



VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes
December 16, 2015

I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The December 16, 2015, meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Chairman Don Beasley at 10am. 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 led by Commissioner Henry, followed by a short prayer from Commissioner Garner. Roll call of members was conducted by the Chairman. Commissioner Rudy Bourg, Sr. was not present due to a medical appointment and his absence was noted as excused.

Commissioners present: Don Beasley, Richard Garner, Russell Henry, Tom Green, Carroll Knott, Richard Garner, and Wyatt Lobrano

LDVA Staff: Thomas Enright, Jr., Interim Secretary; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Homes; Robin Keller, Communications Director; Mike McNaughton, Veterans Outreach Director; Alfred Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Bill Dixon, State Approving Agency (SAA) Director; Cleo Wallace, SAA Assistant Director; Bradley Lemoine, Internal Auditor; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Barry Robinson, Regional Manager/Training Officer; Stephanie Wade, Chief Financial Officer; Robert Hayes, Deputy Undersecretary; Micah Hoggett, Administrative Aide; Linda Theriot, Director of Nursing Services; Brittany Watkins, Troops to Teachers (TTT) Regional Coordinator; and Charmagne Scott, Executive Assistant

Guest: Mrs. Betty Garner

II. Approval of June 25, 2015, Minutes

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

III. Division Reports

Human Resources (HR)/Fiscal. The standard handout showing vacancies within the Administrative Program and the five State Veterans Homes (SVHs) as of December 15, 2015, had been provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Vacancies in the Administrative Program totaled 12 and the SVHs' vacancies totaled 50.

Commissioner Green questioned the vacancies at the Veterans Homes. Mr. Guy noted a high turnover of certified nursing assistants (CNAs) accounts for the majority of the vacancies. Proposed incentives, such as wage increase and optional pay, are being considered to reduce turnovers, and attract and retain employees in these positions.

Ms. Wade reviewed the standard handout of the department's FY 2015-2016 operating budget as of December 7, 2015, which had also been provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting. She noted that approximately 43.3% (\$26,819,453) of the budget had been expended and there were no current budgetary issues.

A copy of the department's Annual Management and Program Analysis Report (AMPAR) for Fiscal Year 2014-2015 was provided to the Commissioners and briefed on by Mr. Hayes. This is a report required by legislation to be submitted by December 5 every year, and it summarizes activities and significant accomplishments within the office of the Undersecretary (Management and Finance) for the preceding fiscal year. Copies of the AMPAR are provided to the Governor, Commissioner of Administration, House Appropriations Committee, and Senate Finance Committee. Mr. Hayes noted this report can be a good resource tool when Commissioners are addressing their respective veterans' organizations at meetings, conventions, etc.

A motion was made by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Knott to accept the Human Resources and Fiscal reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Cemeteries. Via handouts submitted by the respective cemetery directors, interment data were as follows:

- Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville had a total of 101 interments (Veterans, 84; Spouses, 17) for FY 2015/2016, as of October 13, 2015.
- Southeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Slidell had a total of 538 interments as of November 30, 2015, since its official opening in June 2014.
- Central LA Veterans Cemetery/Leesville had a total of 23 interments for the past quarter.
- Northeast LA Veterans Cemetery/Rayville had a total of 9 interments since its official opening on November 10, 2015.

Mr. Hayes noted that Mr. Tim Johnson currently serves as director of the Keithville and Rayville facilities.

A motion was made by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Garner, 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. She highlighted activities at each facility:

Northeast LA Veterans Home/Monroe

- Facility occupancy: 96%
- The annual CMS/DHH survey was completed in September, with one very minor deficiency noted and addressed. The annual VA survey was completed in November, with two minor life safety issues noted and zero quality of care deficiencies.
- The automatic door project is near completion.

Northwest LA Veterans Home/Bossier City

- Facility occupancy: 94%
- Annual CMS/DHH survey was completed in November and the facility received its fourth in a row deficiency-free survey.
- The Red River crested at 28.5 feet during the week of December 4; however there was no flooding threat to the facility.

Southwest LA Veterans Home/Jennings

- Facility occupancy: 94%
- The chapel expansion project continues to progress and the projected completion date is mid-February 2016.

LA Veterans Home/Jackson

- Facility occupancy: 82%
- The annual VA survey was completed in October and was deficiency-free.

Southeast LA Veterans Home/Reserve

- Facility occupancy: 94%
- The recreational building is now in the construction phase. An increase in square footage caused a delay in the bid process. Once completed, the building will be used for special activities, and arts and crafts.

In other comments, Ms. Bruhl stated that findings noted in the Louisiana Legislative Auditors' (LLA) report are still being addressed at each Veterans Home.

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

Contact Assistance/MFA Fund. Mr. Leger submitted a handout showing the names and assigned parish service offices of new Veterans Assistance Counselors (VACs). The mandatory, three-week training school for these new VACs will be held in February 2016. Mr. Bruce Parker, who served as the Claiborne Parish VAC, was promoted to the Northwest Regional Manager position. The annual training conference will once again be

held at the Louisiana National Guard/Gillis Long Center in Carville during the last week in January 2016.

Mr. Leger then reviewed the Military Family Assistance (MFA) Fund report, which showed a current balance of \$700,039.47, as of December 15, 2015. Donations to date for this current fiscal year totaled \$98,596.27, and expenditures totaled \$20,037.24. He also mentioned that reimbursement of travel pay in the amount of \$45,000 for a National Guard unit returning from Fort Hood, TX to Monroe this month (previously approved by the MFA Board at its August 28, 2015, meeting) is still pending until requested documents are submitted.

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

Internal Audit. Mr. Lemoine reported via handout and noted that audits of records management and the Title 29/State Educational Aid Program were issued, and oversight of corrective actions is ongoing. Payroll audit is currently in progress. Anticipated audit projects in 2016 include the Louisiana Purchasing Card (required by the Division of Administration) and a review of the department's ethics-related objectives, programs, and activities (required by the Institute of Internal Auditors).

A motion was made by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Knott, to accept the Internal Audit report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

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

The grand opening of the Northeast LA Veterans Cemetery in Rayville was held on November 10 and over 300 persons were in attendance.

LDVA staff participated in numerous Veterans Day events across the state. These events received a lot of positive media coverage.

The cemeteries in Keithville, Leesville, and Slidell participated in the Wreaths Across America program and all received excellent community and Veterans Service Organizations support.

Approximately 36,500 Veterans Honor Medals have been awarded to veterans or their family members since 2009.

In other comments, Ms. Keller stated that department information was being gathered for the new administration transition team.

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

Troops to Teachers. Ms. Watkins reviewed the program's quarterly evaluation form. It highlighted performance indicators for the July 1, 2015, through September 30, 2015, reporting period. She also noted that TTT works with the Department of Education and Louisiana Workforce Commission in assisting eligible veterans become educators.

A motion was made by Mr. Garner, seconded by Mr. Henry, to accept the Troops to Teachers report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Approving Agency. Mr. Wallace reported via handout on the overall functions of the SAA, which is mainly the review, evaluation, and approval of education and training programs in accordance with state and federal criteria. He then noted that there are currently 233 approved active schools and job training institutions, and approximately 9500 veterans are being served in Fiscal Year 2016.

Commissioner Detweiler commented on a current concern regarding the completion rate of veterans using educational benefits but not finishing school. Mr. Wallace responded that this is also an issue of concern with the federal VA and it may be addressed in the near future.

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

IV. Other Matters

- Chairman Beasley stressed to the Commissioners that any public and/or media inquiries regarding the LDVA should be directed to Ms. Keller, Communications Director. VA Commissioners serve in an advisory capacity only and should not make any public statements on behalf of the LDVA.
- The nomination process of VA Commissioners was briefly discussed. Suggestions were made that all eligible Veterans Service Organizations should be represented on the board and Commissioners should be term limited. These suggestions are intended to attract younger veterans for nomination and have more diversity on the VA Commission.
- The next meeting will be scheduled after the new LDVA Secretary is on board (possibly March 2016).

V. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 11:40am.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Joey Strickland, Secretary

05/03/2016

Date of Approval

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