

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 Miler 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 1st 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 30th 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 1st.

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 9th 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 21st 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 5th 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.