

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2005

A meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) was held on Wednesday, September 14, 2005, at the General Assembly Building – 5 West Conference Room in Richmond.

Members Present

John Bonnell, *Marine Corps League*; Mason Botts, *Air Force Association*; David Ellis, *NAUS*; Pat Green, *Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*; John Jackson, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*; Norman Jasper, *Military Order of the Purple Heart*; James Jones, *Korean War Veterans Association*; Jon Mangis, *Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services*; Daniel Miller, *Disabled American Veterans*; Tom Stephen, Jr., *Reserve Officers Association*; Frank Wickersham, *MOAA*; and Sam Wilder, *Association of the United States Army*.

Late Arrivals

Jim Aucoin, *AMVETS*; Richard Schneider, *Non-Commissioned Officers Association*

Members Absent

John Anderson, *Chairman, Board of Veterans Services*; George Dumas, *Homeless and Disabled Veterans*; John Dunleavy, *Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge*; Paul Fink, *U. S. Navy Cruiser Sailors Association*; Robert Gray, *American Ex-Prisoners of War*; Connie O'Neill, *American Legion*; Thomas Snee, *Fleet Reserve*; Richard Rinaldo, *Legion of Valor of the U. S., Inc.*; R. Goodwin Sacra, *Navy Seabee Veterans of America*; and Peter Snelling, *Veterans of Foreign Wars Association*.

Others Present

Delegate Kirk Cox; Bert Boyd, Deputy Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Roz Trent, Program Administrative Specialist III, Virginia Department of Veterans Services; Don Ferguson, Office of the Attorney General; Genevieve Oberski and Naim Mosby, Hunter Homes McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Materials Distributed

Meeting Agenda; draft Minutes of the July 13, 2005, meeting; JLC Membership Listing/Terms of Office; Department of Veterans Services Benefit Services Section Staff Levels; JLC 2006 Legislative Agenda; Resolution in Support of Fisher House at McGuire VA Medical Center

Opening and Pledge of Allegiance

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. at the General Assembly Building, Fifth Floor West Conference Room. Norman Jasper led the Council in reciting the pledge of allegiance to the American Flag and in prayer.

Roll Call of VSOs and Quorum Determination

The roll was called. Eleven of twenty-two voting members were recorded as present. It was determined that a quorum of the Council (12 of 22 voting members) was not present. It should be noted that at that time, the Chairman believed that 13 of the 22 voting members were required for a quorum, instead of just 12 of 22. Accordingly, Chairman Wickersham determined that the meeting would proceed in anticipation of other members' arrival, but that no issues would be voted on until a quorum was achieved.

Introduction of Guests

Chairman Wickersham introduced and welcomed Don Ferguson, Office of the Attorney General, who provides legal counsel to the JLC. He also stated that Delegate Kirk Cox would be addressing the Council on its 2006 legislative agenda and would be arriving around 12:00 noon. Lastly, Chairman Wickersham introduced and welcomed Genevieve Oberski, with the Hunter Homes McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center (McGuire VAMC), who would give a presentation to the JLC on the Fisher House Project to be built on the grounds of the McGuire VAMC in Richmond.

While awaiting the arrival of other JLC members, Chairman Wickersham requested Ms. Oberski to proceed with the Fisher House presentation. Ms. Oberski introduced Naim Mosby, project manager, who had been instrumental in developing the presentation and distributed informational packets. In summary, the presentation contained the following information:

Background information on the McGuire VAMC:

- Provides health care to 41,000 veterans and active duty military persons
- Provides specialty services: Cardiac Transplant Program; Spinal Cord Injury; Parkinson's Disease; Geriatric Center of Excellence in the VA healthcare system; and the Polytraumatic (Traumatic Brain Injury) Program
- Provides support for patients and families from all over the country and frequently treats patients whose families need overnight lodging.
 - refers 1,100 persons annually to the Hospitality House in downtown Richmond, at a cost of \$10 per night and is available dependant upon space, or
 - hotels in the area at a cost of \$70 per night

McGuire VAMC Fisher House Project:

- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), Congress, and the Fisher House Foundation recognize the need for a Fisher House at the McGuire VAMC
- The Fisher House is a home-away-from-home, similar to the Ronald McDonald House
- Long-term operation of the Fisher House will be the responsibility of the McGuire VAMC in collaboration with veterans service organization support, other community volunteers, the Fisher House Foundation, and the USDVA
- Fisher Houses are constructed by the Fisher House Foundation, then donated to the USDVA
- Fisher Houses provides support, respite and lodging for families of patients, both active duty and veterans, being treated at military or USDVA medical centers

- The Fisher House Foundation would match on a one-to-one basis the community donations to fund the \$3 million project
- Fundraising efforts are to begin in the fall of 2005
- Groundbreaking is projected in the spring of 2006
- Dedication of completed Fisher House in 2007

Discussion regarding the Fisher House project was entertained following the presentation. Chairman Wickersham questioned how much of the \$3 million project would the Fisher House Foundation fund. Ms. Oberski responded that the Foundation would provide half the funding. Commissioner Mangis referenced a telephone conversation he had with Ms. Oberski regarding a meeting that had been held with the Governor, on behalf of veterans service organizations, wherein a Resolution was presented to support a Fisher House at the McGuire VAMC. During the telephone conversation, the Ms. Oberski had questioned its ability to accept state money as part of the community effort towards the \$1½ million in community support (matching funds) required for project completion. Ms. Oberski clarified that the McGuire VAMC could not accept the funds, as it does not have 501(c) (3) status; however, she explained that the Fisher House Foundation could accept the funds, as long as the money goes from the state to the Fisher House Foundation in the name of construction for the Fisher House in Richmond. Ms. Oberski stated that she would communicate this to the Foundation, should this occur.

Mr. Wilder stated that many of his colleagues in other organizations have raised a significant amount of money towards assisting with lodging, etc. until the Fisher House is built and asked for the name of a contact person who would be able to respond to questions regarding this effort. Ms. Oberski responded that until the Fisher House is built, the McGuire VAMC could take donations towards providing lodging, meals, transportation support, etc. through a federal “general post fund.” The fund is managed by Janet Langhorne, Chief of Voluntary Services.

Donations may be made to the Fisher House Foundation online at www.fisherhouse.org or by mail, and should be designated for the McGuire VAMC Fisher House construction. She asked that the McGuire VAMC be notified when donations are given to assist them in making acknowledgements and keeping an accurate account of all donations.

It is planned that the Fisher House will be constructed in close proximity to the new Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center.

Review and Approval of July 13, 2005 Meeting Minutes

With the arrival of Mr. Schneider, *Non Commissioned Officers Association*, the number of Council members in attendance increased to twelve (12). Though this was enough for a quorum (12 of 22 voting members), it was believed at the time that 13 of 22 voting members were required, and hence that there were still not enough for a quorum. Assistant Attorney General (AAG) Don Ferguson advised that no voting action could take place until a quorum was present.

Chairman Wickersham then asked if there were any comments, phrases, or recommendations to the minutes of the July 13th meeting, as written.

Mason Botts commented that two Resolutions were introduced at the last meeting, one of which had been omitted from the minutes. The first dealt with tuition, which was mentioned. However, the second resolution dealing with tax relief for retirees and the military, wherein government and military retirees were not allowed to pay their health insurance premiums with pre-tax dollars, had been omitted.

Chairman Wickersham reiterated that this was not a discussion item, simply a question to the minutes. There were no other recommended changes.

Unfinished Business

Since it was believed that there was no quorum present, Chairman Wickersham asked Vice Chairman Sam Wilder to review the Guard and Reserve issue. Mr. Wilder stated that at the last JLC meeting a Resolution was submitted to “Strengthen Virginia National Guard and Reserve.” It was discussed whether the Guard and Reserve was an appropriate issue for the JLC to undertake, however, it was agreed that this would be a JLC legislative agenda item. However, then-Chairman Connie O’Neill had stated at the last meeting that it would be an appropriate issue to discuss with the Governor. Mr. Wilder stated that he, Chairman Wickersham, Commissioner Mangis and other representatives from the Richmond Area Chapter of MOAA had met with the Governor and this was one of the major issues discussed. He stated that it was clear that Governor Warner was very appreciative of the JLC addressing the issue, whether or not it was not originally designed as a part of the JLC Constitution. The Governor suggested that the group attend the Citizen Soldier Support Council meeting. Bill Leighty, Governor’s Chief of Staff, made contact with the Council, and Mr. Wilder and Chairman Wickersham are scheduled to attend their October meeting to discuss this issue.

Mr. Wilder stated that as of now, the JLC is somewhat hampered in advocating the Guard and Reserve issue because the Virginia National Guard Association has not appointed a replacement for Ronald Shamblin, who resigned in May, and since the JLC has no representation/input from the Guard. He has contacted the Adjutant General of the Virginia National Guard, Major General Claude Williams. Delegate Cox had previously met with General Williams, and the National Guard stated that they were not ready to discuss legislative objectives at this time. However, the Chief of Recruiting, Colonel Harris, did attend the July meeting of MOAA’s Virginia Council of Chapters and gave a briefing on recruiting.

Chairman Wickersham had requested that the Resolution be made more specific. Mr. Wilder distributed a “*Revised Virginia National Guard Resolution.*” He stated that the National Guard is an important issue for both the state and the country. He stated that this is the #1 objective for MOAA, and that the #2 objective is strengthening the National Guard and Reserve at the National Level. He has scheduled meetings with Congressman on this issue. The Revised resolution read as follows:

**Resolution of the Joint Leadership Council
to Strengthen Virginia's National Guard and Reserve**

Whereas, more than 350,000 members of the National Guard and Reserve Forces have been mobilized on lengthy call-ups since September 11th.

Whereas, National Guardsmen and reserve members can now expect multiple, lengthy activations over the course of a career and Governor Warner has said, "They have gone from being citizen soldiers to soldier citizens," and

Whereas, these frequent conditions are exacting hardships on guardsmen, reserve members and their families to an unprecedented degree, and are expected to continue for years, and

Whereas, Virginia's National Guard and Reserve Forces are experiencing serious recruiting and retention problems, with the Virginia National Guard at only 90% of authorized strength, and

Whereas, the strength of the Virginia National Guard and Reserve Forces are vital to the nation's national security, homeland defense, and protection of the Commonwealth during times of natural disasters, and

Whereas, the strength and vitality of the National Guard and Reserve Component must be a concern not only of the federal government, but also of the state government,

Resolved, that the JLC support and advocate the strengthening of Virginia's National Guard and Reserve as a top priority for both the executive and legislative branches of the government of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Resolved, that the JLC support and advocate specific objectives for the Commonwealth that accomplish the goal of a strengthened National Guard and Reserve, in particular to improve recruiting and retention. These specific objectives may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased state funding to double the size of the current recruiting force to at least 400, implement "unit recruiting" by recently returned combat veterans in their local areas, create a new statewide TV advertisement aimed specifically at "influencers," task and fund the Virginia War Memorial to add a video of the War on Terrorism and send to the high schools.
- Provide state tax credits and other incentives for employers to cover pay off-sets when their employees are mobilized

- Assist employers by providing monetary subsidies to continue health benefits for families when mobilized in those cases where TRICARE RESERVE SELECT is not effective
- Create and fund 3 family support centers in Central Virginia, Northern Virginia, and Hampton Roads equipped for video conferencing, e-mail, with financial support advisors.
- Improve state coordination with DOD's National Committee for Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve by increasing training on USERRA for public and private employers – in particular small businesses.

Chairman Wickersham paused to ask the Secretary if a quorum was present. With the arrival of Jim Aucoin, *AMVETS*, a quorum was achieved. Chairman Wickersham stated that the Revised Resolution had not been included in the legislative agenda and opened for discussion. He called for any changes to the Resolution.

Pat Green made a motion that the JLC accept the Revised Resolution as written and then proceed to discussion. The motion was seconded.

Dan Miller stated that although he supported the concept, he felt that the JLC was the wrong forum to address the National Guard and Reserve issues based on the document given to AAG Don Ferguson in which federal legislation defines a "veteran" as someone who has previously served in the United States military without being dishonorably discharged. Mason Botts stated that the National Guard and Reserve would fall under this definition based on the fact that anyone currently serving is very likely to be a veteran, and would not be so if he/she had been dishonorably discharged. In this manner, the JLC would be extending the definition to the veterans of the future in addition the present veterans. Mr. Wilder stated that the definition should not be too narrow.

Chairman Wickersham asked for legal counsel. AAG Don Ferguson elaborated on the purpose of the JLC, referencing the enabling statute found in §2.2-2681 which gives information on the membership, terms, chairman, quorum and compensation. In addition, §2.2-2681 outlines the powers and duties of the JLC, all of which reference the term "veteran." He stated that the congressional definition of a "veteran" does not include active duty members, and the term "veteran" is not defined in the enabling legislation. He stated that JLC has a charter to do certain things, and it would be his opinion that the Council should address those specific things it is chartered to do before it takes on additional responsibilities. Further discussion ensued.

David Ellis suggested an amendment to bullet #3 of the Resolution. He stated that it should read as follows:

Assist employers by providing monetary subsidies to continue health benefits for families.
~~when mobilized in those cases where TRICARE RESERVE SELECT is not effective~~

There were no additional amendments to the Resolution.

Tom Stephen had questions regarding bullet #1 which referenced increasing the size of the recruiting force. He asked if the National Guard could increase their end strengths to meet this requirement or would it be taken from the current end strength level. Mr. Wilder responded that he had asked the Chief of Staff of the National Guard if the State could fund the increase, but he was unsure. Mr. Miller stated that it will cost the state a sizeable sum of money, and inquired if this will take away from other veteran-related issues that the JLC can support.

Mr. Wilder stated that the JLC needs to prioritize its issues. Jon Mangis stated that he felt if it came to a question of money, veterans issues will take priority over anything regarding active duty and the National Guard. Mr. Wilder stated that he would like the National Guard and Reserve to be included in the JLC priorities.

Chairman Wickersham stated that based on discussion, the National Guard and Reserve issue is an important one, and there were member organizations in the body that represent the Guard and the Reserve, as well as other member organizations in the body who had brought this issue as a priority. As noted by Mr. Wilder, the JLC has no representation from the Virginia National Guard Association, and the National Guard has its own Resolutions and legislative process. He stated that the JLC may find itself awkwardly too far in front of the normal course of action of the National Guard. Although noted that the Governor is very supportive of this issue, there are ramifications to consider. He called for a motion to accept the Resolution, as amended.

A motion was made to adopt the amendment to the Resolution, bullet #3 to read as follows:

Assist employers by providing monetary subsidies to continue health benefits for families.

The motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

A roll call vote was then taken to include the National Guard Reserve in the 2006 JLC legislative agenda. There were 13-yeyes; 0-nays.

Mr. Green brought forward two items:

- In regards to the canteen at the Virginia Veterans Care Center, he stated that progress has been made on having a local veterans service organization (or group of VSOs) operate a canteen, but there were small complications concerning the Department of Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). He, Bert Boyd, Frank Powell and others involved at the Veterans Care Center will meet on Thursday, September 22nd to resolve the issues. Once issues are resolved, it will set the precedence for all veterans care centers to be built in the future in the Commonwealth of Virginia. There will be a contract at any post wherein anyone desiring to take over the management of the veterans care center canteen will be able to do so in conjunction with DBVI. Questions were entertained.

Mr. Green explained that there is a contract between the Commonwealth of Virginia and DBVI stipulating that the blind will manage the vending machines in all state government buildings. A meeting was held with representatives explaining the operation of the canteen before the Veterans Care Center became state-operated. The vending machines will remain, but relocated to a better location for the veterans.

- Secondly, Mr. Green discussed the cemetery in southwest Virginia. Pulaski was identified as a possible location, given its central location in SW Virginia. Mr. Green stated that he had initially encountered problems in securing donated land from the Radford Army Ammunition Plant (RAAP), and that RAAP had reneged on the land that was originally promised to build the cemetery. He said that he then solicited the assistance of federal legislators to write letters to the Department of the Army asking why this was done, as well as soliciting the assistance of state legislators to bring this issue up in the next General Assembly session. After Mr. Green's information papers were reviewed, it was agreed that there is no cemetery available for veterans in southwest Virginia, and that the area had been identified as one of the places in the United States that is a #1 priority for a cemetery. It was verbally stated that any grant applications that the Commonwealth of Virginia sent forward would be accepted, as there is already money set aside to build a cemetery.

In summary, 91 acres of land is available for donation. Of that, 24 acres cannot be used at present; however, the federal government has agreed to clean up the land for future use. A meeting has been scheduled on September 21st to meet with the RAAP Commander and the coordinator from Alliant Techsystems, Inc. to further discuss this issue.

Following Mr. Green's report, Chairman Wickersham acknowledged that because there was a quorum, the minutes of the March 9th meeting needed to be approved. A motion was made by Mr. Botts that the minutes be approved with the suggested amendment discussed. Mr. Miller seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

New Business.

Mr. Green proposed a change to JLC Constitution that was passed in 2005 to address the quorum issue. Per the Constitution any changes must be proposed 30 days in advance and voted on at the following meeting. He confirmed that Commissioner Mangis had forwarded a copy of the proposed change to all members that had been appointed by the Governor.

The proposed change is as follows:

ART III: C.2. REF ALTERNATES

OMIT: ART III C.2. (and Alternates) and ADD the following:

The Organizational Representative will be appointed by the Governor of the State of Virginia. The Alternate will be appointed by the President of each member organization and must attend at least one JLC meeting each year with or without carrying a proxy vote of the appointed member. A written Proxy signed by the

State President of the member organization must be presented at the JLC meeting for the Alternate to be able to vote at that meeting.

This change is within the following: ART III, B & C; ART A, 1, 2, 3

Mr. Green said that he believed that this change will ensure that there will be a quorum at each meeting. It was noted that the written proxy signed by the State VSO President must be presented each time an alternate attends a meeting. This will ensure that VSO Presidents become involved with the JLC. Discussion followed.

Chairman Wickersham stated that there would be no vote taken on this issue, and it will be tabled until the next meeting. He sought advice from AAG Don Ferguson regarding ways to address the quorum issue. AAG Ferguson stated that there are only two ways to resolve this issue. Both methods involve changing the enabling statute to read “*a representative may select a designee to sit in on a meeting in his/her absence as a proxy vote.*” The enabling statute provides that the Governor appoints the representative from each qualifying organization. It does not say that the Governor appoints a representative and an alternate, nor does it give the representative authority to designate an alternate.

Chairman Wickersham stated that a formal review committee would be established for the Constitution and By-Laws. Members are as follows: Chairman Wickersham, Mason Botts, David Ellis, Pat Green, and Dan Miller. The committee will work to effect the change to the Constitution.

Commissioner’s Update

Commissioner Mangis reported as follows:

Benefits

During the last two legislative sessions, a number of positions were approved. The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) will have filled all authorized positions by the end of October. Negotiations for office space in Fairfax and Alexandria are taking place. The northern Virginia offices will be located with Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) offices. This is an excellent program to feed information back/forth, especially when dealing with disabled vets.

A Benefits Services Section Staff Level spreadsheet is included in the agenda packets. The spreadsheet denoted that there were full time offices in Tidewater and Portsmouth; however, these are itinerant points, **NOT** full-time offices as shown.

The Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC)

- The USDVA deeded the SBVCC property on July 4, 2005 and final approval of the grant was received on July 30th. The Office of the Attorney General was heavily involved in negotiations.

- Due to the increased costs of construction since the date of the grant, problems have incurred regarding the ground breaking. The contractor is trying to hold his sub-contractors to original bids. Equipment will be on-site the beginning of next week.
- In order for construction of the SBVCC to begin, the Director of the McGuire VAMC requested that the walking trail be replaced. This was a result of a verbal agreement that had been made a number of years ago between the then Director of the McGuire VAMC and the then Care Center Board of Trustees. The agreement was that if the McGuire VAMC would transfer up to 20 acres of land on their reservation for construction of a veterans care center, the Commonwealth would build a new veterans care center on their property and would, in turn, replace the existing walking trail (which was on the proposed construction site) with a walking trail on another site on the VAMC grounds.
- However, there were no funds in the construction budget to do so. Commissioner Mangis contacted the VA National Guard (VANG) and the Governor's Office for assistance, and the VANG has agreed to construct the replacement trail. Work will begin on October 1, the beginning of the new Federal Fiscal Year. The VANG will cut the trail approximate $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile and place gravel, but has no capability to provide the asphalt. The VANG also needs funds to pay for the gravel and for the diesel fuel that will be consumed on the project. Commissioner Mangis is working with VDOT, through the Governors Office, to provide the asphalt and gravel. VDOT is now working with the National Guard. The new walking trail should be completed by mid to late October.
- A date for the ground breaking ceremony has not yet been selected. Schedules between the Governor and USDVA officials are being coordinated. Once a date is selected, JLC members will receive invitations. Commissioner Mangis stated that if JLC members desired, he would schedule the architects to give a description of what the facility will look like. It will have 160 skilled nursing beds; the domiciliary beds will be done at a later date. The state has already appropriated money during the last General Assembly session, and the federal grant already been applied for.

Virginia Veterans Care Center

- Renovation at the Virginia Veterans Care Center is underway. A new storage building, new carpeting and laundry will be replaced.
- As already reported by Pat Green, the canteen agreement will be resolved with DBVI. State law requires that the blind and visually impaired be given first bids in running/operating concessions in state-owned property. The reason this was not done previously is because the Virginia Veterans Care Center was contracted out to a private company for operation, and the private company allowed the canteen to be operated differently. When the state took over, the canteen was shut down, and state guidelines had to be followed. However, a meeting is scheduled with DBVI, and it is anticipated that this issue will be resolved.

Cemeteries

- The Virginia Veterans Cemetery (in Amelia) conducted 16 burials in July and 16 in August. In comparison, the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery (in Suffolk) conducted 42 burials in July and 40 in August. The high burial rate at the Horton Cemetery is expected to continue based on the large retiree population in the Tidewater area. The department is looking at the need for a second committal shelter at the Horton Cemetery. The Commissioner complimented Cemetery Administrator Dan Kemano, who manages day-to-day operations at the Horton Cemetery and also is responsible for the Amelia cemetery, for the wonderful job he had done.
- Commissioner Mangis reiterated Pat Green's statement that the driving factor for the building of a third cemetery in southwest Virginia is a commitment from the federal government to fund the construction. He said that a representative of the USDVA's State Cemetery Grants Program will need to look at the property to ascertain if it is suitable for a cemetery. A visit has already been arranged. He said that the project is not without cost for the state. The Commonwealth must own the land and must pay for the architectural & engineering study to determine the proper design/layout. He noted that this was a relatively expensive project. When the grant is approved by the USDVA, the state would be reimbursed for the architectural & engineering study costs. The state would incur operating costs after the cemetery is turned over after completion, including paying to staff the cemetery. Commissioner Mangis commended Pat Green and Jim Walker for their efforts and the work that had been done on this endeavor.

Supermarket of Veterans Benefits

- The most recent veteran's supermarket was held on August 24th in Wytheville. This was the most successful so far, with over 200 veterans attending and over 34 different organizations, including the USDVA, TRICARE, Social Security, the Salem VAMC, veterans organizations, etc.
- The next supermarket will be held on October 20th at the Rappahannock Community College in Warsaw. Commissioner Mangis encouraged JLC members to help spread the word.

Budget

- Commissioner Mangis stated that the Department will probably need the support of the JLC on the DVS budget. In order to meet the construction costs, there is a capital construction project in for moveable equipment and other additional costs.

Mr. Botts asked how he could get additional information on the October 20th Warsaw Supermarket from the website. Commissioner Mangis stated that the department has a contract with the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) to revise the DVS website to give more up-to-date information. Presently, the website, www.dvs.virginia.gov, does list the supermarket, but gives general information.

Mr. Green recommended that Chairman Wickersham and the Commissioner attend the joint

meetings of the state legislature and let them know that the JLC represented a total of 2.6 million votes in the state of Virginia and the Department has the organization's support.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Arrival of Delegate Kirk Cox

Chairman Wickersham introduced and welcomed Delegate Kirk Cox. Delegate Cox stated that he had come to give his impression of the upcoming General Assembly session; his impression of the JLC legislative agenda, and his advocacy.

Upcoming General Assembly Session

- Delegate Cox stated that there is a surplus in state government. The rainy-day-fund is almost fully funded to about \$1 billion. However, it is always unpredictable how the economy will be. With the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and high oil prices, it is hard to predict how the revenues will be this fall. The real estate market, however, continues to do well.
- This is mentioned because many of the JLC legislative agenda will be somewhat dependent upon how the economy is going. If the economy is going well, legislators will be willing to look at new initiatives; however, if the economy is on the down-swing, legislators will be more cautious.
- There will be a new Governor during the session, who will undoubtedly have his/her own agenda.

JLC Legislative Agenda

- Delegate Cox stated that DVS has already included some of the agenda items in the Department budget, and the JLC will have to wait until the Governor's Budget is released. If legislative agenda items are included in the Governor's budget, the likelihood is that it will stay in the Governor's budget. If legislative agenda items are not in the Governor's budget, it will be an uphill battle. At that time, the JLC must focus on the top 1 or 2 most important issues.
- Most JLC legislative items are appropriations-driven. The full Appropriations Committee is driven by sub-committee recommendations. Sub-committee members should be lobbied first. If items are included in the sub-committee, JLC members should try to get allies on the committee to carry the legislation.

Advocacy

- Legislators should be visited in the summer or fall. The most effective advocate is the delegate in your specific local district. During the months of August, September, October and November, appointments at the legislator's home office are most effective. Waiting until the session begins in January is most difficult to introduce an issue.

Questions were entertained. Mr. Botts asked a question in regards to the changing of the Constitution of the JLC. Delegate Cox suggested that a meeting with the patron who carried the original legislation be held to determine if he/she will or will not support the change. If the patron is not supportive, JLC members will need to explain the new position. If support is given, this will be good. If you still cannot get the original patron to support the change, try to get someone who is generally familiar with the issues who could argue the issue. It is always good to get bi-partisan support.

Mr. Miller thanked Delegate Cox for all he had and is doing for the veterans of Virginia. Chairman Wickersham also thanked Delegate Cox for taking the time to meet with the JLC.

Chairman's Comments

Chairman Wickersham made the following comments:

- Solicited members to discuss the General Assembly process and the JLC legislative agenda/issues with their respective organizations.
- Proposed that there will be a recommended campaign plan for strategies for executing the procedures (General Assembly procedures and the legislative enabling statute)
- Now is the time to meet with legislators – do not wait until January.
- A campaign plan has already been written and will include a list of the targeted people (legislators) to meet with to make JLC members' jobs easy in advocating the legislative agenda. The list of key state legislators was distributed.
- The JLC was formed to “sing the same song” and represents a vast number of people in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- The JLC is off to a great start. Those agenda items that do not get included in the 2006 session will be reintroduced in the 2007 session

The Chairman stated that he will communicate with JLC members to make sure there is a quorum at meetings. Mr. Botts suggested that the Commissioner's Office send communications and make telephone calls at least two weeks before the meetings.

Determination of Date and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the JLC will be held on Wednesday, March 15, 2006, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. The tentative location will be in the Pocahontas Building Conference Room, located at 900 East Main Street, Richmond. Meeting place will be confirmed and members will be contacted. Attempts will be made to arrange for parking.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:20 p.m.