

**Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**March 13, 2008**

A meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) was held on Thursday March 13, 2008, at the American Legion Department of Virginia Headquarters Building, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue, Richmond.

**Members Present**

Mason Botts, *Air Force Association*  
Robert Gray, *American Ex-POWs*  
Connie O'Neill, *American Legion (1<sup>st</sup> half of meeting)*  
Jim Aucoin, *AMVETS*  
Sam Wilder, *AUSA*  
Daniel Miller, *Disabled American Veterans*  
John Dozier, *Korean War Veterans Association*  
Richard Rinaldo, *Legion of Valor*  
John C. Bonnell, Jr., *Marine Corps League*  
Norman Jasper, *Military Order of the Purple Heart*  
Wes Edwards, *MOAA*  
Bill Townsley, *MOWW*  
David Ellis, *NAUS*  
Goodwin Sacra, *Navy Seabee Veterans of America*  
John T. Jackson, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*  
Thomas Stephen, *Reserve Officers Association*  
Frank Sherman, *Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*  
Daniel Boyer, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*  
Jenny Holbert, *Women Marines Association*  
Vince Burgess, *Commissioner of Veterans Services*  
Paul Galanti, *Chairman of the Board of Veterans Services*

**Members Absent**

Thomas Snee, *Fleet Reserve Association*  
Richard Schneider, *Non-Commissioned Officers Association*  
Michala Smith, *WAVES*

**Alternates Present (representing their Veterans Service Organization)**

Dale Chapman, *American Legion (2<sup>nd</sup> half of meeting)*  
John Velleca, *Virginia National Guard Association*

## **Alternates Present (not representing their VSO)**

John Cooper, *AMVETS*

Jack Hilgers, *Legion of Valor*

Don Kaiserman, *MOAA*

David Coffield, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*

Kim DeShano, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*

## **Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present**

Bernie Henderson, *Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth*

Don Ferguson, *Office of the Attorney General*

Anne Atkins, *Department of Veterans Services*

Tasmyn Childress, *Department of Veterans Services*

Steven Combs, *Department of Veterans Services*

Martha Mead, *Department of Veterans Services*

Judy Reid, *Department of Veterans Services*

## **Others Present**

Thomas Hinton, *Senior State Liaison, DoD State Liaison Office*

John R. Clickener, *VCOC-MOAA*

Mike Coleman, Virginia National Guard Association

## **Agenda Packet**

- Agenda
- Draft Minutes of the December 19, 2007 Meeting
- Draft Minutes of the January 14, 2008 Conference at the General Assembly
- DVS Bill Tracking Matrix
- JLC Chairman's Assessment – Legislative Objectives 2008 – Lessons Learned
- Possible State Legislative Objectives for 2009 – Draft
- News Release on Town Hall Meetings – Virginia Department of Veterans Services

## **Additional Handouts**

- Virginia Veterans Service Foundation Brochure
- Key Issues – The Department of Defense/States Military Partnership
- Cover letter – Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children
- Point Paper – Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

## **Opening and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Wilder called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Rich Rinaldo led the Council in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **Roll Call of VSOs, Quorum Determination, and Oaths of Office**

Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth Bernie Henderson administered the JLC Oath of Office to new Council members Wes Edwards and Bill Townsley. Mr. Edwards and Mr. Townsley were warmly welcomed to the JLC.

Twenty of the twenty-three Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) represented on the JLC were recorded as being represented (nineteen by a primary member; one by an alternate member), the Commissioner of Veterans Services and the Chairman of the Board of Veterans Services were recorded as present, and a quorum was determined. Mr. Dale Chapman sat in for Mr. Connie O'Neill for the second half of the meeting.

## **Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Led by Chairman Wilder

Chairman Wilder asked the Council to review the draft minutes of the December 19, 2007 and January 14, 2008 meetings.

### December 19, 2007 Draft Minutes

Correction: On page two under the Alternates Present (not representing their VSO), Mr. John Cooper will be added as being present to the meeting.

A **motion** was made by Mr. Boyer, seconded by Mr. Miller, and passed unanimously, to adopt the minutes of December 19, 2007 as corrected.

### January 14, 2008 Draft Minutes

A **motion** was made by Mr. Miller, seconded by Mr. Boyer, and passed unanimously, to adopt the minutes of January 14, 2008.

## **Overview of 2008 General Assembly JLC Legislative Objectives**

Led by Steven Combs

Mr. Combs called the members attention to the DVS Bill Matrix, included in the agenda packet. He summarized the budget and legislative actions taken to date on each of the seven JLC objectives.

Mr. Combs then summarized the other military- and veteran-related bills listed on the DVS Bill Matrix, covering the budget and legislative actions taken on each. He highlighted several bills which will impact the JLC or which covered items of concern to the JLC, including:

- HB229 (Cosgrove), HB477 (Cox), SB314 (Edwards) and SB760 (Wagner). These bills add the JLC Chairman as an *ex officio* member of the Veterans Services Foundation (VSF), and add the VSF Chairman as an *ex officio* member of the JLC

- HB477 (Cox) and SB314 (Edwards). These bills add eight (8) new citizen members to the VSF. The new members will be appointed by the General Assembly
- SB580 (Edwards). This bill transfer administrative support for the Virginia War Memorial Board of Trustees from the Department of General Service to the Department of Veteran Services. As part of the transfer, the Secretary of Public Safety replaces the Secretary of Administration as an *ex officio* member of the War Memorial Board of Trustees, the Commissioner of Veterans is added as an *ex officio* member, and two additional legislative members are added
- HB1386 (Miller, J) and SB680 (Wagner). These bills relate to the Commonwealth's Service-Disabled, Veteran-Owned, Small Business (SDVOSB) Program. The bills would align state eligibility requirements with federal eligibility requirements. At present, only veterans with a 50% or greater service-connected disability rating (10% or greater if combat-related) may participate. Under the new rules, all veterans with a service-connected disability rating would be eligible to participate. Mr. Combs noted that this was a matter of concern for the JLC in 2007, and that then JLC Chairman Mason Botts had written the Governor on behalf of the JLC, urging him to align the state eligibility requirements with the federal requirements

Mr. John Cooper updated the Council on the actions taken by the 2008 General Assembly to restrict payday lending in Virginia, and specifically, to the measures related to military service members and their dependents. Payday lending was Legislative Objective 5 for the JLC during the 2007 General Assembly.

Commissioner Burgess thanked the JLC and DVS team, for all their hard work and for reporting and keeping everyone up to date with the bills and the JLC objectives. Chairman Wilder also thanked Mr. Combs for keeping everyone informed during the session. Mr. Botts added that the DVS Bill Tracking Matrix was vital in keeping the VSOs informed. Mr. Galanti stated that there was no more powerful lobbying organization in Virginia.

Mr. O'Neill told the Council that there are a few members of the American Legion who are very critical of the Veterans Service Foundation (VSF). He said that one of their main areas of concern is the per diem paid to VSF members and what they see as a lack of results. In light of this criticism, Mr. O'Neill asked what will be gained by adding additional members.

Mr. Combs answered that current Foundation members are required to be active or retired chairmen, chief executive officers, or chief financial officers for large private corporations or nonprofit organizations. He explained that new Foundation members will have to meet this requirement, and will be required to have extensive fundraising experience in the private sector.

Chairman Wilder added that he was very involved with the changes to the Foundation, including drafting bill language. He explained that the VSF and its fundraising capacity is critical to the JLC's top priority – the Wounded Warrior Mental Health Initiative. He stated that the VSF sees the JLC as the most important body in identifying and setting priorities for which private funds are needed. This is because the JLC represents 250,000 members and collectively should know

better than the VSF what the top priorities of Virginia's veterans are. Chairman Wilder stated that the JLC Legislative Objectives reflect these priorities.

Chairman Wilder provided an overview of the Wounded Warrior Mental Health Care fundraising event, held on February 28 and hosted by the Military Family Support Center and McGuire Woods Consulting. He said that the event raised \$30,000 in donations and an additional \$20,000 in pledges. He said that a second fundraising event will be held on April 29 at Virginia Military Institute.

Mr. Hilgers said that there has been a big misperception promulgated about the VSF. He said that while it is true that the Foundation has not actively solicited donations, over the past four years the VSF has received over \$80,000 in in-kind donations and has raised \$350,000. He explained that most of the funds that have been raised are designated to support the operations of the care centers and cemeteries. He added that from a starting balance of approximately \$250,000, the Veterans Services Fund has grown to over \$400,000. He said that future fundraising priorities are to support the Wounded Warrior Mental Health Care Initiative and to build the Foundation's endowment. Mr. Hilgers concluded by urging members to distribute the Foundation brochures, which he said give a brief overview of the Foundation and its future plans, and help clear up the misperceptions about the Foundation.

Mr. Rinaldo asked if a letter could be sent from the JLC to those legislators who sponsored bills in support of JLC Legislative Objectives, thanking them for their efforts. Chairman Wilder said that the issue would be discussed in greater detail later in the meeting.

## **JLC Legislative Objectives, Lessons Learned**

Led by Chairman Wilder

Chairman Wilder said that, in his humble opinion, the JLC did a fantastic job during the 2008 Legislative Session, especially given the state's financial situation. He expressed his sincere thanks to all present.

Chairman Wilder called the members' attention to the Lessons Learned summary, included in the agenda packet. He stated that he developed the summary to capture those things that worked well and those things that could be improved upon. He elaborated on the information presented in the summary.

### Legislative Timeline

Chairman Wilder noted that the time spent to develop the JLC Legislative Objectives, and in particular, the supporting position papers, was time well spent. He said he received kudos from legislators for the timeliness and completeness of the position papers. He said that in the future, there should be a JLC sponsor for each objective. The sponsor would take ownership of the objective, all the way from development of the position paper to representing the JLC at committee hearings.

Patrons Obtained for each Objective

Chairman Wilder stated that the JLC was able to get patrons for each of their top legislative objectives, and, with the exception of JLC Objective 2, identical bills were submitted in both the House and Senate.

Chairman's Report Sent to all 140 Legislators

Chairman Wilder explained that he viewed the JLC Chairman's Annual Report as an important tool to educate the General Assembly members on the JLC and its legislative objectives. He said that in addition to being sent to the Department of Veterans Services and the Board of Veterans Services, the JLC Chairman's annual report was sent to all 140 members of the General Assembly.

JLC Day at the General Assembly

Chairman Wilder said that the JLC day at the General Assembly gave the JLC visibility among the legislators, and that the JLC members received a standing ovation when the JLC was recognized during Morning Hour in the House.

Chairman Wilder thanked Jack Hilgers for organizing such a successful event.

Mr. Hilgers thanked Chairman Wilder, Mr. Martinez, Mr. Kaiserman, Mr. O'Neill, and Mr. Combs for their work in helping organize the event.

Numerous Co-Patrons signed on

Chairman Wilder stated that one of the key objectives of the JLC Day at the General Assembly is to find co-patrons for JLC legislative objectives. He pointed to the fact that the Wounded Warrior bills had 82 co-patrons. He praised Mr. Hilgers for signing up a number of co-patrons.

Mr. Miller asked if it would be helpful to have a training session in advance of the JLC Day at the General Assembly, so as to help JLC members in enlisting co-patrons. Chairman Wilder agreed this was a good idea, and suggested that the December JLC meeting would be a good opportunity for this type of training.

Excellent Support for Patrons in Committee Hearings

Chairman Wilder stressed the importance of a JLC representative being available to help legislators in committee hearings. He said that when he attended the Wounded Warrior committee hearings in the Senate, he identified himself to Senator Puller, and let her know that he was there to assist if necessary.

Chairman Wilder recognized MOAA for their support at committee hearings, in particular Mr. Edwards, Mr. Kaiserman, Mr. John Clickener, Mr. Stu Williams, and Mr. Hilgers. He also recognized the Commissioner Burgess and Ms. Martha Mead of DVS and Mr. Dave McGinnis of the Department of Mental Health.

Chairman Wilder also stressed the importance of attending sub-committee meetings, because that is where testimony is often heard.

Good ‘Turnout of Troops’ on Short Notice

Chairman Wilder noted that Delegate Terrie Suit, Chair of House General Laws, often asked that people who favored or opposed a bill to stand and be recognized. Chairman Wilder said that this was a great opportunity for the members of all the VSOs to show support for veterans bills.

Empathy and Timing for Wounded Warrior was Excellent

Chairman Wilder said that increased public awareness is needed if private funds are to be raised in support of the Wounded Warrior Mental Health Program.

Mr. O’Neill suggested that letters to the editor are effective in raising public awareness, and that he would work on a letter to the editor of the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Mr. Rinaldo added that face to face meetings with a paper’s editorial board are also very effective.

Overall Greater Support than ever for Veterans/Military

Chairman Wilder said that Delegate Kirk Cox told him that there is greater support for veterans and military issues now then ever before. He said this was echoed by Senator Walter Stosch and Delegate Brian Moran.

JLC Unity

Chairman Wilder stressed the need for JLC Unity – for all VSOs to advocate for the priorities agreed to by the Council. He noted that the JLC was most effective when the member VSOs spoke with one voice. Chairman Wilder noted that the JLC had discussed those instances when a VSO may wish to add an additional legislative objective, but only after supporting the JLC legislative objectives first.

Mr. Boyer concurred and explained how VSO staff needed to review and follow up on coordinating JLC objectives with those of the VSO before any presentation to legislators.

Mr. Bonnell suggested that each VSO appoint their legislative officer as either the primary or alternate representative to the JLC. Mr. Botts added that if the VSO legislative officer was not the primary or alternate, then at least he/she could participate in the JLC legislative development process.

Coordination with the Governor’s Policy Office

Chairman Wilder emphasized the importance of effective coordination with the Governor’s Policy Office, so that the JLC would have a clear understanding of the Governor’s position on JLC Legislative Objectives.

Revised Legislative Objectives Must Reflect Our True Priorities

Chairman Wilder stated that the revised JLC Legislative Priorities must truly reflect the JLC’s true priorities. He cited the case of a letter from Secretary of Public Safety John Marshall to a MOAA member, in which the Secretary says that TurboVet is the top legislative and budget priority. The Chairman stated that by the time the letter was written – February 29, 2008 – that

there was no budget amendment for TurboVet, and that the Wounded Warrior Mental Health Program was clearly the top JLC priority.

Chairman Wilder also cited the example of a letter from a MOAA chapter to its members, which stated that support of DVS was the top JLC priority. Chairman Wilder said that the JLC had changed the top priority from a broad statement of support for DVS to a narrow focus on TurboVet. He said the same letter listed support of the National Guard as the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority, when in fact the JLC had narrowed the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority down to the child custody issue.

Chairman Wilder said that the JLC had agreed at prior meetings that changing the order of the JLC legislative objectives would negatively impact the JLC's credibility. He said that in hindsight, he sees the need to reprioritize JLC legislative objectives. He said the legislative process is dynamic, not static, and that when the JLC reviews its legislative objectives in December, then the JLC should revise its priorities to reflect current budget and legislative reality.

Mr. Ellis suggested that the JLC not number its priorities, so that legislators would pay attention to all of the JLC objectives, not just the top three.

Mr. Hilgers suggested that the JLC form a committee to study this issue, and that the committee issue a report and recommendations at the next JLC meeting.

Ms. Holbert asked if the JLC could wait to number the priority list until after the Governor's Budget is released in December. Mr. Boyer agreed with Ms. Holbert.

Chairman Wilder said that he thought that it would be fine for the JLC to revise its priorities, and for the Council to deliver a revised priority list to the General Assembly members. He said that in his experience, legislators acted on the last thing handed to them, and that they were used to dealing with revisions.

Mr. Rinaldo suggested that all legislative objectives be listed on the JLC Legislative Objective summary, with priority objectives followed by other objectives.

#### Do Bills – Not Budget Amendments – For all Priority Objectives

Chairman Wilder said that the JLC should not rely solely on budget amendments to advance JLC priorities, because budget amendments do not carry the visibility of bills. He said all priorities should be supported by bills.

#### Focus On Key Committee Members

Chairman Wilder stated that the JLC members need to know who the key committee members are for each bill. He noted that not all legislators are the same. He said that even though a legislator might be a strong supporter of veterans issues, if he/she does not sit on a key committee, then his/her influence is lessened. Chairman Wilder noted that legislators who the JLC has never heard of can exercise great influence on subcommittees.

Chairman Wilder returned to the issue of budget amendments, noting that he thought broad statements such as “Support the Department of Veterans Services” was too broad. He said that JLC priorities needed to focus on specifics, such as TurboVet, and that there needed to be both legislation and budget amendments for these types of initiatives.

Mr. Sherman asked if there was a deadline for budget amendment submissions. Mr. Hilgers replied that budget amendment requests are due no later than the week after the legislature convenes.

Chairman Wilder added that there is also a deadline for bill submissions, and that there are limits on the number of bills legislators can submit. He noted that it was better to have a legislator submit a bill prior to the session, when they were not limited in the number of bills they could submit, than to wait until after the General Assembly convenes, when legislators are limited in the number of bills they can submit. He added that early bill submission allows for time for the General Assembly to carefully draft legislation.

Mr. Hilgers told the Council that next year legislators will be restricted in the number of bills they can submit. He said that House members will be limited to 15 bills, including pre-filing.

Mr. Miller asked if the Council could be made aware of who the key committee members are and how to contact them. Chairman Wilder said that the most effective way to reach a legislator is to be a constituent.

Mr. Combs told the Council that the DVS Bill Matrix lists the JLC and DVS lead for each bill. He said that the DVS staff is available to provide research support, to help Council members identify key committee members, and to provide other assistance as required.

Chairman Wilder asked the Council how many had used the Legislative Information System (LIS). He noted that the LIS was a valuable tool in keeping track of bills.

Mr. Cooper said that the LIS does not have a separate listing for veteran bills. Chairman Wilder said that Commissioner Burgess told him that DVS would see if there could be a separate list of veterans bills.

Mr. Sherman asked how the JLC could recognize legislators for their support of veterans issues. Chairman Wilder said he would call Delegate Cox on behalf of the JLC and thank him for his support. Chairman Wilder said that JLC member can and should send thank you letters, on JLC letter head, to their legislators. He noted that Delegates Vivian Watts and Mark Cole are also strong advocates for veterans issues and should be thanked.

Mr. O'Neill made a **motion** that the Department of Veterans Services officially recognize Delegate Kirk Cox with an appropriate certificate or other symbol to convey the thanks of the JLC. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sherman. The issue was opened for discussion. Commissioner Burgess said that the recognition should come from the JLC, not DVS. Mr. O'Neill amended his **motion** to say that the recognition should come from the JLC, but that it

should be prepared by DVS. The amended motion was seconded by Mr. Bonnell and agreed to unanimously.

**The Council took a break for lunch between 12:04pm and 12:30pm.**

**Overview of DoD State Legislative Goals**

Led by Thomas Hinton

Chairman Wilder introduced Thomas A. Hinton, Senior State Liaison, DoD State Liaison Office, and asked him to give an overview of Department of Defense (DoD) State Legislative Goals. Chairman Wilder said that the JLC may wish to consider including some of the DoD goals among its 2009 legislative objectives.

Mr. Hinton noted that he was filling in for Mr. Arthur Jackson, and distributed three documents:

- Key Issues – The Department of Defense/States Military Partnership
- Cover letter – Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children
- Point Paper – Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

Mr. Hinton said that the job of the DoD State Liaison Office is work on the issues that impact military service members – including those in the Guard and Reserve – but over which the states have authority.

Mr. Hinton commended Chairman Wilder and the Council members for their support in securing in-state tuition benefits for active duty service members stationed in Virginia.

Mr. Hinton covered the issues listed on the handout titled “Key Issues – The Department of Defense/States Military Partnership.” The issues covered were:

1. Care of the Guard and Reserve
2. Assistance to Severely Injured Service Members
3. In-State Tuition
4. Military Children During School Transitions and Deployments
5. Spouse Employment
6. Unemployment Compensation
7. Predatory Lending
8. Voting
9. Foreign Language Requirements
10. Accessible Support for Military Family

Mr. Hinton put special focus on two of the issues:

- Unemployment Compensation – he said that Virginia was the state with the largest military population that did not offer this benefit to military spouses. He estimated that 450 spouses per year are affected in Virginia. He said he has spoken with Delegate Bill Howell about this issue

- Military Children During School Transitions and Deployments – he pointed the Council members to these handouts:
  - “Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children”
  - “Point Paper – Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children”

Mr. Hinton noted that Virginia is the state with the largest active duty population that will not participate in the Interstate Compact in 2009. He estimated that the statewide costs in Virginia would be approximately \$80,000.

Mr. Rinaldo stated that he thought the DoD was cheap when it comes to unemployment compensation and military moves and that the DoD should “step up to the plate and take care of its people.” He said that he did not understand how the federal government, with a \$1 trillion defense budget, could not find the funds to take care of service members and their families. He agreed that a military move was not voluntary, but said that trying to force this issue on the states was a subterfuge on the part of DoD. He stated that the DoD should provide additional funding to help military families.

Mr. Hinton thanked the Council for its time and consideration.

## **Possible State Legislatives Objectives for 2009**

Led by Chairman Wilder

Chairman Wilder called the Council’s attention to the handout titled “Possible State Legislative Objectives for 2009.”

### Issues left over from 2008

Commissioner Wilder discussed the issues left over from 2008

1. TurboVet – additional funding may be needed
2. Wounded Warrior – additional funding and/or legislative changes may be needed
3. Tax Relief for 100% Disabled Veterans – continued to 2009
4. Tax Relief for Virginia Citizen-Soldiers – three bills were left in committee, two bills were continued to 2009
5. Credit Freeze

Chairman Wilder asked John Clickener of MOAA to provide additional information regarding the credit freeze issue, noting that Mr. Clickener had followed the issue closely during the session, attending committee hearings and preparing background papers.

Mr. Clickener noted that the bills finally passed were strongly supported by the credit industry. He said that each transaction involved in the credit process (putting a freeze on an account, lifting a freeze, etc.) had a \$10 fee. He noted that because there are three major credit agencies, the fees could be \$30 per transaction, since any or all of the credit agencies could be used. He voiced his opinion that while the fees would not likely to have a significant financial impact on the Council members, the fees could have a large financial impact on military service members, especially lower ranking service members.

Mr. Clickener reminded the Council that the JLC's objective in 2008 was for military members to place (or lift) a credit freeze without the \$10 per transaction fee.<sup>1</sup> He noted that trying to change the legislation passed in 2008 would be strongly opposed by the credit industry. He said that if the JLC wished to pursue this objective in 2009, it should attempt to build strong support in the General Assembly by signing up a large number of co-patrons.

Mr. Edwards said that the measures passed by the 2008 General Assembly revealed the strong support of the credit industry for the new measures, and the strong support the credit industry received from some members of the General Assembly. Mr. Clickener added that the new measures are also supported by the Chambers of Commerce, the Automobile Dealers Association, and the Retail Merchants Association. He concluded by saying that the opposition is not insurmountable, but asked if this was truly an objective the JLC wanted to pursue further.

Mr. Hilgers said that proponents of a credit freeze have been working for several years to enact legislation supporting a credit freeze, and that it took some "hard teeth pulling" to convince the credit industry to agree to the new measures. He added that the measures passed this year were a compromise, and that the JLC could pursue the issue further in the years to come.

#### Other

Chairman Wilder discussed the "Other" issues listed on the handout:

1. Assistance/incentives for doctors to accept TRICARE – he noted that Delegate Cole had raised this issue with him and asked if the JLC would support it
2. Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) issues – Chairman Wilder asked if the JLC should consider any BRAC-related issues
3. "Military Personnel Bill of Rights" – Chairman Wilder noted that Delegate Moran's HB1193 was left in House Finance, and asked if the JLC should revisit any of the issues raised in this bill
4. Resolution to adopt a national flag for veterans – Commissioner Burgess said that this issue had been brought before the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) Winter Conference

Chairman Wilder asked the Council if there were other issues that should be considered at this time.

#### Missing in America Project

Mr. Bonnell discussed the Missing in America Project, which concerns the cremated remains of veterans. He covered these points:

- The military burial is one way the United States honors its veterans
- The cremated remains of many veterans are "forgotten" – left unclaimed on the shelves of funeral homes and hospitals across the state. With no one to claim them, the remains have been stored, often for years
- These veterans were homeless, had no family, or were forgotten by their family

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<sup>1</sup> At the 5/14/08 meeting, the Council voted to keep the sentence as written, as it records what was said at the 3/13/08 meeting. However, the Council voted on 5/14/08 to record, in a footnote, that the JLC objective simply called for a credit freeze, not for a credit freeze without the \$10 per transaction fee.

- The goal of the Missing in America Project (MIAP) is to verify the identity of these unclaimed veteran remains, so that they can receive a proper burial
- The JLC can take the lead in changing the Code of Virginia, so that funeral homes have the legal protection to
  - Check the identity of unclaimed remains
  - Transfer the remains to a national or state veterans cemetery, so that the veterans can receive a proper military burial
- The MIAP is a national-level organization, and is working to develop national awareness
- After the approval of state legislation, and after receiving training, any veterans service organization can participate in the process to identify unclaimed veteran remains
- The MIAP website is: [www.miap.us](http://www.miap.us)

Mr. Bonnell said that he would present a position paper at the next JLC meeting so that the JLC could consider this issue.

Mr. Townsley said that there are thousands of unclaimed remains nationwide, some going back to World War I. He added that it was important that the legislation not put an undue burden on the funeral homes, or the cremated remains might start to disappear.

Mr. Bonnell said that the legislation should be crafted to protect the funeral homes and hospitals from liability. He added that it shouldn't cost the funeral homes anything for a veterans group to come in and research the identity of the unclaimed remains.

Mr. Boyer asked if there were privacy issues involved. Mr. Bonnell said he had spoken with Don Ferguson of the Office of the Attorney General about the legal and legislative issues involved, and that Mr. Ferguson would look into this.

Chairman Wilder asked Mr. Galanti if this was an issue for the Board of Veterans to examine. Mr. Galanti said that Board's Cemetery Committee is meeting in April, and that this item was on the agenda for that meeting.

Commissioner Burgess added that one of the purposes of the Town Hall meetings is to identify potential legislative objectives.

Ms. Holbert returned to the issues presented by Mr. Hinton. She said that the JLC was formed to work on veterans issues, and asked if the JLC was able to work on issues affecting the spouses and children of active duty service members, and if doing so was appropriate.

Mr. Botts said that while the JLC's charter is to work on veterans' issues, the JLC has chosen to focus its attention on non-veterans issues.

Mr. Hilgers stated that provisions of HB229 and SB760:

- Requires DVS to determine eligibility for veterans benefits
- Allows DVS to provide services to members of the Virginia Guard, Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserve who will qualify for veteran status, and their family members

Mr. Combs said that Mr. O'Neill asked him to bring a potential legislative objective to the Council's attention. Mr. O'Neill has proposed that DVS commission a study to examine the current level of services provided to homeless veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the need for and cost of additional services. The goal of the study shall be to identify the resources required to address the unique needs of homeless veterans as part of the Commonwealth's 10-year plan to end homelessness.

Mr. Combs covered the specific objectives of the study, which are to:

1. Determine the extent of homelessness among veterans in the Commonwealth of Virginia;
2. Examine the current services being provided to homeless veterans;
3. Identify best practices in services to homeless veterans;
4. Identify the needs of homeless needs that are not currently being met;
5. Recommend how the Commonwealth of Virginia, in cooperation with federal, local, and private agencies, can fill any gaps in homeless veterans services, and the related cost for such services;
6. Identify current funding opportunities that are available to serve homeless veterans, and highlight those funding opportunities that are not utilized or under utilized in the Commonwealth;
7. Recommend whether the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, in cooperation with federal, local, or private partners, should manage transitional and/or emergency housing programs for homeless veterans, and the related costs of said housing; and
8. Recommend a model or models for integrated delivery of services to homeless veterans, the appropriate agency to manage such a model or models, and the funding and funding sources required to implement such a model or models.

Mr. Combs said that Mr. O'Neill has asked that the JLC request, as one of its 2009 legislative objectives, a bill and a budget amendment directing the DVS to accomplish the study on homeless veterans.

### **Prepare for Election of New Officers**

Led by Chairman Wilder

Chairman Wilder said he has asked Mr. Botts to chair a nominating committee in order to prepare for the election of new officers at the May 14, 2008 meeting.

Mr. Botts said he has asked Mr. O'Neill and Mr. Miller to serve on the nominating committee. Mr. Botts called on JLC members to notify him by e-mail if they wish to volunteer to serve or if they wish to nominate someone to serve as an officer for 2008-2009. He also asked the members to notify him if there is some reason they can't serve. His e-mail address is [Mason.Botts@cox.net](mailto:Mason.Botts@cox.net).

Chairman Wilder and Commissioner Burgess presented Mr. Botts with a plaque for his service as the JLC Chairman for 2006-2007.

## **Open Discussion**

Led by Chairman Wilder

Mr. Cooper asked that there be a presentation at the next meeting on veterans preference in state government by Ms. Sara Wilson of the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM). He noted that he applied for seven state government jobs in the past year, but did not receive a single response. He stated that he would like to know how many veterans have been hired in state government, and what the state has done to implement the provision of the law.

Commissioner Burgess explained that state's policy on veteran preference is that veteran status is the tiebreaker between two equally qualified job applicants. He said that if two candidates were equally qualified, the veteran should get the job.

Mr. Cooper expressed his opinion that Ms. Wilson, DHRM, and the Commonwealth do not truly understand the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that veterans acquire while they are on active duty. He asked that the Commonwealth examine the KSAs of veterans to gain a better understanding of the talents veterans bring to the workforce.

## **Chairman's Report: Board of Veteran Services**

Led by BVS Chairman Paul Galanti

Mr. Galanti covered the budget actions taken during the 2008 General Assembly that relate to the TurboVet project. He stated that:

- The TurboVet project was the Governor's top priority, but that the Governor's staff didn't get the funding in the budget
- Legislators submitted budget amendment requests, but the Speaker did not allow any budget amendments
- TurboVet was "brought back from the dead" during the Conference Committee, and was partially funded at the \$100,000 level
- TurboVet was the JLC's top priority, but the JLC didn't do anything going in to the budget process because the Governor had stated it was his top priority
- That in the future, both a budget amendment and a bill should be submitted
- That he met with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs
  - The Secretary directed his staff to find ways to eliminate paperwork
  - TurboVet eliminates paperwork
  - The Secretary wants to see a live demonstration
  - The developer of TurboVet – the Stratizon Corporation – is meeting with the National Defense University as part of a study to find ways to make the DoD and the VA computer systems communicate better
- TurboVet is a quantum leap forward, and its outrageous that the funding fell through the cracks

Chairman Wilder asked if there could be a demonstration of the TurboVet system at the next JLC meeting. Mr. Galanti responded that he could deliver a PowerPoint presentation at the next JLC meeting.

## **Department of Veterans Services Initiatives**

Led by Commissioner Burgess

### Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center

Commissioner Burgess said that the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC) is now open and currently has 22 residents. He said that SBVCC has just completed the Medicaid/Medicare and VA certification inspections, and that DVS is planning a ceremony to dedicate the portraits of Colonels Sitter and Barfoot.

### Wounded Warrior Mental Health Care

Commissioner Burgess thanked Mr. Hilgers, Ms. Mead, Mr. Combs, and Chairman Wilder for their support in enacting the Wounded Warrior Mental Health Care legislation. He noted that that legislation was critically important, especially since Virginia has deployed the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest number of service members overseas in support of the Global War on Terror – over 130,000 to date. He said that the VA estimates that 38% of the service members returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan need help with mental health issues – this translates to 50,000 Virginians. He said that if you add in family members at an average of 2.5 per service member, then 177,000 Virginians will need assistance.

### Town Hall Meetings

Commissioner Burgess said that DVS and the JLC will host six town hall meetings in the month of April. He thanked Mr. Boyer and Mr. Chapman for their assistance in finding facilities to host the meetings. He encouraged JLC members to attend, and noted that Ms. Atkins would capture any key legislative points.

Mr. Chairman called for volunteers to represent the JLC at each meeting. The meetings and volunteers are:

- April 2, Dale City: Ms. Holbert
- April 8, Galax: Mr. Boyer
- April 9, Front Royal: Mr. Chapman
- April 17, Salem: Mr. Sherman and Mr. Jasper
- April 28, Richmond: Chairman Wilder
- April 30, Norfolk: Mr. Bonnell and Mr. Townsley

### Virginia is for Heroes Regional Conference

Commissioner Burgess announced that DVS will host a regional Virginia is for Heroes Conference on March 26, 2008, that the registration fee is \$45, that more information is available at [www.virginialisforheroes.org](http://www.virginiaisforheroes.org), and that the conference will be held at the Fort Monroe Officers Club. He said that the regional conference is a follow on to the conference held in Richmond in October. He concluded by saying that DVS will host additional regional conferences in the western and northern parts of the state in the months to come.

### State Budget Reductions

Commissioner Burgess announced that all state agencies are being forced to reduce their General Fund operating budgets because of the current fiscal situation. He said that DVS will not make cuts to direct service, but rather will absorb the budget cuts by not filling administrative positions.

### Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Dublin

Commissioner Burgess reported that land for the Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Dublin will be transferred from the DoD to DVS in late summer or early fall, 2008. He said a ceremony would be held to mark the transfer. He said the cemetery is expected to open in the summer of 2010.

### New Benefits Manager

Commissioner Burgess said that John Anderson is the new manager of the Benefit Services section. Mr. Anderson was previously the Eastern District Manager.

### TurboVet

Commissioner Burgess said that the National Defense University (NDU) is pursuing a \$5 million grant to develop the TurboVet system, that Virginia could be one of four pilot states, and that NDU was looking for VSOs to partner in the development of the system.

### Virginia War Memorial

Commissioner Burgess reiterated that the Virginia War Memorial will come under DVS administrative control on July 1.

### Virginia Veterans Population

Commissioner Burgess concluded his presentation by saying that the VA has revised its forecasting model, and now estimated the number of veterans in Virginia at 807,000, up from 728,000. He said that this moves Virginia from 11<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> in the nation in veterans population.

Mr. Jasper announced that in May the Military Order of Purple Heart Service Foundation will present checks totaling \$20,000 to nine veterans hospitals and care centers. He said that the SBVCC will receive a check for \$2,222.

Mr. Kaiserman made a **motion** (on behalf of Mr. Edwards), seconded by Mr. Townsley, to issue a JLC press release reaffirming JLC support for the Wounded Warrior Mental Health Program and the Turbo Vet project. He said such a press release would be critical to gaining VCOC-MOAA support, and that VCOC-MOAA could advocate for support at the national level. After discussion, it was agreed that this support should be expressed as a resolution, not a press release. All members of the JLC were in favor.

## **Preparation for next meeting**

Led by Chairman Wilder

Chairman Wilder said that the next JLC meeting will be Wednesday May 14, and that the meeting agenda will include a TurboVet presentation, an update on the Town Hall meetings, and a presentation on veterans hiring preference. Chairman Wilder asked each member to be prepared to discuss their VSOs' legislative objectives, and that those members who propose a specific objective be prepared to take the lead in developing the objective.

## **Public Comment Period**

There was no public comment.

## **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chairman Wilder called for a motion to adjourn. A **motion** was made by Mr. Botts, seconded by Mr. Boyer, and a unanimous decision was made to close the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.