

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2005

A meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) was held on Wednesday, February 23, 2005, at the offices of the American Legion Department of Virginia, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue, Richmond, Virginia.

Members Present

Jim Aucoin, *American Veterans*; John Bonnell, *Marine Corps League*; Mason Botts, *Air Force Association*; George Dumas, *Homeless and Disabled Veterans*; David Ellis, *NAUS*; Robert Gray, *American Ex-Prisoners of War*; Pat Green, *Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*; Michael Hulsey, *Reserve Officers Association of the U.S.*; John Jackson, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*; Norman Jasper, *Military Order of the Purple Heart*; James Jones, *Korean War Veterans Association*; Jon Mangis, *Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services*; Daniel Miller, *Disabled American Veterans*; Connie O'Neill, *American Legion*; Richard Rinaldo, *Legion of Valor of the U. S., Inc.*; R. Goodwin Sacra, *Navy Seabee Veterans of America*; Richard Schneider, *Non-Commissioned Officers Association*; Peter Snelling, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*; and Samuel Wilder, *Association of the United States Army*.

Members Absent

John Anderson, *Chairman, Board of Veterans Services*; John Dunleavy, *Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge*; Paul Fink, *U. S. Navy Cruiser Sailors Association*; Ronald Shamblin, *Virginia National Guard Association*; Thomas Snee, *Fleet Reserve Association*; and Frank Wickersham, *MOAA*. Mr. Wickersham was absent because he is serving in Kuwait and Iraq as a Department of Defense support contractor on an urgent armoring project for fuel tankers, as assignment which is expected to last until Spring 2005.

Others Present

Ronnie Blythwood, Director, Hire Vets First Initiative, Veterans Employment and Training Service Philadelphia Region, U. S. Department of Labor; Steven Combs, Assistant to the Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Rhonda Earman, Administrative Supervisor, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Don Ferguson, Assistant Attorney General; Paul Hinkhouse, Director, Commonwealth of Virginia Office, Veterans Employment and Training Service, U. S. Department of Labor; Donald Kaiserman, Richmond Area Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America – substituting for Mr. Wickersham; William Leighty, Governor Warner's Chief of Staff; Jerry Lindsey, Veterans Service Coordinator, Virginia Employment Commission; John McAnaw, VFW; Anne McKinney, Paralyzed Veterans of America; Bill Offutt, Executive Director, Hire Vets First Initiative, Veterans Employment and Training Service, U. S. Department of Labor; Terry Schaefer, Veterans Program Specialist, Commonwealth of Virginia Office, Veterans Employment and Training Service, U. S. Department of Labor; Patricia Sykes, Veterans Program Specialist, Commonwealth of Virginia Office, Veterans Employment and Training Service, U. S. Department of Labor.

Materials Distributed

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

Meeting Agenda; draft Minutes of the January 11, 2005, meeting; copy of Certificate of Recognition signed by Governor Warner and Secretary of the Commonwealth Rimler, recognizing March 2005 as "Hire Veterans First Month;" existing JLC Constitution and Bylaws and Proposed JLC Constitution and Bylaws; Memorandum Report No. 1 from the JLC ad-hoc Subcommittee on States' Veterans Benefits; summary of veterans and related legislation in the 2005 General Assembly Session; information flyer and schedule for the 2005 Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits; copy of *The Value of Veterans* article excerpted from Business Week magazine; copy of January 24, 2005, letter from state Delegate Stephen Shannon to Dr. Dumas; program for the Military of the World Wars Roanoke Chapter, Region IV's 19th Annual Massing of the Colors; and Winter 2005 edition of *Virginia Veterans News*.

Call to Order

With 14 of 23 voting members present, Chairman O'Neill called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m. Messrs. Aucoin, Ellis, Rinaldo, and Sacra arrived shortly after the meeting began, for a total of 18 of 23 voting members present.

Mr. O'Neill welcomed guests, John McAnaw of the VFW, Anne McKinney of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the representatives from the Hire Vets First initiative of the U. S. Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service, and Jerry Lindsey of the Virginia Employment Commission.

Presentation of Governor Warner's Certificate of Recognition – Hire Veterans First Month

Governor Warner's Chief of Staff, Bill Leighty, was in attendance to present a Certificate of Recognition signed by Governor Warner and Secretary of the Commonwealth Rimler, recognizing March 2005, as "Hire Veterans First Month."

Mr. Leighty began his remarks by saying he was a former Marine and that several of his family members had served in the military, which he believes gives him a good perspective on veterans issues. Mr. Leighty recognized the JLC for its efforts with the "Hire Veterans First Month" initiative and presented the recognition certificate on behalf of the Governor to JLC Chairman Connie O'Neill.

Mr. Leighty was asked about pending legislation and budget amendments relating to restoring the domiciliary beds that have been cut from the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center and the addition of more veterans service officers. Mr. Leighty explained that different versions of the bills and budget amendments had passed through both chambers and that a Joint Conference Committee, on which Delegate Cox serves, will address the differences.

Mr. Leighty said he realizes that the budget amendments Governor Warner proposed for DVS are less than what many Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) had hoped for, but that the Governor wanted to approach funding levels in a progressive manner. Mr. Leighty also said the Governor understands the significant return in revenue for the Commonwealth for every dollar spent on veterans programs and services.

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Mangis added that House Bill 2850, which would restore the domiciliary beds, had passed both houses, and that the related budget amendment is before the Joint Conference Committee. Mr. Mangis explained that if the legislation and budget amendment are approved by the General Assembly, the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center project would be placed in Priority One status with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) State Veterans Home Program, and DVS then would make application for the construction grant funding. The entire process could take 3 to 5 years.

John McAnaw of the VFW expressed his belief that House Bill 2851 provides for only a minimum level of service officers and itinerate service delivery, and that more funding is needed if Virginia's veterans are going to receive the services they deserve. Mr. McAnaw asked Mr. Leighty what is being done this legislative session to restore the domiciliary beds cut from the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center. Mr. Leighty replied that even if the bill and budget amendment associated with this project do not pass, Governor Warner's administration will find a way to support the Commonwealth's 35% share of the project.

Connie O'Neill reported that during the American Legion's "Day on the Hill" meeting with Governor Warner, Legion representatives told the Governor that while they appreciated the increased funding he had proposed for DVS, requests for additional funds would be submitted by members of the General Assembly. Mr. O'Neill stated that Governor Warner supported this idea and said that he wants his administration to be remembered for its strong support for veterans.

Mr. Leighty also said that Delegate Frank Hall had introduced a budget amendment to cover the increased costs of tuition and fees passed from colleges and universities to Virginia National Guard Soldiers. The funding would continue a highly successful program that rewards soldiers for recruiting new enlistees and would support a retirement incentive available to Guardsmen who remain in the Guard for at least twenty years.

Mr. Leighty noted that Governor Warner had met with a research group from the Rand Corporation in an effort to learn more about veterans population demographics and veterans needs in general. Mr. Leighty said that Governor Warner believes it is important to be sensitive to the needs of all veterans, not just those who served in combat.

Mr. Leighty advised the Council that National Guard and Reserve strength is being addressed by the National Governor's Conference. Governor Warner also has consulted with the Virginia Adjutant General for his recommendations on the changing role of the Guard and Reserve, including such issues as deployment and the amount of training necessary to prepare for deployment.

Dr. Dumas asked if the Governor is a veteran himself, and what specifically he is doing to help Virginia's veterans. Mr. Leighty responded that while Governor Warner is not a veteran himself, his father was. As such, Governor Warner learned early in life that America needs to do more to serve those who have served our country. When Governor Warner took office, he

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

recognized that programs and services for Virginia's veterans were fragmented, and he took steps to consolidate those services into the Department of Veterans Services, creating a strategic vision for veterans in the Commonwealth. Governor Warner also appointed Commissioner Mangis, who has an enormous amount of experience in military affairs and service to veterans on the national and state levels. In addition, Governor Warner created Virginia's first council of veterans service organizations to advise the Department of Veterans Services on veterans issues, services and programs.

Mr. Snelling asked about the possibility of Governor Warner appointing a Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Leighty responded that because of the short time remaining in Governor Warner's administration, it was unlikely such a secretariat would be appointed.

When asked if the Governor's Office would publicize the Hire Veterans First Month initiative, Mr. Leighty said that the information would be posted on the Governor's Web page and sent to all state agency heads. Mr. Leighty added that House Bill 2428 patroned by Delegate Cole, which would strengthen a veterans hiring preference for state and local government, has passed both Chambers. This legislation also provides for a special hiring preference for disabled veterans.

Approval of Minutes

A **motion** was made, seconded, and passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the January 11, 2005 meeting with the following changes:

Page 1 – Members Present – Add David Ellis's name and organization.

Page 1 – Members Absent – Delete David Ellis's name and organization. Add *Mr. Wickersham was absent because he is serving in Kuwait and Iraq as a Department of Defense support contractor on an urgent armoring project for fuel tankers, an assignment which is expected to last until Spring 2005.*

Page 2 – Call to Order – Add David Ellis's name to those who arrived late.

Page 5 – Commissioner's Update, Last ¶ – Add “*Dr. Dumas requested that Commissioner Mangis spend a few minutes responding to Mrs. Hayes' concerns about the level of services to veterans, and Commissioner Mangis responded to Mrs. Hayes' concerns.*”

Page 5 – Old Business, First ¶ – Add “*Mr. Green informed the Council that the donation of a building site in Dublin for the proposed Southwest Virginia veterans cemetery is being negotiated and has received tentative approval.*”

Unfinished Business (Chairman's Report)

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

Chairman O'Neill began his comments by saying Delegate Cox had asked him to address the February 15 meeting of the Senate Finance Committee, where several veterans bills and related budget amendments were heard. Mr. O'Neill said Paul Galanti of the Board of Veterans Services also spoke in support of funding to restore the domiciliary beds at the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center and for additional veterans service representatives. Mr. O'Neill told the Finance Committee that the JLC member organizations represented over 120,000 veterans. Mr. O'Neill said the Committee members were moved by the number of veterans who attended the hearing and by the comments that were made in support of the need for additional funding for veterans programs and services. The veterans who attended the meeting received an ovation from all present. Mr. O'Neill emphasized how important this type of advocacy and collaboration is in helping improve services to Virginia's veterans and that with full participation by JLC member organizations, Virginia veterans can be a powerful voice in the legislative process.

Mr. O'Neill reported that Jon Hatfield of the Virginia War Memorial was ill and could not make the meeting as planned. Mr. Hatfield will attend a future meeting to report on the activities at the War Memorial, including the successful "Virginians at War" program which has been well-received by the public school systems across the state. Mr. McAnaw noted that a bill that would provide 24-hour security at the War Memorial also is in joint conference committee.

Mr. O'Neill reviewed each of the items in the 2005 Legislative Update. With respect to Item Number 3, Mr. Green noted that he is arranging for land to be donated for the proposed veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia, purchase of the property would not be necessary. Commissioner Mangis added that the USDVA State Cemetery Grants Program would evaluate any identified sites prior to donation to ensure that it meets the criteria for a construction grant. If a potential site meets USDVA requirements, then it is likely it would be donated to the Veterans Services Foundation, which would hold the land in trust until construction began. Mr. Mangis said that because the USDVA generally looks favorably upon such transfers, it is possible the project could be completed within two years.

With respect to Item Number 4, Steven Combs noted that the War Memorial would need to come up with 50% of the estimated \$100,000 needed to fund the design of the education wing, which would trigger the Commonwealth's matching grant. The Commonwealth would then fund the construction and operating costs. Mr. Combs said that Jon Hatfield of the War Memorial would likely contact VSOs across the state to solicit donations for the design cost.

Sam Wilder asked whether allocations for the Governor's capital improvement projects need approval by General Assembly. Commissioner Mangis said the funds are part of the Governor's long-range capital improvement plan.

Mr. O'Neill then welcomed Mr. Wilder as a new member of the JLC. Discussion followed as to why the Vietnam Veterans of America were not represented on the Council. Commissioner Mangis responded that an invitation to join the JLC was made to that organization, but that so far, the organization had taken no action regarding JLC membership.

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

Discussion then turned to JLC meeting quorum determinations, and a suggestion was made to allow alternates or designees to attend on behalf of members appointed to serve on the Council. Mr. Ferguson emphasized that if that were to occur, the enabling Code of Virginia statute would need to be amended by the General Assembly. Mason Botts volunteered to chair a subcommittee to study this proposal, and Pat Green agreed to serve with him.

Dr. Dumas praised the Commissioner's Office staff for mailing agenda packets and contacting members by telephone to remind them of meetings.

Mr. Snelling emphasized the importance of all the VSOs coalescing to speak with one voice to law and policy makers. Everyone agreed it would be a good idea to plan well in advance for the next General Assembly session and to agree upon consistent and unified legislative agenda items. Mr. Mangis added that VSOs in some states present their legislative agenda items through a veterans service council like the JLC to achieve the objective of unification and consistency. Mr. Mangis reminded everyone that the JLC serves in an advisory role to the Board of Veterans Services. Mr. Mangis suggested there be JLC "Days on the Hill" that would augment similar efforts of the individual VSOs.

Report of the Constitution and By-Laws Review Committee

After discussion, a **motion** was made and seconded to adopt the Proposed Constitution and Bylaws, as drafted. The motion passed with Mr. Wilder abstaining.

Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Mangis began his report by welcoming new member Mr. Wilder.

Mr. Mangis reported that the concerns raised by Brenda Hayes about veterans services for her husband at the last JLC meeting had been resolved to her satisfaction.

Commissioner Mangis thanked the JLC members for their efforts in asking Governor Warner to declare March 2005 as "Hire Vets First Month" and their support for a veterans hiring preference in state and local government. Mr. Mangis said he was concerned about the number of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who become homeless, and emphasized the importance of supporting employment and housing initiatives for them. Commissioner Mangis reported that DVS had participated in veterans jobs fairs and sponsored two Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits over the past year. Commissioner Mangis said that DVS will host four Supermarket events in 2005 and urged the Council members to publicize these events with their VSOs.

Commissioner Mangis said that the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk is conducting three times the number of burials as the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and asked that Council members help publicize the services offered at the Amelia location. Mr. Mangis said that Cemetery Administrator Dan Kemano has done an excellent job in achieving an aesthetic quality at both cemeteries and welcomes visits from Council members and others. Commissioner Mangis praised the hard work and dedication of Chief Deputy

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Bert Boyd in seeing the Suffolk cemetery project to completion and ensuring that the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center project stays on track.

Commissioner Mangis said that there still are some sticking points between the House and Senate on legislation and budget amendments and, therefore, the General Assembly might not adjourn as scheduled. Commissioner Mangis emphasized that although the Governor's budget proposals for DVS are not at the level hoped for, they fully fund all currently authorized Full-Time Employee (FTE) levels, including two accounting positions. Mr. Mangis said one of the accounting positions may be structured to serve in an audit capacity for the Virginia Veterans Care Center. The Governor's proposal also provides the funds for two full-time groundskeepers at the Horton cemetery and the conversion of two cemetery part-time positions to full-time status.

Mr. Mangis emphasized that even if the legislation and budget amendments to fund the Commonwealth's 35% of restoring the domiciliary beds at the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center pass, it will take 3-5 years to complete the project because of the USDVA administrative process involved. Commissioner Mangis advised the Council that President Bush recommended a moratorium on state veterans home funding in his budget proposal to Congress. Mr. Mangis said that legal issues surrounding the property transfer are being worked out between the USDVA and the Office of the Attorney General, and that groundbreaking probably will take place in early April. DVS also will complete a list of USDVA checklist items by the March 14 deadline.

Commissioner Mangis expressed concern that language in House Bill 2851 creates too much administrative detail and oversight, which could be counterproductive to the interests of veterans. The House has rejected the Senate Amendment that the provisions of the bill not become effective unless general funds are appropriated for it. However, if the budget amendment passes, and the bill fails, the appropriation still will be made to DVS. Mr. Mangis also said that the bill as introduced, does not provide for employee training, office operations, or travel expenses. The Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) and the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC), in separate fiscal impact evaluations, identified these shortfalls, though the shortfall amounts differed between the two studies.

New Business

Richard Rinaldo presented Report No. 1 of the ad-hoc Subcommittee on States' Veterans Benefits. Mr. Rinaldo said that overall, it appears Virginia is doing well as compared to most states. Virginia spends more per capita than North Carolina, but less than Georgia. Mr. Rinaldo said that the next step could involve the Commissioner requesting that his peers provide demographic data from their states and make recommendations for a model benefits program in Virginia. Commissioner Mangis said it is important to compare "apples to apples" when evaluating the data.

Mr. Ellis added, "I want you to know that I was there when Connie O'Neill spoke to the Senate Finance Committee on February 15. The Committee members gave him their earnest attention,

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

and when he said he represented the JLC and 23 veterans' service organizations from across the Commonwealth, I noticed that several of the Senators and their staff were doing a quick tally of all the 'hats' in the room. I stopped counting after I counted 117, and that was just most of those who wore 'hats' (NAUS members do not wear a 'hat' and do most of their work with blazer and tie, buttonholing members of Congress and key staffers). There were five of us up from Fredericksburg, including the Commander of VFW Post 3103, Ben Thomas. As there were so many veterans in the hearing room, I knew immediately what was going through the minds of those Committee members, as their reaction reminded me of a conversation I had had with U.S. Senator John Warner."

Mr. Ellis went on to say, "Senator Warner once remarked to me that his job privileged him to meet some of the finest citizens and persons of influence in our country. He said he always listened to what a new acquaintance had to say, because he felt he could learn something from those who wanted to speak to him. The downside was that he couldn't keep track of everyone, but he knew that at the end of the day, only two things amounted to a hill of beans: how many votes the new acquaintance represented, or how much money the new acquaintance could bring to the table. He went on to say that he had plenty of ideas coming out of his ears and even more new ideas offered from everyone he encountered, but when he met someone new, he was thinking first of how many votes and how much money was he looking at. That's just a fact of life in politics, whether here in Virginia or up on 'the Hill' at the U.S. Congress."

Mr. Ellis continued his remarks by saying, "So, when Connie said he represented the JLC and 23 veterans' service organizations, and those Senators saw all of those 'hats,' it must have been a terrifying moment, and they were thinking how many votes and how much money they were looking at. In a very real sense, Connie put the Assembly on notice that we are ready to do serious business and it will be in their interest to seriously consider what we have to say. Later, I got several e-mail responses from delegates and senators to whom I had sent e-mail notes and snail mail letters. The word was on the street and it was the 'hats' that got their attention. This may be a hard card to play in the future, but it worked on February 15. Both of the bills we were concerned about passed."

Mr. Ellis also said, "I think it is important for us to consider that we are running into other shoals and shallows in dealing with federal and state officials. While we must deal with reality, we also must consider the perceptions of others. Mr. Ellis added that recently:

- A delegate asked about various initiatives that the JLC has discussed, and he asked if it wasn't true that the USDVA was responsible for our veterans. I said that in the main, that was true, but the VA was dropping the ball in too many instances. The delegate then said, to my utter surprise, that perhaps 'we (the Commonwealth of Virginia) shouldn't be too quick to take up the slack because it just lets the feds off the hook!'
- In a conversation with a member of the U.S. Congress, I was pointing out how veterans had been incrementalized and how unfair the matter of just compensation

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

was being ignored. To my utter surprise, the Congressman said ‘there are many on ‘the Hill’ who think the veterans have come up here with their hat in hand one time too many!’

- I was told a DoD paper to the U.S. Congress, which was probably authored by David Chu and approved by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, said ‘the proposed cuts to the U.S.V.A. budget were not excessive since (!) veterans appear to be over compensated as it is.’

Mr. Ellis also said, “what we need to do through the JLC and our differing organizations is ensure a coordinated effort and to work with the Coalition and the NAUS PAC that is spearheading our common agenda, day-to-day, to educate and win the support of the U.S. Congress, one member at a time. Perhaps we need to revisit the whole issue of uniformed services health care – we may have made a fundamental error in agreeing to fees and co-pays for TRICARE services. Look what’s happened – some want to see to it that veterans must pay fees and co-pays for access to the U.S.V.A., based on the TRICARE model and ignoring the promises to more than one generation of those in uniform that their medical needs would be met! Maybe we need to demand fair play in treating the compensation due disabled veterans instead of agreeing to incrementalized and divide the disabled based on some bureaucrat’s schedule! The Commissioner (Jon Mangis) has asked us to get our various legislative agendas to him, so that DVS can use that information to craft its own budget needs, and I think we should respond with gusto.”

Mr. Ellis also said, “I think we need to encourage the Commonwealth and the federal government to extend tax credits to employers who lose and should rehire employees who are mobilized and serve in our nation’s uniform. Even if they hire a temporary employee during the interim, the employer is out hard cash investments and training provided the absent employee. Without some relief, beginning at the state level of taxation, employers will not long tolerate a labor force that is also a part of the reserves or National Guard. We also need to pay close attention to the analysis being developed by Richard Rinaldo and the JLC Subcommittee on States’ Veterans Benefits – if Pennsylvania and North Carolina or others find it in their interests to provide income tax exemptions for military pensions or V.A. disability compensation, in order to retain and encourage military retirees and veterans in their states’ economic development plans, perhaps Virginia should do so, too.”

Mr. Ellis ended his remarks by saying, “we should all do what we can to make sure that returning veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq do not have to endure what happened to veterans returning from Korea or Vietnam. Wherever possible, we should make sure we have a ‘Homecoming’ celebration, parade, or something for our returning troops. (The JLC’s MOPH representative noted the ‘19th Annual Massing of the Colors’ on February 20 that, in part, addressed the concern to salute our returning troops and commend them for a difficult job well done.) We hope to have a ‘Homecoming’ parade and celebration in July for our friends and neighbors returning with our hometown Army National Guard unit in Fredericksburg. Thank you for allowing me to voice my concerns and views.”

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

Mr. Ellis noted that he had provided Commissioner Mangis with a copy of the *Uniformed Services Journal* for January/February, in which the NAUS “Legislative Goals for the 109th Congress” are listed on pages 7 – 8.

Roundtable Discussion

Peter Snelling reported that he had visited the Virginia Veterans Care Center earlier in the week and he expressed concern about the closing of the canteen. Mr. Snelling said that the vending machines that were installed to replace the canteen eliminate the social interaction, and that the quality of the items in the machines is very poor. Commissioner Mangis responded that the canteen was closed because of accounting problems and theft, but that the canteen could be reopened if veterans groups in the Roanoke Valley step forward and agree to operate the canteen, preferably on a collaborative basis. Mr. Mangis said that the American Legion Post 137 in Richmond has already agreed to staff the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center canteen, once the facility is open. Pat Green promised to bring the VVCC canteen issue to the attention of the Roanoke Valley Veterans Council at its next meeting and report back to the Council. He said he personally would see that this issue is resolved and conduct fundraisers to support the project if necessary.

Mr. Green also reported that he has confirmed the availability of land that could be donated for construction of a veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia.

Everyone agreed that the JLC 2006 legislative agenda should be developed soon, so that the member VSOs may consider ratifying the JLC’s agenda at upcoming state conventions.

It was suggested that the idea of providing tax credits to employers whose employees are deployed overseas be considered as an advocacy issue at the state and federal level.

Mr. Schneider suggested that the congressional committee booklet on state veterans programs be updated and republished to provide information on benefits offered in different states. A question was raised as to whether VSOs are still required to register in each state.

Mr. O’Neill asked Mr. Combs for an update on the activities of the Veterans Service Foundation. Mr. Combs said that the Foundation’s organizational logistics are nearly complete and that it will file for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with the IRS. Mr. Combs said that the Foundation’s Trustees soon will finalize a mechanism for recognizing donors and how funds are to be allocated. The Foundation has a good accounting system in place with sub-accounts for restricted, unrestricted, and specific use funds. The next step is to organize and conduct a fund-raising campaign.

Mr. O’Neill asked Dr. Dumas if he would be willing to make a presentation at the next JLC meeting on homeless veterans and what the JLC can do to help them. Dr. Dumas agreed to do so. Mr. Jasper said Dr. Dumas might want to consult with Leon Fields at the Salem VA Medical Center who facilitates a homeless veterans program there.

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
February 23, 2005, Meeting Minutes

Dr. Dumas distributed a copy of a letter he had received from his state representative, Delegate Stephen Shannon, thanking him for his service on the Council and offering his assistance in support of JLC objectives during the General Assembly session. Dr. Dumas said the letter underscores the impact that veterans can have on legislative actions and policy decisions if they work together to achieve common goals. Dr. Dumas encouraged Council members to advocate for veterans issues with their state representatives at the district level.

Mr. Ellis encouraged JLC member organizations to sponsor parades and other events in their communities to show support for veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Everyone liked the idea of having a roundtable discussion at the end of each meeting, and agreed it should be included as an agenda item in the future.

Public Comments

Mr. McAnaw said there is inconsistency from various sources that state the number of veterans residing in Virginia, and that this situation needs to be resolved if veterans are to reach their legislative objectives. Commissioner Mangis responded that some reports use the number of veterans reported on the 2000 Census, while other reports use more recent USDVA estimates.

Anne McKinney spoke in support of the idea of a JLC "Day on the Hill." Ms. McKinney also reported on a wounded veterans project known as "Fisher House." The Fisher House project provides a place for the families of wounded veterans to stay while their loved ones are recovering from their injuries in military hospitals. Some of the housing is located in separate buildings adjacent to the medical facilities and some is on dedicated floors of the hospital itself. These facilities and units cost about \$1 – 2 million to construct, 50% of which must come from private donors. Ms. McKinney asked the Council members for their assistance with this initiative by requesting donations from their VSOs. The Paralyzed Veterans of America, which is spearheading this project, has sent letters to local VSO posts, and Ms. McKinney said she would forward a copy of the letter to Mr. Combs for distribution to the JLC.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the JLC was scheduled for May 11, 2005, at 11:00 a.m. It was agreed that the meeting would be held some where in the Hampton Roads area, with the location to be selected by the Commissioner's Office.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:30 p.m.