



Progress In Advancing Convention Resolutions

Current Convention Resolutions are posted at www.vva.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/VVA-Resolutions-2015.pdf

Agent Orange/Dioxin

BY MAYNARD KADERLIK, CHAIR



The committee has fourteen resolutions on the books. The following are the most pertinent.

AO-1 Research on Agent Orange/Dioxin Effects.

The committee is waiting for the new presumptives out of the March 10, 2016, Institute of Medicine report. The new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, David Shulkin, soon will announce the new presumptives. Either the extension of the Agent Orange Act of 1991 or the Toxic Wounds Act of 2017 (presented as new legislation to replace the Agent Orange Act of 1991) should fund the research on ailments of veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

AO-4 VVA Agent Orange/Dioxin Guide. This self-help guide is the best guide for veterans exposed to Agent Orange. The committee will continue to update it as more presumptives are added by the VA Secretary.

AO-7 Children's Health Care. Recently passed legislation will provide for the necessary research to address the problems of children and grandchildren of veterans exposed to toxic substances.

AO-10 Ban the Manufacture, Sale, and Use of 2,4-D. This will require a huge team effort to get accomplished. Perhaps we should start by targeting state legislators across the country. We will work on this as a committee with VVA national, the state councils, and their chapters.

AO-13 Agent Orange/Dioxin Awareness Month. More than half the states have recognized October as Agent Orange Awareness Month. The committee will work to have it recognized nationally.

AO-16 Blue Water Veterans Exposure During the Vietnam War. The committee supports the new legislation, H.R.299, which was recently resubmitted to the 115th Congress. Blue water sailors and their families were victims of Agent Orange exposure.

The Agent Orange/Dioxin Committee: Maynard Kaderlik, Chair; Bob Behrens, Vice Chair; Jack McManus, Vice Chair. Members: Sandie Wilson, George Claxton, Mark McCabe, Mike Demske, Dennis Andras, Bruce Dobson, Stephen Bowers, Nate Washington, Rossie Nance, and Luther Newberry. Advisors: John Weiss, Tom Owen, Paul Sutton, Jim Doyle, Steven House, John Rossie, Herb Worthington, Wes Carter, Betty Mekdeci,

Robert Cummings, Sandra Morgan, Ken Holybee, John Wells, and Billie Cullin. AVVA Advisors: Nancy Switzer, Kathy Andras, Elizabeth Bowers, and Priscilla Newberry. Staff Support: Mokie Porter and Bernie Edelman.

Economic Opportunities

BY FRANK BARRY, CHAIR



The Economic Opportunities Committee, as required by Public Affairs Resolution P-7, provides this yearly report to the membership.

E-1 Jobs in the Public Sector

advocates for federal legislation that will provide an effective and clear redress mechanism for veterans who believe that their earned rights to veterans' preference have been violated. The EOC supports the move of DOL-VETS to the VA under a new fourth administration of VA Economic Opportunity.

E-2 Job Training and Other Services calls upon VVA to hold accountable programs funded through the Departments of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs to meet the special needs of veterans. EOC members attend VA Veterans Small Business Conferences throughout the U.S. Job training should be an option for service members prior to leaving the military. The EOC supports the GI Bill Education Quality Enhancement Act, the GI Bill Fairness Act, and SDVOB Relief Act.

E-3 Veterans in Business calls for full implementation of legislation that enhances the possibilities and opportunities for veterans to succeed in government and in the marketplace. The committee supported the VVA's signatory on the lawsuit against the VA that resulted in a win for veterans' businesses as the first case dealing with federal procurement. The committee will monitor the implementation strategy of VA's Vets First Contracting Program following the Supreme Court decision favoring a Small Disabled Veteran Owned Business. The EOC supports the Small Business Investment Company Capital Act, which expands the amount of capital available through small business investment.

E-18 A Comprehensive Employment Resource Development Program addresses continued unemployment and underemployment, which create an insecure and unstable quality of life for many veter-

ans. Employment needs are frequently unmet by existing local and national policies. The EOC actively advocates for increases in federal funding for coordinated employment programs at all Vet Centers in order to help veterans seeking employment and training, thereby ensuring an opportunity for their successful integration into the workplace and community.

E-19 A Meaningful Job at a Living Wage:

All federal and state agencies must fully implement the HIRE Vets and Jobs for Veterans Acts. Agencies and their managers must be held accountable for the implementation by written policy and GAO oversight. The EOC supports Boosting Rates of Veteran Employment (BRAVE), which authorizes a preference to VA contractors that hire veterans.

The Economic Opportunities Committee: Frank Barry, Chair; Dennis Andras and Ted Daywalt, Vice Chairs. Members: Larry Carter, Marc Goldschmitt, Dave Johnston, Keith King, Victor Klingelhofer, and Felix "Pete" Peterson. Advisors: Rick Weidman, Joe Wynn, and Carl Twinn. AVVA Advisors: Sharon Hobbs, Nancy Rekowski, and Jeri Wallis. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge and LaVonnia Cogdell.

Homeless Veterans Committee

BY SANDY MILLER, CHAIR



The Homeless Veterans Committee continues to work toward ending veteran homelessness across the country.

HV-1 Homeless Veterans as a "Special Needs Population."

Vietnam Veterans of America urges the Presidential Interagency Council on Homelessness to recognize homeless veterans as a Special Needs Population. Further, we urge Congress to require all entities and agencies, both nonprofit and governmental, that receive federal program funding to report statistics on the number of veterans they serve, their residential status, and the services needed. VVA strongly urges its members to work with state and federal legislators to enhance services to homeless veterans and encourage them to recognize these veterans as a Special Needs Population. Additionally, VVA supports legislation that would incorporate a Fair Share dollar approach for federal funding of all homeless

programs and services to specifically target homeless veterans.

HV-6 VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding. VVA urges that the VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program provide payment for services—rather than the reimbursement for services it presently provides for transitional housing. We also support and seek legislation to establish Supportive Services Staffing Grants for VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Service Center Grant Awardees and support legislation to collapse multiple project numbers associated with a program by merging them into one project number.

HV-7 Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program to Remain at the U.S. Department of Labor and Be Fully Funded at \$50M. VVA opposes the transition of HVRP from the U.S. Department of Labor. DoL should be held accountable for this program's function, oversight, and performance. VVA urges full funding to the authorized level for HVRP.

HV-8 Support for Continued Funding and Oversight of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development/U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services (HUD/VASH) Program. VVA strongly supports and urges the continued funding and expansion of the HUD/VASH voucher program. VVA urges HUD and the VA to establish a mechanism that provides oversight of program outcomes and effectiveness.

HV-10 Continued Funding for "Special Needs" Grants Under the Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Grants & Per Diem Program. VVA supports legislation that would extend the Homeless Veterans with Special Needs grants, due to expire September 30, 2017.

HV-11 The Department of Veterans Affairs to Identify Best Practices Model Addressing Homeless Women Veteran Transitional Residential Treatment Programs Through VA Homeless Grants & Per Diem. VVA urges the VA to identify Best Practice Models that address the unique needs of homeless women veterans and to implement these practices nationwide.

HVC-12 Extend the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Criteria for Veterans Placed in "Housing First" Model. VVA seeks legislation to amend the eligibility criteria for veterans enrolled in the DoL Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program so those veterans entering into "housing first" would be able to gain access to this training for up to twelve months after placement in housing.



HVC-13 Support for the Missing In America Project. At every level—chapter, state council, and national—VVA supports the mission of the Missing In America Project to locate and identify the unclaimed remains of veterans and to secure a final resting place for these forgotten veterans.

HVC-14 Support, Oversight, and Accountability of VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families. VVA fully supports the continuation of the VA's SSVF grant program. Additionally, in order to insure full compliance with the regulations in this most valuable program, VVA strongly urges the VA Secretary to monitor and hold accountable entities receiving and distributing these funds.

The Homeless Veterans Committee: Sandy Miller, Chair; Tom Hall, Ph.D., Vice Chair. Members: Jerry Yamamoto, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Joe McIntyre, and Dave Johnston. AVVA Advisors: Johanna Henshaw, Elayne Mackey, and Nancy Switzer. Advisor: Tom Berger, Ph.D. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge.

Membership Affairs

BY CHARLIE HOBBS, CHAIR



The Membership Affairs Committee, as required by Public Affairs Resolution P-7, provides this yearly report to the membership.

M-2 Communication Among VVA's Organizational Levels. The national office must reply to all communications from state councils and chapters within five working days. State councils and chapters must reply to all communications from the national office within ten working days. M-2 remains worthwhile and was overwhelmingly endorsed at the 2015 National Convention.

During the January CSCP meeting in Silver Spring, all state council presidents were reminded that there would be no more mailed rosters (state or chapters) after the December 2016 mailing. A choice of receiving the monthly roster electronically or real-time on the web was reiterated. Information sheets were handed out to each state council president for distribution; these must be filled out by every chapter and returned to the national office before the chapter will receive a roster. Only one person will receive the roster per state and chapter. Chapters unable to receive the roster in either format should contact their state councils for assistance.

The Third Annual Membership Growth Award Program came to a close on February 28. Some chapters showed outstanding numbers. The recipients will be announced at the National Convention in New Orleans.

During the January MAC meeting, the proposed FY2018 budget was discussed and approved by the committee.

The Membership Affairs Committee: Charlie Hobbs, Chair; Steve Mackey, Vice Chair. Members: Dick Southern, Richard DeLong, Joseph Kristek, Richard W. Lindbeck, Charlie Montgomery, Jerry Pounds, Barry Rice, Rex Moody, Ted Wilkinson, Larry Frazee, Ray Autenrieb, and John Weiss. Advisor: National Secretary Bill Meeks, Jr. AVVA Advisor: Cecilia Essenmacher. Staff Support: Tracie Houston.

Minority Affairs

BY JERRY YAMAMOTO, CHAIR



The Minority Affairs Committee, as required by Public Affairs Resolution P-7, provides this yearly report to the membership. Its twelve Convention Resolutions are:

MA-1 Language-Translated VA Benefits Materials. The committee members periodically monitor VA compliance to make sure it is properly done.

MA-2 Minority Affairs Coverage In The VVA Veteran. Committee articles appear regularly in *The VVA Veteran*.

MA-3 Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans. Recruitment of these Vietnam veterans is a high priority.

MA-5 Foreign National Vietnam Veterans Immigration. We encourage the immigration of these veterans with a needed change in our immigration laws.

MA-6 Involvement by Minority Veterans Welcomed in VVA. The involvement of Vietnam War minority veterans in VVA activities at local, state, and national levels is strongly encouraged.

MA-7 Puerto Rican Veterans and U.S. Virgin Islanders. Our committee has been concerned about the lack of available medical treatment for these veterans.

MA-8 Recognition of the Services and Sacrifices Made by the Veterans of the Territory of Guam and U.S. Pacific Islanders. Our committee thanks these veterans for their sacrifices. It is not a readily accessible area for our committee members to visit due to cost, but we thank the Region 9 Director for his regular visits to Guam.

MA-9 Awareness and Sensitivity to Racial, Cultural, and Gender-Related Equity Issues. These issues are very important and an integral part of our annual recruitment activities across the nation with our membership and information booths. We need to develop training programs specified in this resolution.

MA-10 Self-Determination for Puerto Rico. Supporting legislation for a plebiscite for citizens of Puerto Rico to determine their political status is one of the highest priorities of our committee.

MA-11 U.S. Montagnard Veterans. A thorough study and formal report on the state of benefits and health care for Hmong veterans who fought beside us, and their families, comparable to the benefits, services, and care accorded to American veterans was supposed to be presented to the VVA National Board of Directors in the spring of 2004. It never was. Our committee needs to discuss the study's feasibility with VVA leadership due to its complexity and involvement of several VVA committees.

MA-13 American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Committee members have conducted outreach at Native American powwows and veteran conferences since 2014 and will continue to do so this year. We were pleased to hear of the start of an Alaskan Native veterans organization last year.

MA-14 American Indian Veterans Memorial Exhibit in the Education Center at The Wall. Our committee continues to support the efforts of several nonprofit organizations to raise funds for the new Education Center at The Wall and to have an American Indian, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander Veterans exhibit in the center.

The Minority Affairs Committee: Jerry Yamamoto, Chair; Dave Simmons, Vice Chair; Gumersindo Gomez, Vice Chair for Hispanic Affairs; and Stephen Bowers, Vice Chair for Native Americans. Members: Francisco Ivarra, Jorge Pedroza, Wayne Reynolds, Joe Jennings, Pete Peterson, Virgie Hibbler, Rossie Nance, and Gerry Ney. AVVA Advisor: Joanna Henshaw. Advisors: James Maddox, Linda Blankenship, Anthony Molina, and Manuel Pedraza. Staff Support: Bernie Edelman.

POW/MIA Affairs

BY GRANT COATES, CO-CHAIR



In accordance with VVA Convention Resolution P-7, the following is the annual report of the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Affairs Committee:

PM-3 Declassification of Information and Diligent Effort. The POW/MIA Committee monitors the actions of the National Declassification Center, created on December 29, 2009. More than 329 cubic feet of records of military commands and secret correspondence completed declassification processing between January 2 and August 31, 2016.

PM-4 Americans Missing in Laos and Cambodia. Efforts continue to improve relations with Laos and Cambodia to further recovery missions there.

PM-7 Possibility of Live POW/MIAs and Facilitating the Return of Those Who Remain in Southeast Asia. By defini-

tion of the resolution, "VVA has formally acknowledged the possibility of live Americans being left in Southeast Asia at the end of the Vietnam War, and elsewhere worldwide, as a result of later military operations and war." Until all known missing in action from the Vietnam War are accounted for and returned, no change to the resolution is foreseen.

PM-8 Fullest Possible Accounting of POW/MIAs in Vietnam. The POW/MIA Committee continues to receive timely information from DPAA and other organizations regarding accountability of the missing in action from the Vietnam War. All identified missing in action personnel names are immediately announced through various organizational media. For various reasons, including wishes of the families, DoD announcements are often delayed beyond identification dates and sometimes are not made public.

PM-11 Honoring All Returned POWs, and Giving Recognition to American Civilians Held as POW/Interned During WWII. Chapters and state councils are urged to seek opportunities to honor local ex-POWs and their families. VVA requests that Congress enact legislation to formally recognize the sacrifices of these individuals. Further, VVA commends the extraordinary service rendered by those who have devoted their lives, vocations, time, and personal resources to resolving the issue of prisoners and missing from the Vietnam War and other conflicts.

PM-13 Public Awareness and Education on the POW/MIA Flag. VVA encourages compliance with U.S. Public Law 101-355 and seeks to educate public officials and others on the history and meaning of the POW/MIA flag and its proper display.

PM-14 Forever POW/MIA Stamp. The Perpetual POW/MIA Stamp Act was introduced by Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-

WERE YOU THERE? HELP US!

If you were present at these engagements, you may be able to provide details that will locate enemy casualties. Contact the Veterans Initiative at vi@vva.org. All information is confidential.

- On February 22, 1969, enemy units attacked Dau Tieng Base Camp. Units from the 227th Aviation Bn., 2/27 and 3/25 Inf. Div. Mass graves with more than four hundred bodies located in area.
- During Tet '69 assaults on Davis Station, Tan Son Nhut AF Base, housing 509th Radio Research Group. Mass grave containing twenty to thirty bodies.



Fla.) on September 18, 2015. The motion was referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. There are thirteen co-sponsors. H.R.3558 must be passed by both the House and Senate in identical form and then be signed by the President to become law.

VI-1 The Veterans Initiative, a National VVA Effort on Vietnam's Missing in Action. In an effort to receive more information regarding the Vietnamese missing in action from the Vietnam War, the Veterans Initiative program in 2016 published an announcement, "Were You There?" in *The VVA Veteran*. In 2015 "The Veterans Initiative Needs Your Help" was placed on the POW/MIA page, www.vva.org/Committees/POW_MIA. Several eyewitness reports have been submitted to the committee for investigation. We hope the result of this veteran-to-veteran collaboration between VVA and Vietnamese organizations will be the return of Americans missing in action.

VI-2 Scope of the Veterans Initiative. VVA reaffirms the primary mission of the Veterans Initiative to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all POW/MIAs in Vietnam and supports expanding the mission to include all of Southeast Asia.

The POW-MIA Affairs Committee: Grant T. Coates and Richard DeLong, Co-Chairs. Members: Ray Autenrieb, Lawrence Carter, Terry Courville, Patti Dumin, Allen Harvey, Charlie Hobbs, Steve Mackey, Larry Matika, and Ted Wilkinson. Advisors: Susie Stephens-Harvey (National League of Families), Gary Jones, Bill Duker, and Dan Carr. AVVA Advisor: Kaye Gardner. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge and Mokie Porter.

PTSD & Substance Abuse

BY THOMAS C. HALL, PH.D., CHAIR



In writing this year-end report of the activities of the PTSD/SA Committee as required by Public Affairs Resolution P-7, I can't help but note how much more work needs to be done in 2017 and 2018. Available treatment of PTSD by the VA has improved, yet continues to fall behind what is needed. Reduction in suicides by veterans and active-duty personnel continues to challenge behavioral health providers. Substance abuse, often started as self-medication for the symptoms of PTSD and other mental health conditions, continues to ruin lives and destroy families.

In the area of behavioral health, the members of the PTSD/SA Committee have worked tirelessly to ensure that no one forgets the issues of wrongful discharges which deny needed treatment to military men and women dealing with PTSD and substance abuse. Though wrongful discharges have been recognized and directives set forth in

the Fairness to Veterans Act of 2016, the committee will be working with state and federal representatives, as well as leadership at the local and national levels in the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, to hold DoD accountable for re-evaluating wrongful discharges. The committee continues to lobby for justice for returning men and women, as well as those still dealing with demons from our war half a century ago.

As the VA's most ardent critical friend, VVA, through the PTSD/SA Committee members, addresses our concerns for accountability in VA Medical Centers, from the directors to specific departments. During the last year committee members, through advocacy and reporting, helped promote legislation aimed at ensuring that only evidenced-based, integrated psychosocial mental health programs, quality substance abuse recovery treatment programs, suicide-risk assessment and prevention programs, and accessible behavioral health programs are available to all veterans. To this end, committee members coordinated with legislators, veterans service officers, local VA providers, chapter members, and individual veterans to respond to concerns related to wait times and funding.

To put teeth in our legislative agenda, all our voices and support are needed to ensure our legislators and VA leadership serve all veterans, that necessary services are properly staffed, and that attempts to cut funding or services are arrested.

Often it is the small things that get noticed, break the inertia, and move our leaders to see the need and address policy and legislation to better serve veterans. The committee is grateful for the continuing feedback and suggestions from our members. By all of us helping, coordinating, mentoring, advocating, and volunteering through activities at the chapter, state, and national levels, we can make our views known to VA officials and legislators at all levels of government. In 2017 we will continue to forcefully advance our legislative agenda to bring all our brothers and sisters all the way home.

The PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee: Thomas C. Hall, Ph.D., Chair; Fr. Phil Salois, Co-Chair. Members: Sandy Miller, Dan Stenvold, Jerry Yamamoto, Charlie Stapleton, Tom Brown, and Kate O'Hare-Palmer. AVVA Advisor: Elayne Mackey. Staff Support: Tom Berger, Ph.D.

Public Affairs

BY DENNIS HOWLAND, CHAIR



As we look ahead and try to anticipate VVA's future direction, now is a good time to make your views known to chapter and state council officers. It doesn't take long for rumors to circulate. But

remember that the manner in which you answer such questions is important to your public information and recruiting: It's tough to recruit someone who has heard that our lights are going out.

March 29 is Vietnam Veterans Day in nearly two dozen states. I hope each of you work with your communities and plan a newsworthy event to honor and remember Vietnam veterans.

P-1 Community Services. The Public Affairs Committee emphasizes through its magazine column the importance of using VVA resource materials in community activities. Some activities include adopt-a-highway programs, neighborhood cleanup programs, helping with fun runs to raise money for community projects, sponsorship of Agent Orange town halls and Hep C presentations open to veterans and the public.

P-2 Children's Welfare. The Public Affairs Committee encourages participation in the Combined Federal Campaign with an emphasis on CFC programs that benefit children and families. It is also important to carefully research all solicitations for support from organizations that benefit infants and children. Additional suggestions might be Boys and Girls Club volunteering and Adult Counseling in Scouting programs.

P-3 Chapter Involvement with Educational Institutions on Teaching the Vietnam War. VVA state councils and chapters report favorable and increasing partnerships with public and charter schools in Vietnam Vets in Classrooms programs. The interaction between students, teachers, and Vietnam veterans provides a better understanding of the history of the U.S. involvement in the war. The Public Affairs Committee will be pursuing additional ways to increase our presence in schools.

P-4 Regulation of Certain Activities at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The committee continues to stress the sanctity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and urges members to write to the National Park Service as individual Vietnam veterans to stress their strong feelings against it being used for political or commercial purposes.

P-5 Endorsement of Participation in Local Environmental Efforts. Members have held discussions regarding the use, storage, and underground disposal of millions of gallons of toxic chemicals across the country. One such area is in the state of Washington. One committee member reports on the handling of buried toxic chemicals.

P-7 Requirement to Report Progress on All Currently Approved Convention Resolutions at Least Annually. The committee continues to support the requirements of this resolution, evidenced by this report.

P-8 The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This memorial should be included in all plans regarding the legacy of Vietnam Veterans of America. It is recommended that

this resolution be given serious consideration if and when a plan is developed.

P-12 Public Awareness for Veterans Benefits Campaign. Chapter and state councils continue to inform veterans about their benefits. This is done through membership in local and statewide veterans coalitions, through information booths, and working with other veterans organizations. Veterans are directed to VVA service officers, as well as those of the VA, State Veterans Affairs Offices, and other VSOs. Individual State Offices of Veterans Affairs remain outstanding resources for material about veterans benefits.

P-13 Gold Star Mothers National Monument. VVA chapters are encouraged to seek out and work with Gold Star Mothers chapters in fundraising activities, ceremonies, and community events.

The Public Affairs Committee: Dennis Howland, Chair. Members: Dan Stenvold, Ron Morgan, John Riling, Thomas Brown, Russ Fankell, Grant Coates, Maynard Kaderlik, Daniel Jackson, Tom Devlin, Betty Pike, Walt Schumacher, Robert Gabrinski, Jack Mattingly, and Rod Phillips. AVVA Advisors: Beverly Pounds, Percilla Newberry, and Nancy Switzer. Staff Support: Marc Leepson, Mokie Porter, Michael Keating, and Wes Guidry.

Veterans Benefits

BY TOM BURKE, CHAIR



In compliance with Public Affairs Resolution P-7, the following update is provided to the membership on the Veterans Benefits Committee's efforts to advance the 2015 Convention Resolutions.

VB-1 Judicial Review. Veterans are able to hire a private attorney or claims agent at any point during the claims process. VVA continues to seek changes in applicable law to protect the rights of all veterans in order for them to control all aspects of their representation before the VA.

VB-3 Less-Than-Honorable Administrative Discharges. Most veterans are unaware that they can still apply to the Board of Corrections of Military Records for upgrades. VVA continues to seek the repeal of Public Law 99-126. We continue our work toward having less-than-honorable discharges replaced with certificates of service.

VB-5 Civil Liberties of Active-Duty Military Personnel. VVA considers this an ongoing issue until resolved.

VB-6 Just Compensation for Injuries Sustained by Active-Duty Military Personnel. VVA continues to seek legislation or appropriate action to secure a more equitable compensation for personnel injured



on active duty due to the negligence of government personnel.

VB-7 Class Actions at U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. VVA continues to petition the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to adopt a class-action rule applicable to claims before the court.

VB-9 VA Implementation of U.S. Court of Appeals for Veteran Claims Decisions. The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff in urging Congress to provide for class actions to address veterans' concerns and enact systemic change rather than making each veteran fight his or her own battle.

VB-10 Veterans Benefits & Service. VVA, along with other veterans service organizations, continues to ask Congress to intercede and make the VA implement processes to improve its claims processing and delivery of services to veterans.

VB-11 Veterans Benefits System. The VA claims process is progressing toward fully digitized records, although paper files remain. The transition from paper files to digitized claims processing is far from fool-proof.

VVA Veterans Benefits staff members continue to work to improve the VA compensation system through legislative action and administrative advocacy meetings. We are involved in addressing issues related to the backlog, trying to improve work credits, suggesting improvements to the VA computer systems, and simplifying regulations.

VB-12 Department of Veterans Affairs Service-Connected Disability Compensation Payments & Military Retirement Pay Offset. The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff to allow concurrent receipt for all veterans retired due to length of service with any VA disability rating. We also continue to encourage the full implementation of concurrent receipt for all levels of VA disability compensation.

VB-13 Preservation of VVA Service Representation at the National Level. This remains a work in progress as upgrades need to be implemented as changes occur. The VVA Service Officer Grant program procedures have been upgraded and remain in house. This remains a VVA first priority.

VB-16 Copy of Military Records upon Discharge. The committee has worked with Government Affairs staff to improve the integration of DoD and VA health records to create a virtual lifetime electronic record. Military personnel being separated from the service are provided with a CD or flash drive containing their records.

VB-18 The Department of Veterans Affairs' Voluntary Service Program (VAVS). This is an ongoing program.

VB-19 Veterans Environmental Health Effects. Legislation that addressed VVA's initiative regarding the toxic exposure of all American veterans and possible effects passed on to their children has recently

been passed by Congress (Public Law 114-315).

VB-20 Participation in the Process of Accrediting VA Medical Centers. Ongoing until resolved. VVA encourages its members to get involved at the local level at VA hospitals.

VB-27 Reduction of DIC Survivor Waiting Period. Under Section 1318, even if cause of death is not service connected, a survivor can obtain Death and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits if the veteran had been service connected for a condition that was totally disabling for a period of ten years. VVA continues to seek to reduce the time period to one year.

VB-28 Removal of 5 percent Annual Deductible for VA Pension Eligibility. The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff to urge that all allowable medical expenses incurred by low-income veterans eligible for VA pensions be subtracted from their household incomes.

The Veterans Benefits Committee: Tom Burke, Chair; Joseph Jennings III, Vice Chair; Joe Kristek, Chair, Service Officer Grant Program Subcommittee; Rick Carman, Chair, Service Officer Grievance Subcommittee; and Dick Southern, Chair, Strategic Planning Subcommittee. Members: Gene Crego, Ned Foote, Perry Melvin, Marc McCabe, Felix "Pete" Peterson, John Riling, John Weiss, and Herb Worthington. AVVA Advisor: Sharon Hobbs. Staff Support: Kelsey Yoon, National Director, Veterans Benefits; Jon Davis, Deputy Director; and Elaine Chaney, Administrative Assistant.

Veterans Health Care

BY SANDIE WILSON, CHAIR



The Veterans Health Care Committee continues to monitor care within the VA health system and to work for improvements in access and quality.

All VA health facilities are accredited at least once every three years by an outside agency. Every year the VA evaluates each facility. These facilities are given a rating between one and five. Not all VA health centers are equal. "Five" means the facility provides the highest quality care. "One" indicates significant problems needing attention. Each facility has a consumer advisory council composed of veterans representing veterans organizations in the service area. VVA members are encouraged to attend.

Our concerns over proper treatment of prostate cancer have resulted in the VA providing the best recommended treatment based on the patient's biopsy, with the veteran selecting the course of therapy.

Military sexual trauma remains a major problem for both men and women. The refusal of military officers to take corrective action compounds the problem. MST becomes a PTSD problem within the VA. MST is reported to have a more negative effect on men than on women.

Care Choice has reduced wait times in some locations but still has problems. Other changes have also improved wait times.

The VA Health System has assembled a group to review the research on toxins in the combat arena. This is the same thing that was done by IOM, but better. They are also looking at animal studies and studies of children of veterans. These are the areas IOM was not permitted to include. Claims that were filed for veterans' children and just sat in Colorado are being used. Thanks to those who filed claims.

Since Congress has passed legislation to terminate poor-performance employees rather than transfer them elsewhere, we expect a rapid improvement in high-profile problem areas. Congress also is looking closely at financial transgressions. Together these make up accountability.

We will wait to see if VA health care continues to improve. If it doesn't, we'll protest.

The Veterans Health Care Committee: Sandie Wilson, Chair; Joe Jennings, Vice Chair. Members: Linda Blankenship, Tom Hall, Ph.D., John Margowski, Sara McVicker, Sandy Miller, and Kate O'Hare-Palmer. AVVA Advisor: Sherry Wright-Anderson. Staff Support: Tom Berger, Ph.D., Bernie Edelman, and Rick Weidman.

Veterans Incarcerated

DOMINICK YEZZO, CHAIR

No report was submitted.

Women Veterans

BY KATE O'HARE-PALMER



Below are highlights of some of the Women Veterans Committee resolutions.

WV-2 Medical Treatment of Women Veterans by the VA. Since 1982, VVA has championed appropriate and quality health care for all women veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs has made many innovations, improvements, and advancements over the past thirty years. However, some concerns remain with policies, care, treatment, delivery mode, and monitoring of services to women veterans. The committee has been working with other veterans service organizations to

identify, quantify, and review the areas of most concern for women veterans in the VA. These concerns are shared with the VA Center for Women Veterans. VVA supported H.R.2029, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016, which included increased services to women veterans.

WV-3 Support for Women Veterans resolves to inform women veterans about their earned benefits and help them receive improved medical care and benefits. The committee has compiled a list of women veteran resources, which has been sent to all state council presidents. It will be added to the Women Veterans page on the VVA website.

WV-5 Women Veterans Research. The committee supported H.R.2029 on research in medical services and prosthetics for injured veterans. The committee had research reports presented on the forty-year Longitudinal Studies for Women who Served in the Vietnam Era. We support the Toxic Wounds Act of 2017.

WV-6 Women Veterans and Veterans Benefits. VVA urges the Veterans Benefits Administration to establish a method to identify and track outcomes for all claims involving personal assault trauma, regardless of the resulting disability, such as PTSD, depression, or anxiety disorder. These outcomes are reported to the VA Secretary. We are working to identify legislators who are committed to creating legislation to further these goals. We submit a biannual report on our key concerns to the U.S. House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

WV-8 Military Sexual Trauma (MST) DoD in January 2016 released a 61-page report, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response*, which can be read at www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-report This is its last report. Chain of command is still the ultimate judicial standard with concurrent blocks in equitable prosecution rates. The committee supported legislation that will be instrumental in hiring more mental health counselors. A new bill has just been introduced to provide funds to hire more VA staff. The committee also supports a new bill to review and rescind bad paper discharges related to incorrect mental health diagnoses as a result of military sexual trauma.

The committee requests that review results of the Retaliation Prevention and Response Strategy FY 2016-17 be reported to the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, as well as to the President.

The Women Veterans Committee: Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Chair; Patti Dumin, Vice Chair. Members: Sandy Miller, Dottie Barickman, John Wallace, Tom Berger, Ph.D., Tom Hall, Ph.D., and Sara McVicker. Advisors: Lee Jackson, Beverly Stewart, Billee Culin, Linda Blankenship, and Jennifer Wilson. AVVA Advisor: Elayne Mackey. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge. ■