



## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes  
November 17, 2010

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

The regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Don Beasley, Chairman, at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, November 17, 2010, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Administrative Office, 1885 Wooddale Boulevard, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Ms. Lonnette led in the pledge of allegiance, followed by prayer from Ms. Wilkewitz. Mr. Beasley then conducted the roll call of Members and noted Mr. Abshire's absence as excused.

#### **Present:**

**COMMISSIONERS:** Don Beasley, Charles Huggins, Carroll Knott, Sulanda Lonnette, Russell Henry, Richard Garner, Precilla Wilkewitz, and Lee Richard.

**LDVA STAFF:** Lane Carson, Secretary; Thomas Burbank, Undersecretary; Robert Hayes, Deputy Undersecretary; Kevin Butler, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Homes; Richard Blackwell, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Debbie Smith, Human Resources Director; Don Howard, Troops to Teachers Director; Bill Dixon, State Approving Agency Director; Robin Keller, Press Secretary; Mike McNaughton, Veterans Outreach Director; and Charmagne Scott, Administrative Assistant.

Mr. Carson introduced Mr. Don Howard as the new director of the Troops to Teachers Program. Mr. Howard then briefed on his military background and previous employments in higher education and most recently, the Louisiana Workforce Commission.

### II. Approval of June 30, 2010, Minutes

The minutes of the June 30, 2010, meeting had been distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting. It was motioned by Ms. Wilkewitz, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

### **III. Regular Business Reports**

Military Family Assistance Fund. Via handout, Mr. Blackwell reviewed the current fund balance as of November 1, 2010:

Starting Balance (July 1, 2010)	\$461,083.95
Donations to date this FY (2010/2011)	\$6,256.82
Expenditures to date this FY	\$71,104.42
<b>Current Balance</b>	<b>\$396,236.35</b>

The handout also noted the total number of individuals assisted and total amount of need-based and lump-sum claims paid since May 1, 2008, when the LDVA took over the program. It was motioned by Mr. Richard, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the MFAF report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Management/Finance Reports. Mr. Hayes reviewed the standard handouts showing the status of all LDVA budget units as of November 8, 2010. The percentage of the budget expended was 30.2% and the remaining free budget was 69.8%. He noted there is adequate funding for all budget units for the remainder of FY 2010/2011. Mr. Hayes then distributed and reviewed a handout of the following actions affecting the LDVA since July 1, 2010:

- Executive Order No. BJ 2010-12 (Limited Hiring Freeze); effective July 1, 2010.
- Executive Order No. BJ 2010-20 (Expenditures Reduction); reduction of \$350,495 State General Funds, effective October 22, 2010.
- The FY 2011/2012 Operating Budget was submitted on November 1, 2010, with a reduction in State General Funds of \$2,467,711 (31.7%). State agencies were requested to prepare budgets with a 35% reduction in State General Funds.
- Request for Capital Outlay funding for FY 2011/2012, totaling \$17,600,000, was submitted on November 1, 2010, and included the following projects:
  - Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery (Vernon Parish) - \$6,600,000
  - Proposed Southeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery (St. Tammany Parish)- \$6,600,000
  - War Veterans Homes (four emergency generators) - \$1,800,000
  - Louisiana War Veterans Home/Jackson (major repairs; renovations) - \$2,600,000

- New VA Per Diem Rates went into effect October 1, 2010, increasing from \$77.53 to \$94.59 daily, resulting in increased federal funding at the War Veterans Homes of potentially \$4.5 million annually.

It was motioned by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the finance reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Ms. Smith reviewed the personnel status report as of November 1, 2010, noting one vacancy (Administrative Program Manager 2) at the Northwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery due to the resignation of Mr. Kent Lynn. Secretary Carson also commented on the transfer of duty stations for Dr. Paul Jones (transferred from the Jackson facility to the Reserve facility) and Mr. Jon Salter (transferred from Reserve to Jackson). He noted that Dr. Jones was strong in the areas of overtime control and nursing management, which were needed at the Reserve facility; and Mr. Salter was strong in the area of increasing occupancy, which was needed at the Jackson facility.

It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Ms. Lonnette, to approve the Human Resources report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Veterans Homes Report. Mr. Butler reviewed the War Veterans Homes System third quarter report via handout, giving an overview of new developments since the last meeting. He noted the following:

- All five homes are 94.6% occupied collectively.
- The centralized, in-house pharmacy at the Reserve facility is fully operational and servicing all WVHs successfully.
- Ms. Linda Theriot, Nursing Compliance Officer, has fully implemented the new Minimum Data Set (MDS) 3.0 process in all five homes. There have been some implementation issues with the current software company, and the staff is in the process of exploring another software company that is more long-term care friendly so that electronic charting capabilities can be functional at all facilities by spring 2011.
- Wing 4 at the Jackson facility is now opened and a full staff has been hired. The new generator should be fully operational by February 2011.
- The interior renovation project at the Monroe facility is approximately 95% complete. Also, the facility has increased its Medicare utilization, resulting in increased self-generated income.
- The Jennings facility has partnered with the Corps of Engineers to level out 25 acres directly behind the home to make all surfaces flat to grade.
- The Bossier City facility has increased its Medicare utilization, creating funding for the recent wage increases for the nursing staff.
- Meetings between the contractor, architects, and Facility Planning and Control (FP&C) staff have been held and documented concerning the poor installation of the shower areas at the Reserve facility. It was determined that all shower rooms have

to be replaced to meet the original construction designs. Demolition is now in progress and being monitored by the FP&C staff.

It was motioned by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Richard, to approve the Veterans Homes reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

State Cemeteries Report. Via handout, Mr. Burbank briefed on the following activities at the Northwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery (Keithville):

- Due to the resignation of Kent Lynn, Mike Richardson has assumed oversight responsibilities of the cemetery while maintaining his current position as Northwest Louisiana Regional Manager.
- An operations and maintenance grant for \$750,000 was submitted to VA to improve soil conditions. A local Rotary Club has expressed interest in pledging financial support to improve irrigation at the cemetery, which would complement the grant, if approved.
- VA conducted a Triennial Review of the cemetery in July. The main issue noted was the soil conditions. Overall, the cemetery met National Cemetery Administration (NCA) standards.
- Beginning October 2011, the burial and funeral allowance will increase to \$700 (current allowance is \$300), due to the passage of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2010.

A copy of the cemetery's current burial report was provided. As of October 20, 2010, the total number of gravesites maintained was 481.

It was motioned by Mr. Huggins, seconded by Mr. Garner, to approve the NWLA State Cemetery report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Public Relations/Marketing Report. Ms. Keller provided a handout on the following media communications and events held since the last Commission meeting.

- The dedication of the carillon at the Northwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery was held on September 23.
- A groundbreaking ceremony for the Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery was held on November 8 in Leesville.
- The Veterans Honor Medal events continue to be held throughout the state.
- Letters to editors were disseminated regarding the Veterans Honor Medal Program and Veterans Day. A packet of information was also sent out to all legislators for Veterans Day informing them of the department's programs and soliciting their continued support.
- The new "Support Our Veterans" license plate was presented. The plate will be available for public sale after the first of the year.

It was motioned by Mr. Huggins, seconded by Mr. Richard, to approve the PR/Marketing report as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

Benefits & Outreach. Mr. Blackwell reported that the St. Bernard Parish Council granted approval to locate a parish service office in St. Bernard Parish after the first of the year. The staff is also working with the Parish of Orleans to move the current office from the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward to an area in downtown New Orleans to service more veterans.

Mr. McNaughton stated the LDVA website has been updated to include a link for information on women veterans. He also mentioned that preplanning has begun for the 2011 Women Veterans' Conference.

Mr. Dixon provided a handout on the status of the State Approving Agency (SAA) division. He noted an increase in the number of active schools and veterans attending education facilities in Louisiana at the end of federal FY 2010 (September 30, 2010). The SAA division also received an excellent rating from the VA Regional Office for FY 2010.

Secretary Carson mentioned that the Veterans Assistance Counselors (VAC) Regional Training Sessions held in July and August at the Veterans Homes realized a cost savings of approximately \$20,000, in lieu of hosting the Annual VAC Training Conference.

It was motioned by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. Henry, to approve the Benefits/Outreach reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Abshire absent for the vote.

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

Before consideration of the next meeting date, Mr. LaCerte briefed on the impending move of the Administrative Office from its current location at 1885 Wooddale Boulevard to a state office building located in downtown Baton Rouge. The location should be decided sometime in December and it is estimated the actual move will occur around the end of February.

After receiving the above report, the next meeting was tentatively set for Tuesday, March 1, 2011, 10:00 a.m., at a location to be determined later.

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

The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Mid-Winter Conferences will be held in January in Alexandria.

## **VI. Adjournment**

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Lane A. Carson, Secretary

March 1, 2011  
Date of Approval

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

