

**Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission**  
4141 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (North S. Herrera Way), Phoenix, AZ 85012

**October 10, 2013**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners**

Jeff Olson, Chair  
Ron Perkins, Vice Chair  
Kara Caldwell  
George Cushing  
Philip Hanson  
Wayne Krula  
Brett Rustand

**Absent**

David Toliver, Sr. (Excused)

**AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)**

Robert Barnes, Deputy Director  
Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director  
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer  
Katherine Harding, Exec. Assistant to the Director  
Judy Smith, Admin. Secretary

**Guests**

Lonnie Sorrell, Veteran

**Call to Order** – Chairman Jeff Olson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. He asked for corrections to the September minutes. There were none. Commissioner Cushing moved to approve the minutes as presented. Commissioner Hanson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**Introduction and Welcome to Invited guests** – Chairman Olson welcomed new Commissioner Kara Caldwell. Kara gave a brief background of her education, military and work experience. She attended U of A before becoming a member of the Army Reserves. She served with the Texas Army Reserves in Afghanistan in 2010. She has since finished her college degree. Kara previously worked at the Goldwater Institute and is now working with “Experience Matters”, a local non-profit. Kara lives in the North Scottsdale area.

Chairman Olson congratulated Commissioner Brett Rustand for being named “Man of the Year of Tucson’s 40 Under 40”. Forty people under the age of 40 are recognized for their professional achievements and community service. Recipients are selected by the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Arizona Daily Star. This year’s recipients were chosen from nearly 300 nominees.

Veteran Lonnie Sorrell was recognized and welcomed.

**Communications** – The agency received a letter and Oath of Office from the Governor’s Office of Boards and Commissions, re-appointing Commissioners Philip Hanson, David Toliver and Jeffrey Olson to the ADVS Advisory Commission. Philip Hanson’s Oath of Office was presented to him today; Mr. Toliver’s and Mr. Olson’s Oaths of Office will be forwarded when received.

A second letter from the Governor’s Office of Boards and Commissions was received confirming new Commissioner Kara Caldwell to the Advisory Commission.

The Arizona Hall of Fame Reception will be held Thursday, October 24 at 6:00 p.m. A luncheon and awards ceremony will be held Friday, October 25 at 11:30 a.m. Both events will be held at the El Zaribah Shrine Auditorium. Bob Madden presented ADVS 20 complimentary luncheon and awards ceremony tickets. This is the first year the public has been invited to the event. If anyone would like to attend, please contact Katherine Harding to make a reservation. Commissioner Perkins has already reserved for the event.

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Commissioner Phil Hanson will introduce Governor Brewer who will pin recognition pins on the honorees. Inductions will be made by Rick Romley and Director Ted Vogt.

**Agency Announcements and Updates** – ADVS Deputy Director Robert Barnes noted that Director Vogt is away for other obligations and sends his regrets that he could not be present today. Director Vogt wishes to recognize the re-appointments of Commissioners Hanson, Toliver and Olson and to congratulate Kara Caldwell for her appointment to the Advisory Commission.

**VA Shutdown** – ADVS services have not been significantly impacted by the VA shutdown. Our ADVS Veterans Service Division is operating even though the VA offices are closed to the public. We have set up a temporary VSD office with counselors at the Veteran Home to assist those who cannot get into the VA Regional office. All other VSD offices are open and operating. The shutdown has not impacted the nursing homes or cemetery operations.

### **ADVS Projects Status**

**Flagstaff Cemetery Project** – ADVS received the Federal VA pre-grant award and is moving to meet all deadlines to get the funding and start project construction. Project bids are in.

**Marana Cemetery Project** - ADVS is number 32 on the Federal Cemetery Grants list to receive funding. We have the land title. We are now working with an engineering firm on how to build on the portion of property that is on a flood plain. We expect their report in about six weeks and will present those details to the VA for moving the project forward.

Commissioner Hanson inquired if any other entity can move ahead of ADVS on the grant award list, and is the VA funding paying for the engineering firm's land evaluation?

The Cemetery Grant office grants monies to cemetery expansions before new cemetery requests because existing cemeteries are about to close or are running out of interment space. After those are funded, the new cemetery projects are funded, based on their needs and the number of veterans those cemeteries can serve. Cemetery Grants contacts states that are to be funded; if the states are not ready due to some complication, they go to the next name on the list. ADVS has met the matching funds requirement and has the land title; it is just a matter of waiting for funding. The environmental study cost is under \$10,000; it will be paid with the VA funding.

Chairman Olson inquired whether any other states can move ahead of the Marana project to claim the funding the agency is to receive. Mr. Barnes said other states cannot move ahead of this project; the list is good through 2014.

**Veteran Homes** – The census at the Phoenix Veteran Home is at 163 today, with a 200 bed capacity. Nine residents are in the hospital and expected to return.

A \$1.2 million improvement grant was received earlier this year from the VA for construction of a new front entrance foyer, nurse call system and dementia wing security system. ADVS is working on getting project bids.

The Tucson Veteran Home is at 100 residents, with a 120 bed capacity, including 10 Medicare A certified beds.

Commissioner Krula inquired if the rooms at the Tucson Home are all single rooms or can they accommodate a husband and wife. Mr. Barnes said all rooms are private single occupancy with a private bath. They can accommodate a husband and wife, which has been done.

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**Tribal/Native American Outreach** – Director Vogt continues an aggressive schedule. He and Mike Klier have met with tribal leaders of several Native American Tribes in Maricopa County and around the state and gone back for second and third meetings.

**Veterans Services Division** – Mike Klier reported that even though the VA Regional Office is closed to veterans, our state Veteran Counselors are in the office working claims. There are a few VARO employees working to accept claims packages and the Vetrospect system is running so our counselors can view details.

A second Veteran Counselor was placed at the Phoenix Veteran Home to handle calls and walk-in visitors. When the Regional office reopens, the claims our counselors are working will be ready for VA review and continued processing.

Commissioner Rustand asked what are the contingencies in addressing the backlog of claims and veterans' access to the regional office if the shutdown doesn't end soon?

Mike said VSD is doing all that it can do under the circumstances. The contingency plan would be exactly what our Veterans Services Counselors are now doing in keeping the flow of claims moving and readying them for the VA to assume when they reopen. The claims backlog is going to be worked when the VA opens again. If an agreement is not reached to reopen the government before November, there will be real problems

ADVS is well-liked and respected and has a good relationship with the VA Regional office. They allowed our people to continue working while the building is shut down. In some states, the VA Regional offices requested that VSO's inside their buildings not work during the shutdown.

The VA Hospital remains open; only the VA Regional Offices are being impacted at present.

Commissioner Perkins said it is his understanding there was approval for Federal workers to receive back pay when the shutdown ends. He questioned why they should receive back pay when they aren't working? Mike said the Senate passed a bill to pay VA workers during the shutdown. Commissioner Rustand said if the VA Regional Office is working; why not let the veterans into the building if the ADVS Veterans Services Division is working?

Mr. Barnes explained that the VA offices are not fully staffed to accept veteran walk-ins right now. Our Veteran Counselors are making sure the claims they are processing are date stamped and filed into the VA system, so at least this much is accomplished by the time the VA Regional offices reopen after the shutdown.

Chairman Olson said he is working with a terminally ill veteran whose claim was submitted months ago. The veteran was diagnosed with only a few months to live. Jeff wants to know if his claim will be processed quickly because he is terminally ill.

Mike said Fully Developed Claims are scanned immediately and sent straight to an express lane to be processed. The terminally ill veteran's claim is considered a 21Q and those are handled immediately. Mike asked Jeff for information on the terminally ill veteran so he can check the claims system to be sure the claim is in the right place for immediate processing. Chairman Olson commended Mike and his staff for handling an unmanageable situation to the best of their ability.

Brett Rustand said the commission appreciates all the agency does and they are not criticizing the ADVS with their questions. If it comes to a point when the processing of claims becomes an issue, Mike needs to let the commission know.

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Visitor Lonnie Sorrell has paperwork to submit to the VA and questioned whether he could take it to the Regional Office. Mr. Klier said veterans are not allowed in the building during the shutdown. ADVS is Power of Attorney for Mr. Sorrell and Mike left the meeting to escort Mr. Sorrell to the veteran counselors stationed at the Veteran Home for assistance.

Dave Hampton pointed out that VA medical facilities are not affected by the shutdown. Their budgets are separate from other parts of the VA, so medical facilities and medical benefits are not affected.

Dave noted that if the shutdown continues, near the end of October, it is possible compensation checks and other VA checks will not go out for November. Dave believes a continuing resolution to raise the debt ceiling will be passed to at least get the checks out for November. The government may remain shut down for the next few weeks and around Thanksgiving we will be going through this again unless some deal is made in Washington.

**Outreach Activities for the Commission** – Chairman Olson attended the Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Event; Commissioner Dave Toliver was the emcee. Director Vogt attended and Dave Hampton spoke at the event. A number of Tuskegee airmen were there and Jeff enjoyed talking with them.

Commissioner Krula said the Korean War Veterans were privileged to have Director Vogt speak before them in September. He was well received and Mr. Krula appreciates his willingness to come and speak to the Korean War Veterans. Mr. Barnes will pass that information on to Director Vogt.

In the last couple of months, the commission spoke about submitting a policy statement to the governor that addresses each area of the ADVS budget. We want to provide the governor a clear understanding of what the commission thinks of the agency's various operations and what we think the policy should be so she can use that information to make budget decisions.

**Commissioner Sub-committee Reports** – Last month, the commission divided into sub-committees. Commissioners Perkins, Cushing, Toliver and Rustand were asked to be leads on these sub-committees. Dave Toliver is excused today so we won't receive his report until next month. Kara will be assigned to a sub-committee. Chairman Olson asked for Ron Perkins' report.

**Ron's report covers the Veteran Homes, Cemeteries and Homeless Veteran Program.** Ron thanked the ADVS staff members Sean Price and Victor Daniels, who were very accommodating in providing him information. To become more knowledgeable, Ron asked questions of Victor and Sean and would like to go through those questions and, at the end, summarize what the commission might want to put into the governor's letter.

**Veteran Homes** – Ron's first question was what is the current patient census compared to the Veteran Homes' capacity.

In the agency update, Mr. Barnes covered the occupancy for the Veteran Homes, which has increased in the last few days at Tucson. Ron noted there is no waiting list at the Phoenix Veteran Home. There is a waiting list for the Tucson Home; most of the names are families who are pre-planning to have a family member live there, but are not at the point of admitting that person just yet.

The current status of renovations at the Phoenix Home shows these were approved in April. These improvements have been funded and can go forward.

The fence around the Tucson Veteran Home is completed; ADVS is waiting for invoices to close out the project.



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**Future Veteran Homes around the state** – Victor informed Ron that the VA uses a formula to figure the number of veterans in the state and where the largest concentration of veterans is located for its plans for future veteran homes. The VA is looking at three areas; the Northwest, which covers Kingman, Bull Head City, and Lake Havasu. Yuma in the Southeast, and Flagstaff in the Northeast, are being considered.

The state needs to increase the number of veteran beds in Arizona. The formula the VA worked out shows the state needs 1,520 long term care beds to be able to serve veterans by the year 2020. Currently, Arizona has a total capacity of 320 beds. The need is definitely there. Victor said the strategy is to coordinate with communities in the Northwest, Northeast and Southeast areas to find land to build veteran homes on.

Asked if there are plans for other homes in the state, Ron was told Yuma, and the northwest area; Kingman, Bullhead City and Lake Havasu, are being considered.

**Veteran Cemeteries** – The Sierra Vista expansion is complete. Director Vogt was there September 20<sup>th</sup> for the dedication of the \$1.7 million columbarium that was built.

The Northern Arizona Cemetery project in Flagstaff is waiting for project bids.

Marana Cemetery – ADVS is waiting for the Flood Plain Impact Report that is due in two weeks. After that, we will await word from Washington D.C. to proceed.

In the past, the VA has worked in conjunction with rural communities which allow the VA to have a portion of a community cemetery. Ron asked if there were any plans of that nature being considered; there is not at this time.

Ron noted that only two cemeteries in Arizona provide in ground and columbarium burials. These are in Phoenix and Sierra Vista. There is a columbarium niche in Prescott.

With more than 600,000 veterans in Arizona, and the facilities provided for families to bury loved ones at no cost, the state definitely needs more cemeteries. Areas being considered in the northwest part of the state are, Kingman, Bullhead City, Lake Havasu; Flagstaff in the central part of the state and Yuma in the Southwest.

**Homeless Veterans** - Ron asked Sean Price how many homeless veterans there are in Arizona. On any given night there are about 321 street-living homeless veterans; another 937 veterans are in an emergency shelter or transitional housing.

Project H3 VETS, which stands for Home, Health and Hope, is working to end chronic veteran homelessness. Every January, Sean and volunteers go around the state to get a count of homeless veterans who are on the street and in homeless shelters. In January, 2013, there were 1,258 homeless veterans in the state. **By the end of 2013, the number is expected to rise to 2,400.**

Ron questioned the progress in reducing homeless veterans in Arizona over past few years. Great strides have been made in reducing the number of homeless veterans on the street; much of it is a result of Project H3 VETS.

Project H3 VETS uses an assessment tool to prioritize medical, vulnerable and chronically homeless veterans living on the street or in homeless shelters. Project H3 utilizes the Veterans Affairs supportive housing program to provide permanent housing and supportive services such as case management, social support and mental health services to chronically homeless veterans.

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The number of homeless veterans has declined across the state. The goal in Maricopa County is for zero chronic homelessness by the stand down in February, 2014. The stand downs have been extremely successful around the state. ADVS has established a stand down alliance in working with the VA and non-profit and profit organizations to take care of homeless veterans.

The stand downs are held in Phoenix, Bullhead City, Prescott, Tucson, Casa Grande, and Flagstaff. Bullhead City, Casa Grande and Flagstaff were just formed last year. Commissioner Perkins said the department has worked to get an alliance established and this has made a big difference. Because of the new stand down alliance that was formed in 2012, the Prescott and Tucson stand downs were expanded to a two-day event, which was a significant help in serving veterans.

The State VA has a five-year plan for reducing homeless veterans across the nation. Their number one goal is to end chronic homelessness. Number two is to increase the capacity of the temporary help system and third, prevent homelessness among veterans.

Several grants are established to help ADVS and the VA reduce homelessness; some of these are Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), the Prevention and Rapid Re-housing, Grant and per diem transition housing and HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Permanent Housing and Transition in place.

The homeless veteran program is going in the right direction with a lot of credit going to Sean Price, ADVS Homeless Veteran Coordinator. He has been coordinating with local agencies to get support and his efforts are making a difference.

There is concern that with more troops coming home from Afghanistan and jobs hard to find due to the slow economy, the state may have more homeless veterans.

Chairman Olson said in the last month or so while discussing homeless veterans and how Arizona is a leader in the nation in curtailing veteran homelessness, we actually have beds available to meet homeless veterans' needs, which puts the homeless veteran population at functional zero. In regard to the homeless veteran program, he believes the letter to Governor Brewer should be to stay the course and that the department and commission remain vigilant on the needs of homeless veterans.

Commissioner Perkins said he believes recognition goes to ADVS for their work in forming alliances around the state and how they have made a positive difference.

Commissioner Krula noted that the monies available for the homeless veteran project are significant and asked if we have been able to appropriately access those funds for homeless programs or are there any impediments in the use of the funds?

Mr. Barnes said to his knowledge, there are no impediments. Former Director, Joey Strickland, had the vision to start the homeless veteran program in 2009 even though the VA was also providing a program. At that time, the state had three applications for grant per diems for transitional housing from the VA. Only one of those was successful. In the first year of the program, there were 9 applications to the VA for grant per diem programs and three or four of those were successful. ADVS had one successful SSVF grant that was supportive of shelter placement through the VA. This year there were four grants netting \$8 million across the state. Applications for grant requests are successful.

Mr. Barnes noted that a few years ago, ADVS was the teacher on how to make grants successful; how to interact and work with the VA, how to read grants and understand the grants process, and what the focus is for non-profits as they shift from the VA.

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ADVS is successful in housing chronic homeless veterans throughout state by maximizing the HUD Vash Vouchers that have been successful in providing navigation assistance in Arizona. ADVS has been recognized nationally for its efforts in Arizona to prevent homelessness.

Ron Perkins said the department and alliance will make a homeless veteran count next week on October 17, 18 and 19. They will try to meet their goal of zero veteran homelessness by February, 2014.

Chairman Olson said, with the anticipated return of a large number of veterans from Afghanistan, our homeless veteran population could become impacted in a couple of areas. Those are returning women veterans, women and children, and families. Should the commission comment to that effect to the governor?

Ron Perkins said the number of women homeless women veterans and families has increased over last couple of years. He believes this information should be provided to the governor. Mr. Barnes said about 14% of those returning are women veterans.

Commissioner Cushing said even though many good things are being done to eliminate veteran homelessness, the commission should comment to the governor the impact of returning veterans and make the governor aware.

Dave Hampton said the last statistic he saw said one million military members are expected to leave military service by December, 2015. We don't know how many will be coming to Arizona.

Chairman Olson said the state needs to make sure we have programs that are attractive to returning veterans. There is a lot of competition with other states so it is important to attract the talents they bring and hopefully they will remain in the state and work.

Commissioner Rustand's understanding of Ron's report and what the commission wants to focus on for the governor's report is that, in regard to nursing homes, in the next six years we are going to see an increase of 300 to 1,500 veterans and, within the next 5-10 years, we need to expand veteran bed space.

In regard to cemeteries, we need to look into regional cemeteries in the northeast and northwest areas, and to continue the great work that is being done for the veteran homelessness goal of functional zero. Now it's a matter of locating homeless veterans and expanding facilities for women veterans and families.

Ron Perkins said the women's section of MANA House was closed due to lack of funding. MANA House has a good working relationship with UMOM, which is a good homeless facility for women veterans and families and some women from MANA were relocated there.

Mr. Barnes said in response to Mr. Krula's inquiry of maximizing funds available, there are 8 family units at UMOM, the result of a successful grant per diem project ADVS did a couple of years ago.

Jeff said it would be wise to include in a statement to the governor that those programs are essentially self-funding, requiring little, if any, legislative dollars. He asked if it was fair to say the veteran homes are profitable.

Mr. Barnes said the veteran homes are self-sufficient by statute. The cemetery requires state support for general fund staffing, which is not a lot when you consider what the cemetery offers. A place of shrine status for veterans to be interred and where the families can visit their graves locally is being offered.

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Mr. Barnes asked that instead of regional cemeteries, the commission consider rural cemeteries, which works along the lines of what the Federal VA is doing.

Jeff asked if the VA issued a rural cemetery program status report requesting that a portion of the cemetery be designated as veteran.

Mr. Barnes said the VA has reserved a portion and is using it in states that have no federal cemetery whatsoever. There are 5 or 6 states that have no federal program. California will get a mausoleum; the first time the VA has looked at that possibility.

### **George Cushing's sub-committee report covers the Veteran Benefits Counselors and Fiduciary Programs.**

ADVS staff members George talked to were very accommodating. He received answers to his questions quickly and wishes to commend the agency for doing a fantastic job.

In 2005, a task force was set up regarding the veteran community and one of the topics was authorizing the number of VBC's necessary to accommodate our veteran community. The number of veterans per VBC was 10,000, and at that time, the number was reasonable.

The agency has raised the number of VBC's from 18 to 36, which means the agency is working well in that respect, considering the number of veterans in the state. There was a need to know where the veterans are located, where resources are, and to strategically place VBC's around the state accordingly so that a Veteran Counselor is no more and one hour away from a veteran.

The agency authorizes service officers from Veteran Service Organizations (VSO's) to receive training along with Agency VBC's bi-annually. All Veteran Benefit Counselors and VSO's are on the same page, which benefits veterans within Arizona.

We need to see where veterans are located, how many VBC's are needed to serve them and look at how efficient each office is being run. Is staffing where it should be for the current number of veterans served?

It is Commissioner Cushing's opinion that the department has been handled well to this point; it is documented as being efficient to serve our current veteran community and staffing is where it needs to be. The question of whether we have enough counselors to handle the influx of veterans that is expected in the next year or so will need to be addressed at a later time. For now, the staffing is where it should be in serving our current veteran community and the Veteran Services Division is running as efficiently as possible.

George paid particular attention to how much experience the VBC's have. How long does it take to train a new VBC to be productive and efficient. Of the 36 counselors, about 20 have five or more years' experience. George's concern was to be sure the counselors are in a position to fully develop a veteran's claim so it can go to the VA to be processed without issues.

The number of years' experience of current staff is where it should be; some are in a 2-3 year time frame. Overall, the amount of experience of VBC's is where it should be.

The commission was briefed earlier in the year that the number of Veteran Services regions would drop from four to three. We questioned if there would be an impact of service to veterans. There doesn't seem to have been an impact to the service our veterans receive.

The issue of VBC pay has been a touchy subject. The Counselor I, II and III positions were changed to Manager or Counselor titles with no division or classification. Some time ago, a plan for giving pay



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raises was put in place by the Department of Administration and, for some reason, the plan got sidetracked or shut down. Some employees got raises, some did not.

George's concern is that we have good people who have been in the business for a number of years with time and money invested. We want to make sure these people who are performing well are recognized financially. George is dismayed at the lack of money some counselors are receiving for the great job they are doing.

The commission needs to let the governor know that there is a good Veteran Benefits Counselor crew and the agency needs to take care of them financially. We don't want to lose good people because we can't afford to pay them.

Overall, the Veteran Services Division is working well; the needs keep changing and the department is adapting well to the changes.

Mr. Cushing is looking forward to the Quality Control process which will help in the claims processing so that when claims are handed off to the VA, the job is well done with all the information included and less than 125 days later, the veteran is being compensated. George questioned how many people will be in the Quality Control section?

Mr. Barnes said right now, only two people. It is important to understand that quality control goes both ways; we are also looking at what is coming from the VA to be sure they have followed the rules and regulations and are maximizing benefits to the veteran. The VA checks our work, and we in turn review their claims for quality.

Mr. Cushing asked where ADVS is getting the quality control people. Could we use very experienced VBC's who have been working claims for a number of years as Quality Control?

Mr. Barnes said we will advertise and get quality people through competitive hiring practices. We try to hire from within but we will not decrease VBC staff to allow for quality control people.

Mr. Krula asked if consideration would be given to women for the VBC positions. Bigger population areas such as Phoenix and Tucson need to have women represented. As we continue to expand or replace in our larger populated cities, this should be considered.

**Fiduciary Report.** - Mr. Cushing met with Clark Leuthold, Fiduciary Manager to get facts and presented a Fiduciary Report.

George prefaced his remarks by saying that the comments made here are not meant to be derogatory. These matters should be addressed and it has no reflection on how the agency conducts business. We know there are restrictions to work under and we want to be sure the things we question get documented so that if we make a report of concern to the governor, we have properly reviewed the matters.

While talking to the people in Fiduciary, George was given the straight facts. He advised Clark that he was there to help and not criticize. If there are matters the commission can help with, by statute, it is their charge to do so.

One issue is that ADVS Fiduciary fees are low compared to Public Fiduciary fees. If veterans had to go elsewhere for fiduciary needs, the fees would be higher. George was of the impression that ADVS Fiduciary fees were competitive but they are somewhat lower. The Fiduciary Division is doing a great job under the circumstances.

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Commissioner Rustand inquired about the closing of the Tucson Fiduciary office. Was there low demand in the Tucson Office? Now that there is only one Fiduciary office serving veterans, which is in Phoenix, how are rural areas being served?

Mr. Barnes said the decline in the number of clients and cost of renting office space were factors. It was a strategic move to bring better control than to pay office fees and office setups; it was more cost effective to close the Tucson office. Service to existing clients in the area has not changed. Tucson and rural areas are being served by the Phoenix office.

Mr. Cushing said travel to rural areas is a concern. Rural veterans need service to the best of our ability, however, he has no figures of how many clients are served on the reservations or the northwest side of the state.

Another concern is the downtime in traveling from Phoenix to Tucson and rural areas. During that time, the counselor is not working a client. The Human Service Managers have 180 clients or, 45 clients per manager. There is concern about the downtime in going between clients because during that time, other clients are not being served. George said it appears that for now the Tucson area Fiduciary clients can be handled from the Phoenix office. George's concern is how rural veterans are being served.

Mr. Barnes said rural veterans have always been served outside of Maricopa County. There was a point when it seemed feasible to have a Fiduciary office in Tucson to serve the southwest area and an office was formed in Tucson. When the Tucson office closed, we offered to transition the two staff members to the Phoenix office. It was not a loss of personnel.

Mr. Cushing has concerns about the Fiduciary Assets and Accounting Managers who will retire soon. The current Principal is handling the Principal's job and the Accounting Manager position.

Mr. Cushing would like to see an Accounting Manager hired, possibly a CPA, so we have checks and balances between the three divisions of management. Right now the Principal is asking for money and signing checks for money. There is not a good checks and balance system in place at this time. George would like to see three separate managers in place to manage Fiduciary for cross check and accountability purposes.

Mr. Cushing asked Clark if Fiduciary has a legal secretary or paralegal employee to take care of documentation and remove that burden from the managers.

If Fiduciary could get by with one receptionist or Administrative Secretary, would they consider bringing a paralegal or legal secretary to make the managers' workloads a little easier?

In the Fiduciary section of the Sunset Audit, a time lapse of when documents have to be at the court was noted. George talked with Clark about having an attorney on staff. In lieu of an attorney, a paralegal or legal secretary could be hired to be sure documents are flowing to the court in the proper time frame.

Being self-sufficient is an issue. Fiduciary's fees are reasonable compared to public fiduciary fees. Overall, in those areas that were looked at, we want to get those concerns into our report to the governor so she is aware that the commission could be of assistance in helping get a person or two hired for more support toward Fiduciary's efforts in taking care of our veterans. The agency is doing a great job and the commission appreciates all that has been done. The foresight and vision the agency has demonstrated is benefitting our veterans and they are being served as well as can be expected.

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In looking forward, we need to have a vision of whether an influx of veterans is coming and that there may be an impact on the department. What do we need to do up front to address those issues? Overall, Fiduciary is doing a great job for veterans and he commends the agency for all that is being done in advance planning for issues we know are coming.

The Advisory Commission could assist in getting more support to Fiduciary by letting the governor know the department's needs. The areas reviewed and the concerns need to go into the governor's report so she is aware and we can be of assistance in getting a couple more people hired in Fiduciary.

### **Brett Rustand's sub-committee report covers Minority Veterans and Student Veterans**

Brett referred to the September meeting in which Student Veteran Associations were covered in depth. Arizona is leading in the nation and should continue doing what it is doing.

His recommendation to the governor is to advise her that Arizona is leading all other states in the education of student veterans and establishment of Student Veteran Associations on all college campuses. His only other recommendations would be:

1. Increase the expansion to community colleges of Vocational and Technical Schools, specifically technical schools and focus on that. That is where a lot of veterans are going after leaving military service and utilizing their G.I. Bill, as opposed to standard state schools.
2. Clear roadblocks in the certification of veterans with the qualifications they bring from their military service. Truck driving is an example. Many veterans are experienced truck drivers when they come back to Arizona, but are still required to go through the 120 day courses to get Commercial Driver's License (CDL) certifications.

Certification modifications were just done for Paramedics and should be done for CDL's also.

Arizona is doing well with Student Veteran Associations and G.I. Bill accreditations.

Commissioner Krula inquired what the G.I. Bill currently does right now? He is working with a marine just back from Afghanistan and needs an update on what the G.I. Bill can do for this marine.

Brett said the Post 9-11 G.I. Bill is very different and robust compared to the Montgomery G.I. Bill. It pays up to the highest tuition of state schools, including books and fees. It will also cover housing with a monthly stipend that covers up to E-5 active duty military, with provisions for spouses and children.

Brett noted that Steve Weintraub, ADVS Outreach Coordinator, is doing great work in this area. The National Student Veterans Association will convene in January.

Ron Perkins said there are cases, due to the government shut down, where some transitioning students' tuition has been held up. Steve Borden, in charge of the Veteran Center at ASU, told about a student who signed up for classes, then got deployed. The veteran asked instructors if they could send him materials so he could work on classes during his deployment.

The attendance rosters showed him not attending classes and when he returned from deployment, his tuition assistance had been stopped and he was no longer registered in ASU's system. Steve Borden worked with the professors and the university and was able to allow the veteran to take the classes he needed to graduate.

Brett said tuition assistance for active forces has been cut back significantly in the last five years, however, the G.I. Bill remains the same.

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Work has been done by the agency and others to improve the certification qualifications for returning veterans. Experienced Medics, Paramedics and Truck Drivers who are coming back from deployments should not be required to take extra schooling to prove their skills.

Dave Hampton noted that effective September 16<sup>th</sup>, the Arizona Department of Transportation waived the testing for a commercial driver's license for active duty veterans and veterans with a good driving record.

The governor issued an Executive Order asking departments to examine what they can do. Dave said you might want to reference that Executive Order in your letter to the governor.

### **Jeff Olson's sub-committee report covers USDVA Regional Office, Medical and Governor's Office Liaison**

Jeff said in response to George's report; it is not uncommon for a state to have only one Fiduciary office, as a number of states have left the Fiduciary programs completely and turned them over to the private sector.

Dave Hampton said Arizona and Oregon are the only states with State Veteran Fiduciary Programs.

Jeff plans to draft a letter to the governor before the November meeting and distribute to commissioners for comments and approval. Upon approval, an overall statement will be sent to the governor.

The issue has not been brought up before, but Brett asked if the report to the governor could include the need to crack down, by force if necessary, on the VA so they start using community-led partners in both behavioral and medical health, as they are supposed to and have been directed to do, by two presidents through executive order. Twice they were directed to work with community partners, especially through the behavioral health council and medical health, where they are woefully understaffed to serve the veteran population. They are supposed to be working with community partners and they are not doing as much as they should be.

Brett said he knows of providers in Maricopa and Pima counties that are staffed with veterans who are proven effective in suicide prevention, PTSD treatment, and many other areas who are ready to assist but the VA won't allow it.

Dave suggested this is something the governor could bring to the National Governors Association and get their belief on the matter.

George said the situation is going to get worse; this was his concern as a drawdown of troops was being talked about. He felt the VA was not staffed well enough in mental health areas to handle the influx of veterans. Almost every returning veteran is suffering with PTSD. Suicide rates are going up and there is not enough medical staff to handle the veterans' needs.

Jeff said he can work this into the governor's report and make a recommendation to the governor. There are a number of areas that have needed advocates for a long time.

Jeff said he met with Director Vogt to discuss asking the managers of the offices of concern to attend the December meeting and to give them 45 minutes to tell us what their operations are doing. Commissioners will be given the opportunity to ask questions. It is an opportunity to talk about community partnering.

**Open Discussion for the Good of the Order** – Chairman Olson asked for open discussion from members.



## **D R A F T –Until officially accepted by the Advisory Commission**

Commissioner Krula said the next Veterans Expo. will be held in Chandler next weekend and what is the commission's plan for attending it?

Ron Perkins sent out information about the expo because he will be out of town and cannot cover it. There are two veteran job fairs coming up; one in Chandler October 18<sup>th</sup> and one at the Maricopa Skills Center on Buckeye Road on November 7<sup>th</sup>. Ron will be out of town and unable to attend either event.

Commissioner Cushing noted that the Commission elected to attend hiring fairs; the most complaints they had heard or questions received were repetitive; there is no support from the VA Regional Office. The Job Fair at Chandler is an opportunity to direct veterans to the VA booths for their questions and concerns.

Commissioner Perkins talked to Ron Shackle of the Chandler Veterans Services office who has information on the job fairs.

Ron Perkins noted that the Motor Vehicle Division just started putting veteran status on veteran driver's licenses. When he went a week or so ago, it cost \$12 and took about 45 minutes. Veterans must provide a DD-214, however, MVD was accepting VFW, American Legion, and MOAA cards as valid proof of being a veteran. It is a good idea to have a veteran I.D. card if you don't have one of the above association cards.

Jeff and Director Vogt talked about what would be gained by putting veteran status on driver's licenses. ADVS will gain access to see how many veterans are in the state. As veterans renew, hopefully, they will put veteran status on their driver's license.

Commissioners Rustand and Olson talked about the Fourth Annual Street Fair, a 3-day event to be held in Tucson in December. In trying to secure a booth, Jeff found there are no free booths available. The non-profits got the free booths. He called the fair director to inquire how much it would cost to rent a booth. He hasn't heard back from the director yet. The street fair will be a big event with over 100,000 people expected to attend.

Katherine said ADVS does not have a VBC booth at the street fair. Jeff Olson said if he hears from the chairman and the commission gets a booth, he will advise Katherine to let the Tucson VBC's know.

Chairman Olson adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held November 14, 2013.