

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
Meeting Minutes
August 8, 2007

A meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) was held on Wednesday, August 8, 2007, 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*; Sam Wilder, *AUSA*; Thomas Snee, *Fleet Reserve Association*; 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*; Frank Wickersham, *MOAA* (note: Wes Edwards represented MOAA at the meeting); David Ellis, *NAUS*; R. 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*; Kenneth Smith, *Virginia National Guard Association*; Daniel Boyer, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*; Michala Smith, *WAVES*; Jenny Holbert, *Women Marine Association*; Paul Galanti, *Chairman, Board of Veterans Services*; and Vince Burgess, *Commissioner of Veterans Services*.

Members Absent

Connie O'Neill, *American Legion*; Jim Aucoin, *AMVETS*; Daniel Miller, *Disabled American Veterans*; Henry Doctor, *Homeless & Disabled Veterans*; and Richard Schneider, *Non-Commissioned Officers Association*.

Alternates Present (representing their VSO)

Dale Chapman, *American Legion*; John Cooper, *AMVETS*; David Martinez, *Disabled American Veterans*; and Wes Edwards, *MOAA*.

Other Alternates Present

Don Kaiserman, *AUSA*; Jack Hilgers, *Legion of Valor*; and Russell Fenn, *Marine Corps League*.

Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present

Steven Combs, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Anne Atkins, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Sandra Ranicki, *Administrator for SitterBarfoot Veterans Care Center*; Thad Jones, *Secretary for the Board of Veterans Services*; Jon Hatfield, *Executive Director of the Virginia War Memorial*; Don Ferguson, *Office of the Attorney General*; Eutopia Rogers, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; David Simmons, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Judy Reid, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*.

Others Present

Donna Cooper, *AMVETS Aux*; Stuart Williams, *MOAA*; and John Clickener, *MOAA*

Agenda Packet

- Meeting Agenda
- Draft Minutes of the May 16, 2007 meeting
- JLC Guiding Principles for Priority Legislative Objectives
- JLC Legislative Time Line: August-January 2007-2008
- JLC 2008 Legislative Proposals – Summary
- Point Paper – Tax-exempt Retired Military Pay – Draft (7/27/07)
- Point Paper – MOAA 3 – Provide Tax Relief for Virginia Citizen Soldiers Called to Active Duty – Draft (7/23/07)
- Tax Situation for Military Filing Virginia Income Tax
- Point Paper – MOAA 4 – Permit Virginia Resident Servicemembers to place “Freeze” on their Credit Files- Draft (7/23/07)
- Resolutions Approved at the 47th VNGA Annual Conference – 28 April 2007
 - VNGA Resolution Index
 - Resolution No. VA-1, Relating to State Tuition Assistance for Members of the Virginia National Guard
 - Resolution No. VA-2, Relating to the Youth Challenge Program
 - Resolution No. VA-3, Relating to the Virginia State Defense Force
 - Resolution No. VA-4, Relating to the State Recruitment Incentive
 - Resolution No. VA-5, Relating to State Tax Credits for Employers of National Guard Members and Self-Employed Members of the National Guard
 - Resolution No. VA-6, Relating to a State Retirement Benefit for Members of the Virginia National Guard
 - Resolution No. VA-7, Relating to a State Tax Exemption for Active Members of the Virginia National Guard
 - Resolution No. VA-8, Relating to the Qualifications of the Adjutant General
 - Resolution No. VA-9, Relating to the Payment of Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance Premiums for Members Deployed to a Combat Zone

Other Handouts

- Memorandum of Understanding for the Virginia Department Of Veterans Services and the American Legion
- Executive Order 19, Serving Virginia’s Veterans, Summary of Initiatives
- JLC Proposals from VSOs, Meeting 8 Aug 07
- JLC Position Paper Support For National Guard & Reserves – Draft
- Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center Flyer
- Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center Dedication Ceremony Committee Cost Estimates
- Virginia’s Veterans Cemeteries packet
- Families of the Wounded Fund, Inc. brochure
- Virginia Department of Veterans Services wallet brochure.

Opening and Pledge of Allegiance

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. at the American Legion Department of Virginia Headquarters Building, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue, Richmond. Mr. Frank Sherman led the Council in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

Roll Call of VSOs and Quorum Determination

Twenty of the twenty-three member Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) were recorded as being represented (16 by a primary member; 4 by an alternate member), and a quorum was determined. Ms. Smith came to the meeting later, making a total of twenty-one of the twenty-three member VSOs present (17 represented by a primary member; 4 by an alternate member).

Certificate of Appreciation

A certificate of appreciation was granted to Dale Chapman by Chairman Botts for his outstanding and lasting contributions to the JLC of Veterans Service Organizations.

Review and Approval of March 14, 2007 Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the May 16, 2007 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Wilder identified a correction on page 9 under heading **VCU Veterans Center**. Instead of “cost purposes” it should be “cross purposes.”

A **motion** was made by Norman Jasper, seconded by Thomas Stephen, and passed unanimously, to adopt the minutes with the change noted above.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center Presentation

Mr. Galanti introduced Mr. Thad Jones, who is a member to the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center Opening Ceremonies Committee and is also a member of the Board of Veterans Services. Mr. Jones said that the care center Opening Ceremony is scheduled for September 26, 2007 at 1 p.m. He stated that Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC) is a state of the art, 160-bed facility, to accommodate short and long term healthcare. He acknowledges Ms. Sandra Ranicki, SBVCC Administrator, and noted that she and her staff have promised to provide high quality, compassionate and comprehensive nursing care to Virginia’s veterans. Mr. Jones remarked that the SBVCC residents will have private rooms, be able to dine in a spacious, restaurant-style dining room, and will have available a library, canteen, game room, craft room, and snack room. He continued, noting that the SBVCC has a beautiful landscape with an enclosed courtyard and an outdoor walking path. He acknowledged the efforts of Ms. Ranicki, who is currently hiring top-notch professionals to take care of those persons who will reside at this facility. Mr. Jones declared that the SitterBarfoot Opening Ceremonies Committee needs financial support. He asked the JLC to review the cost estimate sheet, which contains a wish list of thing that are needed to make the Opening Ceremony a success. Mr. Jones requested that the members of the JLC community help the committee financially with this project. He stated that SBVCC is a beautiful building and anticipates a magnificent grand opening. In closing, Mr. Jones thanked the chairman for allowing him to make this presentation. Mr. Jones stated that all inquiries

should be directed to Ms. Anne Atkins. Ms. Atkins can be reached at 804-371-0441 and email address is anne.atkins@dvs.virginia.gov.

Mr. Galanti brought to the members attention on the cost estimate list that the American Legion has volunteered to cover the cost of 500 commemorative coins.

Chairman Botts thanked Mr. Jones for his presentation.

Chairman's Report: Board of Veterans Services

Mr. Galanti stated that the TurboVet initiative was approved unanimously by the Board of Veterans Services. Mr. Galanti said that TurboVet is an automated system for developing and filing claims for disability benefits. The test project is up and running, and the contractor is working with DVS field staff. There has been a lot of interest expressed around the country. Mr. Galanti commented he has been working on this initiative for about 10 years and finally got the Board of Veterans Services in Virginia to embrace it, and that Commissioner Burgess and the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) has gotten enthusiastically behind it. Mr. Galanti stated that the TurboVet system is like using TurboTax® to prepare your taxes, as opposed to doing them manually. This will take all the myriad of intricacies from filing claims and pull them right out of the Title 38 CFR code. He noted that TurboVet would put all of you information in the system, just like TurboTax®, and you would never have to enter it again.

Chairman Botts thanked Mr. Galanti for the presentation of his report.

Department of Veterans Services Initiatives

Commissioner Burgess wanted the members to recognize some of the staff members that are now officially with Department of Veterans Services. Anne Atkins was assigned to DVS from the Department of Motor Vehicles for the last 13-14 months. In July she became an employee of the department. Sandra Ranicki is the Administrator for the SBVCC, and Commissioner Burgess noted that she has been doing an outstanding job. DVS IT Manager David Simmons has a new assistant. Mr. Simmons introduced Judith Reid, who will be handling the audio functions for board meetings. He noted that Ms. Reid is a former Marine, a retired federal employee with 25 years of service, and has fairly extensive experience both in the IT field and in working with veterans organizations associated with serving veterans. Mr. Simmons then said that she will also be involved with technical support with such things as TurboVet, getting the SBVCC facility up and running, and other projects.

Commissioner Burgess noted that the official opening of the SBVCC will be on September 26, 2007 at 1 p.m. The Governor will be at the ceremony. Commissioner Burgess encouraged the JLC members to get the word out to their organizations about the ceremony.

Commissioner Burgess stated that on August 14, 2007, the Governor will visit the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke as part of Cabinet Community Day. He is going to spend about an hour to an hour and a half at the VVCC with his cabinet. A brief presentation on EO19 and TurboVet will be given by Mr. Burgess.

Commissioner Burgess next noted that on October 17, 2007, a one-day conference will be held at the Louis Ginter Botanical Gardens in Richmond. Commissioner Burgess stated that the purpose of this conference is to raise awareness and to look at what is need to expand the services to the families and the servicemen and women returning from service in the Global War on Terrorism.

Commissioner Burgess continued, saying that one of the things that DVS is doing in the area of providing mental health services to our veterans and their spouses, as well as their families, is looking at how we can better partner with the community mental health centers in the Commonwealth. He stated that DVS is in the process of developing a series of pilots with several Community Service Boards in the Commonwealth, to link them to the VA medical centers in Virginia. The idea is to provide a safety net and an extended array of services for service members, especially those that are in the Guard and Reserve and individuals that live in rural parts of the Commonwealth where services are not readily available. Commissioner Burgess stated that the Commonwealth has a mental health system that can provide these services to those individuals if Virginia can develop a good working relationship with the VA medical centers. DVS is working with the VA's Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) 5 and 6 to develop this. Commissioner Burgess stated that DVS is starting with pilot projects but is looking at this going statewide and maybe looking to seek funding through the state budget process.

Commissioner Burgess remarked that DVS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the American Legion. Mr. Chapman and Mr. Burgess have been working on this for the last couple of months. DVS is also trying to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Mr. Boyer and the VFW. Mr. Burgess passed around the Memorandum and asked the other members of the JLC if they would be interested in doing the same with DVS. Commissioner Burgess stated that this is something that puts the exclamation point at the end of the sentence as to the importance of partnerships and how we value and support each other.

Commissioner Burgess said that DVS is in the process of building the budget request for the next biennium, and noted that Steven Combs was leading this effort. Commissioner Burgess stated that during the budget development process, DVS is limited on the amount of information it can publicly discuss, as many of the draft budget documents are part of the Governor's Confidential Working Papers.

Commissioner Burgess brought to the member's attention an article in the Richmond Times-Dispatch about going back to school after military service that mentioned DVS and its State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and Training. He stated that this is the type of exposure that we need more of, and that Ms. Atkins has been very successful at getting information like this in the paper. Also he stated that articles about Virginia's veterans cemeteries had appeared in several newspapers. Commissioner Burgess stated that DVS is going to continue getting information out to the media and getting the word out about what services DVS provides.

Commissioner Burgess noted that a meeting will be held on August 15, 2007 between representatives of the JLC, Board of Veterans Services, Virginia Citizen-Soldier Support Council (VCSSC), and Virginia Military Advisory Council (VMAC). He said he would take what comes

out of today's JLC meeting, what is being developed by the VMAC, what is being developed by the VCSSC, the Board of Veterans Services, and DVS, and combine them into one package that will be sent to the Governor.

He concluded by saying that DVS is continuing to move forward for the cemetery in Dublin and hopes to have the land transfer complete in late winter or early spring.

Chairman Botts thanked Commissioner Burgess for his report.

Joint Leadership Council (JLC) 2008 Legislative Agenda

Chairman Botts stated that the main focus of today's meeting was to gather a list of legislative items in preparation for the 2008 General Assembly session, and in preparation for the August 15, 2007 meeting with the other military/veterans groups. Chairman Botts stated that Mr. Wilder did a marvelous job last year as a Chairman of the Legislative Group and that this year he is doing the same thing – pulling together the specific things that the JLC members gave him as legislative issues. He noted that there were about 15 to 20 issues at this point. Chairman Botts stated that the members needed to narrow those items down to the top 5 to 7 issues in the final agenda.

JLC Guiding Principles for Priority Legislative Objectives

Mr. Wilder brought to the member's attention the handout "JLC Guiding Principles for Priority Legislative Objectives." Mr. Wilder stated that prioritizing is the difficult part. He said that it was nice to have a whole bunch of issues that the members would like to see happen, but that every legislator that he has ever been to has always said to boil it down to what you really, really, really want. Mr. Wilder paraphrased what Governor Mark Warner had told him several years ago, which was "if we (the VSOs) all would get on the same sheet of music, we the veterans would be the most powerful political force in the state." Mr. Wilder stated that the members need to all agree on what those issues are. Mr. Wilder stated the need for the JLC to prioritize the issues according to what vets need to have rather than what would be nice to have.

Mr. Wilder stated that the JLC needed to be responsible and realistic – i.e. that the JLC shouldn't ask for the moon. An incremental approach is a valid approach that can be used. Mr. Wilder gave the idea of the in-state tuition for military service members as an incremental approach which took two years to get legislation through. One year the benefit was provided for dependents, and the next year for the service members themselves.

Mr. Wilder talked about serving our constituents and to remember who we are really serving and that is our veterans and our military community. It is not everyone in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Wilder stated that when the JLC members articulate their objectives at today's meeting, they need to be specific enough and clear enough so that their fellow JLC members can understand it, and so that their fellow JLC members can articulate the objectives to legislators.

Mr. Wilder stated that when the JLC adopted an issue as a priority legislative objective, the members ought to agree at that point which Veteran Service Organization is going to take responsibility for being the sponsor. The responsible VSO should research an issue, get the facts

of the issue, and get that to everybody in the form of a position paper. Mr. Wilders stated that the position paper is really critical to keeping everyone all on the same sheet of music.

The final point Mr. Wilder made was to advocate. The members of the JLC must go out and advocate for the JLC legislative objectives, which means to go out and visit legislators and convince them about the JLC legislative agenda. He said that the best way to do this is schedule an appointment with the legislators. The second best way to advocate is personally meet with the legislator's legislative assistant to discuss the JLC objectives. Third best way to advocate is to send a letter with the position papers attached.

Don Kaiserman suggested that the JLC should give priority to those objectives with the best chance to gain support of the elected officials. Also, Chairman Botts suggested that if the members are not comfortable talking to a legislator, then other members could help by accompanying the member for support.

JLC Legislative Time Line August through January 2007-2008

Mr. Wilder went over the JLC Legislative Time Line. He stated the VCSSC Legislative Committee would meet on August 14, 2007. The joint military/veterans meeting will be August 15, 2007, attended by representatives from the Board of Veterans Services, the Joint Leadership Council, the VCSSC, and the VMAC. These groups will all sit down and prepare one list of legislative objectives that will go to the Governor and the Policy Office. The Board of Veterans Service Meeting will be held September 10, 2007. The Veterans Services Foundation meeting will be held September 13, 2007, which is an opportunity to let that group know what the JLC is doing, so that perhaps they can help in raising private funding for issues that the JLC considers important. The JLC will meet next on October 10, 2007 to review where the JLC is regarding the legislative agenda, what the JLC has done and who's done what. He said that in August through December, the JLC members will advocate to legislators and convince them about their legislative agenda. At the December 20, 2007 JLC Meeting, the members will discuss where everything sits at this point and time. He said there may be a need for some final tactical corrections on issues, and that the JLC would go from there. The planning for the first JLC Storming of the Hill event is underway, which will give another opportunity to speak with legislators and also to hear from other legislators who will come to speak to JLC members.

The JLC recessed for lunch at 11:58.

Chairman Botts called the meeting back to order at 12:15 p.m.

JLC Proposals from VSOs

The following are the list of proposals that the JLC representatives submitted for consideration as priority legislative objectives:

1. Support DVS Strategic Goals and Objectives outlined in EO19 Report 30 April 07 (MOAA, AUSA, AMVETS)
2. Wounded Warrior Mental Health Program (AUSA, MOAA)
3. National Guard (AUSA, MOAA, VFW, VNGA)

4. Tax relief for Virginia citizen soldiers called to active duty (MOAA, Legion of Valor)
5. Permit Virginia Resident Service members to place a freeze on their credit file (MOAA, Marine Corps League)
6. Tax relief for 100% disabled soldiers (AUSA, MOAA)
7. Additional funds for Virginia War Memorial (VFW)
8. Defer debts for wounded in combat (AFA)
9. Defer reservists debt caused by income loss (AFA)
10. Veterans Homeless Programs (AMVETS)
11. A valid Virginia Driver's license is automatically extended when personnel are on active military duty (Legion of Valor)
12. Exempt military retired pay from state tax (AFA)
13. Pay Day Loans (AMVETS)
14. Other proposals:
 - NAUS (request this to be a support item vs. a priority item): Ask the Commonwealth of Virginia to follow the federal rules that protects those who work for the federal government.
 - American Legion: Ask that the General Assembly pass legislation providing for short-term loans to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to provide for the additional 80-beds for the SBVCC and construction. A **motion** was made by Mr. Wilder, seconded by Mr. Martinez, and passed unanimously to approach this as a budget amendment but not necessarily be one of the top priority objectives.
 - VNGA: Support VNGA Proposals 5 – 9.

Each issue was discussed in detail, with the JLC representative who had proposed the objective taking the lead in explaining the issue to the other members. The members agreed that while each objective had merit and should be supported, only certain objectives should go forward as top JLC priorities. In that spirit, the JLC narrowed the list to seven priority objectives. They are as follows:

1. Support DVS Strategic Goals and Objectives outlined in EO19 Report 30 April 07
2. Wounded Warrior Mental Health Program
3. National Guard
4. Tax relief for Virginia citizen soldiers called to active duty
5. Permit Virginia resident service members to place a freeze on their credit file
6. Tax relief for 100% disabled veterans
7. Additional funds for Virginia War Memorial

Next, the members voted to put the seven lists of objectives in priority order. The priority order is:

1. Support DVS Strategic Goals and Objectives outlined in EO19 Report 30 April 07
2. National Guard
3. Wounded Warrior Mental Health Program
4. Additional funds for Virginia War Memorial
5. Tax relief for 100% disabled veterans
6. Tax relief for Virginia citizen soldiers called to active duty
7. Permit Virginia resident service members to place a freeze on their credit file

Finally, a VSO was assigned to take the lead in developing a position paper for each of the legislative objectives. Lead VSOs are:

- MOAA – Priorities 1, 6, and 7
- AUSA – Priorities 2, 3, and 5
- VFW – Priority 4

The members set a target completion date of August 31 for all positions papers.

Public Comment Period

There was no public comment.

New Business

Chairman Botts stated that name tags would be created for those who do not have them.

Election of New Officers

Chairman Botts stated that Frank Wickersham was the Chairman of the Nominating Committee and that the Nominating Committee came forward with a really good slate of candidates for Chairman and Vice Chairman. Sam Wilder was the nominee for Chairman, and Dan Boyer was the nominee for Vice Chairman. The slate of candidates was placed officially before the group. A **motion** to accept the slate of officers was solicited by Chairman Botts, and Mr. Edwards so moved. Mr. Ellis seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Botts thanked Mr. Wilder and Mr. Boyer for agreeing to serve in these positions. Chairman Botts thanked everyone for their support and participation while serving as Chairman.

Mr. Wilder told the members that they have come a long way as a group. Mr. Wilder stated that everyone has done a good job. He thanked everyone and stated he will do his best as Chairman of the JLC.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:09 p.m.