of the issues facing veterans today.

Commissioner Burgess asked Dan Kemano to provide an update on the Southwest Virginia Cemetery project. Mr. Kemano stated that after Congress passed legislation in 2007 to convey the property from the U. S. Government to the Commonwealth, the General Assembly allocated the necessary state funding to get the project off the ground. Mr. Kemano reported that a contract to clear a section of woods and construct a new security fence has just been executed and that the work should begin in the next month or so. Mr. Kemano noted that a cemetery master design plan is in the process of being finalized, and that the target date for opening the facility has been pushed back from Memorial Day 2010, to late summer 2010. Mr. Kemano also noted that the Army Corps of Engineers is in the process of completing its environmental impact study for approval by the Department of the Army. Mr. Kemano said it is anticipated that the land transfer ceremony will occur in late summer 2008.

Commissioner Burgess thanked the legislative board members for all their hard work in getting veterans legislation and budget amendments passed during the 2008 legislative session. Commissioner Burgess noted that the Wounded Warrior and TurboVet projects received funding, and that legislation transferring the operations of the Virginia War Memorial to the Public Safety Secretariat and DVS also was passed. Commissioner Burgess thanked Delegate Cox and Senator Puller for their efforts in securing \$4.5 million over the next biennium for Wounded Warrior, a program that requires DVS to cooperate with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, and the Department of Rehabilitative Services, to expand current resources for treatment of combat-related stress disorders and traumatic brain injury in Virginia veterans. Commissioner Burgess stated that Wounded Warrior will employ a statewide director, three district managers and an administrative assistant to adequately and timely evaluate and treat polytrauma in veterans. Commissioner Burgess said DVS also may partner with the 211 referral service used by state health and human resources agencies for Wounded Warrior. Commissioner Burgess noted that the Military Family Support Center is putting together fund-raising events across the state in support of Wounded Warrior. Commissioner Burgess said that Martha Mead also is working with the Defense Center for Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury to promote a national public awareness campaign proposed by the Department of Defense, with Virginia's Wounded Warrior initiative serving as a pilot program.

Commissioner Burgess then reported on the Virginia is for Heroes regional conference held at Fort Monroe in March. The conference brought together public and private service providers to identify the services needed to address polytrauma and combat/operational stress among veterans of the Global War on Terror, and how best to bring the services to bear. Commissioner Burgess noted that additional Heroes conferences will likely take place this fall. Commissioner Burgess also noted that the findings of this group will assist those responsible for implementing Wounded Warrior.

Commissioner Burgess then reported on the Veterans Workforce Development Taskforce, which was established under the direction of Secretary Marshall and chaired by Board of Veterans Services

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member Al Sample. Commissioner Burgess noted that the charge of the task force is to make recommendations for a comprehensive workforce development initiative for Virginia veterans, with a special emphasis on disabled veterans and those returning from the Global War on Terror. The goal is to identify ways to effectively match veterans with employers and positions, encourage public and private employers to hire veterans, especially those with disabilities, and to develop a more comprehensive technological approach for informing veterans on how to obtain jobs and training opportunities. Commissioner Burgess noted that the task force will provide a report on its findings and recommendations to Secretary Marshall by September 1, a copy of which will be provided to the Board.

Commissioner Burgess then reported on the series of Town Hall meetings DVS is holding across the state in cooperation with the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC). Commissioner Burgess noted that each meeting has had an average attendance of 25, including state and federal officials.

Commissioner Burgess noted that he, Secretary Marshall and General Newman attended the funeral of a Virginia National Guard member killed while serving in Iraq, and that the soldier was buried at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery.

Commissioner Burgess reported that the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC) has received certification from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), effective March 27, 2008, and that SBVCC now has 38 residents, with at least 50 applications for admission pending. Commissioner Burgess called attention to the SBVCC "Lessons Learned" outline in the agenda packets.

Commissioner Burgess then reported that the Hampton VA Medical Center has received federal funding to demolish the buildings on the property where DVS hopes to construct its next veterans care center. Commissioner Burgess noted the care center project must first receive approval from the VA State Home Grant Program before the formal planning process can begin.

Commissioner Burgess discussed the Auditor of Public Accounts 2007 Audit of agency operations, calling attention to the handout in the agenda packets related to correction of audit deficiencies. Commissioner Burgess noted that some of the deficiencies were carried over from the previous year's audit, and that DVS was optimistic as to how it believed those points could be addressed. Commissioner Burgess noted that DVS is well on its way to developing the policies and procedures needed to correct the deficiencies. Commissioner Burgess promised to keep the Board updated on the progress of the plan of correction.

Commissioner Burgess then introduced John Anderson, who recently was hired to fill the vacant Benefits Services Manager position. Commissioner Burgess pointed out that Mr. Anderson previously held the position of Eastern District Benefits Services Manager.

### **Pre-Registered Public Comment**

Chairman Galanti then recognized Roger Sullivan, who recently retired from many years of serving Virginia veterans as a Military Order of the Purple Heart service officer.

Mr. Sullivan asked why there was no one from the Veterans Services Foundation (VSF) present at the meeting, given that Delegate Cox had worked so hard during the 2008 General Assembly session to get legislation passed for the VSF. Commissioner Burgess responded by asking Steve Combs to provide a summary of the VSF legislation passed. Mr. Combs said there were several bills that dealt with all DVS

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boards, including Delegate Cox's HB 477 and companion bill SB 314 (Edwards), which make some very specific changes to the VSF, including adding 8 citizen members, and the Chair of the JLC as an *ex officio* member. In addition, these bills clarify that the purpose of the VSF is to raise funds from the private sector for veterans services and programs. Mr. Combs added that the new citizen members will be appointed by the state legislature. Mr. Combs also said that the legislation also requires that all newly appointed members have fund-raising experience. Mr. Combs noted that other legislation patroned by Delegates Cosgrove and Wagner, which also passed, make small changes to the VSF, again clarifying that the purpose as fundraising and increasing the length of membership terms from three years to four years.

Mr. Sullivan asked about the legislation that would have provided tax relief for 100% disabled veterans. Commissioner Burgess responded that it was carried over to the 2009 session. Mr. Sullivan said that this measure has been carried over for the past three sessions. Mr. Combs added that there were four resolutions, two from each chamber and related to JLC Legislative Objective Number 5, all of which were continued to 2009 in the respective Privileges and Elections Committees. Delegate Cole added that this measure involves a constitutional amendment and that constitutional amendments must pass twice with an election between each passage. Mr. Sullivan expressed concern that because this measure has been continued for three years, it may be continued again next year. Delegate Cole suggested Mr. Sullivan discuss this legislation with members of the respective committees, and added that there was no reason to take the measure up during the 2008 session, because it cannot be passed until the 2010 session.

### **Presentation of Board Resolution**

Chairman Galanti presented Bill Leighty with a Board resolution and special Virginia license plate commending him for his outstanding service to the veterans of the Commonwealth.

### **Draft Policy for Inter-relationships Between DVS Boards**

Commissioner Burgess called attention to the draft policy in the agenda packets and made a **motion**, seconded by Thad Jones, that the Board adopt it. Mr. Combs noted that the Veterans Services Foundation had adopted the draft policy. Discussion followed, with Mr. Wilder objecting to the policy, stating it would create a hindrance to board actions due to the timing of board meetings. Mr. Wilder said the chairs of the respective boards have the authority to speak for the full bodies and that newly enacted legislation establishing *ex officio* membership by chairs on all boards should cover the intent of the policy. Chairman Galanti agreed with Mr. Wilder, saying the concept needs further study. A **motion** was made by Pat Green, seconded by Delegate Cox, and passed unanimously to table action on the policy until the next meeting.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

#### Benefits Subcommittee

In the absence of Al Sample, Delegate Cox provided the Subcommittee report and called attention to the written report provided in the agenda packets. Delegate Cox noted that the Subcommittee had not met since the last Board meeting. Delegate Cox highlighted some of the items in the report, noting that the TurboVet project received a \$100,000 allocation from the 2008 General Assembly and that DVS continues to work to implement this program. Delegate Cox also drew attention to the claims adjudication rating in the report and noted that the relocation of the Richmond Benefits Services office has allowed for additional itinerate service points, covering new geographic areas. Delegate Cox emphasized that closing of VEC offices in which DVS field offices are co-located needs to be

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addressed. Delegate Watts expressed her frustration with the closure of the VEC Fairfax office, in which a DVS field office is located, and the negative impact it will have on accessibility for veterans living in that area. Delegate Cox also highlighted the number of educational institutions approved by the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and Training for attendance by veterans under the GI Bill.

Care Centers Subcommittee

Thad Jones began his report by saying that the SBVCC is now fully operational and has been inspected and certified by the VA, with 38 residents and at least 50 more waiting to be admitted.

Mr. Jones noted that although the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) recently experienced an electrical power outage, VVCC staff still were able to serve hot meals and provide other essential services to the residents, until the power was restored.

Paris Davis asked how many veterans had been hired at the SBVCC. Mr. Boyd responded that of the 38 residents, five are service-disabled and nine members of the 78 full-time, and 24 part-time, staff are veterans. Mr. Boyd emphasized that SBVCC always tries to give preference to veterans in care centers hiring, while still meeting regulatory requirements for qualifications.

Mr. Jennings said that the SBVCC will open a dementia unit the first week in May, with 13 residents currently on the waiting list for it. Ms. Jennings also noted that of the 38 SBVCC residents, 4 are female.

Cemeteries Subcommittee

Pat Green began his report by referencing the "Meeting the Memorial Needs of Virginia Veterans: An Analysis of Existing and Proposed Cemetery Sites" report conducted for DVS by the University of Virginia. Mr. Green said that factors considered in the study's recommendations for future cemeteries include number of veterans residing in Virginia, land mass, the distance from a veterans home to a veterans cemetery, etc. Mr. Green made a **motion** that the Board adopt a resolution that all Virginia veterans be served by a cemetery that is a least within a 50-mile radius of their home, and that at least 90% of all Virginia veterans be served by either a state or national veterans cemetery. The motion was seconded by Paris Davis, but was not voted on, due to a lack of quorum.

Mr. Green also asked the Board to support the study's recommendation that allows for veterans in neighboring states to be buried in Virginia veterans cemeteries, noting that this action would have almost no financial impact on the Commonwealth. In addition, Mr. Green asked for the Board's support for the next cemetery to be built in Nelson County, citing a need in the area from Culpeper south to Lynchburg, due to the Culpeper National Cemetery being at near capacity.

Mr. Combs added that the study recommends strengthening outreach and marketing efforts, and the use of a consumer satisfaction survey to ensure the continuous needs of veterans are properly identified, as well as ways to improve cemetery services.

Mr. Combs provided to Delegate Cole a brief summary of the discussions that took place during the Cemeteries Subcommittee meeting held earlier in the day, including six primary recommendations included in the Cemeteries study report:

1. Adoption of a 50-mile service boundary;

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2. Adoption of the goal of having 90-percent of Virginia veterans served by a national or state cemetery within a 50-mile boundary of a state cemetery;
3. Construction of a future veterans cemetery in Nelson County;
4. Lifting of eligibility requirements so that veterans from out-of-state can be buried at Virginia veterans cemeteries;
5. Strengthening outreach and marketing opportunities;
6. Adoption of the use of a satisfaction survey, a practice used by national cemeteries, to focus on meeting the needs of the veterans and their families, and continuous improvement.

Mr. Green restated his earlier **motion** that the Board accept the report and its primary recommendations. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burgess and passed unanimously.

Budget and Strategic Planning ad hoc Subcommittee

In the absence of Sam Metters, Delegate Watts provided the Subcommittee report. Delegate Watts noted that the subcommittee had not met since the January Board meeting, and called attention to the subcommittee report in the agenda packets. Delegate Watts highlighted the Strategies for Achievement assessment form in the handout, which she asked members of all the Board's subcommittee to complete, after reviewing the full Subcommittee report. Delegate Watts emphasized that this process will assist in the preparation for the next biennial budget cycle. Mr. Combs added that a DVS staff member will be assigned to each subcommittee to assist with this process.

**Legislative Report and 2008 General Assembly Summary**

Chairman Galanti asked Sam Wilder to provide a short summary of how the JLC's 2008 Legislative Objectives fared during the session. Mr. Wilder thanked all state legislators for their willingness to pass veterans legislation and budget amendments during a time of state revenue shortfalls, noting that the overall perspective of the General Assembly has changed significantly in recent years to better recognize and address the needs of Virginia's veterans, while making great strides to act in a bi-partisan manner. Mr. Wilder emphasized that because of the work of DVS and the JLC, all legislators now know what the JLC is and, therefore, are more likely to support veterans measures.

Delegate Cox noted that this was a great session for veterans and thanked everyone who worked so hard to get veterans measures passed.

Delegate Watts emphasized the key role the JLC has played in getting veterans legislation passed, and noted the assistance it has provided to legislators like herself who previously had no veterans background. Delegate Watts thanked the JLC for its work in helping Virginia veterans speak with one voice with law and policy makers. Delegate Watts noted that one of her bills that would have given tax relief to National Guard and Reserve members deployed outside the United States for 90 days or more was carried over to the next session, and said she would ask DVS and the JLC to make that bill one of its priorities for the 2009 session.

Delegate Cole echoed his colleagues' comments by praising the General Assembly for the veterans and military measures passed. Delegate Cole emphasized the importance of veterans in the Commonwealth

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and the need to adequately address their and their families' needs. Delegate Cole said some of the measures he patroned this year were not passed, including bills relating to interstate compact on educational opportunities for military children, and tax credits for physicians who accept Tri-Care, issues he hopes the JLC will champion next session.

Mr. Combs drew attention to the documents in the agenda packets regarding 2008 legislation and budget amendments.

Commissioner Burgess noted that DVS's administrative budget is under 6% of its total operating budget, and that it has not filled previously authorized positions in order to address the current budget restrictions. Commissioner Burgess said this represents sound fiscal approach to how DVS operates and the best mechanism for not disrupting direct services to DVS clients.

### **JLC Chairman's Report**

Mr. Wilder distributed a handout listing prospective JLC legislative objectives for the 2009 General Assembly session, highlighting the following items:

- I.1. TurboVet funding – may want to consider a bill for this item instead of a budget amendment. Mr. Wilder noted that private fund-raising efforts for this project are going well and that the VSF has received donations dedicated to it.
- II.3. Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children – two other states already have passed this.

Mr. Wilder also noted that the issue of in-state tuition also may be an objective again this year.

Mr. Wilder noted that he is assisting with the hiring for the Wounded Warrior program positions by making military retirees aware that they soon will be filled. Mr. Wilder also emphasized that DVS is working with federal legislators to try and get federal funding for this program.

Mr. Wilder emphasized the JLC needs to know now the top issues being identified in the Town Hall meetings, so it can consider them when it develops its 2009 legislative priorities.

Delegate Watts suggested that the JLC wait to finalize its 2009 legislative agenda until after the Veterans Workforce Development Taskforce has submitted its report in September, to ensure that any workforce issues requiring legislative action are included in the agenda.

Mr. Wilder said he would like to see someone from the Governor's policy office attend a JLC meeting in preparation for the state budget process.

### **Open Public Comment and Roundtable Discussion**

Mr. Green informed the Board of a nation-wide effort known as the "Missing in America Project" that seeks to recover unclaimed cremated remains of veterans in nursing homes and provide a proper burial of them. Mr. Green said he is working with DVS, the Virginia Funeral Directors Association and the Virginia Cemetery Association to establish a Virginia program in partnership with this initiative, including getting state legislation passed, if necessary.

Mr. Combs drew attention to the Veterans Services Foundation report in the agenda packets.

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Chairman Galanti then discussed the Families of the Wounded Fund, a project that provides financial assistance to families of wounded troops being treated at VA medical centers and asked everyone to support this worthy cause, noting the web site address [www.familiesofthewoundedfund.org](http://www.familiesofthewoundedfund.org).

**Scheduling of Next Meeting and Adjournment**

The next meeting was scheduled for July 21, 2008, 11:00 am, tentatively at the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center, subject to the availability of the facility. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:25 p.m.