



VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

February 7, 2017

I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The February 7, 2017, meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Chairman Don Beasley at 9:50 am. The meeting was held at the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) Administrative Office, 602 N. Fifth Street, Baton Rouge. The meeting opened with the pledge of allegiance recited in unison, followed by a short prayer from Commissioner Bourg. Roll call of members was conducted by the Chairman. Commissioner Bill Detweiler was not present at time of roll call, but he joined the meeting shortly after.

Commissioners present: Don Beasley, Rudy Bourg, Ed Gary, Bill Detweiler, Mary Mills, Thomas Green, Carroll Knott, Richard O'Brien, Wyatt Lobrano

LDVA Staff: Joey Strickland, Secretary; Homer Rodgers, Undersecretary; Charlie Dirks, Executive Counsel; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Veterans Homes; Alex Juan, Communications Director; Al Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Bill Dixon, State Approving Agency (SAA) Director; Holly Talley, Executive Management Officer; English Josey, Internal Auditor; Linda Theriot, Director of Nursing Services; Matt Farlow, Deputy Assistant Secretary/ HR & Finance; Stephanie Wade, Chief Fiscal Officer; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Billy Robbins, Cemeteries Program Director; Barry Robinson, Capital Area Regional Manager/Training Officer; and Charmagne Scott, Confidential Assistant.

Guest: Mr. Alton Rock

II. Introductory Remarks- Secretary Joey Strickland

Secretary Strickland welcomed Commissioners to the first of four quarterly meetings for 2017. This will put LDVA back on track for ensuring that the department is taking care of Louisiana's Veterans. The Secretary is in regular communication with the members of the Commission and feels that they are all on the same page concerning the direction the department is heading. First, we are very fortunate to have a Governor that is a Veteran and is supportive of the mission of LDVA. After a year of turmoil, LDVA has a clean bill of health and is able to focus on assisting Veterans. There are many projects taking place within LDVA currently: major projects happening at all Veterans Homes and cemeteries; major work has been done with the field concerning benefits; human resource changes; etc.

III. Approval of December 16, 2015, Minutes

The May 3, 2016, meeting minutes had been distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the February 7, 2017 meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Division Reports

Human Resources (HR)/Fiscal. The standard handout showing vacancies within the Administrative Program and the five State Veterans' Homes (SVHs) as of February 1, 2017, was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Vacancies for the Administrative staff total only 1 vacancy, and it will be filled officially by February 13, 2017. Mr. Guy noted the vacancies at the Veterans Homes in the nursing division are 91% filled. The department has implemented a Special Entrance Rate policy and has updated the premium pay policy that resulted in a pay adjustment for all Veteran's Assistance Counselor job titles. Since the last meeting "global" pay policies at the Veterans Homes have been finalized to help with recruiting and retention, including: Special Entrance Rates, On-Call, Shift Differential, and Premium Pay. CNA schools have been established in Reserve, Jennings, and Jackson.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Bourg to accept the Human Resources report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Farlow reviewed the standard handout of the department's FY 2016-2017 operating budget as of February 1, 2017, which had also been provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting. He noted that approximately 58.8% of the budget had been expended. LDVA currently has nothing in arrears; travel vouchers and HQ budget status are being audited monthly; VACs budgets statuses are being audited monthly; Cemetery payments/budgets are being audited and reconciled monthly; homes gaining payments reports under preparation and action by each home, with NELA home already in progress.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green to accept the Fiscal report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Cemeteries. The standard handout concerning the status of the 4 LDVA Cemeteries as of February 1, 2017, was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Mr. Robbins reported:

- Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville had a total of 219 interments, 193 Veterans and 26 dependents, for 2016.
- Southeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Slidell had a total of 374 interments, 322 Veterans and 52 dependents for 2016.
- Northeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Rayville had a total of 95 interments, 87 Veterans and 8 dependents for 2016.
- Central LA Veteran Cemetery/Leesville had a total of 117 interments, 98 Veterans and 19 dependents for 2016.

Mr. Robbins noted that Mr. Ken Epperson now serves as the full-time director of the Keithville cemetery and Carol Martin is the Interim Cemetery Director of the Leesville cemetery. There is a significant erosion problem at the Rayville cemetery due to heavy rains in the spring, but working on getting funding for project to correct issues. It was noted that Secretary Strickland worked to get legislation changed that would allow him to waive the burial fee for the spouse and family members of a Veteran buried at one the State Cemeteries in the event of financial hardship. Also, he is looking to have the burial plot fee raised by to \$1,000 by the Federal VA.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Detweiler, to accept the State Cemeteries report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Veterans Homes (SVHs). Ms. Bruhl briefed on her standard consolidated report that had been provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting. Also, copies of demographic information for all facilities were provided to the Commissioners. Ms. Bruhl highlighted activities at each facility:

Northwest LA Veterans Home/Bossier City

- Facility occupancy: 87
- Change in Administrator effective 08/06/16- Wesley (Wes) Pepitone.
- The in-house Medical Director retired and new physicians have been contracted to provide visits as necessary and on-call assistance.
- Installation of Wander Guard system and mag-locks throughout the facility has been done to provide an added level of security.
- CMS/DHH annual survey conducted in December with 0 deficiencies.
- Fire Marshal conducted Life Safety survey with 0 deficiencies.
- Veterans Week festivities included a facility parade with school marching bands & community organizations, Shreveport/Bossier Mayoral proclamations, and a honor medal ceremony.

Northeast LA Veterans Home/Monroe

- Facility occupancy: 89%
- During November 2016, the home had their VA Annual Survey & they are still waiting on the results.
- The home had numerous Christmas parties during the month of December that were sponsored by various community and Veterans' organizations. Residents greatly enjoyed them.
- Friday, Feb. 10, the King and Queen of the Krewe of Janus will be visiting Veterans around 11 am. And then residents will have a Mardi Gras party that afternoon around 2:00 pm.

Southwest LA Veterans Home/Jennings

- Facility occupancy: 96%
- The Veterans are really enjoying the chapel expansion.
- The home has trained their Nursing Staff in the area of IV's, so Veterans that require this level of care can be admitted to the home.
- SWLVH has been approved by DHH to host an in house Nursing Aide Training Program. On December 15th, SWLVH graduated the first class. All 5 of the students passed the State Exam to become certified CNAs. Next class is planed for late February.

LA Veterans Home/Jackson

- Facility occupancy: 81%
- Change in Administrator: Effective 11/21/16- Ashlyn Hilburn.
- The facility received a “deficiency-free” survey for both clinical and life safety from their annual CMS/DHH Surveys completed on 06/30/16.
- Admitted 8 evacuees from the shelters following the flood in August.
- The home held and Honor Medals program in Nov. 2016 where 136 Veterans received medals, 3 of which were Purple Hearts.
- LVH has been approved to host an in-house Nursing Aide Training Program. Their first class was help on January 24, 2017 with 10 people enrolled.
- Mardi Gras events will begin Friday, February 24 at 10:00 a.m. The Final Mission Band from DCI will be playing music from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. The parade will start at 1:30 p.m. Mr. Gerald Reid is the Grand Marshall.

Southeast LA Veterans Home/Reserve

- Facility occupancy: 87%
- The facility has cleared all deficient practices cited during the Annual CMS/DHH survey in November. Currently, the facility is now focused on its Annual VA survey, which should be held in February 2017.
- SELVH has been approved by DHH to host an in house Nursing Aide Training Program. They have completed their first class with 8 graduates and maintained 7 of the 8 graduates for employment at the home. The home is planning to start the next nurse aide training class in March 2017.
- The home had its Annual Luau in late summer 2016 and had over 200 people in attendance.
- The home was in full emergency preparedness activation during the flood event in August 2016, as the staff was on stand-by for potential evacuation for 5 days. The staff did an excellent job!
- Construction began on December 12, 2016 for the 1,995 square foot Recreational Building and is to be completed on or before June 11, 2017.
- SELVH's Annual Mardi Gras Ball is scheduled for February 16, 2017 and they are expecting over 300 individuals from the local community in attendance for the event.

- The facility has reached a new census high of 29 Service-Connected Veterans residing at the facility.

Ms. Theriot, Director of Nursing Services, reported on the in house CAN training program taking place at the homes. She also discussed on Pioneer/New Tech software programs being used in the homes that will allow their records to become web based, so that their systems can be remotely access by those authorized to view records. Starting with the home in Jennings, the pharmacies at each of the homes will be reopened. The goal is to have this up and running within 30-90 days, then work out any glitches before beginning process to reopen at other homes. Sec. Strickland wants to make sure that it is done quickly, but correctly.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the SVHs report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Contact Assistance/MFA Fund. The standard handout concerning the status of the 4 LDVA Cemeteries as of February 1, 2017, was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Mr. Leger reported all parishes are open. For the first time in years there are no vacancies in Contact Assistance at the counselor positions at this time. This is thanks to Col. Strickland and Homer Rodgers who put replacing counselors at the top of the priority list to help veterans of this state. Louisiana has surpassed the 1.2 billion dollar mark in compensation and pension benefits for veterans in Louisiana. Total benefits surpassed 2.5 billion dollars which includes all other benefits for example; medical *care*, insurance, education, etc.

Mr. Robinson discussed setting up a VAC training class for the fall time frame. The new counselors will be participating in OJT until that time. Because documented OJT may be complete the class given answers more questions for the new counselors.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the Contact Assistance report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Talley reviewed the Military Family Assistance (MFA) Fund report, which showed a current balance of \$777,529.45, as of January 18, 2017. Donations to date for this current fiscal year totaled \$10,706.45, and expenditures totaled \$417,873.89. Expenditures were: Flood related \$343,501.00; MFA Need Based \$28,997.10; and LANG Travel \$45,375.79.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the Military Family Assistance Fund report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Approving Agency Mr. Dixon reported that LDVA, Veterans' SAA, Veterans' Education and Training has completed its 2016-17 FY Contract. The SAA has received a satisfactory rating from the VA and JPRG. This is the highest rating a SAA can receive. LDVA has received this rating for the past 10 years. Within the state of Louisiana, over 400 schools and training establishments have received approval, supervision and compliance auditing.

A motion was made by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. Detweiler, to accept the State Approving Agency report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Internal Audit. Mr. Josey discussed the Audit Projects Worked on in 2016 – 2017: Payroll (Issued) – Follow up of corrective actions on-going (Attendance Enterprise); P-Card, Phase I (Issued) – Follow up of corrective actions to be scheduled (Complete at HQ); Resident Trust Fund (Issued) – Follow up of corrective actions to be scheduled; Cemetery Division – Reports on the 4 Cemeteries to be issued in February, 2017. He also discussed the Non-Audit Projects Performed, noting work does not meet audit standards and cannot be considered an audit: Annual Risk Assessment with Emphasis on Fiscal Requirements; Analysis of Aged Receivables in Source Documentation (Pioneer); Property Management with Asset Works; Year 4 of 5 in Preparation for External Quality Assessment of IA Program. He also touched on several anticipated audit projects for 2017.

A motion was made by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to accept the Internal Audit report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Counsel Mr. Dirks discussed: The nine (9) legislative acts passed during the 2016 regular or special sessions; Administrative rule changes in the law that impacted LDVA necessitated amendments to the administrative rules governing the veterans homes and the Military Family Assistance Fund, as well as required the creation of a new administrative rule for the LDVA cemeteries; the cooperative endeavor agreement entered into between LDVA and the Volunteers of America; LLA and OIG completed their review issues highlighted in the January 2016 joint report; In regard to civil litigation, LDVA reached a final resolution of two lawsuits and one civil service appeal.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Detweiler, to accept the Executive Counsel report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Communication/Women Veteran Outreach Ms. Juan discussed the relaunch of the new state of the art LDVA website. The previous website had been corrupted and it crashed. After searching for the right host for the website, LDVA decided on ThreeSixtyEight because of the cost and quality of that they offered. There is still tweaking that need to be done, but overall website is functional and easy to navigate by Veterans.

LDVA launched a Women's Lunch & Learn series to teach a class and allow female Veterans to network and enjoy a free lunch. These events will be hosted once a quarter at a different university around the state. The first event, held on January 28 at LSU, welcomed 30 female veterans.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the Communication/ and Women Veteran Outreach reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Other Matters

Veterans Park It was discussed that there is discussion of turning the park by the Capitol in to a Memorial Park to honor Louisiana's service members.

Second Quarter Commission Meeting The next Commission meeting has tentatively been set for Tuesday, May 2 at 10:00 am, pending commissioners confirming their schedules are clear for this date to ensure quorum will be met.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 12:25pm.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Joey Strickland, Secretary

Date of Approval

Minutes submitted by Holly Talley. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes and are available upon request.