



VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

June 25, 2015

I. Call to Order – Rudy Bourg, Sr., Vice Chairman

The June 25, 2015, meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Vice Chairman Rudy Bourg at 12:25pm. The meeting was held at the Department of the Army/JRTC & Fort Polk in Fort Polk, Louisiana, after the conclusion of a briefing by BG Timothy McGuire, Commanding General, and his senior staff. A prayer was given by Commissioner Wyatt Lobrano. Roll was called by the Vice Chairman. The following Commissioners were not present and their absences were noted as excused: Don Beasley (illness), William Detweiler (prior commitment), and Lee Richard (illness).

Commissioners present: Rudy Bourg, Sr., Russell Henry, Tom Green, Carroll Knott, Richard Garner, and Wyatt Lobrano

LDVA Staff: David LaCerte, Secretary; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Homes; Robin Keller, Communications Director; Mike McNaughton, Veterans Outreach Director; Yurie Crockett, Central LA Veterans Cemetery Director; and Charmagne Scott, Executive Assistant

Guests: Mrs. Betty Garner, Mrs. Silvana Bourg, Mrs. Dianne Knott, and Mrs. Kim McNaughton

II. Approval of April 16, 2015, Minutes

The April 16, 2015, meeting minutes had been distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the June 25th meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Lobrano, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Division Reports

Human Resources (HR)/Fiscal. The standard handout showing the vacancies within the Administrative Program and the five State Veterans Homes (SVHs) as of June 15, 2015, had been provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Vacancies in the Administrative Program totaled 16 and the SVHs' vacancies totaled 49.

The standard handout of the department's FY 2014-2015 operating budget as of June 15, 2015, had also been provided to the Commissioners for review. Approximately 92.4% (\$55,584,423) had been expended. In additional comments, Secretary LaCerte stated the

Regional Manager positions within the Contact Assistance Division had decreased from four to three; the Northwest Louisiana Regional Manager position was lost due to budget cuts. He also noted that the LDVA budget was \$500,000 less in state general funds than last year and two unclassified positions (Deputy Secretary and Undersecretary of Management/Finance) are currently frozen.

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. She highlighted activities at each facility as of June 12, 2015.

Northeast LA Veterans Home/Monroe

- The facility is currently 92% occupied.
- The annual CMS survey will be held soon, and bids are pending for a Capital Outlay project for automatic doors on all entrances and the replacement of interior doors.

Northwest LA Veterans Home/Bossier City

- The facility is currently 92% occupied.
- The annual VA survey was concluded in April, with one minor issue cited.
- The facility initiated its emergency preparedness plans and possible evacuation due to the flooding of the Red River, which crested on June 10, 2015. Thanks to successful pumping efforts by the City of Bossier City, water never reached a critical stage around the facility. Secretary LaCerte also noted that no emergency expenditures were used during this time.

Southwest LA Veterans Home/Jennings

- The facility is currently 93% occupied.
- The 29x40 covered pavilion, funded by the Louisiana Elk's Lodge, has been completed and was dedicated on May 15, 2015.
- In preparation for the chapel expansion, the pipe rerouting project was completed in early May. The Office of Facility Planning and Control advertised bids for the chapel expansion project during the week of June 8.

LA Veterans Home/Jackson

- The facility is currently 83% occupied.
- The annual CMS survey was completed on May 20, 2015, and was deficiency free.

Southeast LA Veterans Home/Reserve

- The facility is currently 92% occupied.
- The generator project, which has been ongoing for at least two years, is coming to a close as preparations are made for major aspects of the installation process. During this preparation time, the staff will perform a mock shelter in place hurricane/disaster drill.
- The recreational building project is now in the design phase of the construction process.
- The annual Memorial Day ceremony was a huge success with over 400 individuals in attendance.

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

State Cemeteries. Via handouts submitted by the respective cemetery directors, Secretary LaCerte reviewed the following interment data:

- Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville had a total of 275 interments (229 veterans, 43 spouses, 2 Scatter Garden, and 1 Memorial Garden) for FY 2014/2015, as of June 12, 2015.
- Since its official opening in June 2014, the Southeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Slidell had a total of 347 interments (304 veterans, 43 spouses).
- Mr. Yurie Crockett, director of the Central LA Veterans Cemetery/Leesville reported a total of 108 interments to date this year, a 20% increase from last year.

Each facility also noted successful Memorial Day ceremonies, with several hundred attendees at each one.

Secretary LaCerte stated the construction of the Northeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Rayville is still progressing and the anticipated opening remains early spring 2016. Mr. Tim Johnson, current director of the Keithville facility, has requested a transfer to the Rayville facility to serve as its director.

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

Contact Assistance/MFA Fund. Secretary LaCerte reviewed the Contact Assistance report submitted by Alfred Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits. The report noted staffing changes and new personnel in several parishes due to resignations (Veterans Assistance Counselors [VACs] leaving for better paying jobs elsewhere) and permanent vacancies due to budget cuts.

The Military Family Assistance Fund report showed a current balance of \$691,724.44, as of June 11, 2015. Donations to date for this current fiscal year totaled \$89,281.24, and expenditures totaled \$19,037.24. The expenditures total reflects the payment of three need-based claims and one Wounded Warrior claim, totaling \$7,622.58; and \$11,414.66 paid for outreach, administration, and third-party expenses.

Mr. Bourg shared a letter from a veteran commending the services provided by the Lafayette Parish Veterans Assistance Counselors.

A motion was made by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the Contact Assistance and Military Family Assistance Fund reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Relations/Marketing. Ms. Keller reviewed her standard handout of LDVA events and other public relations information since the last Commission Meeting.

The Louisiana Women Veterans Day was held on June 9 at the State Capitol and approximately 75 women veterans were in attendance. State Representative Regina Barrow presented a House Concurrent Resolution honoring and recognizing their contributions.

Secretary LaCerte's editorial regarding the denial by Arlington National Cemetery to bury LANG SSgt. Florich was published in The Advocate (Baton Rouge), Lake Charles American Press, Leesville Leader, and was discussed on statewide radio via LA Radio Network.

Promotional materials were disseminated to the parish service offices regarding the federal VA's FY 2014 Expenditures Report, which showed increases in Louisiana's veteran population and total compensation and pension benefits paid directly to veterans.

A motion was made by Mr. Garner, seconded by Mr. Henry, to accept the Public Relations/Marketing report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Other Matters

2015 Legislative Recap

Secretary LaCerte reported the LDVA remains financially sound after the legislative session ended, even with a decrease in funds within the Contact Assistance Program. He stated that past decisions to streamline services, such as pharmaceutical consolidation within the State Veterans Homes Division, has contributed to this standing.

The following actions were/were not taken on military and veteran-related bills:

- HB 485 became Act 232, providing a "Governor's Military and Veteran Friendly Campus" designation at public, post-secondary education institutions
- SB 132 became Act 233, providing for the reverse transfer and award of academic credits to veterans and their spouses
- HB 272, which would have expanded the eligibility requirements for participation in the Veterans Treatment Court Program, was vetoed.
- No action was taken on HB 175, which would have provided a tuition exemption for certain former members of the Armed Forces; and SB 247, which would have provided

in-state tuition and fee rates for veterans and certain dependents enrolling in public, post-secondary educational institutions.

VA Commission Nomination Process

Mr. Bourg requested that this matter be tabled for discussion at a later date when the full Commission is in attendance.

Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) News

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) State Convention will be held June 26-28 in Alexandria.

Mr. Bourg was elected Department Vice Commander at the American Legion State Convention held last week.

V. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Henry, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned with a closing prayer by Mr. Lobrano at 1:35 p.m.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Thomas Enright, Jr., Interim Secretary

12/16/2015

Date of Approval

Minutes submitted by Charmagne Scott, Executive Assistant. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes and are available upon request.