



## Working Group I

BY BOB SEAL, CHAIR

Based on feedback received from several State Council Presidents, there appears to be a concern that the general membership lacks information about the status and progress of Working Group I (WG I) and Working Group II.

WG I is finalizing the VVA Strategic Plan for Dissolution. The draft strategic plan will be provided to the VVA BOD on March 25 for its review and comment, and will be finalized by WG I prior to April 12, when WG I will transfer ownership of the plan to the BOD for its information and use.

The VVA Strategic Plan for Dissolution will contain specific actions and the dates those actions need to be taken to provide for an orderly and successful dissolution of the VVA National Corporation. Because a date for dissolving the VVA National Corporation has not been established, WG I will list action dates in an X-Date minus some number of months or years format. Some of those actions will need to be taken relatively soon, with most occurring closer to the date of dissolution.

The VVA BOD will have primary responsibility for maintaining and executing the strategic plan and will need to be focused and involved in every step of the process. The strategic plan includes specific actions to identify and preserve legacy programs and activities important to the VVA membership. WG I believes the BOD needs to form a small committee to focus on legacy issues, because they will eventually need to identify organizations to transfer assets to preserve programs important to the legacy of VVA.

Directors of a nonprofit corporation generally have a two-fold duty: 1) fulfill the corporate mission; and 2) protect and maximize the assets of the corporation while at the same time avoiding insolvency. The VVA BOD has a duty to provide for the future of the VVA National Corporation, which will inevitably be dissolved either voluntarily or involuntarily, by planning ahead for its certain termination.

The VVA Constitution is silent regarding dissolution. WG I will propose an amendment to the VVA Constitution at the 2019 VVA National Convention for the purpose of tasking the BOD, including the officers, with actively managing the legal dissolution of the Corporation, to include adopting, updating, and implementing a strategic plan for dissolution, and to take all actions necessary to accomplish the dissolution of the VVA Corporation. Please note that this amendment does not establish a date or condition for dissolution of the VVA National Corporation.

Identifying a date to dissolve the VVA National Corporation was difficult for WG I, but the date that will be proposed to the membership in the form of an amendment to the VVA Constitution for approval of the delegates at the National Convention will be “on or about December 31, 2028.” Why that date? First, today the average age of the VVA membership is about 72, and by the end of 2028, the average age will be about 82. While VVA has a few active and contributing members who are 80 years and older, they are the exception rather than the rule.

Second, VVA will celebrate its 50th anniversary of service to veterans in 2028, and it would be fitting for the VVA membership to celebrate that land-

*continued on page 49*

## Working Group II

BY LYNN McMILLEN

When Vietnam veterans came home from the war, there was no one there to greet us, or we were greeted with curses, scorn, and derision. The Veterans Administration didn't want to hear about us. PTSD wasn't even an issue on the horizon, and most of the established veterans service organizations gave us a cold shoulder. In fact, the general social climate was so negative that many of us preferred not to speak about our service at all.

Feeling abandoned and isolated by the government and the citizens for whom we had served, and in need of services, some of which did not yet exist, we decided to band together to help ourselves. In 1978 we formed Vietnam Veterans of America, and we took as our mission statement, “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.”

We are no longer the current generation of veterans. Now we have become the Past Generation, the Old Guys—dad and granddad. Now our children and their children are serving their country, and we find ourselves facing a decision: Are we going to be there for the generations of veterans who follow us, for our children and the country they serve?

We know that many of our members are uncomfortable with the idea of opening up VVA to another generation of veterans. We have decided that as an organization we wish to end the way we started—as ourselves. Yet we also promised ourselves that we will not abandon following generations.

Is it really all that important what we decide to do here? After all, we're just one small veterans organization. There are lots of other ones out there. Why not let the next bunch of veterans start their own organization as we had to? Why should we help them?

One answer is that we have a huge head start, even though we had to learn the hard way. We have an inheritance to share, something we have earned and can pass on to help the next generation.

Another answer is: because we can and many of us want to. We have a history of leading, of getting it done. We don't want

all we have done to just go down the drain. For a small organization, we have had an outsized impact on the veterans community.

We have lobbied to improve the lot of veterans and their families. We have provided trained service officers who have gotten thousands of veterans the VA benefits that they earned through their service, but which the VA was reluctant to provide. We have informed veterans about issues of immediate and pressing importance to them.

We have supported Vet Centers where veterans are counseled by fellow veterans. We have created incarcerated veterans chapters, advocated for the upgrading of bad paper discharges and for veterans courts to help turn around veterans' lives.

What will be lost if VVA does not pass on its experience and successes to following generations? Here is a baker's dozen of VVA accomplishments for us to be proud of—and to pass on.

1. Legislative experience. VVA has a strong record of success in writing, lobbying for, and getting passage of bills to benefit all veterans.

2. Influence on Capitol Hill. VVA has testified on dozens, if not hundreds, of issues of interest and benefit to veterans, building the case, pro-

*continued on page 49*

## Working Group I

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

mark before ending operations. Other indicators—such as chapters and state councils having difficulty filing the proper reports to remain in good standing with VVA National Corporation, and smaller chapters struggling to find five members willing to serve as officers and directors—demonstrate an increasing problem at the root level of the organization.

So, what happens if the delegates do not approve WG I's proposed date for dissolution, or an alternate date proposed at the Convention? An excellent analogy provided by WG I and Board member Kerwin Stone is that the truck has already crested the hill and is starting down the slope. At the bottom of the hill there is a train stopped across the road, and the longer the driver of the truck delays applying the brakes the faster the truck will be going and the more difficult it will be to take actions to prevent a wreck at the bottom of the hill.

Even should the delegates not approve the date proposed by WG I, that will not delay or stop the inevitable point when the VVA National Corporation must dissolve. There are many actions that must be taken over a several-year period to distribute assets and preserve the legacy of VVA. If the VVA National Corporation delays taking well-planned and orderly actions too long, the state of New York, rather than VVA, will make those decisions.

Both working groups need to provide as much information as possible to the membership prior to the 2019 Convention so they can discuss the issues before the Convention. WG I will distribute the final VVA Strategic Plan for Dissolution to the State Council Presidents in electronic format on the same day it presents the hard-copy document to the VVA BOD. The two constitutional amendments that WG I will submit to the VVA Constitution Committee will be distributed to the membership through the regular committee process. ■

## Working Group II

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

viding statistics, and “telling it like it is” so that members of Congress can learn what veterans need and want.

3. The future of toxic exposure research. VVA has taken the lead in getting Congress to require VA to study the effects of toxic exposure—not just on veterans, but on their families.

4. POW/MIA accountability. VVA is the only veterans service organization actively searching for and repatriating remains of soldiers from many wars, not just Vietnam. We were the veterans organization that lobbied Congress until they passed the new Missing Service Personnel Act, requiring families to be represented at hearings, and the government to produce all known information about a missing veteran, including confidential information, and many more requirements protecting POWs and MIA from being abandoned or simply declared dead.

5. VVA is the only VSO that has sued the U.S. government to protect the rights of veterans from government overreach, failure to provide benefits, and other harms to veterans' lives and rights.

6. Services to incarcerated veterans. VVA is the only VSO that actively serves veterans, even in jails and prisons. VVA has several incarcerated veterans chapters across the country, and actively advocates for issues such as consideration of PTSD status during sentencing.

7. Veterans Preference legislation. VVA has worked to enact laws putting teeth into veterans preference in government hiring.

8. Bad paper. VVA has taken the lead in getting the military to re-evaluate dishonorable and bad conduct discharges, taking into account issues such as PTSD.

9. The Forever GI Bill. VVA took the lead in getting the “Forever” in the Forever GI Bill—a benefit that will reverberate far into the future.

10. Job training and placement. VVA has had major influence on the provision of job training programs and job placement help for freshly released veterans, as well as veterans who have had difficulty finding work.

11. Self-help guides. VVA has produced many publications about veterans benefits, toxic exposure, job training, and other issues of immediate benefit to veterans.

12. VVA has advocated steadily for improvement in all phases of VA benefit delivery, including duty to assist, accuracy in processing, timeliness, back benefits, and rating accuracy. VVA has also lobbied and testified in Congress to help prevent the privatization of VA, which would lead to greatly increased costs and decreased quality of service.

13. Vet Centers. VVA was a leading advocate for veteran-to-veteran services in a non-VA setting for veterans whose distrust of the VA was keeping them from using services. Many VVA chapters were born as outgrowths of Vet Centers.

If VVA is to disband, who will carry on their work? How will future veterans organizations acquire the experience and know-how they will need to protect veterans of their generation?

We can do it. Even as our light goes out, we can kindle another light. Even in passing, we can pass on the torch. This is wholly in keeping with who and what we are. We are the veterans group who proclaimed “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.” We can reach down and lift up the next generation. We can provide the leadership, the experience, the heritage for future generations of veterans.

We can do this by helping charter, fund, and lead a new veterans organization. We won't know the exact shape of this new organization, but we can provide a framework for it to grow on. We won't know all the issues a new generation will face, but we can show them how to address those issues. Even as we close our tent and slip quietly into the night, we can light the day for a new generation. We can. We should. ■