



VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

August 7, 2012

I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Don Beasley, Chairman, at 10:08 a.m., on Tuesday, August 7, 2012. The meeting was held at the Department of Veterans Affairs Administrative Office, 602 N. 5th Street, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The pledge of allegiance was led by Ms. Lonnette, followed by prayer by Mr. Garner. Roll call was conducted by the Chairman. All Commissioners were present.

Commissioners: Don Beasley, Charles Huggins, Russell Henry, Carroll Knott, Sulanda Lonnette, Rudy Bourg, Richard Garner, Lee Richard, and Precilla Wilkewitz.

LDVA Staff: Lane Carson, Secretary; David LaCerte, Deputy Secretary; Tom Burbank, Undersecretary; Al Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Kevin Butler, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Homes; Robert Hayes, Deputy Undersecretary; Bill Dixon, SAA Director; Mike McNaughton, Veterans Outreach Director; Robin Keller, Press Secretary; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Diana Wilson, Troops to Teachers; and Charmagne Scott, Administrative Assistant

Guests: Mrs. Silvana Bourg, Mrs. Betty Garner, Mr. Herbie Petit, Jr., American Legion Department Commander; Mr. Louis Dechert, Louisiana Veterans Coalition; Ms. Dian Payne, Veterans Enrollment Advisor, University of Phoenix; Mr. Chad Fuller, Associate Director of Enrollment, University of Phoenix (Baton Rouge campus); Mr. Larry Raymond, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department Commander

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the May 17, 2012, meeting had previously been distributed to the Commissioners for review. It was motioned by Mr. Richard, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Division/Program Reports

Fiscal/Human Resources. Mr. Hayes reported via handouts on the LDVA operating budget for current FY 2012/2013 beginning July 1, 2012, and previous FY 2011/2012 ending June 30, 2012. The FY 2012/2013 budget reflected a Table of Organization (TO) of 825 and total budget of \$57,457,764. No budgetary issues were noted. Mr. Hayes

commented that the FY 2011/2012 budget was the first in the history of the LDVA that did not provide state funding for the Veterans Homes.

Mr. Guy was introduced to the Commissioners as the new Human Resources Director. He reviewed the standard handout of the full time employees' personnel status report as of July 26, 2012. The report reflected six vacancies: one clerical position at the New Orleans Claims Office; one horticultural position at the Keithville cemetery; and four horticultural positions at the Leesville cemetery. Although the report did not reflect vacancies at the Veterans Homes, Mr. Guy noted there are currently 27.

It was motioned by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the Fiscal/Human Resources reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Veterans Homes (Mr. Butler). The State Veterans Homes System Report noted the following developments as of August 7, 2012:

- All five homes have an average census of 95.1% as of July 30, 2012.
- The electronic software program will be fully operational at all Homes by October 2012.
- The LWVH/Jackson received deficiency free results from a state survey conducted in July 2012.
- The bid for a new generator at the SWLWVH/Jennings has been awarded and the installation date is scheduled for October 2012.
- A federal VA survey was recently conducted at the NWLWVH/Bossier City with one deficiency noted.
- The Office of Facility Planning and Control has once again identified some construction issues at the SELWVH/Reserve and repairs are currently underway.

CENSUS STATS PER HOME (as of August 7, 2012)

Facility	Bed Capacity	Current Census	Available Beds
LWVH/Jackson	161	149	12
NELWVH/Monroe	152	139	13
SWLWVH/Jennings	152	145	7
NWLWVH/Bossier City	152	147	5
SELWVH/Reserve	152	151	1

Mr. Knott questioned the impact on the Homes of the impending changes in Medicare rules and regulations. Mr. LaCerte stated the staff cannot determine the impact until the laws are actually passed.

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Richard, to approve the State Veterans Homes Report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Cemeteries (Mr. Burbank). Handouts of the Facility Access Report for the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery/Keithville and the Central LA Veterans Cemetery/Leesville were distributed. The reports reflected 193 gravesites maintained at the NWLA cemetery and 45 gravesites maintained at the CENLA cemetery as of August 6, 2012. Mr. Danny Garris, cemetery director, will travel to east Texas to inform that area of the availability of the Leesville cemetery. Other marketing efforts, such as more signage and working with the local veterans' organizations, will be increased to promote the CENLA cemetery. Mr. Burbank also reported that a plan is currently in progress to redo the landscape at the CENLA cemetery, and all documents required by VA for grant approval for the SELA cemetery in Slidell have been submitted in a timely manner.

It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to approve the report on the State Cemeteries as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Troops to Teachers. Mr. LaCerte reviewed the Troops to Teachers standard report in the absence of director, Don Howard. Between April 1-June 30, 2012, 18 teachers were hired in several parishes and 33 outreach visits were made to colleges/universities, school administrators, job fairs, and military installations. Mr. LaCerte also mentioned that long-time Troops to Teachers executive assistant, Diana Wilson, will retire in November.

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the Troops to Teachers report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Benefits Update (Mr. Leger). Mr. LaCerte introduced Mr. Al Leger as the new Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits. Mr. Leger reviewed the Military Family Assistance Fund (MFAF) handout showing the fund balance, donations, and expenditures as of July 27, 2012. There were no changes to the fund since the May 17, 2012, meeting. Mrs. Wilkewitz questioned why the fund balance was so high. Mr. LaCerte said there has been a decrease in applications being submitted, but an upcoming request for pre-deployment travel funds and new legislation expanding the eligibility requirements for need-based claims will affect the fund.

FUND SUMMARY:

Starting Balance (July 1, 2011)	\$474,272.87
Donations to date	\$107,070.44
Expenditures to date	\$38,174.42
Fund Balance (as of July 27, 2012)	\$543,168.89

In the Contact Assistance Program, Mr. Leger mentioned that six new Veterans Assistance Counselors (VACs) have been hired (five in the southwest region and one in the northeast region), and a VAC training class was currently in progress at the Southwest LA War Veterans Home.

It was motioned by Mrs. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to approve the Benefits report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Relations/Outreach. Ms. Keller circulated a handout that showed the VA paid \$914,857,000 in compensation and pension benefits to Louisiana's veterans and their families in FY 2011, and credited the efforts of the Parish VACs in assisting veterans and their families in filing for benefits. A poster highlighting this amount will be displayed at media appearances and events statewide. Additionally, all VACs have been provided promotional handouts that show the veterans' population and total compensation and pension benefits paid into their respective parishes. These handouts will be used for office display and to present to area elected officials showcasing the work performed at the parish offices.

Ms. Keller also circulated a promotional brochure of the State Cemetery Program. A comprehensive marketing strategy to raise awareness and boost utilization of the NWLA and CENLA cemeteries is currently being planned. Installation of the carillon at the CENLA cemetery is progressing and a dedication ceremony will be scheduled shortly after completion.

In other PR news, the Office of Motor Vehicles is currently working on the implementation of the veteran designation on drivers' licenses and identification cards. It is anticipated the implementation will be completed in four to six weeks. Any requests for the LDVA Mobile RV to be available for Veterans Day events/activities should be submitted as early as possible.

It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Richard, to accept the Public Relations/Outreach report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting date was tentatively set for Tuesday, December 4, 2012, 10:00am, at a location to be determined later.

V. Other Matters

- Secretary Carson acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the attendance of VSO leaders from the American Legion, VFW, and Louisiana Veterans Coalition; and representatives from the University of Phoenix/Baton Rouge Campus. Mr. Louis Dechert presented a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the Louisiana Veterans Coalition to Secretary Carson and the LDVA.

The Human Resources staff is currently working on proposed salary increases for the VACs. Mr. LaCerte added that a bid process is currently underway to upgrade the computers/copiers/fax machines in the parish service offices.

