



## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes  
November 10, 2011

### I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Don Beasley, Chairman, at 9:00 a.m., on Thursday, November 10, 2011. The meeting was held at the Louisiana War Veterans Home, 4739 Highway 10, in Jackson. The pledge of allegiance was led by Mr. Huggins, followed by prayer from Mrs. Wilkewitz. Roll call was conducted by the Chairman. Mr. Beasley welcomed new Commissioner, Rudy Bourg, to the board and noted the absences of Commissioners Garner and Richard as excused due to illness. A quorum was present.

#### **Present:**

Don Beasley, Charles Huggins, Russell Henry, Carroll Knott, Sulanda Lonnette, Rudy Bourg and Precilla Wilkewitz.

**Absent:** Richard Garner, Lee Richard

**LDVA STAFF:** Lane Carson, Secretary; David LaCerte, Deputy Secretary; Tom Burbank, Undersecretary; Robert Hayes, Deputy Undersecretary; Debbie Smith, Human Resources Director; Kevin Butler, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Homes; Richard Blackwell, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Mark Ourso, Grants Writer; Al Leger, Southwest Regional Manager; and Charmagne Scott, Administrative Assistant.

### II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the August 16, 2011, meeting had previously been distributed to the Commissioners for review. It was motioned by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

### III. Division/Program Reports

Fiscal/Human Resources. Mr. Hayes reviewed a handout of the LDVA's FY 2011-2012 operating budget as of October 10, 2011, which was distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. The handout shows the total budget, obligations, and free budget to date for the following programs: LDVA (includes Administration, Claims Division, Contact Division, State Approving Agency Division, and Northwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery), Louisiana War Veterans Home, Northeast

Louisiana War Veterans, Southwest Louisiana War Veterans Home, Northwest Louisiana War Veterans Home, and the Southeast Louisiana War Veterans Home. The percentage of total budget expended to date was 31.8 percent. Mr. Hayes noted that all programs were operating in good standing and the Veterans Homes were operating with no state funds. It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Ms. Lonnette, to approve the Fiscal report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

Mrs. Smith reviewed the standard handout showing the status of full time employees (excluding the Veterans Homes) as of October 11, 2011. The current vacancies to date totaled seven. Effective November 14, the Veterans Assistance Counselor (VAC) position in Lafayette Parish will be filled. Also, interviews will be scheduled in the near future for positions at the new Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery in Leesville. It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the Human Resources report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

State Veterans Homes. Via handout, Mr. Butler briefed on the following new developments within the State Veterans Homes System since his last report given at the August 16, 2011, meeting.

- All five homes are 96.0% occupied collectively, representing an increase in census over the last quarter.
- In July 2012, all medications will be provided free of charge to the veteran residents until their Aid and Attendance is approved by VA.
- Three units are currently filled at Liberty Hill Apartments on the grounds of the Jackson facility, with two more tenants expected to move in soon. The gift shop and greenhouse are now officially opened.
- Annual state surveys were recently conducted at the Monroe and Jennings facilities. Also, the replacement of boilers is underway at Monroe, and a replacement generator has been requested in next year's budget for the Jennings home.
- Mrs. Charlie Kelly is the new administrator at the Reserve facility after the retirement of Dr. Paul Jones.

CENSUS STATS PER HOME (as of November 10, 2011)

Facility	Bed Capacity	Current Census	Available Beds
LWVH/Jackson	161	152	9
NELWVH/Monroe	156	143	13
SWLWVH/Jennings	156	149	7
NWLWVH/Bossier City	156	147	9
SELWVH/Reserve	156	<i>(unavailable)</i>	

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the State Veterans Homes report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

State Cemeteries. Mr. Burbank gave the following report on the cemeteries via handout:

- **Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville.** Nineteen services were conducted during October; 8 casketed and 11 cremations. Since July 1, 2011, 71 services have been held and the total number of burials to date is 726.
- **Central LA Veterans Cemetery/Leesville.** A copy of the architects/engineers monthly meeting minutes for October was provided to the Commissioners, giving the latest information on the cemetery progress. Mr. Burbank added the cemetery is near completion and it is anticipated the keys will be turned over to LDVA before Thanksgiving.

It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Ms. Lonnelle, to approve the State Cemeteries report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

Troops to Teachers. In the absence of Mr. Don Howard, director, Mr. LaCerte reviewed a handout showing statistical data on the program since 1994. To date, 265 teachers have been hired in 57 school districts. The stats were broken down by elementary and secondary subjects, gender, ethnicity, and branch of service. It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the Troops to Teachers report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

Military Family Assistance Fund (MFAF). Mr. Blackwell reviewed a handout of the fund balance, donations, and expenditures to date for FY 2011-2012.

<b>Starting Balance (July 1, 2011)</b>	<b>\$474,272.87</b>
Donations to date	\$11,464.13
Expenditures to date	\$31,253.63
<b>Fund Balance (as of October 26, 2011)</b>	<b>\$454,483.37</b>

It was motioned by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the MFAF report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

Public Relations/Outreach. In the absence of Ms. Robin Keller, Press Secretary, Mr. LaCerte provided the Commissioners with recent press releases and promotional/marketing materials. One release was from Secretary Carson in honor of Veterans Day. Also included in the packet was the Fall 2011 issue of LDVA's newsletter, "The Louisiana Veteran." It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mrs. Wilkewitz, to approve the PR/Outreach report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

#### **IV. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held in Leesville in conjunction with the grand opening of the Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery, anticipated for February 2012. Notices will be sent to the Commissioners once the date is set.

#### **V. Other Matters**

Proposed Administrative Rule Changes. Proposed changes to the Administrative Rules regarding the LDVA had been emailed to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date, and a handout of the highlighted changes was provided at the meeting. Mr. LaCerte commented the changes are being made to conform to R.S. 36:783-786, which establishes the Office of the Secretary. Other proposals include changes in wording under the Veterans Affairs Commission, State Aid Program, and Veterans Homes chapters to conform more to current law; the deletion of certain sections under the Veterans Affairs Commission that are no longer applicable; and the deletion of the housing policy section under Veterans Homes.

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the proposed changes to the Administrative Rules as presented and for the staff to proceed in the publication process through the Louisiana Register. The motion passed unanimously, with Commissioners Garner and Richard absent for the vote.

Other Remarks. Secretary Carson briefly commented on the following matters:

- There were wetland issues with the previously selected proposed site for a cemetery in St. Tammany Parish, and the LDVA is now exploring a new site in cooperation with the Louisiana National Guard.
- Several lawsuits have been filed against LDVA by applicants who were denied payment of benefits under the KIA/WIA Disability Act; to date, two claimants have been paid disability benefits of \$100,000 each.
- All but 13 parishes had passed the Louisiana Homestead Exemption for Disabled Veteran Homeowners (Act 1049 of 2010). For those parishes that have not placed the constitutional amendment on their local ballots, the area VACs will make an effort to educate the local tax assessors on the amendment. Also, LDVA staff will draft a verification form, to be signed by the VACs, for eligible veterans to take to their tax assessor's office when filing for the exemption.

**VI. Adjournment**

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, the meeting adjourned at 9:39a.m.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Lane A. Carson, Secretary

02/15/2012

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Date of Approval

*Minutes submitted by Charmagne Scott, AA6. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes.*