



West Virginia Veterans Council
Meeting Minutes
September 27, 2017

- The meeting was held at the office of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance, West Virginia State Capitol Complex, Building 5, Room 205.
- Meeting called to order by Chairman Harrison Gilliam.
- All nine Council members were present: Harrison Gilliam, Randall Bare, Cedric Greene, Woody Williams, Jim DeCarlo, Mary Byrd, Bill Harris, Jack Gerrard and Kenneth Boggs.
- Also attending: WVDVA Cabinet Secretary Dennis Davis; Deputy Cabinet Secretary Billy Wayne Bailey, WVDVA Chief of Staff Randy Coleman, WVDVA Director of Operations Mike Lyons, Kim Good and Mara Boggs (U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin), Earskel Caul (DAV), Rick Given, Paulene Gerrard, Mike Harris, Jeff Elkins (VFW), Deborah Brammer (VA Medical Center, Huntington), Stacy Vasquez (Director, VA Medical Center, Beckley), Sara Yoke (VA Medical Center, Beckley).
- Minutes of the May 3, 2017 meeting were approved.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Cabinet Secretary Dennis Davis explained the rationale behind the WVDVA's move from an off-campus to on-campus office. The Secretary explained that he felt the office should be more visible to the governor's office and the Legislature.

REGULAR BUSINESS

- Chairman Gilliam discussed the placement of Veterans Recognition signs, saying he had met with Department of Transportation officials regarding the possibility placement of signs (one being a sign to honor Gold Star Mothers) and the protocol involved with getting a sign produced and placed.
- Council member Woody Williams followed up with his opinion of the names on highway signs. He noted that even signs for veterans, with military designation, are not clear to the public. He is suggesting that we pursue a way to expand the information on signs. The action calls for legislative action. ... Chairman Gilliam stated that during conversations with DOT officials, proposed legislation would likely be welcome. The

chairman recommended and the Council voted to seek legislation to correct this problem.

- Mr. Williams told the Council about his plans to go to San Diego to have the Expeditionary Sea Base ship named in his honor. He told members of having to choose a female to christen the ship, an honor that was granted to his two daughters, who in turn had to weld their initials into two plates that will stay with the ship until it is decommissioned. The ship was to be christened on the October 21. It will be commissioned in March.
- Chairman Gilliam offered updated information regarding the West Virginia Veterans Medal (West Virginia Service Cross). He stated that a resolution was passed in 2014 approving the medals, but no funding was provided. He stated that the resolution needs a second look to correct wording. Design models have been done, but no money has been authorized. Questions remain: If this happens ... What are the requirements? What is the final cost? How would distribution be handled? ... Several Council members, including Vice-Chairman Bare, said they were not in favor of offering these medals, based in part because medals have already been given and in part because of obvious expenses involved. ... The issue was tabled.
- Council member Williams offered an update on the placement of Gold Star Memorial monuments. He stated that an individual has raised \$5,700 and is proposing the erection of a monument near the Veterans Memorial. Member Williams asked for the endorsement of the Council for pursuit of a monument on the State Capitol grounds. The project would have to be approved by the Legislature. Vice-Chairman Bare recommended that the Council fully support the project.
- Director Vasquez (Beckley VA) was recognized by the Chair:
 - She mentioned that a new VA clinic has opened in Lewisburg. The next priority is increasing the space at the clinic in Princeton.
 - She noted that the VA is in the season of stand-down with homeless.
 - Ms. Vasquez thanked Woody Williams for his participation in the dedication of the Medal of Honor wall at the Beckley facility.
 - She noted a couple of construction projects: an emergency room expansion and medical waiting areas are being revamped; the receipt of a \$3.3 million grant for a whole-health program, things such as chiropractic and rehab to combat opioid addiction.

CABINET SECRETARY'S REPORT

- WVDVA Cabinet Secretary Dennis Davis informed the Council that the Legislature intends to place the veterans' retirement bill on the special session call.
- The Secretary reported that the receipts from the sale of fireworks are not what the WVDVA had hoped. Part of the reason is that municipalities are putting restrictions on

when and where fireworks can and cannot be use. Secretary Davis stated that the total in the account is just short of \$1 million. ... Director Vasquez (Beckley VA) offered what she felt might be an alternative means of funding the new State nursing facility in Beckley. She stated that she has an offer for building a 120-bed (\$45 million investment) community living center. She stated that there is an emphasis now with the VA on investing in public-private partnerships. She suggested that the State might want to examine such a partnership to move the nursing facility forward in a more expeditious way. She stated that a design plan is available.

- Secretary Davis told the Council that he had met the previous day with the State Department of Revenue Secretary Dave Hardy, where he made a brief presentation about the department's budget. The Secretary stated that he asked for the Administration to keep the budget at its same status. Considering the State budget shortfall, the Secretary stated that it would be unrealistic to ask for a significant increase.
- Secretary Davis offered a report on the Cemetery, stating that recent hydrology studies indicate that there is not now, and likely has not been, a significant water problem. Some of the problems came from a former employee, who started rumors that there was a huge problem. The West Virginia National Guard has assisted with the evaluation process. Chairman Gilliam, speaking on behalf of the National Guard, stated that Guard engineers indicated that any substantial moving of earth at the Cemetery would cause damage, instead of creating better water flow.
- The Secretary pointed out to the Council that the WVDVA has helped bring in \$1.4 Billion to veterans and family members. The department has done so on total operating budget of \$10.3 million. The Secretary stated that much of this money is pass-through, meaning spent in West Virginia. Doctors, nurses and other federal VA employees also spend considerable amounts of money in West Virginia. ... The secretary stated that the WVDVA would like to increase the money brought in to veterans and their families. The action plan to do so involves adding four supervisors to the WVDVA Operations staff, with the supervisors mandated to help efficiency and outreach in the department's field and claims offices.
- Secretary Davis updated the Council on efforts to get control of the Van Transportation program. He said the department is working to get better information and tracking from the VA.
- Chief of Staff Randy Coleman updated the Council members on an initiative the WVDVA is taking on behalf of the Governor's World War I Centennial Commission. The department authorized outside researchers to undergo a study on behalf of potential sites across the state to be tabbed as part of a World War I Historic Trail.

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