

Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission
4141 N. 3rd Street (North S. Herrera Way), Phoenix, AZ 85012
June 14, 2012

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners

Terrie Gent, Chair
George Cushing, Vice Chair
Gary Fredricks
Wayne Krula
Ronald Perkins
Lionel Sanchez
David Toliver, Sr.

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Joey Strickland, Director
Robert Barnes, Deputy Director
Homer Rodgers, Assistant Deputy Director
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner/Women Vets
Kathering Harding, Exec Assistant – Director
Travis Schulte, Military Family Relief Fund
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer

Absent

Philip Hanson
Jeffrey Olson (pre-arranged)

Guests

Marie Fredricks
Daniel L. Schrader (OEF Veteran)

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Chairperson Terrie Gent. The minutes were approved as published.

Briefing – Experiences of an OEF Veteran - Dan Schrader shared experiences he has had with the VA and brought with him a folder of issues he has compiled over the past few weeks. One issue dealt with his being referred to St. Joseph's hospital last October where he was immediately admitted to the hospital for 3 days. He contacted Congressman Trent Franks and the VA Hospital's patient advocates, but the bill has not been paid and was turned over to collections. The lack of accountability by various VA departments was the most pressing issue, according to Mr. Schrader.

Director Strickland offered to meet with him to discuss some of these issues and arrange a meeting with the new Phoenix VA Hospital administrator, Sharon Helman. Director Strickland also suggested including Brian Mancini who briefed the Commission at the May 10 meeting.

Gary Fredricks suggested that Ms. Helman be invited to a future meeting. Deputy Barnes indicated he would assist Mr. Schrader with the bill from St. Joseph's hospital today.

Terrie Gent thanked him for the briefing and reminded the Commission that he was very capable of articulating his issues while many of our returning troops cannot.

Agency Updates – Director Joey Strickland asked for reports from Deputy Director Barnes, Assistant Deputy Director Homer Rodgers and Travis Schulte, Military Family Relief Fund. In future, the agency may need support for a change to the law to ensure that Fiduciary is financially self-sufficient. Director Strickland indicated that he might need the Commission's support as he educates organizations about the grant process in place for

the Veterans Donation Fund. Since the grant process started, the agency has received a number of requests for funds that are not in keeping with the agency's objectives (or the provided services do not specifically target veterans).

There was talk about having a private non-profit assist the Southern Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Sierra Vista. The citizens of Southern Arizona have offered to fund the construction of a chapel because the committal shelter is open to the elements. The agency supports the private funding of the chapel. The cost to build the chapel is approximately \$218,000.

The Military Family Relief Fund has served approximately 200 families and provided nearly \$1 million in funds. The program will be funded by tax credits and is due to expire in 2018. Recently, Travis Schulte reported receiving four applications every day.

Commission Guidelines and Strategic Plan Review Committee – Lionel Sanchez and Vicechair Cushing worked with Jeff Olson on how to approach the revision these key documents. They agreed that the strategic plan as the critical first step in revising materials. A draft was distributed with a request to provide comments to Vicechair Cushing. This task is expected to take several months, just as the original documentation required lengthy discussion as it was initially drafted.

Commissioner Fredricks referred to the Veterans Task Force report published in 2005. The report was responsible for the first increase of the number of Veterans Benefits Counselors (VBCs) in many years, increasing from 19 to its current 38 VBCs.

Letter to Governor Brewer – Chairwoman Gent asked for feedback on the draft included in the agenda packet. The Commission felt that the Governor should be apprised of established veteran courts and those being developed in the state. The letter need not be limited to those programs that had been included on meeting agendas. The letter should also include other legal support being provided to veterans (such as the Phoenix School of Law legal clinic and the Military Legal Assistance Committee of the State Bar of Arizona).

Commissioner Sanchez will assist in crafting the letter, including a report of efforts to establish a vet court in Flagstaff.

Director Strickland offered to hand-deliver the Commission's letter to the Governor when he meets with her on June 29.

Discussion of Flagstaff Parade and Future Activities – Vicechair Cushing asked that Commissioners think about the regional assignments for the Commissioners. There is no process in place now to identify which Commissioners might be able to participate in statewide events and the Commission should avoid having a quorum attend an event without proper posting. These issues will be dealt with as the Guidelines and Strategic Plan are revised. Of particular interest to the revision committee is how the Commission wishes to deal with region assignments. This question will be included in the next meeting agenda.

Veteran ID on Licenses – This issue is complex and Chairwomen Gent pointed out that asking first responders to alter their training may require lobbying at various levels of government. Because Arizona drivers' licenses are replaced so infrequently, the database of veterans is expected to build slowly.

Director Strickland and Deputy Barnes will meet with the AZ Dept. of Transportation to ensure the veteran database is shared with the agency when their computer system has been modified (probably at the first of the year). This issue will be placed on the agenda in late fall.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair – Chairwoman Gent reminded the Commission that the election will be held at the next meeting.

For the Good of the Order – Chairwoman Gent gave Commissioner Fredricks his official photo used while he was on the Commission and asked Director Strickland to join her. Director Strickland gave Commissioner Fredricks a certificate of appreciation from the agency with a wooden plaque commemorating his six years on the Arizona Veterans' Service Advisory Commission. Governor Janice K. Brewer also provided a certificate acknowledging his two three-year terms and her appreciation for his service to Arizona veterans.

Commissioner Fredricks collaboratively documented the strategic direction and operational guidelines for the Commission, the first of its kind in the Commission's 50+ year history. While Commissioner Fredricks has been witness to very difficult agency issues, he has seen those challenges overcome by the agency as its operations have become more transparent.

Chairperson Gent adjourned the meeting at 12:05 p.m. The next meeting will be held July 12, 2012.