



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



AO-1 Research on Agent Orange/Dioxin Effects: This resolution should stay the same as written. We have been pushing for national legislation and are waiting for new numbers to be assigned to the bills that will further research and treatment for both our progeny and those of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

AO-2 Agent Orange/Dioxin Children's Registry; Recognizing the Connection Between Dioxin & Learning Disabled Children: This resolution should stay as written. We have worked closely with this registry in getting more Vietnam veterans' children registered and in gaining evidence of conditions due to veteran exposure to toxins.

AO-4 VVA Agent Orange/Dioxin Guide: This resolution should stay as written. This booklet is one of our best methods for reaching veterans and their families.

AO-5 Assure Proper Implementation of the Agent Orange Act of 1991: This resolution must be reworded by the committee. Although this law expired before reinstatement, we need to contact all senators and congressmen to reinstate it as it is the foundation for all other Agent Orange and toxic substances programs and research.

AO-6 Dioxin Disposal Methods: This resolution can stay as it is written. Although we continue to push for better disposal methods of dioxin, this is a problem that will haunt us for years to come. The EPA has standards for doing this, but even their guidelines fall short of complete and safe disposal.

AO-7 Children's Health Care: This resolution can remain as written. We have been pushing this issue with our legislators, and it looks as though we will soon be getting treatment services if we can muster enough votes for the two bills before Congress.

AO-8 Agent Orange/Dioxin Network: This resolution can stay the same. We have been working very diligently on this through town hall meetings around the country and symposia with national veteran and non-veteran groups.

AO-9 Papermaking Manufacturing Process: This resolution remains the same. We have been actively working to have non-chlorine methods used in making

paper. Chlorine eventually winds up in our waterways and pollutes them. But it is expensive and slow to have manufacturers change methods.

AO-10 Ban the Manufacturing/Sale and Use of 2,4-D: This resolution remains the same. This chemical should not be allowed on any market, and we are working to have it taken off the market.

AO-12 National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Funding for Research in Vietnam: This resolution can stay the same. This is an ongoing project and we have made some headway: Our government has started reclamation of the Da Nang Airport.

AO-13 Agent Orange/Dioxin Awareness Month: This resolution can stay the same. Although October is used for other causes, it most certainly should be used for Agent Orange awareness.

AO-14 Hearing Loss Added to the List of Birth Defects Due to Exposure to Agent Orange: This resolution can stay the same. This is a resolution that needs to be pushed more as there are Vietnam veterans who had jobs that did not involve direct acoustic shock but still came home with hearing problems.

AO-15 Government's Responsibility for Veterans' Right To Know: This resolution can stay the same. We continue to push this resolution in hopes of gaining the right to know about so many things that the government considers secret or just cannot find.

AO-16 Blue Water Veterans' Exposure During the Vietnam War: This resolution can stay the same as written. It has been formulated into a bill, and we hope it will be voted on soon.

AO-17 U.S. Air Force Reserve C123K Aircrews' Exposure Post Vietnam: This resolution can be retired due to the fact that the Institute of Medicine confirmed crews' exposure to Agent Orange. Nonetheless, the VA is still reluctant to grant service connection and is considering each case individually.

The Agent Orange and Other Toxic Substances Committee: Herb Worthington, Chair; Dennis Andras, Bill Dumsick, George Newell, and Tom Owen, Vice Chairs. Members: Joseph Armstrong, Elizabeth Bates, Stephen Bowers, Wayne Cartier, George Claxton, Billee Culin, Mike Demske, Tom Hall, Steve House, Maynard Kaderlik, Darrel Martin, Marc McCabe, Luther Newberry, Francis Rowan, Nate Washington, John Weiss, and William Whaley. Special Advisors: Paul Bucha, Bruce Dobson, Jim Doyle,

Jack McManus, Sandie Morgan, Bobbie Morris, and Paul Sutton. AVVA Advisors: Kathy Andras, Elayne Mackey, and Nancy Switzer. Staff Support: Tom Berger, Bernie Edelman, and Mokie Porter.

Economic Opportunities Committee

BY FRANK BARRY, CHAIR



The Economic Opportunities Committee is pleased to provide this annual report on its progress in implementing its Convention resolutions.

E-1 Jobs in the Public Sector calls on VVA to favor federal legislation that will provide for an effective and clear redress mechanism for veterans who believe that their earned rights to veterans' preference have been violated. In the legislative agenda for the 114th Congress, the EOC supports cleaning up the Center for Verification and Evaluation (CVE) and setting a single standard for statutory, regulatory, and interpretive policy that is fair and not overly burdensome. We call for a culture of inclusion, rather than exclusion, that uses applicable case law to ensure that veterans are accorded veterans' preference in securing jobs. Committee members will meet with CVE staff to provide guidance on how to better serve veterans.

E-2 Job Training and Other Services calls on VVA to hold accountable programs funded through the Departments of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs to meet the special needs of veterans in their programs. Job training is an option for veterans before they leave the military. The EOC is advocating for skills training in science, technology, engineering, and math—areas needed by companies that can provide veterans with successful employment.

E-3 Veterans in Business calls on VVA to support legislation that mandates the full implementation of legislation that enhances the possibilities and opportunities for veterans to succeed in business. The EOC recommended a letter of support for Senate Bill 2834, The Protect VETS Act of 2014, sponsored by Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.). This legislation is designed to correct some DOL guidelines. For example, currently the Secretary of Labor may not impose additional restrictions on the services provided

by Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) or those who may be assisted by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs). LVERs may provide individual casework for veterans; DVOPs may conduct initial assessments of individuals to ensure they are not misclassified. Now the state, subject to approval by the Secretary, will employ such full- or part-time DVOPs as it determines appropriate and efficient to carry out intensive services and facilitate placements. Committee members are a part of the SBA Veterans Business Advisory Committee and the Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development.

E-18 A Comprehensive Employment Resource Development Program: VVA actively advocates for increases in federal funding for mental health services and programs at all Vet Centers and VHA facilities in order to assist veterans and their families with mental illnesses caused by their military service. This will better ensure veterans' successful integration into the workplace and community. The EOC supported the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act signed into law on July 22, 2014. It replaces the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and retains and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It will be effective July 1, 2015.

The law's highlights include: requiring the states to strategically align workforce development programs; promoting accountability and transparency; fostering regional collaboration; improving the American Job Center (AJC) system; improving services to employers and promoting work-based training; enhancing workforce services for the unemployed and other job seekers; and improving services to individuals with disabilities.

E-19 A Meaningful Job at a Living Wage: All federal and state agencies should fully implement the Hire a Vet program and the Jobs for Veterans Act. Agencies and their managers must be held accountable for the implementation by written policy and GAO oversight. The EOC supports the Department of Labor training program in cell tower installation and maintenance. It is expected to create five thousand jobs in 2015.

The U.S. Department of Transportation is also creating thousands of new small business jobs by updating Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). It is a federal construction program implemented by the states to supply materials,

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machines, and labor to build and maintain the nation's highways, bridges, airports, and transit system. We are urging Congress to level the playing field for the unemployed, underemployed, and small businesses by updating the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) definition in MAP-21 to include Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs) and HUBZone companies to create thousands of new jobs for the citizens who need them the most: service-disabled veterans and the unemployed and underemployed living in the nation's poorest and rural communities.

The Economic Opportunities Committee: Frank Barry, Chair; Ted Daywalt, Vice Chair. Members: Dennis Andras, Larry Carter, Ric Davidge, Marc Goldschmitt, Dave Johnston, and Harold Nash. Special Advisors: Paul Ignosh, Joe Wynn, and Carl Tuvin. AVVA Advisor: Sharon Hobbs and Nancy Rekowski. Staff Support: Rick Weidman.

Finance Committee

BY NED FOOTE, CHAIR



The Finance Committee's job is to help VVA cost centers achieve their goals with proper funding within expected revenue. In March of each year, each committee, department, officer, and director must submit a budget request to us with narratives about how and why they need funds. Usually they ask for more than what our projected revenue will be.

Last year we had to cut more than one million dollars in proposed expenses. We did this in a very long budget meeting, and we recommended a balanced budget to the Board of Directors in April 2014, which they accepted. We had some moaning about these budget cuts, but over the year we did not see anyone unable to accomplish his or her goals, and we expect to see that some have not used what was allotted them. That is good stuff, and all are commended on holding down expenses. We try to work with cost centers throughout the year on funding shortfalls, and they are reminded when it looks like they will go over their budgets.

This time around (FY2016) we are coming into the budget process with an expected excess of proposed expenses versus expected revenue. As our organization continues to get older, some revenue goes down. We are no longer the new kids on the block, and some of the funds 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. Lesser priorities usually

are where expenses are reduced. This is the nutshell version of what we do.

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

Homeless Veterans Committee

BY SANDY MILLER, CHAIR



The Homeless Veterans Committee continues to monitor legislation relative to the Convention resolutions listed below.

HV-1 Homeless Veterans as a "Special Needs Population": The Homeless Veterans Committee, in concert with the Government Affairs Department, continues to work on this resolution. The VA has increased funding for homeless veterans and homeless veteran programs in keeping with the VA plan to end veteran homelessness in five years.

HV-6 VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding: Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding methodology remains at the top of the committee's priority list. This will require legislative initiatives, which the committee is prepared to go forward with. Progress on this issue has been slow; however, the committee remains hopeful that this will happen.

HV-7 Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program To Remain at the U.S. Department of Labor and Be Fully Funded at \$50M: With the addition of a "fourth arm" of the VA, the committee looks forward to working to ensure that HVRP dollars are not lost, regardless of where the authority for the program is seated.

HV-8 Support for Continued Funding and Oversight of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development/U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services (HUD/VASH) Program: We continue to work toward a full accountability of all dollars allocated to this program as well as toward placement numbers with positive outcomes. The committee has worked for many years to have the HUD/VASH Voucher program funded and utilized to the greatest possible level.

HV-10 Continued Funding for "Special Needs" Grants Under the Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Grants & Per Diem Program: Recent

legislation has extended this date to September 30, 2015.

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 VA should identify and implement these practices in programs for homeless women veterans nationwide.

HV-12 Extend the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Criteria for Veterans Placed in "Housing First" Model: Veterans entering into "housing first" should be able to gain access to training for up to twelve months after placement in housing. The committee continues to support this resolution and views it as key to ending veteran homelessness.

HV-13 Support for the Missing In America Project: VVA supports the mission of the Missing In America Project in locating and identifying the unclaimed remains of veterans and securing a final resting place for these forgotten veterans.

HV-14 Support, Oversight, and Accountability of VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families: VVA supports the continuation of the SSVF grant program. To ensure full compliance, VVA urges the VA Secretary to monitor and hold accountable those receiving and distributing these funds to the most vulnerable veteran families.

The Homeless Veterans Committee: Sandy Miller, Chair; Tom Hall, Vice Chair. Members: Pat Bessigano, Linda Blankenship, Terry Hubert, Tom Johnson, Dave Johnston, Joe McIntyre, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, and Jerry Yamamoto. AVVA Advisors: Joanna Henshaw, Cathy Keister, and Nancy Switzer. Staff Support: Tom Berger and Sharon Hodge.

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 kept at the local level in a confidential and secure manner in accordance with the provisions of the 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 in a timely manner. The Membership Committee is working hard 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: Dick Southern, Richard DeLong, Ben Humphries, Leonard Ignatowski, Joseph Kristek, Richard W. Lindbeck, Charlie Montgomery, Jim Pace, Jerry Pounds, Barry Rice, Carol Schetrompf, and Rex Moody. Special Advisor: National Secretary Bill Meeks. AVVA Advisors: Cathy Keister and Penny Meinhardt. Staff Support: Alyson Alt.

Minority Affairs Committee

BY JERRY YAMAMOTO, CHAIR



The VVA Minority Affairs Committee is required by Convention resolution to provide this yearly report on actions taken to further the implementation of current Convention resolutions.

MA-1 Language-Translated DVA Benefits Materials. The committee continues to monitor the VA benefits materials to ensure that they are translated in the relevant languages 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 articles to publish in *The VVA Veteran* about ethnic minority veteran activities. We continue to run a column in *The Veteran*.

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 continue to attempt to 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 other ethnic minority veteran conferences, and monitors the conferences and other events of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, the National Association For Black Veterans, the Asian/Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, and American Indian veteran conferences. The committee will attend local ethnic veteran community programs. It also interfaces 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. A Minority Affairs Committee vice chair has been appointed for Hispanic Affairs. The committee continues to monitor the level of VA services provided to these veterans.

MA-8 Recognition of the Service and Sacrifices Made by the Veterans of the Territory of Guam and U.S. Pacific Islanders. The committee continues to support the improvement of health services for the Vietnam veterans of Guam and all U.S. Pacific Islanders. The Region 9 Director maintains contacts with veterans in Guam and the Philippines. The chair will try to contact representatives of these veterans during the current year.

MA-9 Awareness and Sensitivity to Racial, Cultural, and Gender-Related Equity Issues. The committee questions the training of VA staff in cultural competency and the staff's ability to display those skills. The VA needs to have staff available to assist non-English-speaking family members of patients by providing staff who can speak to those families in their native languages.

MA-10 Self-Determination for Puerto Rico. The committee continues to monitor the effects of the plebiscite vote in Puerto Rico for statehood. The congressional representative for Puerto Rico is not taking any action. VVA needs to ask Congress, based on this plebiscite vote, to grant statehood to Puerto Rico. This resolution will be rewritten to include that requested action.

MA-11 U.S. Montagnard Veterans. The committee will make contacts to gather relevant information on the status of Montagnard veterans to provide the mandated report to the National Board of Directors that was not completed, as required, by spring 2004. The word "Hmong" is redundant and should be deleted.

MA-12 American Indian Veterans Memorial Initiative. This resolution will be retired as the memorial legislation was enacted and the memorial will be placed

inside the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitors Center.

MA-13 American Indian, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians. The committee continues to support these veterans and the resolution as written.

The Minority Affairs Committee: Jerry Yamamoto, Chair; Dave Simmons, Vice Chair; Stephen Bowers, Vice Chair for Native Americans; Gumersindo Gomez, Vice Chair for Hispanic Affairs; Joanna Henshaw, Secretary. Members: Horace Brown, Pete Peterson, Lou Nunez, Francisco Ivarra, Joe Jennings, Allen Manuel, Gerald Ney, Cecilio Besares, Connie Steers, James Maddox, Paul Washington, Ric Davidge, Ron Speight, Jorge Pedroza, Tony Molina, Virgie Hibbler, Manuel Pedraza, Henry Urioste, Tom Wilson, and Joe McIntyre. Staff Support: Bernie Edelman.

PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee

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



A new legislative year has arrived, and with it a new crop of disturbing statistics telling us how many of our servicemen and women, both active and veteran, have died

by their own hands, have lost family or jobs through self-medication, or have become homeless due to PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and military sexual trauma (MST)—the invisible wounds of war. Most disturbing, often these invisible wounds result in wrongful diagnoses by the Department of Defense, leaving the wounded without the benefits they earned and need.

These are not just statistics; they are our brothers and sisters in arms. Each trauma is experienced by a living, breathing person who took an oath to serve and defend us. Each person has earned our immediate attention and action. The PTSD and Substance Abuse Committee has spent the last year working on the following policy initiatives, and we invite you to join us as we advocate for the resources and expertise necessary to treat the invisible wounds of war.

Only by talking about these policy initiatives with everyone you know, especially your senators and congressman, will the needs of our fighting men and women be met with the highest-quality care. Make the call right now. Help get the following legislative priorities for the 114th Congress signed into law.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

VVA shall work with Congress to ensure that DOD corrects all wrongful "personal-

ity 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 to which they are entitled.

VVA shall work with Congress to take whatever measures 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 for PTSD, TBI, substance abuse, and suicide risk.

VVA shall work with Congress to ensure that DOD and the VA 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.

The PTSD and Substance Abuse Committee: Thomas C. Hall, Chair; Fr. Phil Salois, Vice Chair. Members: Ray Autenrich, Dottie Barickman, Bob Barry, Pat Bessigano, Linda Blankenship, Dennis Cohoon, Kenneth Hafford, Sandy Miller, Allan Perkal, Ed Ryan, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Charlie Stapleton, Dan Stenvold, John Wallace, and Jerry Yamamoto. AVVA Advisor: Frances Cartier. Staff Support: Tom Berger.

Public Affairs Committee

BY TOM BURKE, CHAIR



In compliance with Public Affairs Resolution P-7 the following update is provided on the committee's efforts to advance the 2013 Convention Resolutions.

P-1 Community Service: Encourages community service as a positive expression of Vietnam veterans' participation in their communities. I am pleased that VVA state councils and chapters continue to be extremely active attending to the needs of their communities. One needs only to view the achievements of chapter and state councils that meet with their federal, state, and local government officials in a continuing effort to bring VVA's message to them. If you look at Membership Notes in *The VVA Veteran* or click "Events" on VVA's Facebook page, you will see the many achievements of our members. Facebook and Twitter provide free coverage of local events.

P-2 Children's Welfare: Encourages efforts to safeguard children and infants. VVA members, chapters, and state councils have initiated and maintained many programs that benefit America's children, ranging

from support of food pantries to soapbox derbies, hurricane relief, and scholarships. These efforts, often recounted in *The VVA Veteran*, honor the achievements of our chapters and inspire others. Finally, VVA advocates for research on the multigenerational effects of Agent Orange exposure.

P-3 Chapter Involvement with Educational Institutions on Teaching the Vietnam War to the Generations that Follow: VVA remains committed to the concept that those who participated in the Vietnam War are best suited to educate our children about the war. The committee's Education Subcommittee, chaired by Florida's Tom Hall, has revised VVA's Education Guidebook. It is available online.

P-4 Regulation of Certain Activities at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: VVA has called on the National Park Service to prohibit press conferences and politically motivated actions on the grounds of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. NPS is urged to control vendors and maintain an atmosphere of reverence and respect for those honored there. VVA continues to support regulation of activities at The Wall.

P-5 Endorsement for Participation in Local Environmental Efforts: VVA encourages chapters and state councils to participate in programs and political efforts that minimize environmental impact. The committee is reviewing this resolution and may recommend changes at the Convention in Springfield.

P-7 Requirement To Report Progress on All Currently Approved Convention Resolutions at Least Annually: This report fulfills the requirement of the Public Affairs Committee. To encourage general compliance, the process has been formalized: While any committee may report in any issue of *The Veteran*, every committee with resolutions must report on the progress in advancing those resolutions in each March/April issue.

P-8 The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall: We reaffirm VVA's commitment to the conservation and legacy of The Wall. VVA encourages the active participation of VVA members in the care and maintenance of The Wall. One striking example is the monthly Wall Washing by Silver Spring, Maryland, Chapter 641 and guests. (see article in the September/October 2012 issue at www.vvaveteran.org).

P-12 Public Awareness for Veteran Benefits Campaign: There are continuing discussions in the Public Affairs Committee on the best ways to promote VVA's concerns about federal veterans benefits.

P-13 Gold Star Mothers National Monument: Supports the establishment of a national memorial in Washington, D.C., to honor the singular sacrifices of America's Gold Star Mothers.



WA Annual Committee Reports

The Public Affairs Committee: Tom Burke, Chair; Herb Worthington, Vice Chair; Dan Stenvold, Chair, Awards Subcommittee; Tom Hall, Chair, Education Subcommittee; and Tom Owen, Chair, Real Estate Subcommittee. Members: Bob Barry, Grant Coates, Richard DeLong, Ken Holybee, Ronald Morgan, John Riling, Beverly Stewart, Charles Stapleton, Dick Southern, and Ron Zink. AVVA Advisors: Sherry Wright-Anderson and Beverly Pounds. Staff Support: Wes Guidry, Michael Keating, Marc Leepson, and Mokie Porter.

Veterans Benefits Committee

BY JOHN L. MARGOWSKI, CHAIR



VB-1 Judicial Review: Veterans are able to hire a private attorney or claims agent at any point during their claims process. However, a contingency fee agreement is allowed only after the filing of a Notice of Disagreement (NOD), and the fee agreement needs to be reasonable. However, once a post-NOD agreement is entered into the record, it can be difficult to remove. VVA continues to seek changes in applicable law to protect the right of veterans to control all aspects of their representation before the VA.

VB-3 Less-Than-Honorable Administrative Discharges: In September 2014 former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel signed a directive ordering the Army, Navy, and Air Force to implement supplemental guidance involving discharge upgrade applications relating to PTSD. The directive may affect up to eighty thousand Vietnam veterans with PTSD who have other-than-honorable discharges. Outreach to veterans from all wars still needs to be accomplished on this issue. Most veterans are unaware that they can still apply to the Board of Corrections of Military Records for upgrades. VVA continues to seek the repeal of Public Law 99-126 regarding the Carter administration's special discharge upgrade program and is working toward having the other-than-fully-honorable discharge replaced with a certificate of service.

VB-5 Civil Liberties of Active-Duty Military Personnel: Ongoing until resolved.

VB-6 Just Compensation for Injuries Sustained by Active-Duty Military Personnel: Active-duty military personnel are often unable to recover adequate compensation for injuries due to negligence of government personnel. VVA continues to seek legislation or other appropriate action to secure a more equitable compensation for personnel injured on active duty due to the negligence of government personnel.

VB-7 Class Actions at U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims: VVA continues to petition the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to adopt a class-action rule applicable to claims before the court. This would allow veterans with identical issues to petition for relief within the court with jurisdiction over their benefits claims.

VB-9 DVA Implementation of U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Decisions: VVA joined in an amicus brief on a lawsuit with Veterans for Common Sense that sought to use the federal courts to improve the speed and quality of VA benefits decisions. Unfortunately, this lawsuit was not successful, so veterans still have to pursue individual VA claims. The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff to urge Congress to provide for class actions to address veterans' concerns and enact systemic change instead of making each veteran fight his or her own battle.

VB-10 Veterans Benefits & Services: VVA, along with other veterans service organizations, continues to ask Congress to intercede and make the VA implement processes to improve its claims processing and delivery of VA services to veterans. For more information on this topic, please review Veterans Benefits Director Jim Vale's January 22 written testimony before Congress at <https://veterans.house.gov/witness-testimony/james-r-vale-esquire>

VB-11 Veterans Benefits System: The VA claims process is nearly fully digitized. Although there still are paper claims files, most have been scanned or archived for scanning and nearly all claims are processed without the use of paper. The transition from paper files to digitized claims processing, however, is not foolproof. VVA Veterans Benefits staff continue to work with VVA Government Affairs to improve the VA compensation system through legislative action, administrative advocacy, and meetings with VA executive staff. We have been involved in addressing several issues related to the backlog, such as improving work credit, suggesting improvements to VA computer systems, and simplifying VA regulations.

VB-12 Department of Veterans Affairs Service-Connected Disability Compensation Payments & Military Retirement Pay: Concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability has been phased in over the past several years. However, this only applies to those with 50 percent or higher VA disability ratings. Combat-related special compensation is also a way veterans can receive both military retired pay and VA disability benefits (only those related to combat). Veterans must choose between the two programs each year. The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff to allow concurrent receipt for all veterans retired due to length of service with any VA disability rating. We also encourage the full implementation of concurrent

receipt for all levels of VA disability compensation.

VB-13 Preservation of VVA Service Representation at the National Level: At the national level, VVA continues to maintain high-quality attorneys for representation of veterans' claims. For our service officers, the *Veterans Benefits Program Policies* is being rewritten to more clearly define a service officer's duties and responsibilities. Service Officer training is now available on the VVA website. The VVA Service Officer Grant Program procedures have been streamlined and now are in house. This remains a first priority of VVA.

VB-16 Copy of Military Records upon Discharge: The committee has worked with Government Affairs staff to improve the integration of Department of Defense and VA health records to create a virtual lifetime electronic record. Providing complete and workable records has been a subject of testimony and meetings with VA staff. The committee also works with VVA Veterans Benefits and Government Affairs staff to monitor the records disposition schedules of the service departments to ensure that important health and personnel records are protected and not destroyed. Recent military personnel being separated are given a CD or flash drive containing their records.

VB-18 The Department of Veterans Affairs' Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program: Ongoing. VVA continues to encourage its state councils and local chapters to get involved with Voluntary Services at their local VA hospitals.

VB-19 Veterans Environmental Health Effects: Legislation that addresses VVA's initiative regarding the toxic exposure of all America's veterans is expected to be re-introduced in the 114th Congress.

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

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

VB-28 Removal of 5 Percent Annual Deductible for VA Pension Eligibility: The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff to urge that all allowable medical expenses incurred by a low-income veteran eligible for VA pension be subtracted from his or her household's income, not just those expenses that exceed the 5 percent deductible. This will be included in our work on reducing the backlog, as the necessary calculations make this annual task more onerous on veterans and VA employees.

The Veterans Benefits Committee: John Margowski, Chair; Jim Pace, Vice Chair. Members: Richard Carman, Joe Kristek, Dick Southern, Joe Jennings, Ned Foote, Dennis Cahoon, Herb Worthington, Charlie Montgomery, Ben Humphries, Pete Peterson, Jon Weiss, Perry Melvin, and Gene Crego. Staff Support: Jim Vale, National Benefits Director; Jamie Rupert, Deputy Director; and Elaine Chaney, Administrative Assistant. AVVA Special Advisors: Sharon Hobbs and Nancy Switzer.

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. This resolution needs to be updated to reflect more recent VA Handbook and performance measures. Measures that have not been met still need to be addressed.

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. The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, Section 403, directs the Department of Veterans Affairs-Department of Defense Joint Executive Committee to report to Congress on the transition of military sexual trauma treatment from the DOD to the VA. Parts of the reporting segments have been changed to provide anonymity for the victim. However, the basic premise of removing the chain of command from the reporting of the crime still stands. This legislation still needs work.

WV-9 Military Sexual Trauma Treatment for Guard and Reserve: Members of the Reserves 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

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allow these members of the National Guard and Reserve forces to receive care from VA medical facilities without cost.

Legislation has been enacted that changes the criteria. This expansion occurred as part of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. The expansion is a part of the VA's effort to provide "free care for all physical and mental health conditions determined by their VA provider to be related to experiences of MST." Although not a specific diagnosis, MST is instead defined as "any sexual activity where a servicemember is involved against his or her will."

WV-10 Travel for VHA Treatment. The Beneficiary Travel Policy indicates that only selected categories of veterans are eligible for travel benefits, and that payment is authorized only to the closest facility providing 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 for 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. This resolution will need further updating by the Women Veterans Committee to align it with current legislation.

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, Pattie Dumin, Lee Jackson, Gene Crego, Ed Ryan, John Wallace, Billie Culin, and Tom Devlin. AVVA Advisor: Elayne Mackey. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge.

Government Affairs Committee

BY PETE PETERSON, CHAIR



Members of the 114th Congress were sworn in on January 6. Rep Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) remains chair of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee; on the minority side, Rep. Corrine Brown (D-Fla.), a 22-year member of the committee, became ranking member, replacing Mike Michaud of Maine. In the Senate, Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) was named chair of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, succeeding Bernard Sanders (I-Vt.). Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) is the new ranking member, replacing Richard Burr (R-N.C.).

VVA intends to work closely with the 114th Congress to secure enactment of our top priorities. We will, of course, reach out to our members, to other veterans service organizations, and to environmental support groups to press for enactment of relevant legislation. That includes:

1. Addressing the legacy of toxic exposures, not limited to Agent Orange and other defoliants employed in South Vietnam;
2. Fixing the VA, so shaken by the predictable waiting-list scandal of 2014 that a chastened bureaucracy might be persuaded to accept some real and lasting change;
3. Organizational reform of the VA, including the creation of a Veterans Economic Opportunities Administration.

Make no mistake: Vietnam veterans still have unmet needs. We refuse to be passed by, dismissed, or forgotten. Enactment of our top priorities, especially addressing the legacy of toxic exposures and fixing the VA, can go a long way toward ameliorating some of these needs—not just for Vietnam veterans, but for veterans of all eras.

G-7 Service Connection for Hepatitis C: There has been no progress on this resolution. Part of the inactivity is that we

have succeeded in getting direct service connection via existing evidence, and there is an effective hepatitis C standard of care in place at the VA.

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

G-10 Endorsement of Legislation To Create Minimum Private-Sector Health-Care Coverage for Uninsured and Underinsured Veterans and Their Families: 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. The committee will recommend retiring this resolution at the 2015 National Convention.

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 non-consensual 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: The resolution is now a program under the auspices of the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America. The committee will recommend retirement of this resolution.

G-16 Sexual Harassment: This resolution was achieved with the enactment of P.L. 113-66, The Defense Authorization Act of 2014, XVII Sexual Prevention and Response and Related Reform in Sections 2-5. The committee will recommend retirement of this resolution at the 2015 National Convention.

G-17 Proper Use of Real Estate at West Los Angeles VA Medical Center: VVA has consistently opposed the use of the undeveloped and unused 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 victory was achieved on January 24, 2015, when the VA signed an agreement dedicating the West LA Medical Center campus to serve veterans in need as was the original intent when the land was donated to the federal government in 1888. In light of this historic agreement, the committee will recommend retirement of this resolution at the 2015 National Convention, but will monitor developments and compliance with the intent of the law—and the purpose of the West LA Campus.

The Government Affairs Committee: Pete Peterson, 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, Dominick Yezzo, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Spence Davis, Gene Crego, Wayne Reynolds, and Dennis Cohoon. AVVA Advisors: Sharon Hobbs and Nancy Switzer. Special Advisors: Nancy Rekowski, Jon Birch, and Jeri Wallis. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge, Rick Weidman, Bernie Edelman, and Tom Berger. ■

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 that further the implementation of currently active Convention Resolutions.