



# Progress In Advancing Convention Resolutions

Current Convention Resolutions are posted at [www.vva.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2017-convention-resolution-new.pdf](http://www.vva.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2017-convention-resolution-new.pdf)

## Agent Orange & Dioxin

BY MAYNARD KADERLIK, CHAIR



At the 2017 Convention the committee went over the fourteen resolutions on the books and made basic word changes. I will report on the most pertinent.

**AO-1 Research on Agent Orange Effects.** We still are waiting for the VA Secretary to determine presumptions based on the March 10, 2016, IOM report. VVA continues to remind the Secretary that this needs to be done.

**AO-2 Agent Orange/Dioxin Children's Registry.** We have worked closely with this registry in getting more Vietnam veterans' children registered and in gaining evidence of conditions due to veterans' exposure to toxins. We have also at the Agent Orange town halls provided the VA Form 21-0304 for the children and grandchildren to file with a certified service representative. It will go to the Regional Office and will be denied. Then it will be archived with the VA in Denver. As the VA moves forward with S.901, which was passed for the children and is now law, they will deal with these archived forms.

**AO-4 VVA Agent Orange/Dioxin Guides.** The committee continues to supply these guides to veterans and organizations throughout the country and at town halls. When VA Secretary David Shulkin reports on the March 10, 2016, IOM findings, we will update the guides with the new presumptions.

**AO-5 Assure Proper Implementation of the Agent Orange Act of 1991.** Government Affairs and the Agent Orange Committee will work together to establish legislation for research on presumptions, as the act expired recently.

**AO-6 Dioxin Disposal Methods.** Two words were added on the disposal method on bedrock that would continue on to the water below.

**AO-7 Children's Health Care.** S.901, which addresses children's health care, passed December 16, 2016, and is now law. VVA will continue monitoring the VA.

**AO-8 Agent Orange/Dioxin Network.** Information is supplied to veterans through VVA's Self-Help Guide. At the Leadership & Education Conference much information is supplied to attendees, who take that information home and spread it to their chapters. Town halls, too, spread the word.

**AO-10 Ban the Manufacturing, Sale, and Use of 2,4-D.** Many of us have read that states are banning the use of these tox-

ins. More states will follow when they realize how toxic this poison is.

**AO-16 Blue Water Veterans' Exposure During the Vietnam War.** We will continue to help Blue Water sailors who suffer from their exposure to Agent Orange. We will help to get legislation passed as they, too, are victims of Agent Orange.

*The Agent Orange & Dioxin Committee: Maynard Kaderlik, Chair; Jack McManus, Vice Chair; Bob Behrens, Vice Chair. Members: Sandie Wilson, Roland Mayhew, Marc McCabe, Mike Demske, Dennis Andras, Bruce Dobson, Stephen Bowers, Nate Washington, Rossie Nance, and Luther Newberry. Special Advisers: John Weiss, Tom Owen, Paul Sutton, Jim Doyle, Steve House, John Rossie, Wes Carter, Robert Cummings, Ken Holybee, John Wells, Billee Culin, Betty Mekdeci, Sandra Morgan, Elizabeth Bowers, Herb Worthington, Robert Grabinski, Carlton Rhodes, Frank Arminio, John McGinty, and Joe McIntyre. AVVA Advisors: Nancy Switzer, Kathy Andras, and Pricilla Newberry. Staff Support: Mokie Porter, Rick Weidman, and Bernie Edelman.*

## Economic Opportunities

BY FRANK BARRY, CHAIR



The Economic Opportunities Committee has two main goals. The first includes promoting meaningful jobs in the private and public sectors, job preparation, and training for current transitioning veterans. The second goal is to promote veterans in business.

**Jobs and Training.** The staff director of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity for the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs spoke to the EOC on new legislation, including the new GI Bill, the Accountability Act dealing with official time in businesses with collective bargaining, and improving the Transition Assistance Program for those transitioning from the military to civilian jobs and to provide more help for small businesses.

**Forever GI Bill:** An in-depth presentation by VA Director of Educational Services Robert M. Worley II updated the committee on the implementation of the Forever GI Bill, the Harry W. Colmery Educational Assistance Act of 2017. VVA was responsible for putting the "Forever" in the bill's title.

Committee members are working for the benefit of all veterans by interacting with such agencies as the D.C. Mayor's Veterans Advisory Board, D.C. Department of Employment Services, GovConnect Small Business Event, the Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, Orange County Veterans Advisory Council, and the National Veterans Small Business Coalition. Members also attended the Small Business Conference in St. Louis.

**Promote Veterans in Business.** One pressing issue is ensuring that veterans get what they were legislatively promised: preference in hiring and a percentage of Veteran Owned Businesses (VOBs) and Service Disabled Veteran Owned Businesses (SDVOBs) in government contracts. VVA was a signatory to the Supreme Court *Kingdomware* case, which was decided in favor of a SDVOB. Because it is being challenged, the committee will continue to monitor the case and seek support on Capitol Hill this year.

Directors from the SBA and Department of Labor keep the committee updated on employment and veterans business development programs such as: Boots to Business, Veterans Business Outreach Centers, Access to Capital, and One-Stop Shop for Veteran Entrepreneurs.

In 2017 the veteran unemployment rate fell to 4.1 percent.

*The Economic Opportunities Committee: Frank Barry, Chair. Members: Dennis Andras, Linda Blankenship, Larry Carter, Marc Goldschmitt, Victor Klingelhofer, and Pete Peterson. AVVA Advisors: Sharon Hobbs, Jeri Wallis, and Nancy Rekowski. Special Adviser: Joe Wynn. Staff Support: Rick Weidman.*

## Finance Committee

BY NED FOOTE, CHAIR



The Finance Committee is not like most VVA committees, which are driven by Convention Resolutions. The job of the Finance Committee is administrative in nature. Its biggest task is to present a balanced budget to the VVA Board of Directors for approval.

The budget process begins every January. Each cost center (officers, board members, committee chairs, the CSCP, and national departments) is asked to prepare a

proposed budget for the coming fiscal year. Staff then take the proposed budgets and put them into a form that can be reviewed at the annual March Committee Budget Meeting. The March meeting is quite interesting as the proposed expenses usually exceed anticipated revenue by hundreds of thousands of dollars.

That's when the hard work really starts as committee members review all revenue and expense items with the goal of balancing the budget. Once balanced, a final proposed budget is prepared and submitted to the BOD for approval at its April meeting.

Once approved, the second phase of the committee's work begins: Oversight of actual expenses versus approved budget figures. This oversight continues throughout the fiscal year. Monthly reports are presented to the BOD highlighting compliance or noncompliance with approved budgets. In rare cases cost center managers can ask for increases to their budgets because of unforeseen circumstances.

Our thanks to all who participate in the financial processes of VVA.

*The Finance Committee: Ned Foote, Chair; Sara McVicker, Vice Chair. Members: Tom Burke, Dan Stenvold, Dottie Barickman, Barry Rice, Allen Manuel, and Jake Barsottini. Special Adviser: Wayne Reynolds, Ph.D. Staff Support: Joe Sternburg and Deborah Williams.*

## Homeless Veterans

BY SANDY MILLER, CHAIR



**HV-1 Homeless Veterans as a Special Needs Population.** The Homeless Veterans Committee continues to urge the Presidential Interagency Council on Homelessness to recognize

homeless veterans as a Special Needs Population. This continues to be an issue in some federal agencies, and the committee is working with the ICH to address this. We are hopeful this will come to fruition this year.

**HV-6 VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding.** Though there have been drastic changes in the VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program, this committee continues to work toward a method that would provide payment for services rather than the reimbursement for services it

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presently provides for transitional housing. The committee also continues to seek legislation establishing Supportive Services Staffing Grants for VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Service Center Grant awardees. Multiple project numbers associated with a program need to be merged into one project number. With the most recent change to GPD, providers were initially told that all projects in an agency would be able to bill using only one project number, but that is not the case.

**HV-7 Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program to Remain at the U.S. Department of Labor and Be Fully Funded at \$50M.** We continue to oppose the transition of the HVRP from the Department of Labor, and DOL should be held accountable for this program's function, oversight, and performance. Additionally, VVA urges full funding to the authorized level for HVRP. This is the one program allowing for the retraining of homeless veterans, thereby providing opportunities for these veterans to change their lives.

**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.** We support the continued funding and expansion of the HUD/VASH voucher program. We continue to ask that HUD and VA establish a mechanism whereby oversight of the HUD/VASH voucher program will be ensured so that the outcomes and effectiveness of the program can be monitored.

**HV-10 Continued Funding for Special Needs Grants Under the Veterans Affairs Homeless Grants & Per Diem Program.** One of the priorities for the committee this year will be legislation that would extend payment under the Homeless Veterans with Special Needs program, which currently requires annual renewal.

**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.** With women veterans being the most rapidly growing sub-population of homeless veterans, the VA needs to identify best-practice models that address the unique needs and issues of homeless women veterans and move to implement these practices in programs 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 into housing. Currently, there is a problem providing these vulnerable veterans with the opportunity to increase their income for a better quality of life.

**HVC-13 Support for the Missing In America Project.** We continue to encourage chapter, state council, and national support for the mission of the Missing In America Project in locating and identifying the unclaimed remains of veterans and securing a final resting place for them.

**HVC-14 Support, Oversight, and Accountability of VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families.** SSVF is a most effective arm lending support to those needing homeless services and to those veterans needing a myriad of services. We wholeheartedly support the continuation of the VA's SSVF grant program. We need to hold this program accountable in the distribution of funds to the most vulnerable veterans and their families.

*The Homeless Veterans Committee: Sandy Miller, Chair. Members: Tom Hall, Ph.D., Dave Johnson, Joe McIntyre, and Kate O'Hare-Palmer. AVVA Advisers: Joanne Blum, Casey Farrell, Sharon Hobbs, and Elayne Mackey. 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 2017 National Convention.

The Fourth Annual Membership Growth Award Program came to a close on February 28. Many chapters showed outstanding increases. The award recipients will be announced at the National Leadership & Education Conference in Palm Springs.

During the January MAC meeting, the proposed FY2019 budget was discussed and approved by the committee.

*The Membership Affairs Committee: Charlie Hobbs, Chair; Steve Mackey, Vice Chair. Members: Ray Autenrieb, Richard DeLong, Larry Frazee, Richard Lindbeck, John Margowski, Rex Moody, Charles R. Montgomery, Bob Pace, Barry Schloffel, Dick Southern, John Weiss, Jeff White, and Ted Wilkinson. VVA Adviser: National Secretary Bill Meeks, Jr. AVVA Adviser: Cecilia Essenmacher. Staff Support: Tracie Houston.*

## Minority Affairs

**BY GUMERSINDO GOMEZ, CHAIR**



The Minority Affairs Committee is on its way to the Leadership & Education Conference this July at Palm Springs, and we are enthusiastically preparing our Diversity Seminar.

The last Diversity Seminar was presented at the 1994 Conference. I recall the room was packed; we had more than seventy-five members attending.

Since I became committee chair last October, I have striven to bring the committee back to center stage where it belongs, ensuring that the committee fulfills its mission according to the VVA Constitution.

What will happen at our seminar in July? The committee is working on a program that will span the history of minority veterans from the Revolutionary War to the present. We will have displays of minority veterans' accounts in the military and graphics to compare how minority veterans fare with the VA when it comes to services, health treatment, and benefits claims.

Another area that we will be visiting is the skill of attracting minority veterans to VVA ranks; where to go to make acquaintances with minority veterans, what to say, and what to present to them. We are in the process of developing a minority membership card, which on the front reflects our diversity, our mission, our vision, and our values. On the back is a VVA membership application. The card is subject to approval by the Board of Directors at its April meeting.

We are excited about this seminar and ask that you help us. It should bring awareness to the concerns of minority veterans in VVA. Hope to see you at the Leadership Conference. If you have comments or suggestions, please contact me at [Sgtgomez@aol.com](mailto:Sgtgomez@aol.com) or [ggomez@vva.org](mailto:ggomez@vva.org)

*The Minority Affairs Committee: Gumersindo Gomez, Chair; Stephen Bowers, 1st Vice Chair; Joe McIntyre, 2nd Vice Chair. Members: Francisco Ivarra, Dave Simmons, Gerald Ney, Kerwin Stone, Joe Jennings, Pete Peterson, Jorge Pedroza, William Garcia, and Clifford Riley. AVVA Advisers: Nina Schloffel and John Birch. Staff Support: Bernie Edelman.*

## POW/MIA Affairs

**BY GRANT COATES, CHAIR**



In accordance with VVA Convention Resolution P-7, adopted at the 17th National Convention, the following is the annual report of the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) Affairs Committee:

**PM-3 Declassification of Information and Diligent Effort.** The POW/MIA Affairs Committee monitors the actions of the National Declassification Center. The NDC has released a list of 112 entries that completed declassification processing between June 1 and September 29, 2017. More than 2,612 cubic feet of records, including various military commands and secret correspondence, have completed declassification processing.

**PM-4 Americans Missing in Laos and Cambodia.** Efforts continue to improve relations between Laos and Cambodia to further recovery missions in the respective countries.

**PM-7 Possibility of Live POW/MIAs and Facilitating the Return of Those Who Remain in Southeast Asia.** As defined in 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 MIAs are immediately announced through the media. For various reasons, including wishes of the families, Department of Defense announcements are often delayed beyond identification dates and sometimes are not made public.

On February 14, House Resolution 129, "A resolution calling on the Department of Defense, other elements of the federal government, and foreign governments to intensify efforts to investigate, recover, and identify all missing and unaccounted-for personnel of the United States," was passed 411-0. There also exists a companion Senate Resolution 61.

**PM-11 Honoring All Returned POWs and Giving Recognition of American Civilians Held as POW/Interned During World War II.** As expressed in the resolution, "VVA urges all of its chapters and state councils to seek opportunities to honor local ex-POWs and their families." VVA desires that Congress enact legislation to formally recognize the sacrifices of these individuals.

VVA commends the extraordinary service rendered by those public servants, military personnel, and citizens 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.** As defined in the resolution, VVA "encourages and supports compliance with U.S. Public Law 101-355. VVA further resolves to continue efforts to educate public officials and others on the history and meaning of the POW/MIA flag and its proper display."



Any official VVA function displaying the national colors should include the POW/MIA flag; it shall be posted or flown to the immediate left of the national colors. All other flags used in the display shall be flown to the left of the POW/MIA flag following published guidelines for positioning protocol.

**PM-14 Forever POW/MIA Stamp.** The Perpetual POW/MIA Stamp Act was introduced by Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) on May 30, 2017, during the first session of the 115th Congress. The motion was referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on the same day. As of February 16 there were seven co-sponsors for H.R.2765. It 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 Vietnamese missing in action from the Vietnam War, the Veterans Initiative Program (VIP) launched a new informational request advertisement in 2016 titled "Were You There?" which appeared 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](http://www.vva.org/Committees/POW_MIA)). Several eyewitness reports have been submitted to the committee for investigation. We hope the result of the 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.** As defined in the resolution, VVA "reaffirms the primary mission of the Veterans Initiative to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all unrepatriated POW/MIAs in Vietnam and supports expanding the mission to include Southeast Asia."

*The POW/MIA Affairs Committee: Grant T. Coates, Chair. Members: Ray Autenrieb, Lawrence Carter, Terry Courville, Richard DeLong, Patti Dumin, Skip Hochreich, Dennis Howland, John Kost, Steve Mackey, Larry Matika, and Ted Wilkinson. Special Advisers: Gary Jones, Bill Duker, and Dan Carr. AVVA Advisers: Kaye Gardner and Terry Rangle. National League of Families Liaison: Susie Stephens-Harvey. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge and Mokie Porter (VI Program).*

## PTSD & Substance Abuse

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



Over the last year the PTSD/SA Committee has worked hard to build and strengthen resources and advocacy efforts through grassroots initiatives and to hold the VA accountable for implementing legislation tied to our legislative agenda.

Further, members have been active in the Women's Committee, Homeless Committee, Health Care Committee, Government Affairs Committee, POW/MIA Committee, and other VVA national committees in which mental health and substance abuse issues overlap.

Committee members have been involved in many activities, including the following:

- Members participated in Agent Orange round tables last year. Much of our lecture was about suicide prevention—complete with literature on PTSD and suicide prevention, along with phone numbers for state and national help.
- Presented programs in secondary education classes on PTSD and its impact on veterans, paving the way for behavioral health referrals for family members.
- Partnered with local CBOCs to ensure no veteran seeking mental health services is turned away without the intake assessment mandated by the VA.
- Met regularly with a local hospital director to correct poor treatment of a veteran taken to the emergency room suffering from chemical dependency.
- Facilitated a monthly two-hour secondary PTSD support group for the families of veterans and others who have PTSD. Discussions are curriculum-focused and deal with issues such as recognizing and managing triggers, developing effective communication skills, and promoting personal growth and self-care.
- Served on county behavioral health coalitions.

The committee continues to sponsor town halls and workshops on the identification and treatment of PTSD, including outreach to veterans and first-responders. In the coming year the committee has scheduled several town halls and invited an international authority on PTSD to present at the VVA National Leadership & Education Conference.

The committee also has strengthened its partnership with AVVA to establish PTSD support groups. To accomplish this, the committee has sponsored several town halls on secondary PTSD and has more planned for the coming year. AVVA also has developed stand-alone town halls to inform and help with secondary PTSD.

The committee understands the importance of getting help to people before they die by their own hand. The committee has sponsored presentations and town halls in the past year and is scheduled to present more events focused entirely on recognizing the signs and symptoms of suicide and how to work with a suicidal loved one.

The committee continues to challenge VA practices and procedures, locally and nationally, that do not address veterans' needs for substance-abuse treatment and other military mental health challenges. For example, many treatment and transitional housing providers are struggling under the VA's "unfunded

mandate" requiring more licensees and certifications in staffing without financial assistance to help the agencies stay competitive with the private sector for the best staff.

The committee, working with the national office, will continue to insist on policy or legislative initiatives that implement mental health assessments from induction to discharge with a smooth transition to the VA when indicated. We also will continue to insist that the same rigorous mental health assessment (or medical protocol) leading to an award of benefits should be applied when a reduction of benefits is considered.

The committee built stronger linkages with Veterans Against Drugs by establishing a subcommittee to support the twice yearly "Drug Take Back" program sponsored by local law enforcement and the DEA.

Committee members partnered with the Veterans Health Care Committee to ensure PTSD/SA issues and symptoms are considered in the greater context of overall veteran health. Working with the Women's Committee, we focused on military sexual trauma. MST often results in the victim being removed from the military with an other-than-honorable discharge, very much like veterans suffering from PTSD. Working with the Veterans Benefits program, our committee will continue to monitor and challenge the use of personality disorder (and other administrative discharges) in discharging veterans, especially those suffering from PTSD or MST.

The committee is keenly aware of the many claims by some providers that their particular treatment of PTSD/SA is "the cure." However, this only reminds us of the importance of checking for adequate evidenced-based research by recognized research entities, such as the National Academy of Medicine or the Food and Drug Administration, when considering claims for mental health treatments. Anecdotal reports are not evidenced-based.

*The PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee: Thomas C. Hall, Ph.D., Chair. Members: Fr. Phil Salois, Barry Schloffel, Carolyn Baker, Charles R. Montgomery, Charles Stapleton, Dan Stenvold, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Linda Blankenship, Sandy Miller, and Thomas Brown. AVVA Advisers: Elayne Mackey, Jeri Wallis, and Nina Schloffel. Staff Support: Thomas Berger, Ph.D.*

## Public Affairs

BY DENNIS HOWLAND, CHAIR



March 29 is Vietnam War Veterans Day, now a national day of observance. I hope each of you works with your community and plans newsworthy events to honor and remember all Vietnam War veterans that day.

The Public Affairs Committee would like your input about VVA's website, [www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org). Please send me the pros and cons you discover as you navigate through the site. If it's good news, let the committee know. If you have a problem, we need to know that as well.

In compliance with Public Affairs Resolution P-7, the following update is provided to the membership on the committee's efforts to advance the 2017 Convention Resolutions.

**P-1 Community Services.** The Public Affairs Committee encourages chapters to take the initiative to make a better community for everyone and serve as a focal point to promote relationships between Vietnam veterans and the community. The committee stresses the importance of using VVA resource materials in community activities. Examples include adopt-a-highway and neighborhood cleanup programs, assisting in community-sponsored fundraisers for community projects, or sponsorship of Agent Orange town halls or Hep C presentations.

**P-2 Children's Welfare.** The committee encourages participation in the Combined Federal Campaign with emphasis on programs that benefit children and families. It is important to research all solicitations from organizations that benefit infants and children for potential VVA support. Suggestions might be Boys and Girls Club volunteering or adult counseling in Scouting programs.

**P-3 Chapter Involvement with Educational Institutions on Teaching the Vietnam War.** State councils and chapters throughout VVA participate in "Vietnam Vets In Classrooms" programs. This provides for interaction between students, teachers, and Vietnam veterans by permitting a personal understanding of the Vietnam War while encouraging an exchange of ideas between generations. The committee is developing additional ways to increase our presence in educational institutions, such as JROTC medal and ribbon presentations.

**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 directly to the National Park Service to stress their strong feeling against it being used for any political or commercial purposes.

**P-5 Endorsement for Participation in Local Environmental Efforts.** Members have held discussions about the use of toxic chemicals and the storage and underground disposal of the millions of gallons of these chemicals. The issue of contaminated water at military installations is especially pressing. North Carolina State Council President Rossie Nance has a good resource for tracking the contaminated water issue: [www.gmasw.com/ao-bases.htm](http://www.gmasw.com/ao-bases.htm)

**P-7 Requirement to Report Progress on All Currently Approved Convention**

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**Resolutions at Least Annually.** The Public Affairs Committee continues to support the requirements of this resolution, as evidenced by this report.

**P-8 The Vietnam Veterans Memorial.** A commitment to continue the conservation and legacy of this memorial should be included in any plan regarding the legacy of Vietnam Veterans of America. It is recommended that this resolution be included as a serious consideration if, and when, a plan is developed, approved by vote, and becomes policy.

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

*The Public Affairs Committee: Dennis Howland, Chair. Members: Grant Coates, Ken Holybee, Ken Rogge, Robert Grabinski, Dan Stenvold (Chair of the Awards Subcommittee), Wayne Reynolds, Ph.D., Tom Brown, Ken Rose, Bill Hodges, and Bruce Waxman. AVVA Advisers: Betty Pike and Terri Rangel. Staff Support: Wes Guidry, Mokie Porter, Marc Leepson, and Michael Keating.*

well attended by National Officers, National Board Members, State Council Presidents, VVA staff, and local children and parents.

In February I attended the Annual Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America Convention at National Harbor, Md. CADCA is a wonderful source of information on everything that is new or successful in the war on drugs. It's also an opportunity to make connections with local governments, schools, law enforcement, and community organizations that operate successful anti-drug programs across the country.

*Veterans Against Drugs: Dave Simmons, Chair; Pattie Dumin, Vice Chair. Members: Dennis Andras, Ray Bates, Terry Courville, Billee Culin, Richard DeLong, Rodney Farley, Adolph Gardner, Bernard Kenan, Jack Kempter, Allen Manuel, Charles R. Montgomery, Carlton Rhodes, Henry Urioste, John Weiss, Ted Wilkinson, Herb Worthington, and Dominick Yezzo. Special Advisers: Mara Boggs and Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.). Special AVVA Advisers: Kathy Andras and John Birch. AVVA Advisers: Felicea Catapano, Patsy Chin, Kaye Gardner, Diane Nicholson, Betty Pike, Elaine Simmons, and Margaret Wojciechowicz. Staff Support: Deborah Williams.*

## Veterans Against Drugs

BY DAVE SIMMONS, CHAIR



In the past year the Veterans Against Drugs Committee has had an increase in interest from our members and from local communities searching for additional information, programs, and ways to decrease illegal drug use and violence. Each week, I receive inquiries about the VAD programs, how to get started, what age groups are best to work with, and how many volunteers are needed for a successful program.

Last year we established a great working relationship with the National Guard in West Virginia. The Guard runs the WV Challenge Academy, a boot camp-type learning center in which at-risk adolescents are sent to complete high school. The National Guard members are excited about introducing VAD at the Mountain Academy in the fall 2018 semester.

Another organization that Veterans Against Drug worked with last year is the Boy Scouts of America. Last summer VAD had a presence at the National Boy Scouts National Jamboree. We are very pleased to be invited again next year to the International Jamboree.

In January during the Board meeting, Veterans Against Drugs sponsored its All Free Skate program at the ice rink in Silver Spring, Md. This event grows more popular each year; this year it was very

## 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 efforts to advance the 2017 Convention Resolutions.

**VB-1 Judicial Review.** Veterans are able to hire a private attorney or claims agent at any point during the claims process. However, a contingency fee agreement is allowed only after the filing of a Notice of Disagreement (NOD), and the fee agreement needs to be reasonable. Be advised that once a post-NOD agreement is entered into the veteran's record, it can be difficult to remove. 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.** In September 2014 former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel signed a directive ordering the Army, Navy, and Air Force to implement supplemental guidance involving discharge upgrade applications relating to PTSD. The directive could affect upwards of eighty thousand Vietnam veterans with PTSD who have other-than-honorable discharges. Outreach to veterans from all wars has over the last

couple of years increased substantially on this issue. However, many veterans are still unaware that they can apply to the Board of Corrections of Military Records for upgrades, but we are making progress. VVA continues to seek the repeal of P.L.99-126. We continue our work toward having other-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.** Active-duty military personnel are often unable to recover adequate compensation for injuries due to negligence of government personnel. VVA continues to seek legislation or specific appropriate action to secure a more equitable compensation for personnel injured on active duty due to such negligence.

**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. This would allow veterans with identical issues to petition for relief within the court with jurisdiction over their benefits claims.

**VB-9 VA Implementation of U.S. Court of Appeals for Veteran Claims Decisions.** VVA joined in an amicus brief with Veterans for Common Sense that sought to use the federal courts to improve the speed and quality of VA benefits decisions. Unfortunately, the lawsuit was unsuccessful, so veterans still have to pursue individual VA claims. 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 instead of making each veteran fight his or her own battle.

**VB-10 Veterans Benefits & Services.** VVA and other veterans service organizations continue 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 there are still paper claims files, the VA claims most have been scanned, and nearly all claims are now processed without paper. The transition from paper files to digitized claims processing is far from foolproof. VVA Veterans Benefits staff continue to work with VVA Government Affairs to improve the VA Compensation system through legislative action, administrative advocacy, and meetings with VA executive staff. The committee continues to address issues related to the backlog, trying to improve work credits, suggesting improvements to the VA computer systems, and simplifying VA regulations.

**VB-12 VA Service-Connected Disability Compensation Payments & Military Retirement Pay Offset.** Concurrent

receipt of military retired pay and VA disability has been phased in over the last several years. However, this only applies to those with 50 percent or higher VA disability ratings. Combat-related special compensation is also a way veterans can receive both military retirement pay and VA disability benefits. The committee has continued 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.** At the national level, VVA continues to maintain high-quality attorneys for representation of veterans' claims. For our service officers, the Veterans Benefits program policies are being revised to more clearly define a service officer's duties and responsibilities. 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. Providing complete and workable health records to create a virtual lifetime electronic record has been the subject of much discussion, testimony, and meetings with VA staff. The committee also works with the VVA Veterans Benefits Department and Government Affairs staff to monitor records disposition schedules of the service departments to ensure that important health and personnel records are protected and not destroyed prematurely. Military personnel recently separated from their service branches are being provided with CDs or flash drives containing their records.

**VB-18 The Department of Veterans Affairs' Voluntary Service Program (VAVS).** This is an ongoing program. VVA continues to encourage its state councils and local chapters to get involved with voluntary services at their local hospitals.

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

**VB-27 Reduction of DIC Survivor Waiting Period.** Under Section 1318, even if a 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 ten-year period to one year.

**VB-28 Removal of 5 percent Annual Deductible for VA Pension Eligibility.**

*continued on page 14*



The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff to urge that all allowable medical expenses incurred by a low-income veteran eligible for a VA pension be subtracted from his or her household income, not just those expenses that exceed the 5 percent deductible. This will be included in our work on reducing the backlog as the necessary calculations make this annual task more onerous on veterans and VA employees.

*The Veterans Benefits Committee: Tom Burke, Chair; Joseph Jennings III, Vice Chair; Joe Kristek, Chair of the Service Officer Grant Program Subcommittee; Joe Jennings, Chair of the Service Officer Grievance Subcommittee; and Marc McCabe, Chair of the Strategic Planning Subcommittee. Members: Chuck Byers, Gene Crego, Ned Foote, John Margowski, Perry Melvin, Pete Peterson, John Riling, Phil Smith, Dick Southern, and John Weiss. AVVA Special Adviser: Sharon Hobbs. Support Staff: Kelsey Yoon and Elaine Chaney.*

## Veterans Health Care

**BY CAROL BAKER, CHAIR**



As the new Chair of VVA's Veterans Health Care Committee, I began meeting with the committee in October 2017. We identified many issues. The committee includes the chairs of four other national committees that deal with the same issues and are faced with similar concerns. The committee now plans on receiving a report on the discussions and recommendations of four committees—PTSD, Agent Orange & Dioxin, Homeless Veterans, and Women Veterans—in order to begin working together to identify and prioritize the issues, and to work together to address those concerns.

The committee began reviewing the Convention Resolutions and will make recommendations at the next meeting. The committee determined that the VVA website needs to be updated so our members and the public can locate information more easily. I look forward to serving on the committee and encourage everyone to contact us if you have questions or if we can be of assistance.

*The Veterans Health Care Committee: Carol Baker, Chair; Sara McVicker, Vice Chair. Members: Wayne Reynolds, Ph.D., Sandy Miller, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Tom Hall, Ph.D., Kerwin Stone, Ronald Mayhew, Gene Crego, John McGinty, Chuck Byers, and James Fleming. Consultant: Maureen Elias. Special Adviser: Linda Schwartz, Ph.D. AVVA Advisers: Fran Davis and Joanne Blum. Staff Support: Cathy Wiblemo, Rick Weidman, and Tom Berger, Ph.D.*

## Veterans Incarcerated and in the Justice System

**BY DOMINICK YEZZO, CHAIR**



The Veterans Incarcerated and in the Justice System Committee, as required by Public Affairs Resolution P-7, provides this yearly report to the membership. The

Veterans Incarcerated Committee was renamed at the 18th National Convention to include activities to expand the Veterans Treatment Courts. Its five Convention Resolutions are:

**VINJS-2 VVA Chapter and State Council Relationships with Veterans Incarcerated.** Many times there are not enough Vietnam veterans in a facility to form an incarcerated chapter. The closest regular chapter can volunteer to meet with the veterans and make them members of their chapter. Veterans incarcerated can make effective and credible mentors for Veteran Treatment Court mentees. The regular chapter can also help the veteran when re-entering society by providing support upon release. In Florida, VVA is sponsoring a pilot re-entry program, "Getting Ahead While Getting Out." The first class graduates in April. The committee intends to present lessons learned from this pilot program at the National Leadership & Education Conference this summer.

**VINJS-3 Veterans Incarcerated Benefits and Entitlements.** The committee urges the Department of Veterans Affairs to more aggressively provide medical treatment and counseling for veterans incarcerated, with special emphasis on PTSD and other service-related disabilities, and for the VA to work more closely with federal, state, and local correctional facilities to assist veterans incarcerated complete a successful rehabilitation. The VA should work more closely with the Department of Justice in developing a verifiable and statistically sound method for identifying veterans who are incarcerated. This committee will attempt to identify those states and regions that need more work.

**VINJS-4 PTSD and Parole/Clemency.** This committee strongly recommends that the U.S. Sentencing Commission and states that have no parole review for individuals sentenced for life establish special and specific mechanisms within their respective court systems and the boards of pardons to address the issue of veterans with service-connected PTSD who were arrested prior to 1980 and have not been afforded the opportunity to present evidence of the influence of PTSD on their criminal actions. The committee will contact the U.S. Sentencing Commission. We encourage state councils to discuss this topic with their state offices.

**VINJS-5 Retention of Benefits for Incarcerated Veterans.** The VA reduces the service-connected disability compensation payments to veterans incarcerated to the 10 percent rating pay schedule. The committee finds that this discriminates against disabled veterans incarcerated. We have been unable to identify a member of Congress willing to champion this resolution. There is no consensus on where the funding would come from.

**VINJS-6 PTSD Treatment of Incarcerated Veterans.** Veterans with service-connected disabilities who become incarcerated often do not have access to proper medical care within prison systems, especially those veterans with PTSD who need specialized mental health treatment. Some regions have seen good cooperation between the VA and the state prison system. The committee will work to identify states and regions that need better cooperation.

The committee believes that all chapters should provide mentors for the Veterans Treatment Courts in their areas. This will help stop the flow of veterans into the justice system. We also believe that chapters and state councils can help with the successful re-entry of veterans incarcerated into society. This will help reduce homelessness and recidivism. We encourage the establishment and support of Veterans Treatment Courts and re-entry programs.

*The Veterans Incarcerated and in the Justice System Committee: Dominick Yezzo, Chair; Larry Frazee, Vice Chair; and Raymond Pawlicki, Secretary. Members: Tony D'Aleo, Mike Bousher, Gary Estermeier, Tom Haberkorn, Ben Humphries, Allen Manuel, Ron Morgan, Gary Newman, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, and Dave Simmons. AVVA Advisers: Casey Farrell and Don Jones. Staff Support: Bernie Edelman.*

## Women Veterans

**BY KATE O'HARE-PALMER, CHAIR**



Several amendments were made to Committee Resolutions during the 2017 Convention. Some changes were minor, but the highlights of specific changes include:

**WV-2 Medical Treatment of Women Veterans by the VA.** The resolve section has been expanded to include accountability of the Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) to ensure women veterans receive appropriate care and to have a woman veteran collaborating with each VISN meeting. It calls on the VA to streamline eligibility and receipt of information to access health care services for first-time users, to have billing rates organized in an understandable language for first-time VA users, to review

the sense of mistrust of women veterans who use the VA, and to develop strategies to alleviate mistrust. It also calls upon the VA to expand reproductive health care to ensure complete infertility workups and fertility solutions.

Satisfaction assessments need to be available after each provider visit, and they must include reporting by gender and race to detect any differences in quality of care. Mental health care changes need to include access to female mental health professionals when requested (if necessary, use of Choice Card), creating women veteran mental health groups in every CBOC, as well as evidence-based holistic programs for women's health, mental health, and rehabilitation in all VA hospitals and CBOCs.

**WV-3 Support for Women Veterans.** Resolved: to continue to provide women veterans with an awareness of their benefits and to mentor them in their legislative rights for improved medical care and benefits.

**WV-5 Women Veteran Research.** Additions in the resolved section: equality in Compensation and Pension ratings. Also: continued comprehensive evaluation of suicide among women veterans, including rates of both attempted and completed suicides, as well as risk factors, including comorbid diagnoses, history of sexual trauma or sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, bullying, unemployment, deployments, or homelessness. The VA should utilize all media to promote the availability of women veterans' programs.

**WV-6 Women Veterans and Veterans Benefits.** Addition to resolved section: VA to establish a functional transition program with DoD for newly released military. The current program does not address information referrals for women's resources adequately.

**WV-7 Women Veteran Program Managers.** Additions in the resolved section: WVPM information to be posted clearly at the check-in counters in the clinic areas.

**WV-8 Military Sexual Trauma.** Resolve additions: VVA requests review results of the Retaliation Prevention and Response Strategy FY 2016-2017 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; Pattie Dumin, Vice Chair. Members: Sandy Miller, Dottie Barickman, Tom Berger, Ph.D., Tom Hall, Ph.D., Sara McVicker, Sandie Wilson, Frank Arminio, Chuck Byers, Carol Baker, Gene Crego, and Tom Devlin. Special Advisers: Beverly Stewart, Lee Jackson, Billee Culin, Linda Blankenship, Ed Ryan, Ph.D., Jennifer Wilson, Linda Schwartz, Ph.D., Maureen Elias, Cathy Wiblemo, and Cheryl Van Syckle. AVVA Adviser: Elayne Mackey. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge. ■*