

**Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission**

Arizona State Veteran Home – Phoenix  
4141 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012  
January 12, 2012

**MINUTES**

Advisory Commissioners

Terrie Gent, Chair  
George Cushing, Vice Chair  
Philip Hanson  
Wayne Krula  
Jeffrey Olson  
Lionel Sanchez  
David Toliver, Sr.

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services  
(ADVS)

Joey Strickland, Director  
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner/Women Vets  
Katherine Harding, Exec Assist to Director  
Brian Williamson, Fiduciary Manager  
Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director – Veterans  
Services  
Fred Irwin, VSD Training Officer

Absent

Gary Fredricks (pre-arranged)  
Ron Perkins (family emergency)

Guests  
BG R. Thomas Browning, Retired USAF  
Gary Rideout, Founder of Vetraplex, Clarkdale

**Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Chairperson Terrie Gent. The minutes of the December 8 meeting were approved as written.

**Correspondence** - A letter from Lloyd E. Greenwood from Kingman was received. He was concerned about the provision of health services in the Kingman area. His letter will be added to the February meeting agenda.

**Regional Meeting Subcommittee Report** – Jeff Olson, Lionel Sanchez, and George Cushing discussed the regional meetings and were all concerned about the costs and staff impacts of continuing them as the commission's exclusive means of interacting with the public. Dave Toliver also indicated that the time he personally expended on the Kingman meeting resulted in fewer attendees than he expected.

There are opportunities to promote the commission and the agency by participating in existing events as presenters or exhibitors. Commissioner Olson mentioned that the veteran-specific events may not reach many veterans who are not already aware of services available. Events for the general population would provide greater exposure to veterans who are not aware of how to access their rightful benefits, since one of every 10 Arizonans are veterans (such as a large home show). Vice Chair Cushing also indicated that the American Legion holds a fall conference where the Commission could hold a session to obtain feedback from veterans statewide and to educate veterans about their role.

Commissioner Olson moved to form a committee to review regional meetings and develop a proposed action plan to the Commission. It was seconded by Commissioner Sanchez and was approved unanimously.

Chairperson Gent asked for volunteers and named Vice Chair Cushing and Commissioners Olson and Sanchez to serve on the Regional Meeting Committee. A status report will be provided at the February meeting.

**Agency Announcements and Updates** – Director Joey Strickland, Assistant Deputy Director for Veterans Services Division (VSD) Mike Klier, and VSD Training Officer Fred Irwin provided agency progress reports. The state veteran homes in Phoenix and Tucson are both doing well with excellent management. The Tucson Home passed its first survey and is focused on admitting veterans. The 120 bed skilled nursing facility has received 144 admission applications.

Mr. Klier reports there are 36 Veterans Benefits Counselors (VBCs) in 16 offices statewide. Mr. Irwin reported that the number of average monthly claims were 842 two years ago and are now at 1542 per month. Reasons for the rapid increase include annual VBC refresher training, upgrade of technology of their monitoring program, veterans from recent conflicts are coming forward to file claims, women are breaking their silence and accessing their benefits, and the high volume of “Nehmer “ cases where Vietnam era veterans had been prioritized by the VA.

Additionally, the agency is working with the Veterans Court in Maricopa County Superior Court and developing much stronger ties with the Arizona Attorney General’s Office. Mr. Klier answered questions about their outreach into prisons and jails and has been working to step up filing claims before inmates are discharged.

Veterans Donation Fund (VDF) requests that are for amounts over \$5000 will be processed once per quarter in keeping with the new procedures. VDF requests for less can be processed more quickly by a committee of decision-makers in the agency.

**Auditor General Performance Audit Recommendations** – Fiduciary Manager Brian Williamson reviewed all issues raised by the Auditor General in the Sunset Audit. Each of the recommendations included in the December 2011 audit were recapped for the Commission and Mr. Williamson provided the action plan for making those suggestions part of the Fiduciary Division routine business practices. Procedures are being changed to ensure staff accurately account for their time expenditures on each client. Some of the remedies include proposed changes to the law to establish a minimum of 5% charge to cover costs for conservatorship with a ceiling of 10% charge to the client (the fees are based on income). Director Strickland indicated that some indigent clients would never be able to pay, but he would not be in a position to refuse to accept clients based solely on ability to pay. His philosophy extends to indigents wishing to be admitted to the state veteran home. Mr. Williamson’s review was very thorough and Chairperson Gent thanked him for an exceptional job in recapping each of the recommendations and the agency’s response to each. The Commission accepted the agency response as presented.

Additionally, Mr. Olson described Director Strickland’s introduction to the Arizona Department of Veterans’ Services as the “perfect storm.” Upon accepting the appointment as Director for ADVS, the hiring Governor left and Governor Brewer stepped into her role. The ten-year Sunset Audits came due after the agency had already survived other intense scrutiny following the previous Director’s departure. Mr. Olson congratulated Director Strickland for hiring staff capable of moving the agency forward and pressing through a very difficult time. Chairperson

Gent congratulated Director Strickland for an extraordinary job and exceptional leadership under extremely demanding circumstances.

**Boards and Commissions** – Gary Fredricks is out of town on a pre-arranged basis and will speak to this issue at the next meeting.

**Legislator Support for In-House Counsel for ADVS** – The Commission will re-vector its focus on obtaining an in-house attorney for the agency by assisting the agency in another way. The Assistant Attorney General assigned to the agency may be able to invest more time in direct support of ADVS instead other work demands. Director Strickland will get back to the Commission if he believes a letter to Attorney General Horne might be helpful.

**Open Discussion/For the Good of the Order** - Tom Browning mentioned that legislation proposed this year to prevent encroachment near military installations is similar to that proposed in the past. Although Arizona has better laws than many states, previous bills to protect Arizona military installations from encroachment have failed. He indicated that the balance is respecting individual property owners' rights while protecting military presence in the state. The issues are not unique to military, but he was very involved as the chair of the pre-BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) committee appointed by Governor Napolitano six years ago.

Gary Rideout was introduced. In addition to establishing Vetraplex, he is active with Verde Valley Leadership Program. Mr. Rideout asked to shadow a high-level executive to gain insight on their style of leadership and as part of that program. He asked Director Strickland permission to work with him. Director Strickland agreed, which is why he will be following him for the remainder of the day and on one other scheduled date.

Chairperson Gent adjourned the meeting at 11:53 a.m. The next meeting will be held February 9, 2012.