



## Progress In Advancing Convention Resolutions

Current Convention Resolutions are posted at [www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)

### Agent Orange

BY MAYNARD KADERLIK, CHAIR



The Agent Orange Strategy Meeting held December 4 at the national office was long and fruitful. We discussed important issues that VVA needs to push forward. We will send four letters.

The first, to the VA Secretary, will be about the five different health conditions of Vietnam veterans. He needs to address them and report out those that will be presumptive.

The second, also to the VA Secretary, will ask for much-needed funding to research birth defects. We also need to issue a press release on this issue. In addition, we need to set up a panel of experts to reinforce VVA's position on research for the descendants. Suggested experts include Christine Casper, Linda Birnbaum, George Knafl, and Richard Albanese.

The third letter, to the Secretary of Defense, will address the Ranch Hand Study, which is not complete until analysis is done. This study has roughly 86,000 samples. This should be done using new technologies, diagnostic processes regarding generational effects, and access to all original data. These samples are stored in Randolph, Texas, and Wright Patterson, Ohio, which are both Air Force bases.

Fourth is a letter to the Secretary of Defense and a press release on the GAO report of November 2018. Action is needed to improve accuracy and communication of the information on testing and storage locations, along with a letter of the action plan to proceed.

Thanks to all who participated in a very productive meeting.

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

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

the children and is now law, it will deal with these archived forms.

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

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

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

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

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

**AO-10 Ban the Manufacturing, Sale, and Use of 2,4-D.** States are banning the use of these toxins. More states will follow when they realize how toxic this poison is.

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

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

### Economic Opportunities

BY FRANK BARRY, CHAIR



The Economic Opportunities Committee has two main goals: 1) to promote meaningful jobs in the private and public sectors through job preparation and training, and 2) to promote veterans in

business. Here is the progress the committee has made on advancing our resolutions.

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

**E-2 Job Training and Other Services.** The committee communicates regularly with the Department of Labor about its training programs, including the Transition Assistance Program, Boots to Business, Veteran Business Outreach Centers, Access to Capital, and One-Stop Shop for Veteran Entrepreneurs. Committee members support jobs and training by attending jobs fairs and offering assistance to local chapters to publicize resources available to veterans.

**E-3 Veterans in Business.** The committee is working on the national and local levels with the Small Business Administration. The committee is promoting procurement readiness so that veterans know the process and have the knowledge of state labor laws, know how to win business, and can execute contracts once they are awarded. The committee is collaborating with veteran-owned financial companies to seek alternative funding sources for veteran businesses in order to gain access to capital.

**E-19 A Meaningful Job at a Living Wage.** Members advocate for advancing employment opportunities in the demand occupations and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) that provide long-term career opportunities for veterans and a living wage.

*The Economic Opportunities Committee: Frank Barry, Chair. Members: Dennis Andras, Linda Blankenship, Larry Carter, Marc Goldschmitt, Victor Klingelhofer, Pete Peterson, and Dave Smith. AVVA*

*Advisers: Sharon Hobbs, Jeri Wallis, and Nancy Rekowski. Special Adviser: Joe Wynn. Staff Support: Rick Weidman.*

### Homeless Veterans

BY SANDY MILLER, CHAIR



This has been a rather good year for homeless veterans. Issues addressed in some of our resolutions have been changed, revised, or passed into law.

A special thanks and recognition goes out to the committee's staff adviser, Sharon Hodge. She represented VVA at the Annual Winterhaven Homeless/At-Risk Veterans Stand Down (see Membership Notes, page 44). She was responsible for taking the lead on the men's coat distribution and collected nearly four hundred winter coats. A special thanks also goes to all the others who helped with this effort.

**HV-1 Homeless Veterans as a Special Needs Population.** Vietnam Veterans of America urges the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to recognize homeless veterans as a Special Needs Population. Further, we urge Congress to require all entities and agencies, including non-profit or governmental, that receive or use federal program funding dollars to report statistics on the number of veterans they serve, their residential status, and the services needed.

VVA strongly urges its membership, at the chapter and state council level, to work with their state and federal legislators to enhance services to homeless veterans and encourage them to recognize these veterans as a Special Needs Population. Additionally, VVA supports legislation that would incorporate a Fair Share dollar approach for the federal funding of all homeless programs and services to specifically target homeless veterans.

The committee will continue to push for recognizing homeless veterans as a Special Needs Population.

**HV-6 VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding.** VVA urges the VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program to provide payment for services, rather than the reimbursement for services it presently provides for transitional housing. VVA supports and seeks legislation to establish Supportive Services Staffing Grants for VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Service Center Grant Awardees.



Merging project numbers was accomplished with the reboot of the Grant and Per Diem program.

**HV-7 Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program to Remain at the U.S. Department of Labor and Be Fully Funded at \$50M.** VVA opposes the transition of the HVRP from DoL; further, DoL should be held accountable for this program's function, oversight, and performance. Additionally, VVA urges full funding to the authorized level for HVRP.

The committee will continue to support keeping HVRP in place, while also moving forward with legislation demanding full funding.

**HV-8 Support for Continued Funding and Oversight of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development/U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services (HUD-VASH) Program.** VVA strongly supports and urges the continued funding and expansion of the HUD-VASH voucher program. Further, VVA urges that HUD and the VA establish a mechanism whereby oversight of the HUD-VASH voucher program will be insured so that outcomes and effectiveness of the program can be monitored.

The committee will continue to support the HUD-VASH program as an effective method of housing.

**HV-10 Continued Funding for Special Needs Grants Under the Department of Veterans Affairs' Homeless Grants & Per Diem Program.** VVA aggressively advocates for legislation that would extend the Homeless Veterans with Special Needs program due to expire on September 30, 2019.

The only change is updating the expiration date.

**HV-11 The Department of Veterans Affairs to Identify Best Practices Models Addressing Homeless Women Veteran Transitional Residential Treatment Programs Through VA Homeless Grants & Per Diem.** VVA strongly urges the VA to identify Best Practice Models addressing the unique needs and issues of homeless women veterans and move to implement these practices in programs for homeless women veterans nationwide.

We continue to be watchful over those programs established to address the needs of homeless women veterans.

**HVC-12 Extend the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Criteria for Veterans Placed in "Housing First" Model.** VVA seeks legislation to amend the eligibility criteria for veterans enrolled in the DoL Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program so those veterans entering into "housing first" would be able to gain access to this training for up to twelve months after placement into housing.

This resolution was completed with the passage of P.L.115-407 and will be considered for retirement at the Convention.

**HVC-13 Support for the Missing in America Project.** VVA at every level sup-

ports 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.

Many chapters and state councils participate in the project.

**HVC-14 Support, Oversight, and Accountability of VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families.** VVA fully supports the continuation of the VA's SSVF grant program. Additionally, in order to insure full compliance with the regulations set forth for this valuable program, VVA strongly urges the VA Secretary to monitor and hold accountable those entities receiving and distributing these funds to the most vulnerable veteran families.

The SSVF program has been successful in providing assistance to homeless veterans and to those who are classified as "imminently homeless."

As committee chair, I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to the committee members.

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

## Membership Affairs

BY CHARLIE HOBBS, CHAIR



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

**M-2 Communication Among VVA's Organizational Levels.** The national office must reply to all communications from state councils and chapters within five working days, and state councils and chapters must reply to all communications from the national office within ten working days. M-2 remains worthwhile and was overwhelmingly endorsed at the 2017 National Convention.

During the January CSCP meeting in Silver Spring, all state council presidents were made aware of the importance of informing their chapters about the \$50 Life Membership change. There has been some confusion on the change. All questions should be directed to the Membership Department.

The FY2020 proposed budget was approved by the MAC Team during its January 2019 meeting.

The Fifth Annual Membership Growth Award Program came to a close on February 28. Several chapters gained outstanding numbers. The awardees will be announced at the National Convention in Spokane.

I want to introduce and thank the MAC Team members for their dedication and loyalty.

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

## Minority Affairs

BY GUMERSINDO GOMEZ, CHAIR



Since becoming chair of this committee in October 2017, many positive things have emerged. First, we assured the Board and the State Council Presidents that this committee was going to be reenergized.

After making my first presentation to the Board, I discovered we were supported and respected by many members of the Board and the State Councils. We got off to a rocky start, but now we are communicating and persistent as we tackle the issues of minority veterans.

Our workshop at the Leadership & Education Conference last July at Palm Springs drew forty participants (mostly white), including our National President and Vice President. All participated in an exercise on how to recruit minority veterans.

Puerto Rico has been an area that VVA has kept a close eye on after Hurricane Maria devastated the island. Under the direction of President John Rowan I traveled to Puerto Rico in November to take part in a roundtable meeting focused on veterans and their families (see January/February, page 47). The VA has created the Office of Transitional and Economic Development as a mechanism to increase veterans' access to the benefits and services to which they are entitled. I continue to monitor these issues in Puerto Rico.

We have commenced work on a very stimulating issue with Korean American Vietnam War veterans. The ROKs were our strongest ally in Vietnam; 325,517 of them served with us during the Vietnam War. Today 2,800 of them have become U.S. citizens. They are asking for our support in being recognized as veterans of the war, able to receive services from the VA for their PTSD and Agent Orange exposure. This is an issue that will take some time and lots of lobbying on their behalf.

**MA-1 Language-Translated VA Benefits Material.** That VVA continue its support for distribution by the VA of materials

outlining benefits, programs, and adjudication guides in Spanish.

**MA-2 Minority Affairs Coverage in The VVA Veteran.** The committee submits a regular column and this annual report. In addition, it recommends articles covering the concerns of minority veterans.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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tion Conferences and National Conventions.

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

I would like to thank the committee members who have been there with me, encouraging and supporting me as we confront the issues facing us.

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

## POW/MIA Affairs

**BY GRANT T. COATES, CHAIR**



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

Committee:

**PM-3 Declassification of Information and Diligent Effort.** The POW/MIA Affairs Committee monitors the actions of the National Declassification Center (NDC), created on December 29, 2009, by Executive Order 13526. The NDC has released listings of 335 entries that have completed declassification processing between October 2, 2017, and September 28, 2018. More than 3,825 cubic feet of records, including various military commands and secret correspondence, have completed the declassification processing.

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

**PM-7 Possibility of Live POW/MIAs, and Facilitating the Return of Those Who Remain in Southeast Asia.** VVA has formally acknowledged the possibility of live Americans being left in Southeast Asia at the end of the Vietnam War and elsewhere worldwide as a result of later military operations and war. Until all known missing in action from the Vietnam War are accounted for and returned, no change to the resolution is foreseen.

**PM-8 Fullest Possible Accounting of POW/MIAs in Vietnam.** The committee continues to receive timely information from DPAA and other organizations regarding accountability of the missing in ac-

tion from the Vietnam War. All identified missing-in-action personnel names are immediately announced through organizational media. For various reasons, including wishes of the families, DoD announcements are often delayed beyond identification dates and sometimes are not even made.

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

VVA commends the extraordinary service rendered by those public servants, military personnel, and citizens who have devoted their lives, vocation, time, and personal resources to resolving the issue of prisoners and missing from the Vietnam War and other conflicts.

**PM-13 Public Awareness and Education on the POW/MIA Flag.** VVA encourages and supports compliance with P.L. 101-355. VVA further resolves to continue efforts to educate public officials and others on the history and meaning of the POW/MIA flag and its proper display under that law.

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

**PM-14 Forever POW/MIA Stamp.** The Perpetual POW/MIA Stamp Act will be introduced by Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) on September 20, 2019, during the 116th Congress. If passed in the House of Representatives, the bill must be passed by the Senate in identical form and then be signed by the President to become law.

**VI-1 The Veterans Initiative, a National VVA Effort on Vietnam's Missing in Action.** In an effort to receive more information regarding the Vietnamese missing in action from the Vietnam War, the Veterans Initiative program launched an informational request advertisement in 2016 titled "Were You There," published in *The VVA Veteran*. In 2015 "The Veterans Initiative Needs Your Help" was placed on the POW/MIA page, [www.vva.org/Committees/POW\\_MIA](http://www.vva.org/Committees/POW_MIA). Several eyewitness reports have been submitted to the committee for investigation. The end result of the veteran-to-veteran collaboration between VVA and Vietnamese organizations will be the accounting of Americans missing in action.

**VI-2 Scope of the Veterans Initiative.** VVA reaffirms the primary mission of the Veterans Initiative to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all unrepatriated POW/MIAs in Vietnam and supports ex-

panding the mission elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

*The POW-MIA Affairs Committee: Grant T. Coates, Chair. Members: Ray Autenrieb, Lawrence Carter, Terry Courville, Richard DeLong, Patti Dumin, Skip Hochreich, Dennis Howland, John Kost, Steve Mackey, Larry Matika, and Ted Wilkinson. Special Advisers: AVVA Kaye Gardner, AVVA Terri Rangle, National League of Families' Susie Stephens. VI Program Advisers: Gary Jones, Bill Duker, and Dan Carr. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge and Mokie Porter (VI Program).*

## PTSD & Substance Abuse

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



Over the last year, the PTSD/SA Committee has worked hard to build and strengthen resources and advocacy efforts through grassroots initiatives and holding the VA accountable for implementing legislation tied to our legislative agenda. Further, members have been active in the Women Veterans Committee, Homeless Veterans Committee, Health Care Committee, Government Affairs Committee, POW/MIA Affairs Committee, and other VVA national committees where mental health and substance abuse issues overlap. There is still much to accomplish.

Committee members have been, and will continue to be, involved in many activities. The following points indicate the depth and breadth of these activities:

- Members participated in workshops and town halls. A fair amount of this work was about PTSD, suicide prevention, secondary PTSD, and substance use disorder. We distributed literature and phone numbers for state and national help.
- Presented in college education classes on the Vietnam War with special focus on PTSD and its impact on veterans, paving the way for behavioral health referrals for family members.
- Worked with local VA behavioral health centers as first-time vets seeking mental health services have been turned away without proper mental health intake assessment.
- Facilitated a weekly hour-long workshop group on living and coping in recovery with PTSD.
- Facilitated support groups with AVVA for the families of veterans and others who have PTSD. Discussions are curriculum-focused and deal with issues such as recognizing and managing triggers, developing effective communication skills, and promoting personal growth and self-care.

- Served as a consultant on VA emergency residential services for veterans.
- Networked with state veterans commissions to promote suicide awareness and drug take back initiatives.
- Committee members also facilitated Agent Orange round tables; PTSD/SA, suicide prevention, and gambling were addressed.

The committee, along with the VVA Board of Directors, works with chapters, state councils, and regions to sponsor town halls and workshop presentations focusing on the identification and treatment of PTSD, including outreach to veterans and first responders on identifying and managing PTSD. In the coming year the committee has scheduled several workshops across the country.

The committee continues to strengthen its partnership with AVVA toward the establishment of PTSD and secondary PTSD support groups in chapters. To accomplish this, the committee has sponsored several workshops on secondary PTSD and has more planned for the coming year. AVVA also has developed stand-alone workshops to inform and help with secondary PTSD.

The committee understands the importance of getting help to people before they die by their own hand. To meet this ongoing and often preventable tragedy, the committee has sponsored workshops in the past year and is scheduled to present more events focused entirely on recognizing the signs and symptoms of suicide and how to work with a suicidal loved one.

The committee will continue to challenge VA practices and procedures, locally and nationally, that do not address veterans' need for substance-abuse treatment and other mental health challenges. For example, many treatment and transitional housing providers are struggling under the VA's unfunded mandate requiring more licenses and certifications in staffing without financial assistance to help the agencies stay competitive with the private sector for the best staff.

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

The committee recommends that a bio/psycho/social investigation be done after a suicide to look for anything that might help us identify warning signals when a veteran is considering suicide.

The committee has members who partnered with the Veterans Health Care Committee to ensure PTSD/SA issues and

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symptoms are considered in the greater context of overall veteran health. Partnering with the Women Veterans Committee, the committee has focused on military sexual trauma. MST often results in the victim being removed from the military with an other-than-honorable discharge, very much like veterans suffering from PTSD. Working with the Veterans Benefits Program, the committee will continue to monitor and challenge the use of personality disorder (and other administrative discharges) in discharging veterans, especially those suffering from PTSD or MST.

The committee is keenly aware of the many claims by various providers that their particular treatment of PTSD/SA is “the cure.” The committee recognizes the importance of rigorous research studies by recognized entities such as the National Academy of Medicine or the Food and Drug Administration when considering the claims of mental health treatments.

The committee recognizes that PTSD and substance use disorder both require continuing care to anchor gains made in treatment. Supportive Therapy provides an environment that complements and supports gains made in evidenced-based treatments. The committee will continue to advocate for the Supportive Therapy and Continuing Care needs to be made available to all veterans.

*The PTSD/SA Committee: Thomas C. Hall, Ph.D., Chair. Members: Fr. Phil Salois, Barry Schloffel,Carolynn Baker, Charles R. Montgomery, Charles Stapleton, Dan Stenvold, Kate O’Hare-Palmer, Linda Blankenship, Sandy Miller, Thomas Brown, Terry Yates, and Craig Wade. AVVA Advisers: Elayne Mackey, Jeri Wallis, and Nina Schloffel.*

## Public Affairs

BY DENNIS HOWLAND, CHAIR



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

War veterans that day. I look forward to receiving information about your activities so your ideas may be passed on to other VVA members. My email is [dennishowland@msn.com](mailto:dennishowland@msn.com)

Throughout the year there are many opportunities for our members to be extremely visible in our communities. Patriotic programs, working with other veterans organizations, parades, community events—the list is endless. I continue to subscribe to the idea that if communities, including Vietnam veterans, don’t know we are there or what we do, it is more than likely our fault. And

it is imperative that we expand our efforts to recruit more women veterans.

The Public Affairs Committee welcomes your input regarding VVA’s website, [www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org) Based on your input, we added “Info for Members” and “Chapter Locator” links. We ask all state council and chapter presidents to periodically check the accuracy of their contact information listed in Chapter Locator. This will enhance your visibility in your communities by allowing information seekers to easily contact you. Thanks, too, for your support of the interview and information requests that I have forwarded to you.

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

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

**P-2 Children’s Welfare.** The committee encourages participation in organizations that benefit infants and children, such as Boys and Girls Club volunteering, adult counseling in Scouting programs, or working with UNICEF.

**P-3 Chapter Involvement with Educational Institutions on Teaching the Vietnam War.** State councils and chapters throughout VVA participate in Vietnam Vets In Classrooms programs. This provides for interaction between students, teachers, and Vietnam veterans by permitting a personal understanding of the Vietnam War while encouraging an exchange of ideas between generations. The committee developed one more way to increase our presence in educational institutions, JROTC medal and ribbon presentations, and endorses a great tool of the POW/MIA Committee, the Remember Our Warriors bracelet program.

The weeks leading up to Vietnam Recognition Day, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day are great times for contacting area schools and offering to discuss our military experiences with young people. If we don’t tell our story, they may never know about the sacrifices of our generation for their continued freedoms. A new tool is the Eagle Scout Badge program, recently created by the Public Affairs Committee.

**P-4 Regulation of Certain Activities at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.** The committee continues to stress the sanctity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and urges members to write directly to the National Park Service to voice their strong feeling against it being used for any political or commercial purposes.

**P-5 Endorsement for Participation in Local Environmental Efforts.** Members have held discussions about the use of toxic chemicals and the storage and underground disposal of the millions of gallons of these chemicals. *The VVA Veteran* has run articles on the effects of toxic chemicals on our military men and women. The issue of contaminated water at military installations is especially pressing. This is an environmental area that should be a priority. Camp Lejeune is a good example. This problem affects military personnel, their families, and the communities around military installations.

**P-7 Requirement to Report Progress on All Currently Approved Convention Resolutions at Least Annually.** The Public Affairs Committee continues to support the requirements of this resolution, as evidenced by this report.

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

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

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

## VA Voluntary Service

BY KEN ROSE, NATIONAL REP



A couple years ago I outlined An Attainable Goal. At that time VVA had fifty-nine Representatives at VAMCs across the country. I was aiming to increase that number to sixty-five. As of this February, VVA has fifty-nine confirmed Reps, although five or six are in question because we haven’t heard from

them. In order to get a complete and accurate count of Reps and Deps, I again ask them to contact me at [krose@vva.org](mailto:krose@vva.org) For those who already have contacted me, thank you very much.

When there is a change in status, it would be helpful for the chapter or state council to inform me or Samala Parker at the national office. This is an ongoing challenge. I hope by the next issue to report our figures from 2018.

I continue to push for VAVS Chairs at the state level. There is a long way to go, but progress is encouraging. In larger states such as California and Texas, this Chair would help everyone involved. I have given the Conference of State Council Presidents and the National Board updates and information at all their meetings.

All VVA members, family, and friends should be aware of the Suicide Prevention programs that the VA runs at its campuses, clinics, and in the community. There has been an increase in the number of gun-related veteran suicides in VA parking lots after veterans failed to receive proper mental health treatment. The Veterans Crisis Line—1-800-273-8255—is a number we should all carry with us. Wallet-size cards and information are available at the local VAVS office. Ask for them.

Keep your eyes open and stay informed. The VA is proposing shifting billions into private care. This will affect the care in VA hospitals, and we must see that it doesn’t become part of a privatization plan that some people want to use against the VA health care system.

I challenge every VVA member and friends to increase your contacts, visits, and donations to your local VAMC by at least one this year. This doesn’t involve a lot of money or time. Do something for hospitalized veterans. It’s good for your health to brighten a veteran’s day.

## Veterans Against Drugs

BY DAVE SIMMONS, CHAIR



For the past two years Veterans Against Drugs has continued its mission to be a very adaptable program that looks at each community where local chapters and state councils promote

our program, identifies the most important issues in that community, and encourages VVA members to become involved.

The three programs are Anti-Drug, Anti-Violence, and Patriotism. Each program is adaptable to any age group and is easy for members to present to children, teenagers, or young adults.

The Anti-Drug presentation instills a strong resistance to peer pressure and finds ways to become more involved in activities and after-school programs that are fun, in-



teresting, or rewarding. One of the keys to success with this program is to partner with local youth organizations, law enforcement, community governments, and faith-based programs.

VAD completed another year of sponsorship of the January All Free Skate event at the Silver Spring, Md., Ice Skating Rink, two blocks from National Headquarters. This event has earned an award from the local government and is a fun way to spend two hours after school for children and their parents.

The Patriotism program is a favorite with many VVA chapters and is a very popular way to re-enforce the reason for the national holidays of Veterans Day and Memorial Day, the story behind The Star-Spangled Banner, and respect for the flag. Included in this program is an explanation of the POW flag, a hands-on display of the correct way to fold the flag, and other patriotic topics.

The Anti-Violence program—sometimes called the Bullying Program—will be undergoing some revision and review to include a new lesson plan. Today in America young people are exposed to bullying from classmates and friends, and also to bullying and violence on the Internet where it's harder to defend against the aggressor.

We recently hosted a new non-profit organization, Just Ask, a group focused on the issue of human trafficking in America. Following a presentation by this group at the VAD quarterly meeting, Vice President Marsha Four requested a presentation for the entire staff at a mandatory luncheon. Three of the most important facts about this growing problem:

- Human trafficking is the second-largest criminal enterprise in the world.
- Every thirty seconds a child or teen is sold into slavery in the U.S.
- Life expectancy of those exploited can be as little as seven years.

We will be working with Just Ask to develop a lesson plan for Human Trafficking that can either be a stand-alone program or a Core Value presentation for the Anti-Violence Program.

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

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

*son, Betty Pike, Elaine Simmons, and Margaret Wojciechowicz. Staff Support: Deborah Williams.*

## Veterans Benefits

BY TOM BURKE, CHAIR



In compliance with Public Affairs Resolution P-7, this update is provided to the membership on the Veterans Benefits Committee efforts to advance the 2017 Convention Resolutions.

The Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) is now reality in the Veterans Benefits world. What we do and how we do it will change considerably over the next few months. Legacy Claims still processing through the original system will be maintained until resolved if the veteran chooses not to opt into the new system. In effect, Service Officers will deal with two systems for the foreseeable future. All the effects of the changes in the AMA are not yet known. The resolutions here relate to the original or Legacy Claims system. I expect some of these may be changed or eliminated altogether depending on the feeling of the delegates at the convention.

**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. Be advised that once a post-NOD agreement is entered into a veteran's record, it can be difficult to remove. VVA continues to seek changes in applicable law to protect the rights of all veterans in order for them to control all aspects of their representation before the VA.

**VB-3 Less-Than-Honorable Administrative Discharges.** In September 2014 former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel signed a directive ordering the Army, Navy, and Air Force to implement supplemental guidance involving discharge upgrade applications relating to PTSD. The directive could affect upwards of eighty thousand Vietnam veterans with PTSD who have other-than-honorable discharges. Outreach to veterans from all wars still needs to be accomplished on this issue. Most veterans are unaware that they still can apply to the Board of Corrections of Military Records for upgrades. VVA continues to seek the repeal of P.L.99-126. We continue to work toward having the other-than-honorable discharge replaced with a certificate of service.

**VB-5 Civil Liberties of Active-Duty Military Personal.** VVA considers this an ongoing issue until resolved.

**VB-6 Just Compensation for Injuries Sustained by Active-Duty Military Personnel.** Active-duty military personnel are often unable to recover adequate compensation for injuries resulting from negligence of government personnel. VVA continues to seek legislation or specific appropriate action to secure a more equitable compensation for personnel injured on active duty due to 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 VA Implementation of U.S. Court of Appeals for Veteran Claims Decisions.** VVA joined in an amicus brief with Veterans for Common Sense that sought to use the federal courts to improve the speed and quality of VA benefits decisions. Unfortunately, this lawsuit was not successful, so veterans still have to pursue individual VA claims. The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff in urging Congress to provide for class actions to address veterans' concerns and enact systemic change instead of making each veteran fight his or her own battle.

**VB-10 Veterans Benefits and Service.** 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 services to veterans.

**VB-11 Veterans Benefits System.** The VA claims process is progressing toward fully digitized records. Although there are still paper claims files, most have been scanned and nearly all claims are now processed without paper. The transition from paper files to digitized claims processing is far from foolproof. VVA Veterans Benefits staff continue to work with VVA Government Affairs to improve the VA Compensation system through legislative action, administrative advocacy, and meetings with VA executive staff. The committee continues to address issues related to the backlog, trying to improve work credits, suggesting improvements to the VA computer systems, and simplifying VA regulations.

**VB-12 VA Service-Connected Disability Compensation Payments and Military Retirement Pay.** Concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability has been phased in over the last several years. However this only applies to those with 50 percent or higher VA disability ratings. Combat-related special compensation is also a way veterans can receive both military retirement pay and VA disability benefits (only related to com-

bat). 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 continue to encourage the full implementation of concurrent receipt for all levels of VA disability compensation.

**VB-13 Preservation of VVA Service Representation at the National Level.** At the national level, VVA continues to retain high-quality attorneys for representation of veteran claims. For our service officers, the Veterans Benefits Program policies are being updated to more clearly define a service officer's duties and responsibilities. This remains a work in progress as upgrades need to be implemented as changes occur. The VVA Service Officer Grant program procedures have been upgraded and remain in house. This remains a VVA top priority.

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

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

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

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

**VB-28 Removal of 5 Percent Annual Deductible for VA Pension Eligibility.** The committee continues to work with VVA Government Affairs staff to urge that all allowable medical expenses incurred by a low-income veteran eligible for a VA pension be subtracted from his or her household income, not just those expenses that

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exceed the 5 percent deductible. This will be included in our work on reducing the backlog as the necessary calculations make this annual task more onerous on veterans and VA employees.

*The Veterans Benefits Committee: Tom Burke, Chair; Joseph Jennings III, Vice Chair. John Weiss, Chair, Service Officer Grant Program Subcommittee; Joe Jennings, Chair, Service Officer Grievance Subcommittee; and Marc McCabe, Chair, Strategic Planning Subcommittee. Members: Gene Crego, Ned Foote, Perry Melvin, Pete Peterson, John Riling, Eduard Uzumekis, and Dominick Yezzo. AVVA Special Adviser: Sharon Hobbs. VVA Staff: Felicia Mullaney, National Director Veterans Benefits, Kelsey Yoon, and Elaine Chaney. VVA Attorneys and Support Staff: Alec Ghezzi, Homer Richards, Fatmata Contch, Avianna Cooper, Heather Olson, Alexandra Rigby, Mylee Sabarre, Joseph Scott, Kenneth Bouy, Sr., Dee Wallace, and Bre-nae Fletcher.*

## Veterans Health Care

**BY CAROLYNN G. BAKER, CHAIR**



VVA's National Health Care Committee has begun to address issues that affect not only Vietnam veterans but all veterans. The committee consists of a chair and other volunteer members interested in the health issues affecting veterans.

The committee provides a forum that includes the chairs of Agent Orange, PTSD, Women Veterans, and any other committee that deals with issues that affect the health of veterans. By improving how the committee is structured and seeking input from groups that are dealing with the overall health of the veteran population, we are able to work together to develop strategies that address the issues and make recommendations based on a more comprehensive knowledge base.

The committee has made recommendations to VVA's National Board and the VA, and will make recommendations to Congress as appropriate. The committee also is attempting to identify issues that affect its outreach to the general membership and trying to find better and additional ways to communicate to the members.

*The Veterans Health Care Committee: Carolyn G. Baker, Chair; Sara McVicker, Vice Chair. Members: Wayne Reynolds, Ph.D., Sandy Miller, Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Tom Hall, Ph.D., Kerwin Stone, Ronald Mayhew, Gene Crego, John McGinty, Chuck Byers, and James Fleming. Special Adviser: Linda Schwartz, Ph.D. AVVA Advis-*

*ers: Fran Davis and Joanne Blum. Staff Support: Artie Shelton, M.D., Maureen Elias, and Rick Weidman.*

## Veterans Incarcerated & in the Justice System

**BY DOMINICK YEZZO, CHAIR**



In 2019 the Veterans Incarcerated and in the Justice System Committee will continue to implement service for veterans who face incarceration. The committee platform acknowledges

PTSD and TBI as lingering issues for veterans facing incarceration, and in veterans incarcerated, and in veterans returning from incarceration to the community they were unable to thrive in prior to arrest. Our work is national in scope.

As for veterans facing incarceration, I am happy to report that there are approximately five hundred active Veterans Treatment Courts functioning in America. Our committee is partially responsible for such national inclusion. Each court has its own structure, but the purpose of the courts is to save the veteran struggling with PTSD and TBI from incarceration with the assistance of family, VA programs, local counseling, and a good judge's order.

The committee continues to encourage warden and prison administrations to house veterans in separate wards. We have evidence that veterans who are separated in a veteran housing unit have few discipline problems and instead act in hopeful ways to improve skills and character. The recidivism rate for veteran inmates who are housed together is significantly reduced. As well, veterans who return to the community from a veterans ward more easily adjust to civilian life.

As chair, I visit incarcerated chapters, when possible, one at a time. More frequently, I visit institutions where there is no veterans ward in an attempt to convince the prison administration to house veterans together. I continue to seek to assist any chapter or state council in committee initiatives and will visit treatment courts, prisons, and district attorneys' offices upon request.

As for incarcerated veterans facing parole and release, the committee has introduced a program known as Getting Ahead While Getting Out—inspired by the Committee Secretary Raymond Pawlicki. He enters institutions where there are veteran inmates about to be released. He engages the administration and the inmate and prepares the inmate for release. Pawlicki helps recently released inmates with personal support, counseling, clothing, job support, and housing. It's an enormous job because it is national in scope. The committee plans

to train state council and chapter presidents to do the task. Our committee believes education of inmates, citizens, and professionals is the key.

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

## Women Veterans

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



Below are highlights of some of the Women Veterans Committee resolutions.

**WV-2 Medical Treatment of Women Veterans by VA.** The committee continues to work with other

veterans service organizations to identify, quantify, and review the areas of most concern for women veterans in the VA. We submitted a report to the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans in December 2018. We supported the passage of H.R.95, the Veterans Access to Child Care Act. This would expand the pilot program for child care at VA facilities. We supported the passage of H.R.1625 (P.L.151-141), the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, which includes funding to address the gender-specific needs of women veterans. The committee will continue to request a Government Accountability Office report on the administration of women veterans' health programs in the VA, identifying barriers to, and root causes of, any disparities in the provision of comprehensive medical and mental health care.

**WV-3 Support for Women Veterans.** Our committee retired the women veterans trifold and replaced it with a new 5x7 format with current information and websites. The 2018 Leadership Conference seminar focused on harassment in the workplace and organizations. The EEOC participated in the presentation. VVA sponsored the 25th anniversary of the Vietnam Women's Memorial reception honoring women veterans in November 2018. Our committee participates in veteran outreach with the Membership Affairs Committee at the Memorial Day and Veterans Day events on the Mall. We created a Women Veterans Honor Coin, patches, and shirts to Welcome Home all women veterans for their service. We have included new articles on the Women Veterans Committee webpage and new video interviews with women veterans.

**WV-5 Women Veterans Research.** We requested a written update from the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans on the research status of women veterans' reproduction health, especially focusing on infertility and menstrual and menopausal disorders. There are ongoing studies of the increase in women veteran homelessness and suicide. VVA has requested an implementation strategy for decreasing these disturbing statistics.

**WV-6 Women Veterans and Veterans Benefits.** VVA will continue to request hearings before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees regarding women veterans. The VBA is now working to establish a method to identify and track outcomes for most claims involving personal assault trauma, regardless of the resulting disability, such as PTSD, depression, or anxiety disorder. We have written to the VA Secretary on these issues over the past two years.

**WV-8 Military Sexual Trauma (MST).** Our committee continues to monitor passage of legislation supporting changes in the current military culture in regard to MST. We supported passage of S.2141, the Military Justice Improvement Act, and are now working on legislation to create amendments to Title 10, U.S. Code. The latest DoD Annual report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies, Academic Program Year 2017-2018 is at <https://dod.defense.gov/News/NewsReleases/News-Release-View/Article/1744988/dod-releases-annual-report-on-sexual-harassment-and-violence-at-the-military-se/> The statistics are not good. There was an overall increase in reports of sexual assault received in all three academies. Our committee also has requested from the Women Veterans Advisory Committee a written update on the status of Section 402 for the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (P.L.113-564), which expanded eligibility for care and services related to MST at VA medical facilities to active-duty service members. Active-duty service members would not be required to obtain referral from DoD before seeking treatment at a VA facility for MST.

*The Women Veterans Committee: Kate O'Hare-Palmer, Chair; Pattie Dumin, Vice Chair. Members: Sandy Miller, Dottie Barickman, Tom Hall, Ph.D., Sara McVicker, Sandie Wilson, Frank Arminio, John McGinty, Chuck Byers, Carolyn Baker, Gene Crego, and Tom Devlin. Special Advisers: Beverly Stewart, Lee Jackson, Billee Culin, Linda Blankenship, Jennifer Wilson, Linda Schwartz, Ph.D., and Cheryl Van Syckle. AVVA Adviser: Elayne Mackey. Staff Support: Maureen Elias and Sharon Hodge. ■*