Progress In Advancing Convention Resolutions

Current Convention Resolutions are posted at **www.vva.org/OrgDocs/VVA-Resolutions.pdf**

Agent Orange/ Dioxin Committee

BY HERB WORTHINGTON, CHAIR

2013 was a record year for educating the public and veterans about Agent Orange, the other rainbow agents, burn pits, and depleted uranium use by the government both domestically and overseas.

More than twenty-one town hall meetings have been held, with attendance ranging from one hundred to almost five hundred people. At each meeting Agent Orange folders are distributed that contain information on how to run a town hall meeting, copies of individual stories (*The Faces of Agent Orange*), a copy of the Agent Orange Self-Help Guide, a report from our Communications Department, a report on the impact of Agent Orange on U.S. veterans after forty years, the Agent Orange/Dioxin Committee position paper on birth defects, a report on male mediated studies, a list of all ships recognized as exposed to Agent Orange, an information paper from the Department of Defense on herbicide tests and storage outside of Vietnam, and a report on proposed legislation for veterans' families for research and treatment.

The committee continues to work with the National Birth Defect Registry and has adopted two resolutions. The first deals with the C-123 Pilots and Aircrew Association and the second with the Blue Water Navy Association. We continue to advocate for Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange in locations other than Vietnam—Thailand, Laos, Okinawa, the Philippines, Johnston Island, Korea, Cambodia, Guam, and many military installations within the United States. We have reached outside of the VVA and AVVA membership and have held town hall meetings in conjunction with other organizations. All have been very successful, and we have noticed an increase in local membership once a town hall meeting is completed.

Scheduling town hall meetings for 2014 has begun. May and much of June already are booked. States that have scheduled meetings so far this year: Florida, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, Tennessee, North Carolina, Michigan, Nevada, Alabama, and Maine.

We are endorsing Sen. Richard Blumenthal's (D-Conn.) legislation, S.1602, which calls for all veterans exposed to toxic substances to be diagnosed and treated, along with their progeny. We will host a meeting on the Hill on April 10 with as many members of Congress as possible to introduce and urge passage of S.1602. Attending this briefing will be VVA Board members, state council presidents, AVVA members, and children of veterans who have been exposed to Agent Orange.

In 2013 we printed some thirty thousand self-help guides and distributed them nationwide for free. This year it is estimated that we will need forty-five thousand booklets due to the high demand from veterans and their families. Our Agent Orange webpage—along with our Facebook page, Twitter feed, and other social media—has grown greatly. We continue to fight for new conditions to be listed on the presumptive list recognizing the harm caused by our exposure to Agent Orange and the other rainbow agents. Recently the Institute of Medicine reported that there has been no difference in the reaction since 2010 for Agent Orange-related strokes. We will be pushing for this condition to be listed as a presumptive, along with skin cancer.

The Agent Orange/Dioxin Committee: Herb Worthington, Chair; George Newell, Vice Chair; Tom Owen, Vice Chair; Dennis Andras, Vice Chair; and Bill Dumsick, Vice Chair. Members: Wayne Cartier, George Claxton, Billee Culin, Mike Demske, Tom Hall, Steve House, Darrel Martin, Marc McCabe, Luther Newberry, Francis Rowan, John Weiss, Nathaniel Washington, William Whaley, Maynard Kaderlik, and Joseph Armstrong. Subcommittee Chairs: Ken Holybee and Sandie Wilson. Special Advisors: Jim Doyle, Bruce Dobson, Betty Mekdeci, Paul Sutton, and Ray Brezinski. AVVA Advisors: Nancy Switzer, Kathy Andras, and Elayne Mackey. Staff Support: Mokie Porter, Bernie Edelman, and Tom Berger.

Economic Opportunities Committee

BY FRANK BARRY, CHAIR

Public Affairs Resolution P-7 requires that each committee report annually to the membership on its progress in implementing the organization's resolutions. Here is a progress report on the resolutions of the Economic Opportunities Committee. Please note that this is just a sampling of the involvement of our committee members.

Jobs and Job Training: Every two years VVA prepares its legislative agenda. The EOC is working with congressional staff to ensure that veterans are accorded Veterans' Preference when applying for government jobs and are given every advantage when seeking employment in private industry or in attempting to set up their own businesses. Jobs will focus on in-demand occupations such as IT and the medical field.

The EOC is working with the Department of Labor to ensure that the Transition Assistance Program actually helps separating and demobilized service members learn about their options for employment, education, and entrepreneurship. One of the committee members attended the week-long TAP in San Diego to gain firsthand knowledge of that experience.

The EOC is working with Congress and the Department of Labor to significantly reform the Veterans Employment and Training Service Program that is run by individual states but funded through the U.S. Department of Labor, so that it actually matches veterans with jobs.

Veterans in Business: Committee members are working with agencies and committees to promote veterans business development, including the Small Business Association Veterans Business Advisory Committee, the Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development, Women Veterans Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities, and Veteran Business Outreach Centers.

Supporting Legislation: The EOC supports H.R. 2882, which moves the VA Veterans Small Business Verification Process to the Small Business Administration, and H.R. 2327, which creates an Economic Opportunity Administration and moves the Center for Verification and Evaluation there.

The committee also supports H.R. 3395, which extends the Work Opportunity Tax Credit for veterans to December 2017 and simplifies the certification of veteran status by the presence of the following documentation: the veteran's DD-214; proof of receipt of unemployment compensation, which could include copies of unemployment checks received or other proof of unemployment compensation payments; and an affidavit signed by the veteran stating that he or she is an eligible veteran and has been unemployed for four weeks to six months or for more than six months prior to the date of hire.

The Economic Opportunities Committee: Frank Barry, Chair. Members: Dennis Andras, Larry Carter, Ted Daywalt, Marc Goldschmitt, Bob Hesser, Paul Ignosh, Dave Johnston, and Nancy Rekowski. Special Advisors: Joe Wynn and Carl Tuvin. Staff Support: Rick Weidman.

Finance Committee

BY NED FOOTE, CHAIR

The Finance Committee's job is to help VVA achieve its goals with proper funding within expected revenue. Every March each committee, department, officer, and director must submit a budget request with an explanatory narrative. Usually, requests exceed our projected revenue.

Last year we had to cut more than $1 million in proposed expenses. We did this during a very long budget meeting. We recommended a balanced budget to the BOD in April, which they passed. Some moaned about the cuts, but over the year we did not see anyone unable to accomplish their goals. In fact, we expect to see that some have not used what was awarded them. All should be commended on holding down expenses. We try to work with committees throughout the year with funding shortfalls, and they are reminded when it looks like they will go over their budgets.

We are in the midst of the budget process now with an excess of proposed expenses versus expected revenue. As our organization gets older, some revenue goes down. We are no longer the new kids on the block, and some funds that we were getting are now going to the newest veterans. So we have to be more creative in the budget process, and we need to know what our priorities are.

The Finance Committee: Ned Foote, Chair; Sara McVicker, Vice Chair and Budget Oversight Subcommittee Chair; and Tom Burke, Investment Subcommittee Chair. Members: Dottie Barickman, Allen Manuel, Jim Pace, and Barry Rice. Special Advisor: Wayne Reynolds, VVA National Treasurer. Staff Support: Joe Sternburg and Deborah Williams.

VVA Annual Committee Reports

Government Affairs Committee

BY PETE PETERSON, CHAIR

Amid the end-of-year clamor to get a budget done, several members of the Veterans' Affairs Committees in both houses held a press conference. They were supported by some two dozen veterans service organizations, including VVA.

"If there is one thing people in Washington and across America agree on, it's that we should never let funding for veterans become a casualty of Washington gridlock," said Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.), chair of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

"Chairman Miller and I understand when it comes to the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend this country, we are going to go above partisanship, and we are going to work together in an effective and congenial way," said Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Miller's counterpart in the Senate.

"Not only is it both sides of the Capitol, it's both parties that are engaged in moving this piece of legislation forward," added Sen. Mark Begich (D-Alaska), a member of Sanders' committee. He was referring to H.R.813, Putting Veterans Funding First Act, which would move the rest of the Department of Veterans Affairs under Advanced Appropriations. This has proved successful in its implementation for the VA's trio of medical accounts, which represent some 86 percent of that department's discretionary budget.

"This is not about a Democrat or Republican idea," Sen. Begich added. "It's about making sure veterans get taken care of."

Rep. Mike Michaud (D-Maine), ranking member of the HVAC, added the House Democratic voice to this issue by noting: "Now is the time to extend the advance appropriation to the remaining of the discretionary accounts within the Department of Veterans Affairs, and I join everyone here today in calling on the Speaker to schedule a vote on this very important bill."

Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.), who was very skeptical of the chances for success of the idea of Advance Appropriations, is now convinced that this is the right way to proceed.

Sen. John Boozman (R-Ark.) noted: "Protecting veterans during budget fights isn't the only reason to do this. To me, this seems like common-sense budgeting that would enable the VA to have greater certainty and better planning for programs they are implementing for our men and women who have served. So let's work together to pass this bill and get our veterans the certainty they deserve."

CUTTING VA BONUSES

The headline in *The Hill* read: "House to Punish VA by Cutting Bonuses." We thought Congress was finally getting serious about dealing with VA officials who reap bonuses for doing nothing. We were doomed to disappointment. One of the provisions of H.R.1405, introduced by Rep. Dina Titus (D-Neb.), which has passed the House of Representatives and is still awaiting Senate action, "would chop bonuses for [VA] workers by at least 14 percent."

Currently, some $400 million out of the VA's budget each fiscal year goes for bonuses to managers and senior executive service staff. All will have to expect a bit less, or some will have to get nothing if the Senate goes along with the House in capping bonus payments for five fiscal years (2014-18) at $345 million annually.

Perhaps as important as any other element is that these bonuses are reserved only for the bosses. Nothing has been awarded to outstanding VA bedside nurses who often have to work double shifts, yet continue to provide excellent and compassionate care. The extraordinary service of so many people in VA patient care services and areas such as maintenance that directly affect medical care needs to be respected and rewarded.

Maybe if this cap is enacted, it will motivate the VA to demand stellar performance from those in top positions. If they do, we will hail them and lobby Congress to remove the cap.

In addition, bonuses ought only to be given to employees who agree to remain with the VA for a given period of time. A report from the VA Inspector General found that "retention incentives have been awarded to employees who have stated their intention to retire in the very near future."

REPORT ON RESOLUTIONS

G-7 Service Connection for Hepatitis C: There has been no progress on this resolution. Part of the inactivity is that we have had good success in getting direct service connection via existing evidence, and there is an effective hepatitis C standard of care at VA.

G-9 Awarding of the Combat Medevac Badge (CMB): No activity.

G-10 Endorsement for Legislation To Create Minimum Private-Sector Health-Care Coverage for Uninsured and Underinsured Veterans and Their Families: The committee requests permission to retire this resolution. The Affordable Care Act, P.L. 111-148, signed by the President on March 23, 2010, provides affordable and accessible health coverage for all Americans.

G-13 Cessation and Prohibition of the Utilization of the U.S. Military Personnel as Non-Consensual Participants in the Testing by the U.S. Government of Vaccines and Other Medical Treatments: VVA continues to press DOD on nonconsensual inoculations that are not FDA approved.

G-14 State Veterans Homes: VVA continues to support this resolution by working with the Conference of State Council Presidents, the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, the National Association of State Veterans Homes, and the National Governors Association to ensure that state veterans homes receive proper funding.

G-15 Vietnam War In Memory Memorial Plaque Project: VVA is making progress on this issue, working collaboratively with AVVA as we initiate adjustments to the In Memory Plaque placement, lighting, and legibility as befits an important part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial site in Washington, D.C. Most of this progress has been achieved by working with the appropriate federal entities.

G-16 Sexual Harassment: Provisions 1-4 of this resolution were adopted when the President signed P.L. 113-66, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2014, Title XVII, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response and Related Reforms, which provides provisions to reform sexual assault in the U.S. military. VVA will not retire, but rather amend, this resolution to reflect our support for zero tolerance in the U.S. military of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

G-17 Proper Use of Real Estate at West Los Angeles VA Medical Center: VVA has consistently opposed the use of the undeveloped property at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center for purposes other than those consistent with the intentions of the original donor.

In 2011 VVA joined with the ACLU and sued the VA for wrongful misuse of this land. A partial victory was achieved in 2013 in the court's ruling on our suit. VVA will continue to support this resolution to ensure the proper use of land that was donated to the federal government in 1888 with the clear understanding that it be used in perpetuity to help veterans. The VA, under several administrations, has been a terrible steward of this property. At the same time, Los Angeles has the largest population of homeless veterans in the nation.

The Government Affairs Committee: Pete Peterson, Chair; Pat Toro, Vice Chair. Members: Herb Worthington, Frank Barry, Sandy Miller, Leslie DeLong, Tom Corey, Jerry Yamamoto, Richard DeLong, Tom Hall, Tom Burke, Dave Simmons, John Margowski, Pat Bessigano, Terry Hubert, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Patrick Welch, Spence Davis, Gene Crego, Wayne Reynolds, and Dennis Cohoon. AVVA Special Advisors: Sharon Hobbs and Nancy Switzer. Special Advisors: Nancy Rekowski, John Birch, and Jeri Wallis. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge, Rick Weidman, and Tom Berger.

Homeless Veterans Committee

BY SANDY MILLER, CHAIR

HV-1 Homeless Veterans as a "Special Needs Population": The committee continues to support this effort and strongly believes in the "fair share" allocation of all federal funding.

HV-6 VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding: The committee continues this effort and anxiously awaits the overdue release of the study.

HV-7 Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program To Remain at the U.S. Department of Labor and Be Fully Funded at $50M: The committee continues to support this most valuable funding, which provides much-needed training for veterans seeking to change their life situations.

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: The committee continues to push for full accountability of the status of all vouchers to ensure the proper distribution to the most vulnerable veterans.

HV-10 Continued Funding for "Special Needs" Grants Under the Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Grants & Per Diem Program: Although the program was slated to expire September 30, 2013, the expiration date has been extended one year. The committee continues to advocate for the elimination of any sunset dates for Special Needs grants.

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: The committee has been in contact with the Homeless Veterans Research office in Philadelphia for clarification on the VA-identified best practice models.

HV-12 Extend the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Criteria for Veterans Placed in "Housing First" Model: The committee would like veterans enrolled in the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program who are entering into "housing first" to be able to gain access to training for up to twelve months after placement into housing. Current legislation calls for a nine-month cap.

VVA Annual Committee Reports

HV-13 Support for the Missing in America Project: The committee continues to help local chapters work with community funeral directors to identify unclaimed cremains and arrange for proper military burials.

HV-14 Support, Oversight, and Accountability of VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families: The committee continues to monitor the success of the SSVF programs nationwide, as well as the accountability of allocated funds.

The Homeless Veterans Committee: Sandy Miller, Chair; Tom Hall, Vice Chair. Members: Linda Blankenship, Dave Johnston, Tom Johnson, and Jerry Yamamoto. Special Advisors: Nancy Switzer, Cathy Keister, and Joanna Henshaw. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge and Tom Berger.

Membership Affairs Committee

BY CHARLIE HOBBS, CHAIR

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

M-1 Verification and Security of DD Form 214: VVA requires that all applicants for individual membership provide a copy of their DD Form 214 or other acceptable documentation establishing eligibility for membership. These documents are to be kept at the local level in a confidential and secure manner in accordance with the provisions of the VVA Constitution. Verification to the national organization shall be done by the local chapter secretary or, in the absence of the secretary, a designated chapter official.

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-1 and M-2 remain viable and were overwhelmingly endorsed at the 2013 National Convention. The Membership Department makes every effort to address all questions and enquiries pertaining to membership matters in a timely manner. The Membership Committee is working hard on ways to improve your VVA experience and to increase our membership numbers. Your comments or suggestions are always welcome.

The Membership Affairs Committee: Charlie Hobbs, Chair; Steve Mackey, Vice Chair. Members: Carol Baker, Dick Southern, Richard DeLong, Ben Humphries, Leonard Ignatowski, Joseph Kristek, Richard W. Lindbeck, Charlie Montgomery, Jim Pace, Barry Rice, Jerry Pounds, Carol Schetrompf, Peter Bessigano, Rex Moody, and Mark Madsen. Special Advisor: National Secretary Bill Meeks. AVVA Special Advisor: Cathy Keister. AVVA Member: Penny Meinhardt. Staff Support: Mary Stout.

Minority Affairs Committee

BY JERRY YAMAMOTO, CHAIR

The Minority Affairs Committee is required to provide this yearly report on actions that have been taken to implement current Convention resolutions.

MA-1 Language-Translated VA Benefits Materials: The committee continues to monitor VA benefits materials to ensure that they are translated in the relevant language for veterans and their families, because the VA is not doing it.

MA-2 Minority Affairs Coverage in *The VVA Veteran*: The committee is continually looking for material for articles for *The VVA Veteran* about minority veteran activities. The chair writes a regular column in the magazine.

MA-3 Asian American/Pacific Islander Veterans: The committee chair will continue to monitor activities of the White House Initiative on Asian American/Pacific Islanders so as to participate when possible. The chair will recruit more of these veterans through personal, media, and booth contacts.

MA-5 Foreign National Vietnam Veterans Immigration: The committee continues to actively support foreign-national Vietnam veterans who seek medical services in the United States.

MA-6 Involvement by Minority Veterans Welcomed in VVA: The committee annually has health information and recruitment booths at the NAACP National Convention and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Conference. It attends the conferences and dinners of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute and Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies and local ethnic veteran community programs. It also maintains contact with the VA Center for Minority Veterans staff and the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations.

MA-7 Puerto Rican Veterans and U.S. Virgin Islanders: The regional director inspected the San Juan, Puerto Rico, VA Hospital with several committee members. A Minority Affairs Committee Vice Chair has been appointed for Puerto Rico, and meets regularly with Puerto Rican congressional representatives.

MA-8 Recognition of the Services and Sacrifices Made by the Veterans of the Territory of Guam and U.S. Pacific Islanders: The committee continues to support the improvement in health services for the Vietnam veterans of Guam and all U.S. Pacific Islanders. The Region 9 Director has established contact with veterans in Guam. The chair will contact these veterans in 2014.

MA-9 Awareness and Sensitivity to Racial, Cultural, and Gender-Related Equity Issues: The committee will monitor the training of VA staff in cultural competency. The VA needs to have staff available to help non-English-speaking family members of their patients.

MA-10 Self-Determination for Puerto Rico: The committee continues to monitor the effects of the plebiscite vote in Puerto Rico for statehood. The committee Vice Chair for Puerto Rico meets with Puerto Rico's congressional staff.

MA-11 U.S. Montagnard Veterans: The committee is attempting to work on a study of the status of Montagnard veterans to provide a mandated report to the Board of Directors.

MA-12 American Indians Veterans Memorial Initiative: VVA is working with Congress on legislation to enact building this memorial.

MA-13 American Indian, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians: The committee has appointed a Vice Chair for American Indians who is establishing ties with American Indian tribes throughout the nation. The committee continues to monitor the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations and its director.

The Minority Affairs Committee: Jerry Yamamoto, Chair; Dave Simmons, Vice Chair; Pat Toro, Vice Chair for Puerto Rico; Stephen Bowers, Vice Chair for American Indians. Members: Jorge Pedroza, Buster Newberry, Henry Urioste, Paul Crowell, Jr., Joe Jennings, James Maddox, Gerald Nye, Joe McIntyre, Pete Peterson, Allen Manuel, Cecilio Besares, Ric Davidge, Ivan Freeland, Tommy Gipson, Virgie Hibbler, Tom Meinhardt, Ron Speight, Tom Wilson, Connie Steers, Lou Nunez, Anthony Molina, and Paul Washington. AVVA Advisor: Joanna Henshaw. Staff Support: Joe Wynn.

POW/MIA Affairs Committee

BY RICHARD DeLONG, CHAIR

PM-4 Americans Missing in Laos and Cambodia: We have been working with the governments of both countries, and they are helping. But we still have a long way to go before we can close this resolution.

PM-7 Possibility of Live POW/MIAs and Facilitating the Return of Those Who Remain in Southeast Asia: We are still looking, although the chance that anyone is still alive in 2014 is very unlikely.

PM-8 Fullest Possible Accounting of POW/MIAs in Vietnam: We are working with the governments of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia for information and help.

PM-11 Honoring All Returned POWs and Giving Recognition to American Civilians Held as POW/Interned During WWII: This was done when the committee was formed in 1991 and is still being done to this day. Our information says all are accounted for.

PM-13 Public Awareness and Education on the POW/MIA Flag: This has been done in most—if not all—states. In some states VVA chapters have lobbied local governments to fly the flag at post offices and other government buildings.

PM-14 Forever POW/MIA Stamp: We contacted the Postmaster General about the stamp, and were told that it can't be reissued. We disagree and will reach out to the Postmaster for more information.

VI-1 The Veterans Initiative, A National VVA Effort on Vietnam's Missing in Action: We are working on the return of our POWs and MIAs, but we also need help to recover the Vietnamese missing. Members can facilitate this process by providing information on gravesites or by sending us letters, personal effects, documents, photos, or personal statements.

VI-2 Scope of the Veterans Initiative: We are working with the governments of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and China for the recovery of all missing from the Vietnam War.

The POW/MIA Affairs Committee: Richard DeLong, Chair; Grant Coates, Vice Chair. Members: Lawrence Carter, Terry Courville, Pattie Dumin, Allen Harvey, Steve Mackey, Ted Wilkinson, Ron Zink, Charlie Hobbs, and Tom Corey. Special Advisors: Kaye Gardner, AVVA; Susie Stephens Harvey, National League of Families; Gary Jones, Former Chair of POW/MIA Committee; and Bill Duker, Former Chair of VI. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge and Mokie Porter.

VVA Annual Committee Reports

PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee

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

During the past year the committee expanded its focus to include several initiatives. We established two additional subcommittees: Suicide Prevention and Substance Abuse. The latter subcommittee will work with Veterans Against Drugs. Both subcommittees will reinforce VVA policy initiatives aimed at expanding VA organizational capacity for the treatment of these areas of mental and behavioral disorders.

A critical area of emerging involvement for the Substance Abuse Subcommittee is the National Drug Take Back program in the fall and spring of each year sponsored by the DEA and local law enforcement.

The committee has an "At Ease Zones" initiative to collect materials for training educators and staff in higher education to create an atmosphere where returning veterans will feel welcome, accepted, and encouraged to continue their academic endeavors.

The committee has also filed a request to have Dr. William Schlenger, the principal investigator on both the 1985 National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study and the current National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study, to share his research findings at the VVA Leadership & Education Conference in Wichita this August.

We continue to monitor the search process for the executive director for the National Center for PTSD, the director of Mental Health Services at VHA, the director of the Veterans Readjustment Centers at the VA, and the under secretary for health at the VHA. We also continue to work closely with VVA Government Affairs staff to address PTSD, TBI, and MST policy and legislative issues in Congress, and we are working closely with the national office staff and the Veterans Incarcerated Committee to address mental and behavioral health issues affecting incarcerated veterans.

VVA will work with Congress to take whatever measures are necessary to ensure accountability for the organizational capacity and funding for the accurate diagnoses and evidence-based treatments of the neuropsychiatric wounds of war, particularly PTSD, substance abuse, traumatic brain injury, and suicide risk.

VVA will work with Congress to ensure that the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs develop, fund, and implement evidence-based, integrated psychosocial mental health programs, substance abuse recovery treatment programs, and suicide-risk assessment programs for all veterans and their families, for active-duty troops and their families, and for reservists and members of the National Guard who have seen service in a combat zone.

VVA will work with Congress to ensure that DOD corrects all wrongful diagnoses of "personality disorder," "adjustment disorder," and "readjustment disorder" discharges so that all veterans found to have been inappropriately diagnosed and discharged are correctly diagnosed and accorded access to the benefits and care that they deserve.

The PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee: Tom Hall, Chair; Fr. Phil Salois, Vice Chair; Sandy Miller, Secretary. Members: Dan Stenvold, Dennis Cohoon, Dottie Barickman, Ed Ryan, Pat Bessigano, Charlie Stapleton, Bob Barry, Allan Perkal, Tom Devlin, and Jerry Yamamoto. Special Advisors: Terry Hubert and Frances Cartier. Staff Support: Tom Berger.

Public Affairs Committee

BY TOM BURKE, CHAIR

As required for compliance with Public Affairs Resolution P-7, we offer the following update concerning the efforts to advance the committee's 2013 Convention Resolutions.

P-1 Community Service: The committee continues to encourage state councils and chapters to be involved in local events in their communities. Face time with federal, state, and local officials in events sponsored by VVA do a great deal to enhance VVA's image. Achievements of our state councils and chapters are evident when you read *The Veteran*, especially "Membership Notes," and when you view events posted on Facebook. Also check out the accomplishments of our members in the electronic version of *The Veteran* at **www.vvaveteran.org**

P-2 Children's Welfare: This resolution encourages efforts to safeguard children and infants. Although generally outside of VVA's legislative agenda, many members organize programs that support the welfare of children. Many state councils and chapters are sponsoring town hall meetings on subjects such as the Faces of Agent Orange, which target the offspring of Vietnam veterans suffering from Agent Orange-related health problems.

P-3 Chapter Involvement with Educational Institutions on Teaching the Vietnam War: Our chapters and members are committed to the theory that Vietnam veterans should be the ones who teach our young people about the war. *The VVA Veteran* has encouraged the participation of our members in this regard by highlighting stories about members at schools across the nation who are talking to students about the war. Postings by our Communications Department on social media also have highlighted events related to student education about the war. Tom Hall, Education Subchair of the Public Affairs Committee, has completed an update of the Education Guideline, which is available for chapter use.

P-4 Regulation of Activities at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: The memorial always will be hallowed ground. VVA wishes this ground to remain unsoiled by politicians, hawkers, vendors, or anyone else who wishes to use it as a backdrop for partisan issues.

P-5 Endorsement for Participation in Local Environmental Efforts: This resolution came from Vietnam veterans' firsthand experiences with environmental damage caused by Agent Orange. This issue is best handled at the chapter level. We continue to encourage its development.

P-7 Requirement To Report Progress on All Currently Approved Convention Resolutions by All Standing Committees at Least Once per Year: This report fulfills the requirement for the Public Affairs Committee, which encourages compliance with the reporting process by all committees. Any committee may report in any issue of *The Veteran*; however, every committee with resolutions must report on the progress in advancing those resolutions at least once per year.

P-8 The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Our commitment to the conservation and legacy of The Wall must be maintained. VVA encourages the active participation of VVA members in the care and maintenance of The Wall. One example is the monthly washing by Silver Spring, Maryland, Chapter 641.

P-12 Public Awareness for Veterans Benefits Campaigns: Members of the Public Affairs Committee attend meetings of the Veterans Benefits Committee to coordinate our efforts. These joint meetings encourage the best of ideas for the further support and procurement of federal veterans benefits.

P-13 Gold Star Mothers National Monument: This resolution supports the establishment of a memorial in Washington, D.C., to honor the sacrifices of America's Gold Star Mothers. VVA will continue to support this effort.

The Public Affairs Committee: Tom Burke, Chair; Herb Worthington, Vice Chair; Dan Stenvold, Awards Chair. Members: Grant Coates, Ken Holybee, James Maddox, Tom Owen, Richard DeLong, Bob Barry, Ronald Morgan, John Riling, Beverly Stewart, Charles Stapleton, and Ron Zink. Staff Support: Wes Guidry, Mokie Porter, Marc Leepson, and Michael Keating.

Veterans Benefits Committee

BY JOHN L. MARGOWSKI, CHAIR

VB-1 Judicial Review deals with the issue of veterans not being able to gain access to legal counsel at any point in their claims. Current law allows veterans to seek attorney representation upon appeal of their claims, and if they later dismiss an attorney, the fee agreement stays in place.

VVA continues to seek sponsors to introduce legislation to correct this inequity and to seek legislation to allow a veteran who terminates his or her attorney to remove the fee agreement on record with the VA.

VB-3 Less-Than-Honorable Discharges seeks to have the Department of Defense and the VA conduct meaningful outreach to inform veterans about the appeal right for less-than-honorable discharges. We are asking the Secretary of each service to direct Discharge Review Boards to be compassionate and use the benefit of the doubt in favor of upgrading discharges. Some guides for filing for a discharge upgrade can be found at **www.countyofkings.com/veterans_services/documents/Self-HelpGuidetoDischargeUp-Grade.pdf** or **www.afjag.af.mil/questions/jaja/upgradingdischarge.asp** or **www.dd214.us/reference/DischargeUpgrade_Memo.pdf**

We are seeking the repeal of Public Law 99-126 regarding the Carter administration's special discharge upgrade program. This law bars VA benefits for those discharged for being AWOL for 180 days, even if the discharge was upgraded. VVA will also work to have the Other-Than-Fully-Honorable Discharge replaced with a Certificate of Service.

VB-5 Civil Liberties of Active Duty Military Service: VVA affirms and will intervene in appropriate cases, or provide representation, to ensure that the civil liberties of Vietnam veterans and all U.S. military veterans are fully protected. VVA has participated in four amicus briefs in conjunction with other VSOs with regard to civil liberties issues. Three were successful.

VB-6 Just Compensation for Injuries Sustained by Active-Duty Military Personnel: VVA is seeking sponsors for legislation or other action to secure a more equitable compensation system for personnel injured on active duty due to negligence of government personnel.

VB-7 Class Actions at U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims: VVA and the Paralyzed Veterans of America petitioned the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to adopt a class-action rule. That petition was rejected. VVA will seek legislation to allow class-action lawsuits or another similar rule

applicable to cases before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

VB-10 Veterans Benefits & Services: This resolution deals with VBA providing timely benefits and services to veterans. VVA's Legislative Agenda includes efforts to work with the Veterans Benefits Administration to revamp the compensation and pension system. We strongly encourage Congress to provide hard-hitting oversight to force the VA to change drastically how it does business.

VB-11 Veterans Benefits System: This deals with the Veterans Benefits Administration's ability to deliver timely and quality service to America's sick and disabled veterans and their families. VVA's Legislative Agenda for 2014 asks Congress to provide oversight of the VA processes with regard to compensation and pension and holding the VA accountable in the management of the Veterans Healthcare System.

VB-12 Department of Veterans Affairs Service-Connected Disability Compensation Payments and Military Retirement Pay Offset: Under current law, H.R.1588, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2004, concurrent receipt of VA Benefits and Military Retired Pay has been enacted. However, the implementation of this law stopped at those veteran retirees rated at 50 percent disabled by the VA. VVA, along with other VSOs, will continue to petition Congress to force compliance with the law. S.234 has been introduced to end the disability offset for all disabled veterans. The companion bill in the House is H.R.333.

VB-13 Preservation of VVA Service Representation at the National Level: This resolution deals with the first priority of VVA as a veterans service organization. VVA continues to provide funding, based on available resources, for our service officers. Online training is available to maintain the highest quality of representation by our accredited service officers. The board receives timely reports from the veterans benefits director and the Veterans Benefits Committee chair on the needs and accomplishments of our accredited service officers.

VB-16 Copy of Military Records upon Discharge: This deals with photocopies of medical records and personnel files being given to service members upon discharge. While it varies from service branch to service branch, the use of electronic records upon discharge is becoming the norm.

VB-18 The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Program: VVA continues to endorse and encourage participation in the VAVS program throughout all levels of our organization.

VB-19 Veterans Environmental Health Effects: VVA's Legislative Agenda for 2014 addresses the legacy of toxic exposures as one of our top priorities. Senate Bill 1602 has been introduced, and VVA encourages its members to contact their federal legislators to support this bill. VVA is actively seeking sponsors for a companion bill in the House.

VB-20 Participation in the Process of Accrediting VA Medical Centers: This issue may require legislation or an Executive Order to force VA hospitals to comply.

VB-27 Reduction of DIC Survivor Waiting Period: VVA seeks legislation to reduce the waiting period for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation from ten years to one. Given the current congressional effort to cut or reduce veterans and military retiree benefits, this will be an uphill battle.

VB-28 Removal of 5 Percent Annual Deductible for VA Pension Eligibility: Under current law the first 5 percent of an individual pensioner's paid, un-reimbursed medical expenses does not count. These expenses are considered normal and usual. VVA is seeking legislation to change the pension rule to count all of an individual's paid, un-reimbursed medical expenses as a deductible expense to reduce income for pension purposes.

The Veterans Benefits Committee: Jim Vale, Veterans Benefits Department Director; Jamie Rupert, Deputy Director. John L. Margowski, Chair; Jim Pace, Vice Chair. Members: Pete Bessigano, Richard Carman, Dennis Cohoon, Joe Jennings, Jerry Klein, Joe Kristek, Ned Foote, Ben Humphries, Charlie Montgomery, Felix (Pete) Peterson, Pastor Toro, John Weiss, and Herb Worthington. AVVA Special Advisors: Sharon Hobbs and Nancy Switzer. Staff Support: Elaine Chaney.

Veterans Incarcerated Committee

BY TP HUBERT, CHAIR

VIN-2 VVA Chapter and State Council Relationships with Veterans Incarcerated resolves that VVA support veterans involved with the criminal justice system. Incarcerated veteran groups and chapters continue to flourish in many states. New VVA chapters are forming in Alabama, California, and Oregon. Arizona VIC Chair Zorn Farrell has a startup package for veterans in a private prison in Kingman. Chapter 205 at the Auburn Correctional Facility has had its IRS suspension lifted and is fully compliant with VVA requirements.

VIN-3 Veterans Incarcerated Benefits and Entitlement resolves that the VA provide medical treatment and counseling services with special emphasis on PTSD and service-related disabilities. It further urges the VA to work closer with federal, state, and local correctional facilities to promote veteran rehabilitation.

VIN-6 PTSD Treatment of Incarcerated Veterans acknowledges the importance of providing PTSD treatment and counseling programs for veterans incarcerated. VVA believes the VA should be the sole provider of PTSD treatment.

These two resolutions are strongly supported by the PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee. VVA is committed to obtaining these basic medical, mental health, and service-connected disability benefits earned by veterans incarcerated. Lack of veteran-specific treatment and counseling has been recognized by federal judges in sentencing veteran offenders facing mandatory sentences.

VIN-4 PTSD and Parole/Clemency supports sentence mitigation efforts for veterans imprisoned to excessively lengthy terms for offenses attributable to PTSD-related behaviors. The committee supports S.1410/H.R.3382, the Smarter Sentencing Act of 2013, which requires the Attorney General to review sentencing guidelines and promulgate new ones that address public safety concerns and racial disparities. The committee chairs and state presidents will lobby for this act in April, seeking VVA's testimony before the U.S. Sentencing Commission and at Judiciary Committee hearings. The committee has been asked to endorse the Council of State Governments Justice Center calling for the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act of 2005 (H.R.1704), which we supported in the past. Both bills would go a long way toward helping incarcerated veterans serving offenses that precluded veteran court availability. Federal Reentry Court programs already operate for higher-risk federal prisoners. These courts can be readily adapted for veterans and substantially supported by VA transitional funds and services.

VIN-5 Retention of Benefits For Incarcerated Veterans resolves that VVA urge the government to amend the Code of Federal Regulations, which requires reduction of payments to veterans incarcerated with service-connected disabilities who become incarcerated for more than sixty days. It challenges Congress to restore full compensation payments to eligible veterans incarcerated. VVA firmly believes the current law unfairly penalizes veterans.

The Veterans Incarcerated Committee: TP Hubert, Chair; Allen Manuel, Vice Chair. Members: Dave Simmons, John Riling, Gene Crego, Ben Humphries, Linda Blankenship, and Virgie Hibbler. Special Advisors: Bob Barry, Steven Konstenius, Richard DeLong, and Wayne Miller. AVVA Advisors: John Birch and Penny Meinhardt. Staff Support: Elaine Chaney.

Women Veterans Committee

BY KATE O'HARE-PALMER, CHAIR

WV-7 Women Veteran Program Managers: VVA will seek congressional oversight and accountability on all VA Medical Centers and VISN directors' compliance with measures defined in the VA's 2010 Handbook 1330.01, Health Care Services for Women Veterans, as it relates to the position of Women Veteran Program Managers. Compliance must be made a performance measure at all VISNs and VAMCs.

WV-8 Military Sexual Trauma: Currently, instances of sexual assault in the military must be reported through the chain of command. The creation of a separate and independent office to address such crimes would remove barriers to reporting and provide additional protection and safety for the victims. VVA will pursue legislation that reassigns complaints of MST by a service member to someone outside her or his immediate chain of command.

WV-9 Military Sexual Trauma Treatment for Guard and Reserve: Members of the Reserve and National Guard who experience military sexual trauma during weekend drills or battle assemblies and annual training are not eligible for treatment from the VA. VVA calls for legislation to allow members of the National Guard and Reserve forces who experience MST while on drilling and battle assemblies and during annual training to receive care from VA medical facilities without cost.

WV-10 Travel for VHA Treatment: The Beneficiary Travel Policy indicates that only selected categories of veterans are eligible for travel benefits and payment is authorized only to the closest facility providing a comparable service. This directive is not aligned with the military sexual trauma policy, which states that patients with MST should be referred to programs that are clinically indicated *regardless of geographic location*. VVA calls on the Under Secretary for Health to review and reexamine the existing VHA policy pertaining to the authorization of travel for veterans seeking MST-related specialized inpatient or residential treatment programs outside the facilities where they are enrolled and to provide travel funding for these veterans.

The Women Veterans Committee: Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Chair; Sandy Miller, Vice Chair. Members: Dottie Barickman, Pat Bessigano, Tom Hall, Linda Blankenship, Leslie DeLong, Tom Berger, Sara McVicker, Patty Dumin, Lee Jackson, and Billee Culin. AVVA Liaison: Elayne Mackey. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge.■

RESOLVED, THAT:

Vietnam Veterans of America requires that all national committees and task forces report at least annually in *The VVA Veteran* on actions taken which further the implementation of currently active Convention Resolutions.