



West Virginia Veterans Council
Meeting Minutes
Monday, August 29, 2016

- The meeting was held in the Governor's Conference room at the West Virginia State Capitol.
- Meeting called to order by Past Chairman Randy Bare.
- Four members were present, not enough to establish a quorum.
- Members present were: Randall Bare, James DeCarlo, James McCormick and Cedric Greene. Not present: Harrison Gilliam, Miles Epling, James DeCarlo, Harrison Gilliam, Mary Byrd, Bill Harris and Woody Williams.
- Also attending: WVDVA Deputy Cabinet Secretary Billy Wayne Bailey, WVDVA Chief of Staff Randy Coleman, WVDVA Officer Manager Elizabeth Cruikshank, Todd Gunter (Office of U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito), Larry Pennington (Disabled American Veterans), Debbie Voloski (Beckley VA Medical Center), Wesley Walls (Clarksburg VA Medical Center), Debbie Brammer (Huntington VA Medical Center), Mara Boggs (Office of U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin), Sean Cline (Huntington Regional VA).

READING OF THE MINUTES AND ALL BUSINESS THEREAFTER:

- Due to the lack of a quorum, no official business was discussed. The meeting included a report from West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance Deputy Secretary Billy Wayne Bailey and some informal discussion of veterans issues.

SECRETARY'S REPORT AND OTHER DISCUSSION:

- Secretary Bailey reported that there have been problems at the Veterans Cemetery due to substandard work done by contractors hired by the Division of Highways. He reported that Highways is backing the WVDVA and stated that the contractors' work was indeed not up to standard. Bailey reported that dirt was not appropriately placed and sodding was done poorly.
- Secretary Bailey reported that the Cemetery is averaging roughly three interments per week. Unfortunately, multiple services are happening on the same days. He reported that there have been no honor guard issues that he is aware of. The details have been good.

One high-profile service that received media attention involved a veteran originally from Alabama but who had wound up in a nursing home in Dunbar. He had no family. About 50 Patriot Guard motorcycle riders attended the ceremony.

- Secretary Bailey reported that the Department has received \$130,000 from the sale of fireworks. Unfortunately, some municipalities are setting local ordinances against shooting fireworks except for special occasions. Council members questioned whether municipalities are seeking legislation as a response to fireworks tax money not being distributed to them.
- Secretary Bailey reported that on September 7 he would join Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin for an announcement that introduces the WVDVA's new suicide-prevention program. Bailey announced that retired Army and Air Force Chaplain Chris Thompson, a Wheeling native, will direct the program. Bailey announced that the program will be community-based, with partnerships with faith-based, public and private organizations that have an interest in stopping veterans' suicides. The VA is among the agencies that the WVDVA would like to include in the partnerships. The Secretary reported that there are 20 or more suicides per day nationally and eight happened in West Virginia the previous year. The Secretary and Acting Chairman Randall Bare stated, however, that there were likely far more than eight.
- Secretary Bailey reported that the West Virginia Veterans Nursing Facility is implementing a new electronic medical records program in order to comply with VA requirements. Total compliance is expected by September 17. Mr. Bare reported that the Veterans Administration is not in compliance. VA representative Wesley Wall reported that the VA is transitioning into full compliance.
- Secretary Bailey reported that the WVDVA will be bringing in a budget director to replace a recently retired employee. Bailey also reported that Randy Coleman has been named as Department chief of staff and Elizabeth Cruikshank is taking on additional responsibilities within the Department.
- In response to a question from Mr. Bare regarding low pay to state nurses, Secretary Bailey reported that the WVDVA and the Nursing Facility are working on a proposal to present to the State Personnel Board that requests the opportunity to hire nurses at higher wages.
- In response to a question from Mr. Bare regarding the occupancy rate at the Veterans Home, Secretary Bailey stated that, if 100 beds is considered maximum occupancy, there are about 10 vacancies. He also reported that Veterans Home Director Tom McBride has done an outstanding job working with younger veterans who are in transition and needing jobs.
- Secretary Bailey reported that a new sign has been placed on Interstate 64 pointing to the State Veterans Memorial.
- Council member James McCormick suggested that, prior to the 1017 Legislative Session, council members take a hard look at any issues that are negatively affecting veterans transitioning back in civilian life in West Virginia. Member McCormick asked that

attention be placed specific rules and regulations that could be tweaked to give veterans some advantages. McCormick also asked that the state take a hard look at how it treat retired military pay.

- Acting Chairman Bare reported that he met with congressmen Evan Jenkins (WV) and Bill Johnson (Ohio) at a public meeting in Mason. Mr. Bare reported that he was not aware that there are 73,000 missing World War 2 veterans. Recovery is still underway. Mr. Bare also reported that the U.S. representatives stated there will be no VA cuts in the next budget. Mr. Bare stated that if the U.S. goes into war again, the budget would need to be raised.
- Mara Boggs, of U.S. Senator Manchin's office, gave the Council on updating on activity regarding flood recovery and efforts to follow the future of Sugar Grove, the former Navy facility in Pendleton County. Ms. Boggs also stated that Senator Manchin's office is working on a bill that calls for opening up burials in veterans cemeteries to certain guardsmen and cold war veterans.
- Council members also received update reports on activity at the VA Regional Claims Center and VA hospitals in Huntington and Beckley.

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