

**THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**

**JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF  
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

**CHAIRMAN'S 2004 ANNUAL REPORT**

**TO**

**COMMISSIONER JON A. MANGIS**

**AND**

**THE BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES**

***VIRGINIA -- HOME OF AMERICA'S PATRIOTS***

**November 30, 2004**

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## Chairman's Message

Prior to and during the establishment of the Joint Leadership Council (JLC) of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), several naysayers and doubters raised their voices saying that getting different VSOs to work together and agree on anything would be impossible. "Like herding cats," some said. But over the past year, the members of the JLC have proved the doubters wrong. Frank, open discussions at JLC meetings have shown that the members of Virginia's VSOs are united in a common purpose – to advance the interests of Virginia's veterans.

After its September meeting, the JLC created a 10-point legislative agenda, which we will carry to the Governor and the General Assembly during the 2005 General Assembly Session. Our top priorities are increased funding for the Department of Veterans Services, a State Veterans Care Center in the Hampton Roads area, and a State Veterans Cemetery in Southwest Virginia. If we're unsuccessful during this General Assembly Session, we're going to come back again next year, and the year after that, until our united voices are heard.

I'm a veteran of the U.S. Navy, so I often relate things to my naval service. To me, the Commonwealth's government is like a battleship. It's big and it's heavy, so it takes a while to change course. But it's also powerful, and once it's on the right course, there is no stopping it. As I see it, the JLC was created to advise the Commonwealth on the right direction to take as far as veterans are concerned. We're not there yet, but the turn has begun.

Cornelius T. (Connie) O'Neill  
Chairman  
November 30, 2004

## Mission and Vision (Proposed)

At the September 7, 2004 meeting, Chairman O'Neill called for volunteers to serve on an ad hoc committee to prepare the Joint Leadership Committee's mission and vision statements. Messrs. Rinaldo, Botts, and Ellis prepared draft statements, which will be discussed at the December 7, 2004 meeting. The proposed mission and vision statements are below:

### Mission

*The Council provides advice and assistance to the Governor and the Department of Veterans Services on matters of concern to the veterans community, and provides a conduit of information to and from the veterans service organizations on policy and legislation, pending and enacted, as well as information on existing services.*

### Vision

*The Council will:*

- *Give the Department of Veterans Services a broader understanding of the services needed by veterans.*
- *Give veterans a broader understanding of the services available to them as citizens of Virginia.*
- *Help veterans and veterans' organizations achieve legislation or policy changes needed to improve veterans' services.*
- *Enhance communications between the public, the state government, and the state's veterans.*
- *Help the Governor and the Department of Veterans Services develop policies that improve services for Virginia's veterans.*
- *Help the General Assembly develop and pass laws that more clearly respond to veterans' needs.*

## **Joint Leadership Council Overview**

### **Members**

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations is composed of one representative from each qualifying VSO in the Commonwealth. The qualifications for JLC representation are spelled out in the Code of Virginia.

As of November 30, 2004, twenty-two VSOs were represented on the JLC. Those organizations are:

- Air Force Association
- American Ex-Prisoners of War
- American Legion
- AMVETS
- Disabled American Veterans
- Fleet Reserve Association
- Homeless & Disabled Veterans
- Korean War Veterans Association
- Legion of Valor of the US, Inc.
- Marine Corps League
- Military Order of the Purple Heart
- MOAA
- NAUS
- Navy Seabee Veterans of America
- Non Commissioned Officers Association
- Paralyzed Veterans of America
- Reserve Officers Association of the United States
- Roanoke Valley Veterans Council
- United States Navy Cruiser Sailors Association
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge
- Virginia National Guard Association

### **Structure**

An elected Chairman leads the Joint Leadership Council, assisted by an elected Vice Chairman. The Chairman may appoint three officers – a Secretary/Parliamentarian, a Legislative Officer, and a Chaplain – subject to ratification by the Council.

Though there are no standing committees, the Chairman may, with the consent of the Council, appoint ad hoc committees to accomplish specific tasks. Examples of such committees include the Constitution and Bylaws Review Committee and the Mission

## **Purpose**

The JLC's purpose is to address and advocate for the needs of Virginia's veterans.

As spelled out in § 2.2-2682 of the Code of Virginia, the Council shall have the following powers and duties:

1. Advise the Department of Veterans Services regarding (i) methods of providing support for ongoing veterans services and programs, and (ii) addressing veterans issues on an ongoing basis;
2. Recommend issues that may potentially impact veterans of the armed forces of the United States and their Virginia-domiciled surviving spouses, orphans, and dependents;
3. Advise the Department of Veterans Services and the Board of Veterans Services on matters of concern to veterans and their Virginia-domiciled surviving spouses, orphans, and dependents;
4. Promote and support existing veterans services and programs;
5. Recommend and promote implementation of new efficient and effective administrative initiatives that enhance existing veterans services and programs or provide for necessary veterans services and programs not currently provided; and
6. Maintain a nonpartisan approach to maintaining and improving veterans services and programs in the Commonwealth.

## **Focus Areas – 2004**

Discussion at JLC meetings in 2004 focused on a wide range of topics, ranging from education to health care to employment. Council members followed closely the construction and dedication of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, and are anxious to see the Commonwealth open a third cemetery in southwest Virginia. JLC members are already looking beyond the Sitter-Barfoot Care Center, to be built on the grounds of the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, to the construction of care centers in other parts of the state.

The issues of most importance to the Council as a whole are captured in the JLC's 2005 Legislative Agenda. Other items of importance to Council members can be seen in the meeting minutes, included below.

## **2005 Legislative Agenda**

A theme commonly expressed at JLC meetings was the importance of the Council speaking as one voice. Nowhere is this more important than in the area of legislation impacting the welfare of Virginia's veterans.

The JLC's 2005 Legislative Agenda is presented on the next page. This agenda was compiled after the September 7, 2004 meeting, based on member VSO input to Chairman O'Neill. The first version of the agenda was presented to the Board of Veterans Services at that group's September 27, 2004 meeting, and minor refinements have been made in the interim. The agenda will be the cornerstone of the JLC's efforts during the 2005 General Assembly session.

## **Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Services Organizations 2005 Legislative Agenda**

Be it resolved by the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations, representing 22 Veterans Service Organizations, that:

1. The General Assembly provide an increase in funding for the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) of \$1 million. Funding for its predecessor, the Virginia Department of Veterans Affairs (VDVA), has been severely cut over the years.
2. The General Assembly appropriate the amount of money required to fund the Commonwealth's portion of the construction costs of a new Veterans Care Center in the Hampton Roads area.
3. The General Assembly appropriate the amount of money required to fund the purchase of land for a Veterans Cemetery in Southwest Virginia, and that the General Assembly appropriate the amount of money required to operate the cemetery.
4. The General Assembly approve an increase in capital funding of \$4.3 million specifically designated for the Virginia War Memorial to construct a new education wing to preserve and to teach the history of Virginia's military veterans.
5. The General Assembly pass legislation that establishes a true veterans' hiring preference plan for public employees, especially for disabled veterans. The current law reads that public employers "may" take veterans status into account. The law should read "shall" take veterans status into account.
6. The General Assembly support a thirty-day grace period for drivers license renewal for Virginia military personnel returning from overseas assignments.
7. The General Assembly approve legislation that specifically provides for and funds round the clock, on-site Capitol Police security for the Virginia War Memorial.
8. The General Assembly enact legislation that will allow Joint Leadership Council members to receive travel reimbursement for attending JLC meetings.
9. The General Assembly enact legislation that enables the Governor to award Virginia military men and women who serve in combat, combat support, or combat service support roles during Operations Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Iraqi Freedom (Iraq) a unique medal commemorating such service.
10. The General Assembly enact legislation that enables the Governor to award Virginia military men and women who are awarded citations for heroism a unique medal commemorating such heroism.

## **Plans for 2005 and beyond**

The first order of business in 2005 will be to work for the passage of the Council's 2005 Legislative Agenda. The JLC will meet twice while the General Assembly is in session so as to allow for a coordinated lobbying effort.

The Joint Leadership Council will strive in 2005 for closer ties with the Department of Veterans Services and the Board of Veterans Services. The goal will be to communicate to both groups those issues of concern to Virginia's veteran community in such time and manner that the issues can be addressed through the budget and legislative processes of both the Executive and Legislative branches of the Commonwealth's government. To that end, the JLC will work with the Commissioner of Veterans Services and the Chairman of the Board of Veterans Services to develop an "action timeline" for 2005. The timeline will ensure that the right information gets communicated to the right people in time to impact the budget and legislative processes.

## **Minutes of the December 16, 2003 Meeting**

### **JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL MEETING TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2003 VIRGINIA WAR MEMORIAL, RICHMOND MINUTES**

#### **ATTENDING:**

Jim Aucoin  
Johnnie Collins Jr.  
John D. Edgerton  
Dr. Paul Richard Fink  
Michael C. Hulsey  
James F. Jones, Jr.  
Daniel T. Miller, Chairman  
Cornelius T. O'Neill  
R. Goodwin Sacra

Mel Drisko, Member of Board of Veterans Services  
John McAnaw, Virginia Department of Veterans of Foreign Wars

Jon Mangis, Commissioner  
Bert Boyd, Chief Deputy Commissioner  
Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General  
Bonnie Giese, Financial Manager, Department of Veterans Services  
Geneva Claybrook, Executive Services Manager, Department of Veterans Services

#### **CALL TO ORDER:**

Dan Miller called the meeting to order and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. He called the roll and it was decided that there was a quorum.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Connie O'Neill noted he addressed the legislative agenda for the American Legion at the last meeting, and it was not mentioned in the minutes. He asked that this be added to the minutes and that members receive a hard copy. (See Attached)

**MOTION: John Edgerton moved that the minutes of the November 10, 2003 meeting be approved as written, with the noted correction. Johnnie Collins seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

#### **REVIEW OF REVISED BY-LAWS:**

**MOTION: John Edgerton moved that the revised By-Laws be approved as written. James Jones, Jr. seconded the motion and it passed. John McAnaw abstained.**

There was further discussion regarding the removal of the phrase “For God and Country.” Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General stated that it was due to the Council conducting State business and the Council could be open to litigation. The phrase “faith in our Creator” was discussed. Mr. Ferguson advised his legal advice to the Council that it did not belong in a public document; however, Mr. McAnaw recommended that the phrase “faith in our Creator” remain in the By-laws. John Edgerton agreed and a vote was taken. It was unanimous that the phrase remains in the By-Laws. Mr. Ferguson advised that the By-Laws be made available to the general public.

#### **APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS:**

Connie O’Neill was appointed Legislative Officer, and accepted the appointment. Mr. O’Neill reviewed his background with The American Legion as Adjutant and Legislative Chairman for the American Legion. He added he would be representing the Joint Leadership Council and will begin with a legislative agenda for the JLC, representing all organizations.

Dr. Paul Fink was appointed Chaplain, and accepted. He reviewed for the Council his background, adding he had been a minister for 63 years.

It was agreed that there was no need for a Parliamentarian, Secretary. Hopefully Mr. Mangis will get a good deal for him on the tickets. There was ratification of the two appointments.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

Chairman Dan Miller began a discussion of the Development of Veterans Outreach Program. He noted that Title 38 of the Code of Virginia states they are restricted to serving Veterans. They are located at the Department of Commerce in Virginia Employment Commission; however, they are not budgeted by the VEC. The issue is that each has a maximum employment level and currently there are twelve open positions and there is \$360,000 to support these positions, i.e., wages, benefits, etc. If the positions are not filled, the Department of Labor can recapture the money impacting the economy because the pay and benefits are not circulating in the Commonwealth. There are approximately 1200 Veterans who could be put to work, which would mean \$30,000,000 in wages Veterans would earn. This is a loss to the Commonwealth of approximately \$70,000,000. Dan Miller recommended a motion be made to address the issues.

**MOTION: John Edgerton moved to exclude DVOP/LVER form a Maximum Employment Level at the Virginia Employment Commission, so when there is a vacancy it can be filled immediately.**

A discussion ensued on how to address the matter appropriately. The JLC makes recommendations to the OVS and the Board of Veterans Services. The Commissioner

goes directly to the Secretary of Commerce, through the budget process and Don Ferguson addresses it through appropriation. It was recommended that the Adjutant General of the National Guard Association be contacted, since he has gone through the process as Chief of Staff.

**The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

## **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES REPORT – Commissioner Jon Mangis**

Mr. Mangis spoke to the issue of aiding Veterans coming out of uniform, layoffs, etc. He remarked the men/women should have help available to them with field offices located throughout the state.

He recognized Paul Galanti, Chair of the Sub Committee on Benefits and Roger Sullivan, Military Order of the Purple Heart and Virginia Veterans Coalition.

Mr. Mangis reviewed his schedule, stating he had been to the Care Center and the Roanoke office; however, being tied up with the budget has been unable to visit the other field offices. He asked for dates of State conventions and deadlines on VSO newsletters. Mel Drisko commented that his organization could provide space for a column in their newsletter for words from the Commissioner until the Department of Veterans Services publishes a newsletter.

He said he sees the Joint Leadership Council as an excellent group, voicing their concerns to the Board and Foundation, as well as a great help during legislation. Additionally, he asked that he be notified of all meetings scheduled between now and June to help him attend the majority of the State Conventions.

Connie O'Neill presented the American Legion Legislative Agenda and reviewed it for the Council, addressing the second Care Center (see attached). The VFW's Agenda was presented by John McAnaw, which included DVOP/LVER, a study of the resolution for the second Care Center and a third Care Center and a third Cemetery. Also, he discussed authorization for college in-state tuition for active duty personnel.

The MOOA Agenda was presented by Mel Drisko including Department of Veterans Services restored staff cuts, Virginia War Memorial security guards, Virginia Veterans Care Center, in-state tuition for active duty personnel and dependents and State income tax exemptions for Military releases. Also, continue monitoring the second Care Center's construction.

The issue of a budget figure restoring the Department of Veterans Services was discussed. Memos will be sent to Jon Mangis.

**PRESENTATION OF FLAG:**

Dr. Paul Richard Fink presented a U.S. Navy Cruiser Sailors Association flag to the War Memorial. Jon Hatfield, Executive Director accepted the flag on behalf of the Memorial.

**NEXT MEETING DATE:** – March 16, 2004 – 1:00 Meeting to recap legislative progress.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** - Paul Galanti noted a high priority should be set to help Jon Mangis, Commissioner gain permission to hire a part-time assistant.

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

# **Minutes of the March 16, 2004 Meeting**

## **JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**

**March 16, 2004**

**McGuire VA Medical Center, Building 507**

**Richmond**

## **MINUTES**

### **ATTENDING**

#### **Members**

Dan Miller, Chairman, Disabled American Veterans  
Jim Aucoin, American Veterans  
John Bonnell, Jr., Marine Corps League  
Norman Jasper, Roanoke Valley Veterans Council  
John Jackson, Paralyzed Veterans of America  
James Jones, Korean War Veterans Association  
Jon Mangis, Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services  
Connie O'Neill, American Legion  
Richard Rinaldo, Legion of Valor of the U.S.  
Goodwin Sacra, Navy Seabee Veterans of America  
Dick Schneider, Non Commissioned Officers Association  
Richard Shamblin, Virginia National Guard Association  
Frank Wickersham, III, MOAA

#### **Board of Veterans Services Members in Attendance**

John Anderson, Chairman  
Melville Drisko, Vice Chairman  
James Walker, Chairman, Veterans Care Services Sub-Committee

#### **Department of Veterans Services Staff**

Geneva M. Claybrook, Executive Services Manager

#### **Guests**

Roger Sullivan, Virginia Veterans Coalition  
Peter Hicks, Virginia Veterans Coalition  
Ben Walker, Virginia Veterans Coalition  
Anne McKinney, Paralyzed Veterans of America

#### **Call to Order**

Dan Miller, Chairman called the meeting to order and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then asked Ms. Claybrook to call the roll. It was determined that there was a quorum with 12 of 21 members being present.

Dr. Anderson was introduced and spoke briefly of the importance of the Joint Leadership Council in the Department of Veterans Services and to the veterans of the State.

Dan Miller announced that it had been determined that there had not been a quorum at the December 16, 2003 meeting. Therefore, the two motions presented at that meeting would need to be approved. The two motions were

John Edgerton moved that the revised By-Laws be approved as written.

and,

John Edgerton moved to exclude DVOP/LVER from a Maximum Employment Level at the Virginia Employment Commission, so whenever there is a vacancy.

**MOTION: Connie O'Neill moved that both motions (above) that came out of the December 16, 2003 meeting be approved. Jim Aucoin seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

#### **Approval of the Minutes of December 16, 2003**

The minutes of the December 16, 2003 meeting were presented for approval. There were two changes – page 2 – New Business –

Chairman Dan Miller began a discussion of the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program. He noted that Title 38 of the United States Code states they are restricted to serving Veterans.

**MOTION: Norman Jasper moved that the minutes of the December 16, 2003 meeting of the Joint Leadership Council be approved as written, with the noted changes. Mr. Aucoin seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

#### **COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Commissioner Mangis recognized Dr. Anderson, Mel Drisko and Jim Walker and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reported that since the December 16, 2003 meeting he has completed the Annual Report (copies are available through his office). The budget was submitted to the legislature. All committees of the Department of Veterans Services had initial meetings for 2003. January 1<sup>st</sup> saw the final piece in place with the State Approving Agency's move to the DVS.

It was hoped that the Veterans Agenda had been developed to present to the legislature. He mentioned Oregon's system, saying it moves much faster. He addressed the "tax reform" bill saying, if it passes, it will be the first gain since 1992.

#### **Legislation**

There are two bills concerning Veterans. One is SB412 presented by Senator John Edwards. The subcommittee wanted to remove language regarding the Commissioner answering to the Governor. Edwards spoke again and Delegate Cox supported him. The bill then went to the floor and passed. It is to be signed by the Governor. The bill did not

change the reporting structure, only the wording of the existing law, and the Commissioner remains under the Secretary of Administration. The bill also made each chair of the Board, Council and Foundation an ex-officio member of each other group. It also creates an Advisory Committee for the Care Center. There is a VVCC sub committee onboard at the present time.

Delegate Vivian Watts, a member of the Board of Veterans Services, developed House Bill 907, which allows Veterans, who have limited financial resources to apply for admission to VVCC, application can be made for medical assistance, (Medicaid), in the jurisdiction where the Care Center is located. The application will be in Roanoke and then will be processed in Richmond. Presently, the application is completed and sent to the jurisdiction of the Veteran's last known residence. At times, it is impossible to double back and obtain the information needed. Many times the application is lost in the system. The resident then develops an accounts receivable delinquency; or, he/she is not admitted at all until we can obtain the approval. Medicaid will not go retroactive more than ninety days. If a delinquency does happen, the resident does not have the assets to come back and take care of it. Therefore, the Center has to absorb the amount, which is extremely difficult. The Bill passed the House and the Senate and is to be signed by the Governor.

#### **Naming of Streets at the Suffolk Cemetery**

The task of naming the streets in the cemetery is one of the items on the Agenda today. The reason this was sent to the Joint Leadership Council was to get the Veterans Organizations involved in the project. The contractor notified us and asked for the names of the streets as soon as possible. Emails were sent to the Board, the Foundation and the Council asking for suggestions, with good responses. There will be further discussion regarding the street names.

#### **Cemetery Construction**

The cemetery construction is on schedule, and everyone is looking forward to the dedication on Veterans Day. Everyone was invited to Suffolk next week, Friday, March 26, 2004 at 11:00 A.M. for a contractor's walk through, updating all on the construction. Hopefully, the press will be there to publicize the event. A superintendent will be hired in May or June. One responsibility of the superintendent will be developing a public relations and marketing program to keep the cemetery out in front of the Veteran public. That person will also be responsible for marketing the Amelia Cemetery, which does not receive the usage that it should. There needs to be a drawing campaign in the metropolitan Richmond area. The low usage might not exist at the Suffolk Cemetery, due to the large military and naval retirement community in the area.

#### **VSO Support During Legislation**

During the legislative session three veterans organizations "stormed the hill." The American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Military Officers Association of America had time with the Governor and the Lt. Governor. They were the only three organizations that presented agendas to the legislators. There were no other organizations on the hill. What might be done before the next legislation is to have some

type of program; whereas Mr. Mangis can get the meeting dates early enough that he can get the information out to the JLC in order that if a designee can attend hearings, there would be some show of representation at the legislature.

Commissioner Mangis thanked everyone for their help from September to date. Everyone has been extremely helpful and he has met many people in the community, as well as attending many VSO functions.

### **War Memorial**

Jon Hatfield, Executive Director of the Virginia War Memorial has completed the first series of historical taping of Veterans. These first tapes are of World War II Veterans relaying their experiences during that period. The tapes and packaging are extremely professionally done. Commissioner Mangis commented that Jon is doing an excellent job at the War Memorial.

Next week Mr. Mangis will be at the National Association State Directors' of Veterans Affairs in Washington, DC. He remarked that he has two resolutions to present to them. The first is to increase the burial allowance from \$300 to \$500 for the opening and closing of graves in Amelia. It costs the State approximately \$900 per burial. The State is allowed to apply only for the plot burial allowance, which is authorized by Congress through the US Department of Veterans Affairs. There is no additional charge to the family. Hopefully, it can be raised to \$500. This can be presented to members of each organization, in order to take it through the resolution procedure. This is in order for it to be considered at the National Conventions.

The other resolution is for Veterans who are 70% service disabled or greater and are entitled to full cost-of-care in a Federal VA skilled care facility, or if beds are not available, or they prefer in a private nursing home, the VA pays the full cost-of-care. However, they cannot go to a State Veterans Home. If they do go to a State Veterans Home, they pay for the cost-of-care out of their own pocket. Since 1999, there has been an attempt to get this changed, when the Millennium Health Care Act was passed, with little success. However, Mr. Mangis reported he hopes to get a resolution passed to that effect. He is also going to work on the Virginia Delegation to see if they will approach Congress and give direction to the VA. The law does not say they cannot do this, but the VA has just interpreted it to say that they cannot, through a legal opinion. They can either change it through legislation or through direction by the VA.

The two federal grants have been received. One for \$440,000 to cover costs of renovation and repairs to the Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke, and the second is for construction of the new Veterans Care Center in Richmond. It will be built on the tract of land near the McGuire Medical Center grounds.

Jim Dudley, Director, VAMC, Richmond, has already begun the process of having the property deeded to the State. A meeting with the Department of General Services is scheduled for March 30<sup>th</sup> to interview the architectural proposal. Mr. Mangis reported he will be attending that meeting, and will get an initial look at some of the mid-point activities at the Cemetery.

Commissioner Mangis mentioned that Jim Dudley, Administrator at the VAMC is retiring. He has been an advocate to Veterans and served on the VVCC Board of Trustees at the Virginia Veterans Care Center. His replacement has not been announced. There is a retirement dinner planned for him on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Questions/Discussion**

Mr. Dudley's effective date of retirement is April 3, 2004. His wife, Lydia is a 30- year VA employee and she serves on the Veterans Foundation.

Connie O'Neill inquired about Senator Edwards' legislation; specifically regarding the Commissioner having direct access to the Governor. He noted that one of the motivations of the American Legion for wanting this direct access was that if something outrageous were to arise, the Legion would have an advocate that could go directly to the Governor to inform him of the Veterans' stand on current issues. There needs to be a face-to-face approach.

Dr. Anderson asked that the Commissioner share with the JLC some of the progress he has been making on getting administrative support for himself. Commissioner Mangis admitted he had been dragging his feet since September. The agency does not have a lot of money and in an effort not to spend a lot up front and teach himself the in's and out's of the State system and he did not put a support person high on the agenda initially. He has interviewed, and will be hiring a support person very soon.

Additionally, another support person will be hired. Steve Combs worked for the Office of the Secretary of Administration during the time of legislation, and had been in contact with many different organizations. He will be working two days a week initially. He is still a student and will be looking at some of the business practices at the Care Center and working with some organization structuring in order to produce information that is needed to send and getting reports to you and the Board and the Foundation.

Mr. Sacra entered the meeting.

Dan Miller, Chairman recognized Connie O'Neill, Legislative Officer and asked him to briefly recap the General Assembly's Legislative process. Mr. O'Neill reviewed the items presented to the Board – #1 the increased funding for Department of Veterans Affairs, #2 the 3.5 million to construct a new education wing at the Virginia War Memorial and #3 the \$2 million to permit in state tuition rates for active duty military families. All are in the Governor's budget. He reported there had been no news.

There were several legislators that introduced amendments to the budget for additional funding. Mostly it was reflective of roughly the same amount as the Governor was saying was subject to tax reform. Jon Mangis recognized Roger Sullivan as being responsible for a number of them.

Mr. O'Neill mentioned other amendments that had moderate success –

The first was that the General Assembly memorialize the United States Supreme Court to ensure that the wording “under God” remain in the Pledge of Allegiance. The House of Delegates approved it, unanimously; however, it died in the Senate Rules Committee. The American Legion lobbied and labored hard to convince members on the Rules Committee and in the Senate to approve it. The final vote was unanimous to disapprove it.

Mr. O’Neill spoke with Delegate Cole and he recommended to memorialize the Virginia House of Delegates to ensure the wording “under God” to be restored to the Pledge of Allegiance. The Senate voted totally against it. Delegate Cole reported to him this morning that the Senate was against it because it would have been inappropriate for Virginia to come out with its position on this issue. He did not have details.

The second one presented to the Legislators throughout the state was to have a “needs’ test” conducted for an additional two Veterans’ homes in the State of Virginia. Jon Mangis transmitted an email suggesting this would encumber his department because there is no funding appropriated by the General Assembly for the study to be conducted, and it would be taken out of the Department of Veterans Services’ funding. Therefore, the American Legion decided not to pursue the issue.

Commissioner Mangis noted that there was a 1998 study, which called for additional Care Centers in Tidewater, the Richmond and Northern Virginia areas. The rationale they came up with was reported and validated that there is still a need for two other Care Centers. There is a non-profit group on the McGuire Hospital Campus that does a lot of statistical work for a need of nursing home beds in Virginia. It is possible that they could do this at no cost, because they are the same ones that would do all the work on the certificate of needs for private homes. He said he might be able to obtain them for the study.

Mr. O’Neill noted that when Mr. Mangis stated that the needs must be met for the Tidewater and Richmond areas, and he will recommend that it be part of the Legion's 2005 Wish List that the General Assembly provides funding for the start of the third Veterans Home based on that study. Commissioner Mangis will try to the study updated.

Mr. O’Neill made available all the handouts offered by the General Assembly that related to Veterans issues and suggested that members of JLC might take them back to their organizations.

A frequently raised question of when does the Council develop a legislative agenda, what is the process of moving it forward? What is the next step? Jon Mangis replied that the Agency Director would be able to submit some legislation to be considered and wait for approval whether it will be submitted or not. Some concepts, if controversial or required money, might not get any further than the 9<sup>th</sup> Street office during a review process. Agency legislation is going to be dependent of a number of things, primarily, the availability of funds. The Governor is very supportive of veteran issues but he is also prudent. Virginia is not real healthy financially right now. Will that change in a year...good guess. He proposed that the Board and the JLC are in the position to

recommend legislation as well as VSO's legislative agendas. In Oregon, the JLC (United Veterans Group of Oregon) developed its own legislative package and submitted it to a friendly legislator, which was submitted on behalf of the United Veterans Group of Oregon. The JLC can prioritize issues and if members decide to support certain ones, then they can make the approach that it is a governmental committee, and could also request that legislation be filed on their behalf through a friendly legislator. Then, the major VSO's could do the same thing.

Dr. Anderson – One of the advantages of this new legislation that just passed, means that you can literally gain consensus here, bring it to the Board for discussion at Board level with five legislators. They could be “carriers” to help facilitate the process, which is an ideal situation.

Connie O'Neill remarked that the agenda of the JLC will become the Agenda of the American Legion.

#### **SUFFOLK CEMETERY STREET NAMES**

**Discussion:** Dan Miller, Chairman, had previously emailed a request for ideas of street names for the new cemetery in Suffolk, Virginia. The discussion resulted in naming streets after the branches of services – Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines.

**MOTION: Jim Aucoin moved that the names of the streets at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans' Cemetery at Hampton Roads be named after the six branches of service – Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines. The motion was seconded by John Bonnell, Jr. and passed unanimously.**

#### **VIRGINIA VETERANS CARE CENTER CANTEEN**

John Mangis opened the discussion on the closing of the Canteen at the Virginia Veterans Care Center. He reported it had been discovered that money was missing; therefore, he made the decision to close the Canteen, for the present time, until operation could resume under new management. The Canteen is an important part of the residents' daily activities. He submitted an Agreement, similar to one that Oregon used, and offered it as a viable alternative. In Oregon, a small group of Veterans took over the management of the Canteen, stocking it, selling items, and handling the accounting. They paid back the money donated by organizations that helped them get started. The profits from the Canteen provided funds for resident activities i.e. birthday parties, outings, and other activities.

Don Ferguson reviewed the Oregon document composing one that is applicable to Virginia. An organization or auxiliary needs to consider taking over the management of the Canteen.

Jim Walker spoke to the group about the Canteen, which had been opened to the residents, family members and the general public, visiting residents. The Canteen has been operating approximately ten years with volunteers, staff and residents running it. There were seven to nine active volunteers that were there weekly, some daily. For the

first nine years, it ran fine, with some slippage; however, the money always came back. The Financial Statement of the Canteen shows a debit one month and a credit the next. Then it was short \$2000 after the State took control. There needs to be a solution. The Canteen was the humanization of an institutionalized environment. It is a place for the residents to come to and get together, talk with one another and have a soda and chips. The entity should be back in operation soon, and the saving grace is going to be some sort of organization or auxiliary that puts together a plan to manage the business.

The Roanoke Valley Veterans Council has discussed this issue; however, there are not enough members to manage the Canteen. It may take two districts to run it, to include a manager, an accounting person, and a person to place orders and stock the store. There was an in depth discussion regarding the operation, concluding with the consensus that the JLC and the Roanoke Valley Veterans Council could take leadership roles in obtaining management for the Canteen.

Dr. Anderson mentioned that it is an excellent opportunity for the JLC to be involved with a Veterans group in Roanoke. Additionally, he added this could be a trial run for the new Care Center.

It was decided that the following steps be taken by the JLC –

1. Have the Commissioner develop a letter sent to the members of the JLC supporting the Agreement;
2. A second document from the Commissioner to the Board of Veterans Services requesting that they make an appeal to the Roanoke Valley Veterans Council, and
3. Letters to all the organizations that are represented on the Council, requesting their support, financial and personnel. They will be sent to Veterans Service Organizations at the State level.

The organizations need to know there is a requirement to form a company or corporation with an agreement to the State, and then solicit volunteer labor from other groups. The Roanoke Valley Veterans Council is willing to do this if they get some support from the JLC and the Board. Jim Walker will also bring this issue to the Board of Veterans Services at the meeting on Monday, March 29, 2004 and request a letter to the State level VSO's asking for their support.

Mr. Ferguson stated the main concern is to provide Canteen services and products to the residents, which means they get low cost products and a variety of products that normally would not be found in a vending machine. One complication might be eliminating the possibility of using a not-for-profit group, limiting the search for management to Veterans groups. There might be other not-for-profit groups that are perfectly willing and able to begin immediately. Jim Walker discussed the empathy expressed by the organizations managing the Canteen.

The initial funding to restock the Canteen will come from the monies that were transferred to Richmond from the Local Fund.

**MOTION: Connie O’Neill moved that the Joint Leadership Council recommend to the Commissioner and to the Board of Veterans Services that an appropriate letter be sent to the Headquarters at the State level of the VSO’s to encourage their support on whatever is necessary for the management of the Canteen at the Virginia Veterans Care Center. Dick Schneider seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

#### **DISCUSSION**

Anne McKinney, Paralyzed Veterans of America, called the Council’s attention to page 2 of the Agreement under #7 Insurance (a) the figure \$500,00 should be \$500,000. Additionally, the word Virginia in the title is misspelled. The corrections were noted.

#### **APPOINTMENT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

The By-Laws state that there needs to be a new chair and vice chair each year. Dan Miller, Chairman asked for volunteers. John Jackson, Frank Wickersham, and James Jones were appointed to the Nominating Committee.

He asked that they meet at the conclusion of the meeting and exchange phone numbers, emails, etc. and set a time for their meeting.

#### **LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

According to the By-Laws, the Council is required to meet in different locations throughout the state, outside the Richmond area. Norman Jasper recommended Roanoke. Dan Miller asked for a motion.

**MOTION: Norman Jasper moved that the next JLC meeting be held in Roanoke, Virginia at the Care Center. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

The date of the next meeting was decided upon, after considering convention dates and holidays. The meeting will be held Monday, June 21<sup>st</sup> at 1:30 P.M.

#### **2005 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA**

The process of forming an agenda for 2005 legislation should begin with what the JLC is going to recommend to Commissioner Mangis and the Board of Veterans Services. Dan Miller passed the attached document – the Cover sheet explains this is for our review. It can be used as a starting point and only given as an example, and does not contain legislation that is specific to the Commonwealth. He asked that the Council members review the information and pull out items that might be used and bring them to the next meeting.

Connie O’Neill mentioned he felt the time was appropriate to bring to the General Assembly a request for the money to establish a third Veterans Home in Virginia. He asked that members present that as part of the legislative package. There are two locations which have been recommended – the Hampton area and in Northern Virginia.

There was full discussion regarding the Northern Virginia location with regard to the location of VA Hospitals in the vicinity. It was mentioned that there was a VAMC in Washington; however, the majority of the Council felt this would not be as favorable as a location with a VAMC available. There was a suggestion that instead of asking for funding for new home, that a plea should be slated for five or six. It was mentioned that we only have the background for two. Mr. O'Neill recommended that each organization bring their agenda and wish list to the meeting in September in preparation for next year's legislation.

Jim Aucoin addressed the group regarding the VA meeting in Durham (VISN). As a member of the AmVets Department of Virginia, he was upset with the time of notification for the meetings.

He has attended several meetings. The purpose was that they were coming up with taking an analysis of work loads on the number of Veterans in those particular areas and seeing what funding they would need over the next five-year period. The district, VISN 6, is in Durham, but it covers Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina. They have come up with some requirements for funding.

Johnnie Collins offered an additional update on VISN noting that the Care Commission recommended that VISN 6 not have any VA facilities closed; whereas some states will have some closings. They did recommend that VISN 6 take a look at establishing more outreach and community based outpatient clinics throughout the state. Two of the areas discussed were the Tidewater area and Emporia. He noted that from talking with other representatives, Virginia did well.

Commissioner Mangis noted that part of the reason for that is that Virginia's Veteran population tends to continue growing with the large military presence in the state. The northeast area is where they are going to close hospitals and leave the CBOC's. They will be referred to some other state if they had to enter and receive patient treatment. Many people are beginning to retire to Virginia due to the large military population.

Jon Mangis advised that when one is looking at legislation, to look at what other states have to offer veterans. One can use the network and pulling up NASDVA, which list all fifty states and benefits. It is an excellent reference.

Anne McKinney, Paralyzed Veterans of Virginia spoke to the Council regarding a meeting with Congress and John Warner's lack of respect and interest in issues brought to him. She said he remarked he could not help them.

She added that in an article in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* on March 12, Virgle Goode and the Honorable Walter Jones in North Carolina asked the President of the United States why so much money was being given to foreign aide, and not to Veterans' healthcare. She remarked that she felt it was extremely important that our VSO's thank these two men for their time and effort on their behalf.

One of the issues promoted on the hill by her organization was to ask the question, “Why Virginia does not have a person on the Veterans’ Affairs Committee in the House. All other states that have high Veteran populations have someone on that Committee.

Mr. Sacra announced that March 5<sup>th</sup> was the CB’s birthday and that he had attended.

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business Dan Miller asked for a motion to adjourn.

**MOTION:** Mel Drisko moved that the meeting be adjourned.

## **Minutes of the June 21, 2004 Meeting**

### **JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

#### **VIRGINIA VETERANS CARE CENTER, ROANOKE JUNE 21, 2004, 1:30 PM**

##### **OPENING AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chairman Dan Miller called the meeting to order at 1:32 P.M.

Chairman Miller introduced Ms. Brenda Hamilton, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Roanoke, VA, who swore in newly appointed member Dr. George Dumas (representing the Homeless & Disabled Veterans)

Chairman Miller recognized Mr. Bill Van Thiel, Administrator of Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC), who welcomed the Council members to the facility. Believing that it is important that all JLC members be familiar with the VVCC, Mr. Van Thiel had earlier offered the group a guided tour.

Dr. Dumas commended Ms. Geneva Claybrook, who before the meeting took several members on a tour of the VVCC, adding that he was very impressed by the work being done at VVCC. He also commended Mr. Van Thiel on an outstanding facility.

Chairman Miller led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance, and asked for a few seconds of silence in memory of those who have lost their lives in the defense of our country.

##### **ROLL CALL OF VSOs AND QUORUM DETERMINATION**

The roll was called by Chairman Miller:

##### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Dan Miller, Disabled American Veterans, Chairman  
Jim Aucoin, AMVETS  
George Dumas, Homeless & Disabled Veterans  
Michael Hulsey, Reserve Officers Association  
Norman Jasper, Jr., Military Order of Purple Heart  
James Jones, Jr., Korean War Veterans Association  
Cornelius O'Neill, American Legion  
Goodwin Sacra, Navy Seabee Veterans of America  
Ronald Shamblin, Virginia National Guard Association  
Frank Wickersham, III, MOAA

#### MEMBERS ABSENT

John Bonnell, Jr., Marine Corps League  
Mason Botts, Air Force Association  
John J. Dunleavy, Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge  
Paul Richard Fink, US Navy Cruiser Sailors Association  
Robert Gray, American Ex-Prisoners of War  
John Jackson, Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Richard Rinaldo, The Legion of Valor of the US  
Richard Schneider, Non Commissioned Officers Association  
Thomas Snee, Fleet Reserve Association  
Peter Snelling, Veterans of Foreign Wars

#### OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Colbert Boyd, Chief Deputy Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services  
Steven Combs, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services  
John Anderson, Chairman, Board of Veterans Services  
Bill Van Thiel, Administrator, Virginia Veterans Care Center  
Geneva Claybrook, Executive Services Manager  
Paul Willard, representing the Air Force Association

It was determined that because only 10 of the 20 appointed JLC members were present, there was not a quorum. Therefore, official business could not be conducted. Rather, the JLC could only hold a discussion.

#### **INTRODUCTION OF EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS AND GUESTS**

Chairman Miller introduced Mr. Bert Boyd, Dr. John Anderson, and Mr. Steven Combs. Also, in attendance (in the audience) was Mr. Jim Walker, Board of Veterans Services; Dr. Dick Luck, Administrator of the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center; Ms. Taylor Lee Wickersham, lobbyist for survivor benefits on the national level and daughter of Mr. Frank Wickersham, III; Mr. Rob Schmidt, from the Salem VA Medical Center; Mr. Perry Johnson, a Vice Commander with the DAV; and Mr. Sloan Hoops, Past Department Commander of the DAV.

#### **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 16, 2004 MEETING**

One correction was noted on the first page – last sentence – to add the words “it can be filled.” The corrected sentence would read: “John Edgerton moved to exclude DVOP/LVER from a Maximum Employment Level at the Virginia Employment Commission, so whenever there is a vacancy it can be filled.”

The minutes from the March 16, 2004 meeting could not be approved due to the lack of a quorum.

Dr. Dumas added that it would be beneficial if acronyms like DVOP and LVER were spelled out in the minutes the first time the acronym was used. Chairman Miller explained that DVOP stood for “Disabled Veterans Outreach Program,” part of the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). DVOP employees work with veterans under

Title 38 of the US Code, while the Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) program operates under the same legislation.

### **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Chairman Miller, who will relinquish his title as Chairman at the next meeting (assuming there is a quorum, so that elections can be held), thanked members of the Council, as well as Commissioner Jon Mangis, Chief Deputy Commissioner Bert Boyd, and their staffs for their support and assistance to the veterans of the Commonwealth over the past year. Additionally he thanked Dr. Anderson, Chairman of the Board of Veterans Services, for being a liaison for the Council and Board. He also thanked Mr. Combs for helping to pull information together for this meeting.

Chairman Miller spoke briefly of the success of the Council, remarking that it had put some pressure on the state to get officials to work on the paperwork for the construction of the Suffolk Cemetery and plans for the second Veterans Care Center in Richmond. He pointed out that it was necessary for the JLC members to remember why the Governor appointed them to the Council – to improve services to the veterans of Virginia, to provide new and better services, and to advocate for more money to support those services. He remarked that the organization can “pick and choose our battles.”

Chairman Miller said that the Federal Government, over the past few years, has passed down unfunded mandates to the states, and that he felt that Virginia has been in a financial quandary for the last year. With the budget that was passed this year, he added, it looks as though the state will end in the black. Despite this, he said, additional funds will continue to be hard to come by, so there is a need to look at those things that are administrative changes, changes that cost no money or little money, and keep that as the JLC's goal. The Council should take advantage of every opportunity there is to do something to provide more and better services to the veterans of the Commonwealth. He thanked everyone for attending meetings and expressed his appreciation for their support.

He addressed future priorities, such as realizing a true hiring preference for veterans in the Commonwealth and staffing issues regarding the DVOP and LVER positions. These positions are subject to VEC's Maximum Employment Level (MEL) restrictions. Chairman Miller expressed his belief that these positions should be exempt from the MEL, so when DVOP/LVER positions become available they can be listed and filled immediately.

Chairman Miller was applauded by the Council for his leadership as Chairman of the JLC. He will continue working with the DVOP and LVER programs.

### **COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS**

On behalf of the Commissioner, Mr. Boyd discussed recent personnel changes in the Department of Veterans Services. He stated that in an effort to provide increased services to veterans, the General Assembly had approved changing four part-time support positions to full-time positions at the benefits offices in Big Stone Gap, Cedar Bluff, Charlottesville and Wytheville. Mr. Boyd, working with Mr. Combs and other members of the department, will be identifying regions of the state that are underserved, and will

recommend localities that will require either additional benefit/claims agents and/or new offices.

Mr. Boyd stated that prior to the formation of the JLC, several Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) worked closely with the administration in making this organization and the department come into existence through the General Assembly, efforts that are very much appreciated. The service organizations have stayed together and worked on legislation that was enacted, and the department is looking forward to working with the VSOs to continue to determine the major issues the VSOs want to bring to the General Assembly. Mr. Boyd said that he thought that last year some issues were recognized to late in the legislative process, and recommended that this year the VSOs begin earlier rather than later. He recommended that all VSOs bring their primary issues to the Joint Leadership Council, so that that group can coordinate on those issues and be prepared to take them to the next General Assembly session.

Mr. Boyd told the JLC that the Veterans Services Foundation had provided the department's benefits section with a grant of \$14,000 for a training conference, held in May in Roanoke. This was the first training conference that the benefits section has held in over four years. He rated the training conference as very successful, as it combined state and federal level training and was completed as under budget.

Mr. Boyd next turned to the department's activities to date this fiscal year, pointing out that in the past eleven months benefit claims activity has contacted over 90,000 veterans and processed some 17,000 claims. At present, 65 to 70% of the department's claims are granted.

Mr. Boyd said that the burial rate at the Amelia Cemetery has not changed a great deal, and it is only up three burials over this time last year. He attributed the low burial rate to two factors: a low level of marketing efforts and less than ideal location. He expects the situation to improve once the new Cemetery Administrator is hired. Approval has been given to hire a Cemetery Administrator to oversee operations in Amelia and Suffolk. One of the key requirements of the applicant for the position will be marketing and as well as operational experience. The application period just ended, with forty to fifty applications having been received. The Suffolk Cemetery is roughly 75% complete with an anticipated completion date of early September.

The Care Center in Roanoke is operating effectively from a care delivery standpoint as well as a cost delivery standpoint. A Federal grant was approved for the renovation of the facility, which opened in 1992. A number of changes to the interior have been approved. In addition, an outside storage building will be constructed. The VA is paying for 65% of the renovation, with the remainder being funded by the Commonwealth.

Mr. Boyd discussed the construction of the new care center in Richmond, saying that he and Mr. Van Thiel, in conjunction with architects and engineers from Clark Nexsen and the Project Manager from the Division of Engineering and Buildings, have been developing a design plan for the appearance of the building, the allocation of space, and all the site work. The process is approximately 80% complete. There will be private

rooms housed in a single level building on a roughly 19.5 acres tract of land located on the grounds of the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond. On both the renovation and construction projects, there is a July 15, 2004 deadline to submit 35% of the required architectural plans and drawings, with associated costs, to the VA's State Home Grants office. There are no problems at this time that might delay the department from submitting the required documents on time. There will then be about six months for the team to complete and submit the remainder of the plans and drawings.

Mr. Boyd next discussed the move of the State Approving Agency (SAA) from the Department of Education to the Department of Veterans Services. One of the functions of the SAA is to determine at which institutes of higher education in the Commonwealth veterans may use their federal education benefits. During this past session, the General Assembly approved the conversion of two part-time positions to full-time positions. This will allow the department to increase the level of outreach to those institutions that provide educational services to veterans. Permission to staff the two new positions has been received from the Secretary of Administration; but the positions have not yet been advertised.

Mr. Boyd then referred to the handout of letters from the Commissioner supporting two National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) resolutions. In letters to the VSO commanders and the JLC members, the Commissioner asked that each VSO submit the resolutions to their national organization, and that each VSO draft VSO-specific resolutions supporting the NASDVA resolutions. The Commissioner is waiting on progress reports from the VSOs regarding the two resolutions.

Mr. Aucoin addressed the need to obtain details and the cost to upgrade the TV system at the VVCC to a digital system. There was a brief discussion regarding the cost of putting of putting the new system in now instead of later.

Mr. Boyd also remarked that new electric beds might also be included in the VA renovation grant. These two issues will be clarified.

Mr. Wickersham reported that MOAA's Virginia Council of Chapters is supporting the two issues and will take them up with MOAA's national office.

Mr. O'Neill asked how many service officers were trained at the training conference. Mr. Boyd replied that approximately twenty-two persons were involved in the training.

Mr. Miller and Mr. O'Neill pointed out that the DAV and American Legion state conventions will held be at the end of June and the first part of July, and that the two resolutions will be presented at these conventions.

Mr. Boyd reported that three laptop computers were donated to the department's benefits section at the VFW's convention in June. Mr. Boyd expressed his appreciation to the VFW and to other service organizations for their support to the department.

Mr. Combs referred the Council to the packet of correspondence; stating that there was a letter from Commissioner Mangis to the JLC regarding the Canteen at the VVCC and a follow up letter to the VSO commanders from Chairman Miller and Chairman Anderson. These letters are for the Council's information. Additionally, there is a letter to Mr. Walker from Commissioner Mangis regarding the Care Center's "ambulance." Additionally, the packet contained a copy of the letter sent by Chairman Anderson, inviting Chairman Miller and Chairman Hanson (of the Veterans Services Foundation) to the Board of Veterans Services meeting in Hampton. Legislation passed during the 2004 General Assembly Session made the Chairmen of the Joint Leadership Council and the Veterans Services Foundation ex-officio, non-voting members of the Board of Veterans Services. Likewise, the Chairman of the Board of Veterans Services was made an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Joint Leadership Council.

There was a brief discussion regarding how the JLC and VSOs could become more effective in dealing with the Commissioner's office and the public. It was suggested that local VSO chapters become more familiar with their local legislators, to let them know that the VSOs are aware of proposed legislation, when it is coming before them, what issues the VSOs think are important in terms of their own organization, as well as promoting issues that the JLC brings to Dr. Anderson's Board of Veterans Service. Mr. Combs pointed out that one of his duties is to provide support to the Council, Board and Foundation.

Dr. Anderson added that it is very important that communication be established and maintained between the three groups that are working for Virginia' veterans. This is the reason each Chairman will be attending the other groups' meetings. He said it is a key factor that there are five legislators on the Board of Veterans Services to help get issues to the General Assembly. Additionally, the question of a calendar of things to come will be addressed later in the meeting.

Mr. Combs mentioned the copy of Senate Bill 412, passed during the 2004 General Assembly session, which outlines recent changes to veterans services in the Commonwealth. He also said that a report was included in the handout that outlines the duties and responsibilities of the Council, Board, and Foundation. Working under the guidance of Mr. Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General, Ms. Marie Johnson prepared this report at the request of Dr. Anderson. The report summarizes those sections of the Code of Virginia that deal with veterans.

Mr. Jasper announced that after the meeting he would present a check from the Military Order of Purple Heart Service Foundation, in the amount of \$15,100, to the Care Center. A check for \$943.75 will also be presented to the VA Medical Center in Salem.

#### **LEGISLATIVE OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

Mr. Connie O'Neill, JLC Legislative Officer, stated that part of the problem of finding out where the JLC is in regard to the budget is that the budget took so long to be approved. Mr. O'Neill sent an e-mail to Mr. Combs, requesting that he muddle through all the legislation to find out what had been accomplished, with the idea that if the JLC did not get all that it had asked for in the 2004 session, then the JLC could put it on its

agenda for 2005. Mr. Combs produced the requested information, which Mr. O'Neill then outlined. He reported that the issue with the service officers has been rectified, with four new positions being approved (see above). One major problem in this past session was that the Virginia War Memorial's educational program for taping the remembrances of veterans, primarily from WWII, was not funded.

Mr. O'Neill requested that all the VSOs bring in their legislative agenda, passed by the various conventions/conferences, to the September JLC meeting. Mr. O'Neill said that he already has the American Legion's agenda and will bring it at the September meeting. The combined agenda will be passed on to the Board of Veterans Services.

There was discussion regarding the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' benefits package, which Chairman Miller passed out at the last meeting. There is a vast difference between what some states do and what the Commonwealth of Virginia has done for its veterans. Mr. O'Neill reported he was going to suggest that a formal study group be established to look into the status of benefits for Virginia's veterans.

#### **OVERVIEW OF SERVICES OFFERED AT WOODROW WILSON REHABILITATION CENTER**

Dr. Richard Luck, Administrator of the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) in Fishersville, presented information on the center's activities, which are funded with federal and state dollars (\$14.6 million dollars from Federal government). WWRC was constructed as the Woodrow Wilson General Army Hospital in 1942 and was subsequently converted into a rehabilitative center for the citizens of Virginia. There is approximately 600,000 square feet of usable space at the facility. He asked the JLC members to visit the center's website at [www.wwrc.net](http://www.wwrc.net).

Dr. Luck told the JLC that there is greater capacity to provide services, in terms of the number of patients that can be treated at the residential facility at any one time, than there is budget to provide the services. The average number of patients at any one time is approximately 250, but almost 500 could be treated if all space was used. Dr. Luck is attempting to connect with veterans organizations to explain the situation. The center has a \$14.6 million block grant, which comes from the Commonwealth's Department of Rehabilitative Services. The rest of the budget is made up with revenues by third party filing of Medicare and Medicaid. One idea is to set up an arrangement with the VA, where individuals could be sent directly from VA medical facilities to Woodrow Wilson. While Virginia veterans have access to WWRC like any other citizen of the Commonwealth, they have wait in line like everyone else. Dr. Luck is interested in expediting a program that would admit disabled veterans directly into the facility, with a separate source of funding.

Dr. Luck mentioned that brain injuries are increasing due to the increased use of body armor – the headgear is not as good as the body armor. He reported seeing amputations and head injuries increase as well as spinal injuries. Woodrow Wilson is designed to service these injuries. The center has the most comprehensive wheel chair evaluation operation on the east coast. There are approximately 50 – 75 wheelchairs, all shapes and

models, electric powered as well as man powered, and the staff is schooled to be experts on the chairs.

As the Administrator of the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, Dr. Luck serves on the Board of Virginia's Assisted Technology Loan Fund, which is an organization with about \$9 million to make low interest loans to persons with disabilities for any type of assistance in technology. It is run through the Sun Trust Bank, which buys down the interest on loans, i.e., anything from a headset for a person who might need to operate a computer to a van conversion, or to purchase vehicles to be used. Home accommodations, such as construction work to accommodate someone who has become disabled to a ramp or elevators are considered by the Board. It is a very valuable resource for anyone with a disability. So many times there are people with disabilities and they are not eligible for certain services, such as vocational rehabilitation. It might be a family of a young child with a mental disability and this organization makes it possible for them to get low interest loans to provide these services. At Woodrow Wilson there is professional staff that can work with an individual for accommodations and through assisted technology to loan money to those individuals and come to the Center. He encouraged the Council to look at this valuable resource and take advantage of it.

#### **BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Dr. Anderson related he was very pleased to be at the meeting, and noted that the theme of his address to the Council is collaboration as an effective means at getting things done. The Council, Board and Foundation have an extraordinary opportunity in getting things done, he said.

Dr. Anderson reported that he and Chairman Miller sent a letter to the commanders of the VSO's asking for their help in getting the VVCC Canteen reopened. The Canteen is highly valued by VVCC residents, but unfortunately was closed because of financial irregularities. Dr. Anderson stated that he thought that the important thing was to get a mechanism in place whereby a VSO or group of VSOs would sponsor the Canteen.

He next commended Mr. O'Neill's efforts to bring everyone together and encouraged each JLC representative to bring new ideas to the JLC, which will in turn be shared with the Board of Veterans Services. He said he believes the JLC should develop an operating relationship with the Board and Foundation, and said that he is working on Board-Foundation relations. Because the enabling legislation does not specify how the three organizations should work towards a common purpose, it is up to the Council, Board, and Foundation to establish these relationships.

Dr. Anderson stated that he has a passion about getting ready to serve those who have come back from Iraq and Afghanistan. There are problems that have not been in large numbers for quite some time. Body armor has saved lives, but there are many trauma areas in the limbs and head. We need to concern ourselves with how the Commonwealth will help injured veterans when they come back home. There may be a lot of cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He suggested that sometime in the next year

there be a joint meeting of the Board, Foundation and Council so that ideas can be exchanged.

Dr. Anderson said he looked forward to working closely with the JLC and continuing to work for the veterans of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Jasper commented that Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) Post 353 (Washington D.C. area) meets planes returning from Afghanistan and Iraq three times a week and provides returning military personnel with personal comfort items. He reviewed a list of what is provided. He will provide a copy of this to Ms. Claybrook, who will send a copy to members of the JLC.

#### **UPDATE ON DVOP & LVER POSITIONS**

Chairman Miller led a discussion on the DVOP and LVER positions at VEC, saying that this was one of the first issues Commissioner Mangis dealt with through the JLC, as well the . A Virginia Employment Commission and the Disabled Outreach Employment Commission. DVOP and LVER positions are, under Title 38 of the U.S. Code, required by law to work strictly with veterans in employment-related situations. The VEC has a maximum employment level (MEL), and the DVOP and LVER positions count towards the VEC MEL, even though the federal government funds the positions. If these positions are not filled at the end of the federal fiscal year, the federal government will recapture some of the grant money that comes to the VEC to support those positions. Chairman Miller stated that this problem formed the basis of his letter to Commissioner Mangis, recommending to (or requesting from) the Secretary of Commerce that these positions be exempt from the MEL. Either as a result of this letter or other actions, approximately twelve open DVOP/LVER positions, at offices across the state, were advertised on the Commonwealth's job recruitment website. The positions were not exempted from the MEL, but VEC has opened up these positions and is recruiting, interviewing and filling the positions as they become available.

Mr. Miller indicated that he would ask the new chairman he would like Mr. Miller to continue to follow up on the DVOP/LVER situation. Mr. Miller said that he would like to do this because he has had a conversation with the Chairman of the Commerce Committee to explain the situation. The Chairman said that Mr. Miller should keep in touch with him on this issue, that Mr. Miller should write a letter describing the situation and how the Commerce Committee can affect a change. Mr. Miller has also had conversations with the VEC's regional directors, who have indicated to him that they would like these positions to be exempt from the MEL, which in turn would free up over 100 positions in other parts of the VEC. Therefore, the regional directors are in favor of it, and when Mr. Miller talked to Chairman Harvey Morgan of the Commerce Committee, he was in favor of it, based on what Mr. Miller had told him. Chairman Miller said he would like, when there is a new chairperson, to be able to follow up on that with the Council's permission. While the positions are being filled, they are still not exempt from the MEL. This could be an issue for the JLC to address.

Dr. Dumas asked if there was legislation already written that speaks to the veterans' preference issue in the Commonwealth of Virginia. He also asked if there was legislation already written that exempts these DVOP/LVER positions. Mr. Miller responded that in

terms of veterans' preference in the employment aspect, the way the law reads is that basically the hiring authority *may* take a veteran's background into consideration, which does not say that there is a preference there at all. It was suggested that the JLC, along with the Board of Veterans Services, draft legislation for a veterans' preference and put it before the General Assembly for its action.

Mr. Miller stated that he was not certain that the veterans' preference issue requires a legislative action. It is his opinion that it may require nothing more than an administrative change coming from the Secretary of Commerce. That would be something he would want the Board to review. The Federal government pays the salaries, benefits, travel, and training for the DVOP/LVER positions. Mr. Boyd mentioned the part-time employees at the Department of Education and noted they are also funded the Federal government.

Mr. Miller mentioned the men and women returning from the Middle East, noting that they would need case managers at the VA to refer them to the DVOP/LVER program as being "job ready." DVOP works in conjunction with the VSOs to find men and women suffering from PTSD, who are not receiving the care or service to which they are entitled. DVOP can bring these veterans into the system and giving them direction. Additionally, there is the Transition Assistance Program, which works with those men and women preparing to leave the military within the next year. These men and women bring a breadth and depth of services that are valuable to employers.

#### **DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE**

Mr. Boyd introduced Mr. Combs and described his background and work with the Commissioner. Mr. Combs related that Chairman Miller had asked him to look at some future meeting dates and locations, pointing out that the JLC members expressed the desire to hold the meetings in different parts of the Commonwealth. These are public meetings, and the JLC has stated that its goal is to serve Virginia's veterans; therefore, the public should be encouraged to participate in the JLC meetings, especially during the public comment period. It is very important to advertise these meeting, and it was suggested that perhaps the Board, Council and Foundation partner with the VSOs to host a meeting. There may be a regular membership meeting held for that particular VSO Chapter or Post, in order to get the public there to see that the various boards are there to serve them.

The last item in the folder was a list of possible future meeting places. This is in keeping with a quarterly meeting schedule, with the exception being that when the General Assembly is in session two meetings will be held during one quarter, per the JLC constitution. In trying to move the meetings around the Commonwealth, one must keep in mind that people are coming from all over the Commonwealth; therefore driving times will not be perfect for anyone. The next meeting will be somewhere in Northern Virginia, with meetings to follow in Hampton Roads, two in Richmond and looking at possibly Charlottesville or Lexington, which are more centrally located. Dr. Luck volunteered to host a meeting at the Woodrow Wilson Rehab Center.

Without a quorum, there could be no vote on the time and place for future meetings; therefore, Mr. Combs suggested that he poll the Council members by telephone to set a date for the next meeting; Chairman Miller approved this action. Per the JLC constitution, meeting dates and locations are set one meeting in advance. However, a tentative meeting schedule for the next year can be prepared, with the understanding that it is for planning purposes only, and that meeting dates can only be approved one meeting in advance. Accordingly, Mr. Combs asked that each member send a schedule of their meetings for the next year, so that JLC meetings can be scheduled such that they do not conflict with VSO meetings and conventions.

The idea of sponsoring co-organizational meetings was considered. The discussion centered on following through with the various VSOs with regard to support of the VVCC and the Canteen issues. Communication needs to be a priority with more points of contact.

#### **JLC MEMBER COMMENT PERIOD**

Dr. Dumas, JLC representative of the Homeless & Disabled Veterans made another appeal for the JLC, the VSOs, the Governor, and Commissioner's office to get involved in helping homeless and disabled veterans. He asked that the VSO representatives get involved and get to know something about the organization that he represents. The Homeless & Disabled Veterans organization is trying to do something to improve the lives of homeless veterans. One thing that is a priority is to provide employment and to help these veterans get jobs. He asked about the number of veterans serving in Congress and in the General Assembly. He asked Veterans are supported in Congress and the General Assembly, and are Veterans elected and do d that the Council look at whether Virginia V we ask the veterans to be the ones to take the lead in all these areas. He welcomed questions regarding his organization.

Mr. Aucoin, AMVETS noted that the AMVETS State Convention was held two weeks ago and the organization did add a Homeless Veterans Representative at the state level.

Mr. Jasper discussed some upcoming meetings dates for the MOPH, saying he would forward these dates to Ms. Claybrook.

Mr. Miller pointed out that there has been a problem with having a quorum at some of the JLC meetings. Members have been appointed and will spend another three years on the Council. Mr. O'Neill suggested a letter be sent to all members making this clear. The American Legion has extended an invitation to meet at their Richmond headquarters at any time.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Mr. Perry Johnson, Vice Commander, DAV, stated he appreciated the opportunity to be at the meeting. He commented that the Supermarket of Veterans Benefits in Abingdon was not advertised well. He is a member and Adjutant of the Abington Chapter of the DAV and he knew nothing of the event. He asked that he be advised of anything being held in the southwestern part of the state. Mr. Boyd did respond that the event had been advertised in the local media.

Mr. Jim Walker, member of the Board of Veterans Services, noted that several good points had been brought out in the meeting, especially stressing good communication between the Boards and the VSOs and following through with them.

#### **REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Mr. Jackson, Mr. Jones and Mr. Wickersham made up the Nominating Committee. This committee was tasked to identify and nominate a Chairman and Vice Chairman to replace the outgoing Chairman and Vice Chairman. Since there was no quorum, the new officers could not be elected at this meeting. Elections will take place at the September meeting, with current officers serving until then.

Mr. Wickersham reported the Committee's proposed slate, with other nominees being welcome from the floor. The committee nominated Mr. O'Neill to be the next Chairman and Mr. Wickersham the next Vice Chairman. There were no other nominations from the floor.

Mr. O'Neill expressed a desire to remain in the position of Legislative Officer. He asked if he could hold the posts of both the Chairman and the Legislative Officer at the same time. He stated that if he could not serve as both Chairman and Legislative Officer, then he would prefer to remain Legislative Officer. Mr. Combs indicated that he would consult with the Assistant Attorney General as to whether one member can hold these posts concurrently.

The nominations will be held until the September meeting in Northern Virginia. There is no specific location.

#### **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

## **Draft Minutes of the September 7, 2004 Meeting**

NOTE: The minutes of the September 7, 2004 meeting are expected to be finalized and approved at the meeting scheduled for December 7, 2004.

### **Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations Draft Meeting Minutes September 7, 2004**

A meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) was held on Tuesday, September 7, 2004, at the offices of VSE Corporation, 2550 Huntington Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia.

#### **Members Present**

Jim Aucoin, *American Veterans*; John Bonnell, *Marine Corp League*; Mason Botts, *Air Force Association*; George Dumas, *Homeless and Disabled Veterans*; John Dunleavy, *Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge*; David Ellis, *NAUS*; Pat Green, *Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*; John Jackson, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*; James Jones, *Korean War Veterans Association*; Connie O'Neill, *American Legion*; Richard Rinaldo, *Legion of Valor of the U. S., Inc.*; R. Goodwin Sacra, *Navy Seabee Veterans of America*; Ronald Shamblin, *Virginia National Guard Association*; and Frank Wickersham, *MOAA*.

#### **Members Absent**

John Anderson, *Chairman, Board of Veterans Services*; Paul Fink, *United States Navy Cruiser Sailors Association*; Robert Gray, *American Ex-Prisoners of War*; Michael Hulsey, *Reserve Officers Association of the U.S.*; Jon Mangis, *Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Daniel Miller, *Disabled American Veterans*; Richard Schneider, *Non-Commissioned Officers Association*; Thomas Snee, *Fleet Reserve Association*; Peter Snelling, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*; and Norman Jasper, *Military Order of the Purple Heart*.

#### **Others Present**

C. L. "Bert" Boyd, Chief Deputy Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Steven Combs, Assistant to the Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Rhonda Earman, General Administration Supervisor, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; David Keith, Clark•Nexsen Architects; Dan Kemano, Cemeteries Administrator, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Rose Lee, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.; Congressman James Moran, Virginia's 8th Congressional District; William Van Thiel, Administrator, Virginia Veterans Care Center; Will Wells, Virginia Department of General Services; Ron White, Virginia Department of General Services; and L. Kent Woodmansee, U. S. Warrant Officers Association.

#### **Materials Distributed**

Meeting Agenda; Minutes of the September 24, 2003, March 16, 2004, and June 21, 2004, meetings; Virginia Veterans Care Center renovation outline; copy of graphics presentation on Albert G. Horton, Jr., Memorial Veterans Cemetery construction update,

cemetery brochure and list of burial options and costs; laminated 4x6 card with web link to a public website showing Clark•Nexsen’s preliminary architectural rendering of the new Richmond Care Center; preliminary list of JLC legislative agenda items; list of Veterans Services Offered by the Commonwealth; and Virginia Department of Veterans Services Overview.

### **Call to Order**

With a quorum of 14 of 22 members present, JLC Vice Chairman Jim Aucoin, substituting for JLC Chairman Dan Miller, called the meeting to order at 12:20 p.m. Mr. Aucoin welcomed new members David Ellis and Pat Green.

### **Federal Programs and Legislation**

U. S. Representative James Moran briefed the Council on federal programs and legislation affecting veterans. Congressman Moran said that veterans with limited personal resources often are not aware of veterans services and benefits available to them and commended the JLC for helping to bring veterans issues to the attention of law and policy makers. He said that the events of September 11 elevated the public’s perception of the importance of military, and it is vital that America recognizes those who have served in past conflicts. He added that Virginia was fortunate to be a part of the World War II Memorial honoring the veterans who served in that conflict to preserve the freedoms of future generations.

Congressman Moran encouraged members of the JLC to participate in the Veterans History Project, an initiative of the Library of Congress, and thanked Cox Communications Corporation for providing communication services to the project, at no charge.

In line with President Lincoln’s adage to “care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for widow and his orphan,” Congressman Moran said our nation should be mindful of the great sacrifices made by our military by funding vital programs for veterans and their survivors.

Congressman Moran discussed some of the key Congressional measures affecting veterans. In his overview, he discussed:

- **Survivor Benefits/”Widow's Tax”** – On May 20, the House passed the fiscal 2005 Defense Authorization Act by a vote of 391 to 34. That bill contains a provision, which phases out the Survivor Benefit Plan penalty for military widows receiving Social Security benefits. The Senate-passed version contains a phase-out provision, but is graduated over a ten-year period, versus the five-year period contained in the House version. During the conference process, which will begin shortly, the two versions must be reconciled, and then put to vote in both chambers in the form of a conference report, which cannot be amended. Congressman Moran fully supports the House version, in large part because it phases out the Survivor Benefit penalty over a shorter time span.

- **House Resolution 303/The Disabled Veterans Tax** – This issue, known as “concurrent receipt,” is addressed in legislation co-sponsored by Congressman Moran. According to a Government Reform Committee report prepared for Congressman Moran, until January of 2004, when a complicated legislative “fix” became law, 35,400 veterans in Virginia with service connected disabilities lost military retirement benefits due to the disabled veterans’ tax, a dollar for dollar reduction in Department of Defense military retirement benefits for each dollar of VA disability benefits. An 1891 law barred “concurrent receipt” of both military retirement benefits and disability benefits. The “Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2003,” H.R. 303, which would repeal that law, has not been taken up by the House Armed Services Committee, and so far has not been considered on the House floor as a stand-alone bill. Last year, the bill became the subject of a discharge petition, a procedural device used to by-pass the leadership and force a vote on the House Floor. The petition currently has 205 signatures, 13 short of the threshold required to force a vote on the House floor.

A provision was added to the fiscal 2004 Defense Authorization Act, reducing the tax for retirees who are 50% or more disabled. However, this narrowly tailored provision does not go far enough and leaves thousands of disabled retirees still subject to the offsetting tax.

- **Veterans Health Care** – Congressman Moran offered an amendment during Budget Committee consideration of the Budget Resolution to increase the VA budget by \$2 billion to pay for health care. Another measure that would have assured funding for veterans health care based upon population considerations, instead of federal budget considerations, failed to pass the House. Congressman Moran, who supported the bill, emphasized that political considerations like the recent tax cuts should not determine whether veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to. If the tax cuts remain permanent, funding of veterans health care will drain the Medicare and Social Security Trust Funds, and funding for veterans housing programs will create a burden on the Housing and Urban Development Trust Fund. President Bush’s current budget proposal for veterans' health care would decrease current benefits at a time when health care costs are rising.

Congressman Moran urged all Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to play a role in state and federal legislation by advocating for veterans programs with their legislators. He also said that VSOs could provide input into the development of defense policy by making their positions clear to policy makers. Congressman Moran noted that combat pay for our armed forces today is not great as for past conflicts, due to the adverse impact the enormous federal budget deficit is having on defense spending.

#### **Richmond Care Center Construction Update**

David Keith and Ron White provided an update on the design for the new Richmond Care Center. The new Care Center will be constructed on a 19.2-acre site that the Commonwealth acquired from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). The

building will be one story, with a floor plan similar to that of the Roanoke Care Center. Some of the features of the new center will include:

- 200-bed capacity
  - 120 for residents with medical conditions
  - 40 for Alzheimer’s patients, with courtyard and wander garden
  - 40 for residents needing assisted living accommodations
- Single occupancy rooms with private toilet facilities
- Physical and Occupational Therapy units
- Large dining area for the medical wings
- Chapel
- Kitchen facilities

Mr. Keith provided the address for a web site on which the public may view architectural drawing and renderings of the center, <http://project.clarknexsen.com/VeteransCare>. A general contractor soon will be hired, and construction is scheduled to begin in early 2005. Of the \$22.5 million allocated for the project, 65% will be federally financed, and 35% will be come from state funds.

John Jackson asked whether the facility will have the capacity to care for spinal cord injury (SCI) patients, and noted that there is a waiting list nationally for SCI patients at VA hospitals. Mr. Van Thiel responded that the USDVA prefers that SCI patients reside in their own homes and receive treatment in their communities, rather than be cared for in medical or long-term care facilities. In addition, most SCI patients are young and do not wish to reside in long-term care facilities. Mr. Jackson said he would follow up with Mr. Van Thiel and Mr. Boyd on this issue following the meeting.

#### **Roanoke Care Center Renovations**

Bill Van Thiel provided an update on the renovation/construction project at the Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke, and distributed an outline and list of capital projects. The USDVA will provide 65%, and the Commonwealth of Virginia 35%, of funding for the project. The Commonwealth’s portion of the project will be financed by VVCC funds that have been set aside for renovation/construction and capital expenditures. The VVCC receives no funding from general funds appropriated by the General Assembly.

Mr. Van Thiel stated that the USDVA funding criteria for this type of construction is defined under Priority Group I, which includes the following sub-priority groups:

- Subpriority 1) Remedy for life safety issues
- Subpriority 2) States without a construction grant for a state nursing homes and remedy for

states that don't have state facilities

- Subpriority 3) Great need for new beds in a state
- Subpriority 4) Renovations, other than Subpriority 1 (ex., the VVCC request)
- Subpriority 5) Significant need for new beds in a state
- Subpriority 6) Limited need for new beds in a state

Mr. Van Thiel responded to a question regarding admission criteria. He told the group that any honorably discharged veteran, who is a resident of Virginia, or who enlisted in the Armed Forces in Virginia, is eligible for admission to the Virginia Veterans Care Center.

Dr. Dumas asked what the VSOs could do to support care center residents. Mr. Van Thiel answered that funds are always needed to support resident programs, including assistance on trips to sporting events, holiday gifts, etc. He stated that there is always a need for volunteers. Dr. Dumas asked that Mr. Van Thiel prepare a written list of needed items and forward it to Mr. Combs for distribution to Council members.

#### **Horton Cemetery Construction Update**

Dan Kemano and Will Wells provided an update on the construction of the new Albert G. Horton, Jr., Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Suffolk. An on-screen presentation was used to show photographs and the architectural site plan. Mr. Kemano also distributed an informational brochure on the cemetery, as well as a list of the various types of burials and costs.

Despite inclement weather delays, Phase I construction is on schedule, and the dedication ceremony is scheduled for November 1, 2004.

Pat Green said that there is a great need for a veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia and asked for support of such a project from the JLC. Everyone agreed that this was a good idea, and Connie O'Neill said he would include this project in the JLC's 2005 Legislative Agenda. Mr. Boyd reminded the Council that the USDVA would finance the construction of such a project, but that the Commonwealth would have to provide the land and funding to support the operation of the facility.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

A **motion** was made and passed unanimously, to approve the minutes of the September 25, 2003, and the minutes of the June 21, 2004, meetings, as drafted. The minutes of the March 16, 2004, meeting were approved, unanimously, with the following changes to page one: Ron Shamblin, *Virginia National Guard Association*, should be listed as present at the meeting; and the quorum of members should be changed to 12 of 21.

#### **Chairman's Comments**

Jim Aucoin provided the Chairman's Comments in Dan Miller's absence. Mr. Aucoin reiterated Chairman Miller's remarks in his July 9 letter to Council members, saying that

it is imperative that JLC members attend meetings regularly, so that the Council will be able to perform its functions.

### **JLC Legislative Agenda**

Connie O'Neill distributed a preliminary list of JLC legislative agenda items for the 2005 General Assembly session. Mr. O'Neill asked that any VSO that had not yet submitted its item(s) to him, to do so before September 15, as the JLC Legislative Agenda will be presented to the Board of Veterans Services at its September 27, 2004, meeting. A **motion** was made, seconded, and passed unanimously to authorize the JLC Legislative Officer to publish the final Legislative Agenda after the final draft has been distributed to the Council members via e-mail for their approval. Mr. Wickersham suggested that the JLC adopt 4 or 5 key items, with the remainder preserved as "back-ups" in the event any of the key items fail.

### **Constitution and By-Laws Review Committee**

A **motion** was made, seconded, and passed unanimously to appoint John Jackson, James Jones, and Frank Wickersham to serve on the Constitution and By-Laws Review Committee. The Committee will review the existing JLC Constitution and By-Laws and make recommendations for any changes to the full Council at its next meeting.

### **Nominating Committee**

Upon a **motion** by members of the Nominating Committee and seconded, the Council voted unanimously to appoint Connie O'Neill and Frank Wickersham to serve as Chairman and Vice Chairman, respectively, for the period September, 2004 through July, 2005. With his appointment as Chairman, Mr. O'Neill resigned as the JLC Legislative Officer.

### **Commissioner's Update**

Bert Boyd provided the Commissioner's Update in Jon Mangis' absence. Mr. Boyd advised the Council that the Commissioner's convalescence from his recent surgery has gone well, and that he is expected to be back in the office half days beginning September 7.

Mr. Boyd said that based on its veterans population, Virginia meets the USDVA criteria for four more veterans homes, in addition to the existing Care Center in Roanoke, and the soon to be constructed Richmond Care Center. Discussion regarding applications to the USDVA for the additional homes is ongoing.

Mr. Boyd informed the Council that DVS field offices are experiencing staffing shortages due to recent and impending retirements, and staff who are on full disability. There is not sufficient funding to replace these individuals. Despite the drop in staff levels, however, there has been no change in the number of claims processed. Mr. Boyd said that of the approximately 300 staff working for DVS, approximately 240 are employed at the Roanoke Care Center; 50-60 are employed by the benefits and cemeteries sections and in administrative functions; and six work for the Veterans Educational Approval Service.

Steven Combs noted that the Roanoke Care Center recently was recognized by the Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection for full compliance with the federal certification requirements for nursing facilities participating in the Medicare and/or Medicaid programs. This recognition was the result of an inspection of the center with zero deficiencies. These certification requirements are very stringent, and all of the staff at the VVCC should be very proud of their contributions in support of this mark of excellence.

### **New Business**

A question was raised about the chronic absences of some of the members, and the Council discussed ways to address this problem. Everyone agreed that input into critical state and federal veterans issues by the JLC as a body is crucial, and cannot be achieved without the participation of all the VSOs. It was noted that there are Secretary of the Commonwealth policies and procedures that may be used to address the attendance problem.

With respect to veterans advocacy, Mr. Boyd noted that the JLC is not limited to the agency or secretariat level in pursuing its objectives, and urged the Council to advocate directly with the legislature and senior policy makers for veterans programs and funding.

It was noted by new Chairman, Connie O'Neill, that by law, the JLC must adopt mission and vision statements. Messrs. Rinaldo, Botts, and Ellis agreed to serve on an ad hoc committee to develop the statement and submit to the full Council for consideration and approval.

### **Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the JLC was scheduled for December 7, 2004, 11:00 a.m., at the offices of the American Legion Department of Virginia in Richmond. Members are asked to bring a brown bag lunch.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.