



Progress In Advancing Convention Resolutions

Current Convention Resolutions are posted at www.vva.org

Agent Orange/Dioxin

BY MAYNARD KADERLIK, CHAIR



I get many calls and emails on the four presumptives the VA is sitting on. VVA and other VSOs are writing many letters to the VA Secretary encouraging him to move forward with these four. The VA claims they must first complete two studies and report out at the end of 2020. It always amazes me how many studies by professionals need to be done. Another stalling tactic, I'm sure. It has been now over four years since IOM recommended they be put on the list by the Secretary.

One very important Senate bill, S-3444, Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act 2020, does address these four. We need to ask our senators to sign on to this bill. We need to call our legislators at the very least every two weeks to remind them that these are concerns of their constituents. By calling often they realize that this is an important issue to the veterans who served this country.

Another time frame that the VA is behind on is the children's bill, 114-315. The research part is now over a year behind schedule. I understand that things are currently up in the air, but what happened to the time before the pandemic? No excuses, please.

Linda Schwartz and Jack McManus are still involved with 91,000 Ranch Hand samples the U.S. Air Force has in freezers in Dayton, Ohio. Before the pandemic the group had a plan in place, but it is on hold. Everyone is rightfully focused on the pandemic.

Most Faces of Agent Orange town halls have been canceled. When this pandemic is behind us we will continue them and educate veterans and their families on this issue that affects multiple generations. Thanks to the grassroots people in VVA who have worked to present town halls all over America. No matter the outcome, we fought very hard and won many battles and can be proud of what we did for veterans and their families. We are not done yet and will continue the good fight. We are also proud of the hard work the staff does at the national office.

A note to Blue Water Navy sailors: File! File! File! One of two forms must be filed with your service representative. One if you have never filed; the other if you filed previously and were denied. They have two different form numbers and your service representative will be familiar with them.

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 about conditions due to veterans' exposure to toxins. At the Agent Orange town halls we have provided copies of VA Form 21-0304 for the children and grandchildren to file with a certified service representative. They will go to the Regional Office and be denied. Then they will be archived with the VA. As the VA moves forward with S.901, which was enacted for the children, it will deal with these archived forms.

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

AO-5 Assure Proper Implementation of the Agent Orange Act of 1991. The Government Affairs and the Agent Orange Committees work together to establish legislation for research on presumptives, 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 Leadership & Education Conferences much information is supplied to members, who take that information home and distribute it to their chapters. Town halls, too, spread the word.

AO-9 Papermaking Manufacturing Processes Industrial Manufacturing Processes, Including Papermaking. This resolution was reworded.

AO-10 Ban the Manufacturing, Sale, And/or Use of 2,4-D And Glyphosate. This resolution was reworded. The committee continues to take needed steps to ban this on the state and federal levels.

AO-12 National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Funding for Research in Vietnam remained the same. The

committee continues to work with this agency.

AO-13 Agent Orange/Dioxin Awareness Month. The committee encourages states and the federal government to make October Agent Orange/Dioxin Awareness Month.

AO-14 Hearing Loss Added to the List of Birth Defects Due to Exposure to Agent Orange. The committee in its town halls hears testimony about hearing loss in children and grandchildren. When the law, 114-315, for children moves forward to do the research, it should be dealt with.

AO-15 Government's Responsibility for Veterans Right to Know. The committee has been involved with much toxic exposure on many active and abandoned military bases. DOD has knowledge of these toxic substances.

AO-16 Blue Water Veterans Exposure During the Vietnam War. This resolution has been retired by the Agent Orange Committee as legislation has passed and is now law.

AO-17 Remove One-Year Cutoff Date of Chloracne, Acute/Subacute Peripheral Neuropathy, Porphyria, and Cutanea Tarda. Approved at the VVA National Convention in Spokane.

The Agent Orange/Dioxin Committee: Maynard Kaderlik, Chair; Jack McManus and Mike Demske, Vice Chairs. Members: John Hargens, John Weiss, Sandie Wilson, Roland Mayhew, Marc McCabe, Dennis Andras, Bruce Dobson, Gerald Ney, Stephen Bowers, and Rossie Nance. Special Advisers: Tom Owen, Paul Sutton, Jim Doyle, John McGinty, Steven House, Bob Grabinski, John Rossie, Herb Worthington, Wes Carter, Betty Mekdeci, Robert Cummings, Sandra Morgan, Ken Holybee, John Wells, Billee Culin, Frank Arminio, Carlton Rhodes, Gerry Wright, Fran Guevremont, and Mike Beuster. AVVA Advisers: Nancy Switzer, Kathy Andras, and Bobbie Morris. Staff Support: Bernie Edelman, Mokie Porter, and Rick Weidman.

ration and training, and 2) to promote veterans in business. Here is the progress the committee has made advancing our resolutions.

E-1 Jobs in the Public Sector. As part of our advocacy, committee members meet with the House Small Business Committee and Veterans' Affairs Committee on Capitol Hill to express our concerns and ask for support to ensure that veterans receive preference. This is an issue that we continually advocate for so that veterans get what they were legislatively promised.

E-2 Job Training and Other Services. The committee invited to its meeting the new Assistant Secretary of the Department of Labor for Veterans Employment and Training Service, who updated members about its training programs, including the Transition Assistance Program, Boots to Business, Veteran Business Outreach Centers, Access to Capital, and One-Stop Shop for Veteran Entrepreneurs. Accompanying the Assistant Secretary was the National Veterans Employment Manager for the Office of Strategic Outreach. Committee members support jobs and training by attending job fairs and offering assistance to local chapters to publicize resources available to veterans.

E-3 Veterans in Business. The committee works on the national and local levels with the Small Business Administration. The committee promotes procurement readiness so that veterans know the process and state labor laws, as well as how to win business, and can execute contracts once they are awarded. The committee collaborates with veteran-owned financial companies to seek alternative funding sources for veteran businesses to gain access to capital.

E-19 A Meaningful Job at a Living Wage. Members advocate for advancing employment opportunities in demand occupations and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) that provide long-term career opportunities for veterans and a living wage. The Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc., a national construction industry trade association, educated our members about its training programs, which work to fill the shortage of skilled workers and provide opportunities for veterans who have the skills to succeed in the industry.

The Economic Opportunities Committee: Frank Barry, Chair; Vice Chair: Dennis Andras. Members: Larry Carter, Marc Goldschmitt, Victor Klingelhofer, Pete Peterson, and Dave Smith. AVVA Advisers: Sharon Hobbs, Susan Henthorn, and Terri Rangel. Special Adviser: Joe Wynn. Staff Support: Rick Weidman.

Economic Opportunities

BY FRANK BARRY, CHAIR



The Economic Opportunities Committee has two main goals: 1) to promote meaningful jobs for veterans in the private and public sectors through job prepa-



Homeless Veterans

BY SANDY MILLER, CHAIR



Another year has gone by and the number of homeless veterans continues to decrease, according to the VA. Here is the annual review of our resolutions from the 2019 Convention.

HV-1 Homeless Veterans as a “Special Needs Population.” The committee will continue to push for recognizing homeless veterans as a Special Needs Population. It is essential that a fair-share dollar approach to federal funding of all homeless programs and services must target homeless veterans.

HV-6 VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding. VVA continues to urge the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program to provide payment for services rather than the reimbursement for services it presently provides for transitional housing. The committee supports and seeks legislation to establish Supportive Services Staffing Grants for VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Service Center Grant Awardees.

HV-7 Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program to Remain at the U.S. Department of Labor and Be Fully Funded at \$50M. The committee will continue to support keeping the HVRP Program at the Department of Labor, while also moving forward with legislation demanding full funding at \$50 million.

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 continues to support and urge the continued funding and expansion of the HUD-VASH voucher program and to establish an oversight mechanism to review the program’s outcomes and efficacy.

HV-10 Continued Funding for “Special Needs” Grants Under the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Homeless Grants & Per Diem Program. The committee will continue to push for legislation to extend the Homeless Veterans with Special Needs grants, due to expire on September 30 of each VA fiscal year, to permanent funding, thus eliminating the need to renew and reauthorize every year.

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. We continue to watch programs established to address the needs of homeless women veterans and urge the VA to identify best-practice models that address the unique needs and issues of homeless women veterans and move to implement these practices in programs for homeless women veterans nationwide.

HV-13 Support for the Missing in America Project. VVA at every level—chapter, state council, and national—supports the mission of the Missing In America Project in locating and identifying the unclaimed cremains of veterans and securing a final resting place for these forgotten veterans. This continues to be an ongoing project for many chapters and state councils.

HV-14 Support, Oversight, and Accountability of VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families. The SSVF program has been successful in providing assistance to homeless veterans, as well as to those classified as “imminently homeless.” The committee fully supports the continuation of the VA’s SSVF grant program. VVA strongly urges the VA Secretary to monitor and hold accountable those entities receiving and distributing these funds to the most vulnerable veteran families.

As the chair of the committee, I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to the members of the committee, including the valuable input and contributions of AVVA. A special recognition to our Staff Support, Sharon Hodge, for her work.

Homeless Veterans Committee: Sandy Miller, Chair; Tom Hall, Ph.D., Vice Chair. Members: Kate O’Hare Palmer, John McGinty, Steve Mackey, Joe McIntyre, and Jerry Blum. Advisers: Joanne Blum and Joanna Henshaw. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge.

Membership Affairs

BY DICK SOUTHERN, 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, and 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 2019 National Convention.

During the January CSCP meeting in Silver Spring, the state council presidents were made aware of the importance of informing their chapters that membership continues to grow. All questions should be directed to the Membership Department.

The FY2021 proposed budget was approved by the Membership Affairs Committee during its January 2020 meeting.

I want to thank the Membership Affairs Committee members for their dedication and loyalty.

The Membership Affairs Committee: Dick Southern, Chair. Members: Richard DeLong, Larry Frazee, Richard Lindbeck, John Margowski, Rex Moody, Andy LeDuc, Bob Pace, John Weiss, Ted Wilkinson, Leonard Smith, John H. Riling III, Carlton Rhodes, Jerry Corrigan, Sam Brick, Michael Quilty, Ken Rogge, Charlie Montgomery, and James Fleming, VVA Adviser: Bill Meeks. AVVA Adviser: Cecilia Essenschmacher. Staff Support: Tracie Houston.

Minority Affairs

BY GUMERSINDO GOMEZ, CHAIR



Since having been reappointed to chair the committee last year in Spokane, many positive things have emerged. At the Convention we passed a Korean Vietnam War brothers proclamation; I thank all of the delegates who supported this resolution. At present, this resolution is with the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health and has been incorporated into H.R. 5590, the Korean American VALOR Act, introduced by Rep. Gilbert Cisneros, Jr. (D-Calif.). We are hopeful it will make it to the floor, and that with your support our legislators will pass it. Then our Korean brothers will be able to receive treatment for the same medical conditions that in-country Vietnam veterans suffer from.

The Minority Affairs Committee was fortunate to add Chuck Odom. Odom brings vast experience dealing with Native Americans veterans. He works with the Mississippi Band of the Choctaw Indians on an initiative he started in 2018 to bring better health care to veterans at the Choctaw reservation, since the nearest VAMC is 62 miles away. At present, VA doctors and other medical personnel visit the reservation three days a week. Health at the reservation for Vietnam veterans has improved tremendously.

VVA has kept a close eye on Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria devastated the island, followed by recent earthquakes. Southwestern Puerto Rico took the brunt of the quakes. VVA National, state councils, and chapters have sent donations to help Vietnam veterans rebuild their homes and provide for their families. Puerto Rico has a chapter in the town of Yauco, which took a big hit. We will continue to monitor this situation.

The committee will continue to advance the following Convention Resolutions:

MA-1 Language-Translated VA Benefits Material. VVA continues its support for distribution by the VA of materials outlining benefits, programs, and adjudication guides in Spanish.

MA-2 Minority Affairs Coverage in The VVA Veteran. The committee submits a regular column and this annual report.

MA-3 Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans. VVA continues its support for the creation of an Asian American and Pacific Islander working group within the VA. VVA further requests that a study be conducted by the VA on the social and psychological effects of military service on Asian American and Pacific Islander veterans during and after the Vietnam War.

MA-5 Foreign National Vietnam Veterans Immigration. VVA supports legislation to permit free entry into the U.S. of any foreign nationals who served in the U.S. armed forces and who are Vietnam veterans seeking medical care for service-related disabilities, regardless of length of service. This legislation should also give disabled foreign Vietnam veterans eligibility for naturalization, irrespective of the 24-month period required in the current status (Title 8 and Title 9 U.S.C.) for naturalization.

MA-6 Involvement by Minority Veterans Welcome in VVA. VVA continues its commitment to minority affairs programs by encouraging all veterans to become involved at all levels of the organization, and VVA will work more closely with other minority veterans organizations. VVA will devote appropriate staff and resources to continue a long-range, comprehensive Minority Affairs program directed at recruitment, education, and involvement. The Minority Affairs Committee will monitor the plan outline adopted by the Board of Directors.

MA-7 Puerto Rican Veterans and U.S. Virgin Islanders. VVA renews its commitment for the continuum of health care and VA services to veterans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and their families, and to increase awareness of the availability of these services.

MA-8 Recognition of the Services and Sacrifices Made by the Veterans of the Territory of Guam and U.S. Pacific Islanders. VVA recognizes the contributions made by the veterans of Guam and commends and salutes the Vietnam veterans of Guam for their courage and contributions during the Vietnam War. Furthermore, VVA strongly supports the improvement of benefits and health care provided to veterans of Guam and other U.S. Pacific Islands.

MA-9 Awareness and Sensitivity to Racial, Cultural, and Gender-Related Equity Issues. VVA will promote active diversity forums and seminars as part of a training program at all levels, especially during the National Leadership & Education Conferences and National Conventions.

MA-10 Self-Determination for Puerto Rico. VVA supports legislation whereby the U.S. Congress would define the political status options available to the citizens of Puerto Rico and authorize a plebiscite to provide an opportunity for Puerto Rico to decide the island’s political status.

I thank the committee members who have been there with me, encouraging and

continued on page 16



supporting me as we confront the issues facing us.

The Minority Affairs Committee: Gumersindo Gomez, Chair; Melvin M. Murrel, Vice Chair. Members: William Garcia, Francisco Ivarra, Gerald Ney, Jorge Pedroza, Pete Peterson, Joe Jennings, Clifford Riley, Chuck Odom, and Kerwin Stone. AVVA Advisers: John Birch and Nina Schloffel. Staff Support: Bernie Edelman.

POW/MIA Affairs

BY GRANT T. COATES, CHAIR



In accordance with VVA Convention Resolution P-7, adopted at the 19th 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 (NDC), created on December 29, 2009, by Executive Order 13526. The NDC works with various military commands, and secret correspondences have completed declassification processing.

PM-4 Americans Missing in Laos and Cambodia. Efforts continue for better relations with Laos and Cambodia to further recovery missions in these countries.

PM-7 Possibility of Live POW/MIAs, and Facilitating the Return of Those Who Remain in Southeast Asia. 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 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 names are immediately announced through organizational media. For various reasons, including wishes of the families, DOD announcements are often delayed beyond identification dates.

PM-11 Honoring All Returned POWs, and Giving Recognition of American Civilians Held as POW/Interned During WWII. VVA urges 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 public servants, military

personnel, and citizens who have devoted their lives, vocation, 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 and supports compliance with P.L. 116-67, The National POW/MIA Flag Act, enacted on November 7, 2019. The bill changed the days on which the POW/MIA flag is required to be displayed at specified locations to all days on which the U.S. flag is displayed. VVA will 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 that displays the national colors should include the POW/MIA flag. The POW/MIA flag 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 positioning protocol.

PM-14 Forever POW/MIA Stamp. As of March 26, no congressional member has introduced legislation regarding the Perpetual POW/MIA Stamp Act. A bill must be passed by both the House and Senate in identical form and then be signed by the President to become law.

The Perpetual POW/MIA Stamp Act will be introduced by Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) on September 20, 2020, during the 116th Congress. If passed in the House of Representatives, the bill must be passed by the Senate in identical form, 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 launched an information-request advertisement in 2016 titled "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. The end result of the veteran-to-veteran collaboration between VVA and Vietnamese organizations will be the accounting 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 unrepatriated POW/MIAs in Vietnam and supports expanding the mission elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

The POW-MIA Affairs Committee: Grant T. Coates, Chair. Members: Terry Courville, Richard DeLong, Patti Dumin, Skip Hochreich, Dennis Howland, Larry Matika, JD Soileau, Tim Von Bon, and Ted Wilkinson. Special Advisers: AVVA, Kaye Gardner; National League of Families, Susie Stephens. VI Program Advisers: Gary Jones

and Bill Duker. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge and Mokie Porter (VI Program).

PTSD & Substance Abuse

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



Over the past year, the PTSD/SA Committee has worked diligently to build and strengthen resources and advocacy. The committee supported such grassroots initiatives as bringing veterans' concerns to hospital directors and contacting congressional representatives to hold the VA accountable for implementing legislation in line with our legislative agenda.

Accountability was the watchword for the committee last year and will be again this year. Several of our members are active in other national VVA committees, and we continue to strengthen our partnership with AVVA, with whom individual and family mental health and substance abuse issues overlap.

What follows are our issues of concern. **PTSD/1 Issue:** The Department of Veterans Affairs still has not sufficiently taken the lead in many important aspects of the effects of PTSD on veterans.

The committee is keenly aware of the many claims by providers, including the VA, that their particular treatments of PTSD/SA are "the cure." There is no single cure, of course, for those afflicted with debilitating, chronic PTSD. Still, the committee acknowledges the importance of rigorous research studies by recognized entities, such as the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine or the Food and Drug Administration, when considering claims of complementary and alternative mental health treatments.

The committee recognizes that PTSD and substance use disorder require continuing care to anchor gains made in treatment. So the committee will continue to vigorously advocate for the VA to embrace Continuing Supportive Therapy before and after veterans have completed Prolonged Exposure Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.

We have been working locally and nationally to show VA the need to offer Continuing Care support groups instead of shutting them down. These supportive environments complement and support gains made in the above-mentioned treatments. The committee continues to advocate to ensure Supportive Therapy and Continuing Care Therapies are available to all veterans.

PTSD/2 Issue: Treatment of veterans' psychological needs at independent, community-based Vet Centers.

We met with Michael Fisher, chief of the VA's Readjustment Counseling Service, commonly known as the Vet Centers. VVA

fought for the creation of the Vet Centers. Over the years VVA has intervened to save them from being absorbed into the great maw of the mother ship.

We now have an additional voice to help ensure the traditional independence of the Vet Centers. The chair of VVA's PTSD/SA Committee has been appointed to the VA advisory board addressing veterans readjustment. Of current concern is the workload, turnover, and burnout of counselors at Vet Centers.

PTSD/3 Issue: Hundreds of thousands of veterans and their families suffer severe psychological and emotional difficulties related to military service.

Committee members have supported local and national initiatives. A review of some of these initiatives by the PTSD/SA committee includes:

- Members participated in workshops and town halls.
- Presented in college education classes on the Vietnam War with special focus on PTSD and its impact on veterans, paving the way for behavioral health referrals for family members.
- Presented on PTSD and suicide prevention in retirement homes to groups of veterans.
- Continued to work with local VA behavioral health centers to prevent first-time vets seeking mental health services from being turned away without proper mental health intake assessment.
- Facilitated a weekly hour-long workshop group on living and coping in recovery with PTSD.
- Facilitated support groups with AVVA for the families of veterans and others afflicted with PTSD. Discussions deal with issues such as recognizing and managing triggers, developing effective communication skills, and promoting personal growth and self-care.
- Served as consultant on VA emergency residential services for veterans.
- Worked with state veterans commissions to promote suicide awareness and drug take-back initiatives.

The committee, along with the VVA Board of Directors, works with local chapters, state councils, and regions to sponsor town halls and workshops focusing on the identification and treatment of PTSD. That includes outreach to veterans and first responders on identifying and managing PTSD.

The committee will continue to strengthen its partnership with AVVA to work for establishing PTSD and secondary PTSD support groups in chapters. The committee has sponsored workshops on secondary PTSD and has more planned. AVVA also has developed stand-alone workshops.

The committee understands the importance of getting help to someone before they die by their own hand. To meet this ongoing and often preventable tragedy, the



committee has sponsored workshops and is scheduled to present more events focused on recognizing the signs and symptoms of suicide and how to work with a suicidal loved one. Reaching out to others is especially important during a quarantine-lockdown.

The committee continues to challenge VA practices and procedures, locally and nationally, that do not address veterans' need for substance abuse treatment and other mental health challenges.

PTSD/4 Issue: Some Vet Centers do not provide regular and effective PTSD counseling to family members, even though they are the only entity in the VA legally mandated to do so.

The committee continues to advocate in partnership with AVVA for all Vet Centers to offer access to a qualified marriage and family therapist. This also includes the behavioral health departments of the VA.

PTSD/5 Issue: Hundreds of thousands of veterans and their families suffer severe psychological and emotional difficulties related to military service.

The committee, working with the national office, will continue to push for policy and legislative initiatives that implement what we recognize as the fundamental importance of mental health assessments from induction to discharge with a smooth transition to the VA. We also will continue to insist that the same rigorous mental health assessment leading to an award of benefits should be applied when a reduction of benefits is considered.

The committee advocates for a bio/psycho/social investigation to be done after a suicide to look for anything that might tell us what to look for when a veteran is considering suicide.

PTSD/6 Issue: Alcohol and other drugs, including prescription drugs, have had a serious impact on the quality of life of veterans and their families, particularly those with PTSD. The treatment of substance abuse by qualified staff must be made available on a more global basis.

Committee members partnered with the Veterans Health Care and Veterans Against Drugs Committees in Drug Takeback events as part of our mission to ensure that substance use disorder is considered in the greater context of overall veteran physical and mental health.

PTSD/7 Issue: The importance and necessity for the development of mental health resources for PTSD.

The committee, with the Veterans Health Council and Government Affairs, encourages the National Center for PTSD to continue research into new and innovative treatments for PTSD. The committee also focuses on access to treatment of PTSD and substance use disorder. This includes refocusing on continuing clinically supportive care to maintain gains in traditional treatments offered by the VA for all veterans managing PTSD and substance use disorder.

PTSD/8 Issue: The VA still has not sufficiently taken the lead in many important aspects of the effects of PTSD with regard to Veterans Claims.

The committee is working with the Veterans Health Council and the Government Affairs and Veterans Benefits Committees to back initiatives to support veterans service officers so they are able to prepare a fully developed claim for a veteran to help hold the Veterans Benefits Administration to its stated response time of 125 days to adjudicate a claim.

PTSD/9 Issue: Access to appropriate VA mental health services and treatment for returning National Guard members, Reservists, and their families.

The committee advocates for all service members and veterans to have a seamless transition from DOD health care to the VA, with special emphasis on addressing issues of behavioral health.

PTSD/10 Issue: The Veterans Healthcare Administration has not taken sufficient action to address the effects of combat-related PTSD among America's women veterans.

Partnering with the Women Veterans Committee, the committee has focused on Military Sexual Trauma. MST too often results in the victim being removed from the military with an other-than-honorable discharge. Working with the Veterans Benefits Department, the committee will continue to monitor and challenge the use of personality disorder in booting from the service, sans benefits, male and female veterans alike, particularly those suffering from PTSD or MST. Further work needs to be done to address the overall suicide rate among women veterans as it is still at least twice the rate of civilian women.

The PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee: Thomas C. Hall, Ph.D., Chair. Members: Dan Stenvold, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Sandy Miller, Thomas Brown, John Margowski, John McGinty, Ken Rose, Charles R. Montgomery, and Charles Stapleton. AVVA Adviser: Nina Schloffel. Staff Support: Rick Weidman.

Public Affairs

BY DENNIS HOWLAND, CHAIR



The coronavirus situation has captured the attention of everyone at every level of VVA. To some it takes on the appearance of doomsday for the organization, and the levels of quarantine make it nearly impossible to recruit or apply ourselves to our community programs. But we must continue to work hard. When things return to normal, we will have a lot of work to do.

A good tactic is to stay in touch with your community and school contacts, and

anyone who connects with your VVA projects. You can do this safely with phone calls and emails—to show them you are concerned with their welfare and to reassure them that although the world seems to be on hold, VVA is still prepared to help in any way that's safe and healthy. Just keeping contact can give you a step up when things return to normal. Believe me, you will be among the first called upon for assistance.

March 29, National Vietnam War Veterans Day, presented many challenges in trying to honor our brothers and sisters. I am



certain that many of you found safe ways to get this done. I was fortunate in Utah to have a small group briefly visit our replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, place a wreath, and chat about our experiences. It was done with the required precautions and social distances. We also worked with our Department of Veterans and Military Affairs Director and Utah's Governor, who issued a proclamation.

In addition, we held a small gathering on March 13, Utah's Combat War Dog Day. I would appreciate hearing how you spent the day. My email is dennishowland@msn.com or dhowland@vva.org. Let's pray things get back to normal very soon.

The Public Affairs Committee welcomes your input on VVA's website, www.vva.org. We can only recommend a change to benefit members and users if we know there is a problem.

In compliance with Convention Resolution P-7, the following update is provided to the membership on the committee's efforts to advance the 2019 Convention Resolutions.

P-1 Community Services. The Public Affairs Committee emphasizes through its magazine column the importance of using VVA resource materials in community activities. Website materials and available resources are often pointed out and recommended

for chapters and state councils to use as public presentation and recruiting tools. Chapters are encouraged to take the initiative to make a better community for everyone and serve as focal points to promote relationships between Vietnam veterans and the community. Examples include assisting in fundraisers for community projects, sponsorship of Agent Orange town halls, and coordinating with other veterans organizations. Chapters are constantly asked to share their ideas and programs with the rest of the organization.

P-2 Children's Welfare.

The committee encourages participation in organizations that benefit infants and children, such as Boys and Girls Club volunteering, adult counseling in Scouting programs, and working to help families understand new legislation regarding care of the descendants of Vietnam veterans.

P-3 Chapter Involvement with Educational Institutions on Teaching the Vietnam War.

State councils and chapters throughout VVA are asked to participate in Vietnam Vets In Classrooms programs. This interaction between students, teachers, and Vietnam War veterans permits a personal understanding of the war. The committee continues to place emphasis on participation with educational institutions, with the VVA JROTC

medal and ribbon and Eagle Scout programs developed by the Public Affairs Committee, and endorses the POW/MIA Committee's Remember Our Warriors bracelet program. Under normal circumstances, the weeks leading up to Vietnam War Veterans Day, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day are great times for contacting area schools and offering to discuss our military experiences with young people.

P-4 Regulation of Certain Activities at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The committee continues to stress the sanctity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Many members have supported this goal by making direct contact with the National Park Service through written correspondence and telephone contact to voice their strong objection to it being used for any political or commercial purposes.

P-5 Endorsement for Participation in Local Environmental Efforts.

Chapters and state councils have held discussions about the use of toxic chemicals and the storage and underground disposal of the millions of gallons of these chemicals. *The VVA Veteran* has run articles on the effects of toxic chemicals on our military men and women. The issue of contaminated water at military installations is especially pressing.

continued on page 18



Members are asking questions about the proper disposal at local military installations and chemical storage facilities.

P-7 Requirement to Report Progress on All Currently Approved Convention 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. The Public Affairs Committee supports the commitment that continued conservation and legacy of this memorial be included in any plan regarding the future of Vietnam Veterans of America. It is imperative that this commitment be included as a serious consideration when a plan is developed.

P-12 Public Awareness for Veterans Benefits. The Public Affairs Committee continually emphasizes the need for chapters and state councils to stay abreast of changing veterans' benefits and procedures for filing claims. Additionally, we will use available communications tools to keep members in the know as legislation changes the benefits and assistance for all veterans.

P-13 Gold Star Mothers National Monument. VVA chapters have reported seeking out and working with Gold Star Mothers chapters in ceremonies and community events, and supporting the national Gold Star Mothers Family Monument.

The Public Affairs Committee: Dennis Howland, Chair. Members: Ken Rogge, Patti Dumin, Tom Brown, Leslie DeLong, Chuck Renevier, Bob Grabinski, Dave Simmons, Dan Stenvold, Grant Coates, and Richard DeLong. Stenvold, Coates, and DeLong serve as the National VVA Awards Committee. AVVA Advisers: Tim Von Bon and Fran Davis. Staff Support: Mokie Porter, Michael Keating, Wes Guidry, and Marc Leapson.

VA Voluntary Service

BY KEN ROSE, VAVS NATIONAL REP



COVID-19 will affect all of us before it's over. I don't expect much to change before July. I live in suburban Philadelphia. Most of this area—as well as New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut—has been under a stay-at-home order. Many school systems have closed for the school year.

I get reports and minutes of meetings from around the country, and the news at the VA is much the same all over. VA staff are still working hard, with very restrictive access. The VAMCs have low admission rates, but still have patients and are providing necessary care. The VA is consolidating campus beds, making room for isolation patients.

Voluntary Service Offices are still distributing supplies to patients and the needy. They are preparing long term by getting fabric for homemade masks and encouraging their volunteers to make extra ones at home. This virus might return in the fall.

Some VAMCs, because of their locations, have been providing humanitarian assistance by accepting non-veteran patients who have contracted COVID-19. All VAMCs are preparing to handle an increase in veteran admissions.

Meetings with the Executive and the VAVS Committees are being held by teleconferencing.

The volunteer world, like everywhere else, has changed and will continue to evolve. It will be a long time before we return to any kind of normal.

Gift cards for local groceries and gas cards are needed for Social Service; they can be mailed to the VA Voluntary Office.

Also needed at the VA are non-perishable food (for food pantries) and snacks for CLC and domiciliaries. Canteens are limiting access. Gift cards for Uber and Lyft for non-elective appointments will be needed. Contact your local VAVS office for a needs list.

Volunteer hours and donations will be reduced to unimaginable levels, and we will lose some of our dedicated volunteers. Because flag manufacturers have shut down, we may not be able to place flags on veterans' graves this year.

Veterans Against Drugs

BY DAVE SIMMONS, CHAIR



For the past two years Veterans Against Drugs has continued its mission to be a very adaptable program that looks at communities where chapters and state councils promote our program, identifies the most important issues in each community, and encourages VVA members to become involved.

An article published online at www.campusdrugprevention.gov reports that one in 17 college students uses cannabis on a near-daily basis—despite the fact that institutions receiving federal funds must prohibit drug use or sales. State laws about the legality of cannabis have made the drug more available and have complicated the subject of its use on campus. States vary in how cannabis can be obtained or delivered, including times it can be delivered and who can accept it. Due to federal law, however, on-campus delivery of cannabis products is forbidden. Students living off campus can sidestep these proscriptions.

The situation is further muddled, the article notes, by a trend known as “gifting,” in which a business includes a gift of cannabis when a consumer buys other products at in-

flated prices. The purchaser sidesteps delivery prohibitions and avoids sales tax.

“As technology and cannabis legislation continue to evolve,” the article concludes, “so will how students approach cannabis use. As prevention professionals, paying attention to these changes and how students are engaging in them will allow us to provide the best possible care and information, helping to ensure the holistic health of students.”

The DEA's Prescription Drug Take Back Day, originally scheduled for April 25, has been postponed indefinitely.

A webinar, “Pop Culture Influences on Underage Drinking,” was held April 14. A recent *Journal of Studies of Alcohol and Drugs* study concluded that alcohol marketing is causally related to underage drinking. The webinar provided a framework for analyzing the advertising and messages aimed at pre-teens and teens.

Special thanks to my committee. We've had a very rewarding two years. Thanks to everyone for their work and dedication.

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

Veterans Benefits

BY JOHN H. RILING III, CHAIR



VVA's Veterans Benefits Program is working hard to adjust to a home-office environment. Many of our service officers have the ability to represent veterans from their laptops at home.

Others are working diligently to obtain that capability. We also have been advocating to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs is doing everything it can to help relieve stress on veterans during this difficult time.

VA recently announced that it will grant extensions for filing deadlines upon request during the national emergency, and will not enforce any new debt collections due to COVID-19. If you have any questions about claims during this crisis, reach out to a local veteran service officer or call VA at 800-827-1000. You can find a list of local VVA veteran service officers at <https://vva.org/what-we-do/veteran-services/claims-assistance/>

Michigan VSOs are working from home eight hours a day, five days a week. They are calling veterans to ask about their benefits and doing status checks. Because Michigan's VSO program receives state funding, there are extra reports to fill out every day. They have had many IT problems with the VA setting up their work stations at home.

Please contact your fellow veterans and ask how they are doing. Being in quarantine can cause flare-ups with PTSD. Stay safe and healthy.

The Veterans Benefits Committee: John H. Riling III, Chair; Joseph Jennings, Vice Chair. Members: Gene Crego, Chuck Byers, Perry Melvin, Felix Peterson, John Margowski, John Weiss, John McGinty, Marc McCabe, Phil Smith, Gary Estermyer, Dick Southern, Gerald Corrigan, Greg Pauline, Bob Grabinski, Gumersindo Gomez, Phillip Smith, and Rex Moody. AVVA Advisers: Joanna Henshaw and Kaye Gardner. Subcommittees: Grant Review—John Weiss, Pete Peterson, and Gerald Corrigan; VSO Grievance—Joe Jennings, Dick Southern, and John Margowski; Strategic Planning—Marc McCabe, Chuck Byers, and Gene Crego. VVA Staff: Director Felicia Mullaney, Elaine Chaney, Alec Ghezzi, Alexandra Rigby, Fatmata Conteh, Claire Corsey, Justin Huber, Priya Mehta, Dylan Goll, Malkia Saunders, Heather Olson, Kenneth Bouy, Yolonda Harris, Paula Tuero, Joseph Scott, and Danielle Fischer. Special Adviser: Kelsey Yoon.

Veterans Health Care

BY CHUCK BYERS, CHAIR



The focus of health care has never been so much a part of our lives as it is now during this COVID-19 crisis. We are learning new phrases every day, such as flattening the curve, social distancing, and self-quarantining. I hope everyone is safe and healthy. I hope and pray we will soon turn the corner on this virus, with better health days ahead for everyone.

We still need to focus on some of our Health Care Resolutions and continue our strong advocacy for VA health care. Some Health Care Resolutions need to be retired as they have been adopted by the VA. We will continue to monitor these practices and will not hesitate to offer any changes that affect your health care needs.

The committee did not meet in person in April, but we are in contact discussing veterans' health care concerns and how we can continue our advocacy.

I can be reached at seagb@cox.net

The Veterans Health Care Committee: Chuck Byers, Chair; and Gene Crego, Vice Chair.

continued on page 20



Members: Bill Garcia, Tom Hall, Ph.D., Maynard Kaderlik, Roland Mayhew, Sandy Miller, Kate O'Hare Palmer, Michael Patrick Quilty, Kerwin Stone, and Sandie Wilson. Special Advisers to the President: Marsha Four and Linda Schwartz, Ph.D. Staff Support: Dr. Artie Shelton and Rebecca Patterson.

Veterans Incarcerated & in the Justice System

No report was submitted.

Women Veterans

BY KATE O'HARE-PALMER, CHAIR



The Women Veterans Committee is the voice of those who seek strength and support in resolving problems and addressing concerns related to women veterans.

The committee identifies issues and needs specific to women veterans and develops strategies to address and resolve them. Our goals are accomplished through communication, representation, advocacy, and outreach. Our updates on

some of the key resolutions from the 2019 VVA National Convention include:

WV-2 Medical Treatment of Women Veterans by VA. The committee continues to work with other veterans service organizations to resolve these problems. We submitted a report to the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans at the end of 2019. We continue to monitor the provisions in the FY2018 National Defense Authorization Act. The VA Sourcebook, Vol. 4 February 2018, notes a seven-fold increase in the number of women 55 and older who use VA hospitals. The lack of timely care at community-based outpatient clinics is still a concern. Community-based outsourcing does not fulfill these needs. Adequate staffing levels in the VA system is another target area. We requested data collection reporting on all VA programs serving veterans by gender and minority status. Our request for a VA report on the availability of women veteran prosthetics data is being processed.

WV-3 Support for Women Veterans. Committee members participate in veteran outreach at the Memorial Day and Veterans Day events at the Washington, D.C., Mall. The dissemination of Women Veterans Honor Coins and shirts to welcome home women veterans is ongoing. The video interviews of women veterans are included on our committee webpage. Committee information is distributed to all state council

presidents to disseminate to their chapters. Committee members continue to be involved at local levels to support women veteran activities throughout the year. Women veteran panels were set up in honor of Women's History Month in March.

WV-5 Women Veteran Research. The Advisory Committee on Women Veterans has answered our request for maternity and women veterans' reproductive health resource improvement. They have provided updated statistics on these needs and now include increased obstetrics care and IVF and in vitro fertilization eligibility for some veterans. There are ongoing studies on the increase in homelessness and suicide among women veterans. VVA President John Rowan included these concerns in his recent congressional testimony.

WV-6 Women Veterans and Veterans Benefits. VVA will continue to request hearings before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees regarding women veterans. We submitted a paper to the Women Veterans Committee on the need for better outreach to women veterans on their benefits. The VA Center for Women Veterans monitors and coordinates the VA's administration of benefit services and programs for women veterans. There is still a gender gap in the utilization of VA claims, dependent benefits, personal trauma claims, and cemetery benefits among women veterans.

WV-8 Military Sexual Trauma. Our committee continues to monitor passage of legislation supporting changes in the current military culture in regard to MST. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing February 5 that examined how the VA supports survivors of military sexual trauma. The VA must redouble its efforts to improve its support of survivors. The VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention should develop a strategic plan for improving MST care, particularly for the rapidly growing population of women VHA patients. The continued harassment many women experience in VA hospitals and clinics must change. Women will not return to a place that is threatening. Top leadership must insist that harassment stop.

The Women Veterans Committee: Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Chair; Sandy Miller, Vice Chair. Members: Dottie Barickman, Tom Hall, Ph.D., Sandie Wilson, Frank Arminio, John McGinty, Chuck Byers, Gene Crego, and Lee Jackson. Special Advisers: Beverly Stewart, Billee Culin, Linda Blankenship, Jennifer Wilson, Linda Schwartz, Ph.D., Marsha Four, Cheryl Van Syckle, and Patricia Ehline. AVVA Adviser: Fran Guevre-mont. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge. ■