



A New Board, A New Vision

Agent Orange/Dioxin

BY SANDIE WILSON, CHAIR



The National Convention and the Board and committee meetings held in January in Silver Spring have proven that we can meet in person without endangering our health.

This committee will continue its work using all possible methods.

The most-heard request is communication. We are moving forward. The IT system in the national office has been improved. The committee group email has been upgraded. Committee reports will appear in *The Veteran* in either the print or online editions. Thanks to Paul Sutton and Jim Doyle, the AO Update is again functioning. If you would like to receive it, email mporter@vva.org

We are also using the VVA Web Weekly to get the word out. You can be added to this service by going to <https://vva.org/category/web-weekly/>

We are looking forward to holding educational meetings on toxic exposure sponsored by chapters and state councils as the pandemic subsides. Please schedule with Mokie Porter.

You can also contact me at swilson@vva.org Be aware, I do not spend every day on the computer, and scammers got my email address when they hacked the VA. If you email, please use the subject line, "AO matter."

Most of our committee resolutions have to do with research to prove a connection between forever toxic chemicals and military service. Even with the pandemic restrictions, we have been working on them.

The VA Secretary denied implementing the law on toxic exposure research for our offspring. That law was written for more than the offspring of Vietnam veterans. It included the children and grandchildren of all veterans. At this point, we believe that the offspring of Gulf War veterans have more structural defects, while our children mostly have functional defects, which usually are not apparent for years. They include conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and immunity disorders.

Committee advisers have been meeting with VA researchers and the Air Force virtually to get needed research approved. Other committee members have been meeting with epigenetic researchers from a variety of universities.

One of the problems with human AO research has been the lack of a nationwide registry. We need to upgrade the usefulness

of the birthdefects.org registry by having nonveterans as well as veterans enter their offspring. Families who registered on paper need to re-register online so the information will be computer accessible.

One medical condition that has not been classified as presumptive is hypertension. Getting hypertension recognized as presumptive will be difficult because it would involve large disability payments. Some people in Washington, D.C., have started referring to Vietnam veterans as "welfare queens." This is not welfare. Our treatment is the lasting cost of war.

As a grassroots organization committee, we are looking for the involvement of the membership to achieve our mission.

The Agent Orange/Dioxin Committee: Sandie Wilson, Chair; Mike Demske, Vice Chair. Members: John Hargens, Ken Holybee, Roland Mayhew, Joe McIntire, Ros-sie Nance, and Gerry Wright. Advisers: Frank Arminio, Ron Brown, Bob Cummings, Jim Doyle, Maynard Kaderlik, Mike Jared, Jack McManus, John Rossie, Paul Sutton, Tom Owen, Linda Schwartz, and Steve House. AVVA Advisers: Nancy Switzer and Kathy Andras. Staff Support: Mokie Porter.

Economic Opportunities

BY DENNIS J ANDRAS, CHAIR



Co-chair Marc Goldschmitt and I have come up with the goals that we would like our committee to focus on this year. The main objective will be to partner with fellow veterans organizations whenever possible to advance the following objectives and goals:

- To petition and encourage the Small Business Administration to put in place a small business certification program for Service-Disabled, Veteran-Owned Small Businesses that will build and foster a vibrant industrial base in both the domestic and defense industries.
- To develop an affordable and balanced SDVOSB certification program that is fair to disabled veterans using risk mitigation and management
- To have uniform standards for ownership and control of business among

all set-asides that are involved in SBA programs

- To increase the number of set-asides and projects for SDVOSB this year and into the future
- To increase funding for the SBA SDVOSB certification program
- To encourage SBA to have in place training programs that will increase the chances of a SDVOSB being able to obtain certification prior to the certification process.

The Economic Opportunities Committee: Dennis Andras, Chair; Marc Goldschmitt, Co-Chair. Members: Larry Carter, Victor Klingelhofer, Pete Peterson, Rick Weidman, Joe Wynn, and David Smith. AVVA Adviser: Jennifer Ellis.

Finance

BY DOTTIE BARICKMAN, CHAIR



January kicked off with a boom with the forming of an amazing Finance Committee team. Recruitment and selection went well, and we still have a few candidates in the queue if we need another member.

The request for the Fiscal Year 2023 budget and justification went to the cost centers in early January. The end of January and the first of February we held FY2023 proposed budget meetings via Ring Central for a grand total of eleven-and-one-half hours. All five current and recent Officers and the full Finance Committee took part in the meetings.

That fact that we work hard on the annual VVA budget is an understatement. The committee's job is "oversight of the financial activities of the Corporation, the state council, or chapter, and [it] shall recommend policies on financial matters to include, but not limited to, assisting and consulting with the Treasurer on all financial planning, budgeting, reporting, and other related matters."

Moving page by page through the budget book for each cost center's summary and details is daunting. Then flipping to the justifications to make sound decisions takes a team effort. But we did it.

Following that meeting, we took the next step: a review of the appeals made by some cost centers. Each appeal was carefully considered, and additional justifications provided a clearer picture of the cost

centers' objectives. All VVA programs and operations have value and worth. The committee is cognizant of the history of the organization and the recent COVID-19 budget freeze, and we have risen above this. The Board of Directors will vote on the FY2023 budget during its April meeting.

Learning from a budget freeze and the fear of significant revenue losses gives rise to the realization that we are all responsible for keeping this organization solvent. We should look at every cost center and ask, "Is there anything that I can help with to keep their missions moving forward?"

Our tasks now include blazing the trail of cutting costs where feasible, such as eliminating unnecessary printing and postage. How many BOD packets have ended up in the trashcan after a meeting when much of the contents are already provided via email and PDF? All levels can work in this direction and become more astute in weighing in on what is really necessary. These savings can then be shifted to what is needed and to mission-essential programs.

We will work on several tasks during the year and committee members have been assigned to different areas. The Budget-to-Actual Subcommittee and other committee members will work on the motion review and the policy review processes. Cross-training in any organization is key to success, and we plan to cross-train and back-check as we go along so that every committee member understands how the committee works. It takes a full team to keep the train on the tracks.

The Finance Committee: Dottie Barickman, Chair. Members: Alan Cook, Francisco Ivarra, Barry Rice, Sandy Miller, and Dan Stenvold. Staff Support: Janelle Andrew.

Homeless Veterans

BY SANDY MILLER, CHAIR



The Homeless Veterans Committee is continuing to investigate the tiny homes movement by collecting data about them, including the costs of establishing new tiny home communities in areas heavily populated by homeless veterans. By doing this we will be able to provide chapters and state councils with the cost of starting such a pro-



gram. It is the hope of the committee that chapters and state councils grab this concept and run with it. We can reach “virtual zero.”

With the focus on creating tiny communities, many towns and cities have already achieved virtual zero homeless veteran populations. Tiny communities are not intended to be a permanent end to veteran homelessness, though, but a stepping stone to achieving permanent housing and restoring the lives of those who live there.

One of the committee’s goals for the next two years is to add state council presidents as committee members in order to increase awareness across the country. Their inclusion on the committee will be key to bringing the work of the committee to chapters. The committee wants to increase involvement at local levels to help create more tiny home communities where they are needed.

As has always been the goal of the committee, we hope to bring more communities and states to virtual zero. By providing access to agencies within the communities, we will be able to more readily address the homeless veteran issue.

The committee intends to continue our efforts to ensure that government agencies make homelessness among our nation’s veterans a priority when drafting legislation.

The good news is that the 2021 Point in Time Count showed a 10 percent drop in homelessness among veterans. The committee is not sure if there will be an additional drop in the 2022 PIT Count. As always, the count is broken into categories, such as housed and not housed. “Housed” indicates veterans are in shelters and programs; “not housed” are those literally living on the streets.

The status of the resolutions approved and accepted at the Convention is as follows:

HV-1 Homeless Veterans as a “Special Needs Population.” The HVC will continue to review and address issues regarding the “special needs population” designation to ensure it is being seen as a real issue.

HV-6 VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem Funding. The HVC will continue to monitor the Homeless Grant and Per Diem programs and address any program issues to ensure they are in compliance with regulations. Our main concern is the establishment of the Supportive Services Grants.

The Homeless Veterans Committee: Sandy Miller, Chair; Thomas Hall, Ph.D., Vice Chair. Members: Liz Cannon; Jerry Blume; and John McGinty. AVVA Advisers: Sharon Hobbs and Joanne Blume. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge.

Leadership Conference & Convention Planning

BY DAN STENVOLD, CHAIR



The committee would like to thank everyone who attended the National Convention in Greensboro, North Carolina, this past November. We had a fantastic attendance. Our COVID testing worked just as it was supposed to: We had one person test positive and after quarantining

in his hotel room for several days, he was transferred to the VA hospital where he spent several weeks recovering. He was allowed to go home where he had a relapse and is still recovering.

The election surprised some, but what I learned from the elections and attending all the caucuses was that the

members wanted change and wanted the Board to be fiscally responsible. That’s something we will be striving for before the next Convention.

The committee is working on the National Leadership & Education Conference, which will be held August 9-13 in Greenville, South Carolina, at the Hyatt Regency. The hotel is ideally located in the heart of downtown Greenville, only steps from dining, shopping, and nightlife. It’s close to Main Street Jazz, Downtown Alive, Bi-Lo Sports, and the Peace Center for Performing Arts. There are also five downtown breweries that are completely walkable from the hotel—but you may need a ride back!

This year’s Leadership Conference will feature:

- 30 seminars of 90 minutes each
- Two meal functions: the VVA/AVVA Officers Luncheon and the AVVA Luncheon
- Six hours of VVA Service Officer Advanced Training
- VVA Awards Banquet

All rooms include free internet and admission to the hotel fitness center. Prices range from a single at \$119, to a double for \$128, to a triple (double room and extra bed) for \$133. Add to each a 12 percent fee.

In addition, there is a \$75 Registration Fee, and the Awards Banquet is \$50.

The shuttle is free.

We will be hosted by South Carolina State Council President Sam Brick, Chapter 523 President Patrick Ramsey, and Region 3 Director Rossie Nance.

This is still a work in progress and things are still very fluid, but we are working on it daily so please put the dates on your calendar. There’s even a rumor that Sam Brick might start a bar tab for some of you that show up, but I can’t verify that at this writing.

The Leadership Conference & Convention Planning Committee: Dan Stenvold, Chair. 2022 Members: Pete Peterson, Wes Guidry, Sharon Hobbs, Sam Brick, and Rossie Nance. Staff Support: Marc Leepson.

Membership Affairs

BY DICK SOUTHERN, CHAIR



The committee continues to look for ways to recruit members. We are a membership organization that helps veterans and their families to have a better life as we work to get legislation passed to increase benefits for their military service, and our members provide their communities with services through their charity work and volunteer time.

The future looks bright as we work to increase our numbers with outreach to Vietnam War veterans who have recently retired and are looking to work with fellow veterans who share the experience of military service and want to enjoy the camaraderie of veterans. Life membership in VVA is a bargain at \$50, which is the best price to join any veterans service organization anywhere in the world.

Here’s a thought about membership numbers from a committee member. We have an untapped resource for membership. Many Vietnam Era veterans will not join our organization because they view VVA as a wartime organization only for those who served in Vietnam during the war. We should be recruiting all who served on active duty during the Vietnam War. If we do, it will provide us with

increased membership numbers to continue our legislative efforts on behalf of all veterans to ensure that they receive the benefits they have earned by their service to their country.

Many Vietnam Era veterans are not aware of their entitlements, especially eligibility for VA medical care. Let’s reach out to all our fellow veterans and recruit them into our organization.

MEMBERSHIP AFFAIRS RESOLUTIONS

M-2 Communication Between VVA’s Organizational Levels. Realizing that communication is the key, this resolution encourages communication up and down the line to be done within certain times to keep an open dialogue at all levels of the organization.

M-3 Korean Vietnam War Veterans Membership. This resolution starts the discussion about having our allies from the Vietnam War join VVA as members. A great amount of work needs to be done to accomplish this resolution.

The Membership Affairs Committee: Dick Southern, Chair. Members: Larry Frazee, Richard Lindbeck, John Margowski, Bob Pace, John Weiss, Ted Wilkinson, John Riling, Carlton Rhodes, Jerry Corrigan, Sam Brick, Ken Rogge, Charlie Montgomery, James Fleming, Wayne Reynolds, and Randy Schriver. VVA Adviser: Bill Meeks. AVVA Adviser: Teresa Rangel. Membership Affairs Manager: Nicole Kennedy. Staff Support: Priscilla Wiley and Brenae Jones.

Minority Affairs

BY GUMERSINDO GOMEZ, CHAIR



After more than 18 months, the committee came together for a face-to-face meeting during the January National Board meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland. We were very happy to see each other, discuss past issues, and address new ones that the committee plans to work on during the next two years.

First, the committee ratified the members of the committee. Then we took immediate action to continue to have Marc McCabe travel from Florida to Puerto Rico to oversee and work on at least forty VA appeals claims that are pending.

H.R. 234, which deals with in-country Korean Vietnam veterans, was discussed. The bill soon should come to the House floor. The committee asks VVA members to call their congressional representatives to support this bill so our Korean brothers who are citizens of this country can get VA help for PTSD, Agent Orange exposure, and other related illnesses that affect us all from our service in the Vietnam War. Once it clears that hurdle, we are preparing to get support in the Senate.

Over the next two years we will focus on the concerns of Native American veterans. We ask for your support. If you are a Native American veteran or if you are in contact with any of them, we ask that you connect with Francisco Ivarra, coordinator for the Northwest, at agifnc@aol.com; Bill Garcia, coordinator for the Southwest, at bill.garcia42@hotmail.com; Chuck Odom, coordinator for the Southeast, at clodom@comcast.net; or Pete Peterson,

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coordinator of the Central region, at pete73112@yahoo.com I will coordinate the Northeast; you can contact me at Sgtgomez@aol.com

We will contact the Native American Federation and other Native American organizations for their support. In addition, our Leadership Conference workshop in August will concentrate on this community of veterans.

The Minority Affairs Committee: Gomersindo Gomez, Chair. Members: William Garcia, Charles Odom, Francisco Ivarra, Jorge Pedroza, Kee J. Kim, Joe Jennings, Pete Peterson, Dave Simmons, and Virgie Hibbler. AVVA Adviser: Nina Schloffel. Staff Support: Mokie Porter.

POW/MIA Affairs

BY GRANT T. COATES, CHAIR



The Prisoner of War Missing in Action (POW/MIA) Committee's plans for the future remain the same—the fullest possible accountability of Americans who never returned from the war in Vietnam, including the war zone of Laos, Cambodia, and the waters off China. Striving to

keep the POW/MIA issue current, members of the committee continue to make every effort through education, lectures, media exposure, and the Veterans Initiative Program to maintain awareness of the issue.

The current and long-term goal of the committee is to have the fullest accountability of missing Americans. If remains of a service member have not been recovered and identified, these Americans are classified as Missing in Action by the U.S. government. Returned POW remains later recovered and identified are facts. Unaccounted-for personnel cannot be conclusively categorized as deceased. The committee deals with facts from collected evidence.

VVA members can help the Veterans Initiative Program. The VIP has existed for 29 years and collected over 304 cases identifying burial locations of Vietnamese war dead. All cases have been turned over to the Vietnamese government to help with recovery and closure of Vietnamese war dead.

The program was created to foster cooperation between former enemies to help each other recover missing war dead. The VIP was the first in history in which veterans of two countries, once at war, removed politics and joined in a common cause. The mutual undertakings have helped both governments with the recovery of U.S. personnel. VVA members and other American Vietnam War veterans can help by submitting tangible evidence about the location of burial sites of Vietnamese war dead. Any materials, such as pictures, diagrams, maps, items removed from deceased troops, and written accounts of an event, are helpful to continue the mission.

THE ACCORDS

January 27 marked the 49th anniversary of the 1973 signing of the Paris Peace Accords, officially the "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Viet Nam."

The Agreement included a cease-fire throughout Vietnam. In addition, the United States agreed to the withdrawal of all U.S. troops and advisors (some 23,700) and the dismantling of all U.S. bases within 60 days. In return, the North Vietnamese agreed to release all American and other prisoners of war.

The United States, South Vietnam, the Viet Cong, and North Vietnam formally signed the Agreement in Paris. A

two-party version of the document was signed by North Vietnam and the United States. The South Vietnamese were presented with a separate document that did not make reference to the Viet Cong. The separate document was a result, in part, of Saigon's longtime refusal to recognize the Viet Cong as a legitimate participant in the discussions.

The United States and North Vietnam also agreed to the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Laos and Cambodia and the prohibition of bases in, and troop movements through, these countries.

Chapter 3, Article 8 of the Agreement, "The Return of Captured Military Personnel and Foreign Civilians, and Captured and Detained Vietnamese Civilian Personnel," stated:

"The return of captured military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties shall be carried out simultaneously with and completed not later than the same day as the troop withdrawal mentioned in Article 5 (within sixty days of the signing of the Agreement). The parties shall exchange complete lists of the above-mentioned captured military personnel and foreign civilians on the day of the signing of this Agreement."

No complete list was ever produced by the North Vietnamese.

"The parties shall help each other to get information about those military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties missing in action, to determine the location and take care of the graves of the dead so as to facilitate the exhumation and repatriation of the remains, and to take any such other measures as may be required to get information about those still considered missing in action."

COMING HOME

In the days following the signing of the Peace Accords, the American prisoners of war got word that the war was over. Camp officers read the news from prepared texts stating that the men would be released 120 at a time at two-week intervals. The sick and wounded were scheduled to leave first; the others would follow in the order in which they had been captured. The men were released in shifts, with those believed to be the last group leaving Vietnam on March 29, 1973.

That day, two months after announcing the peace agreement, President Nixon addressed the nation for the last time about Vietnam: "For the first time in 12 years, no American military forces are in Vietnam. All of our American POWs are on their way home."

However, on that same day, the Viet Cong announced that Army Capt. Robert White, unaccounted for since his disappearance in November 1969, was still in captivity. He was released a few days later and was the last-known surviving U.S. POW from the Vietnam War. Years later White said, "They just plain forgot about me," until his captors reminded their superiors about him.

Nearly 49 years have passed since the last live U.S. military POW came home. 1,584 unaccounted Americans still remain in Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia.

The Veterans Initiative Program needs your help. Information from American, Vietnamese, or Korean veterans is needed to continue the mission of the VIP. Objects taken from the battlefields of Vietnam are more than souvenirs or war trophies. Maps, stories, after-action reports, pictures, and other military items may have a story that could result in locating missing war dead. Contact the Veterans Initiative at:

Veterans Initiative Program
Vietnam Veterans of America
8719 Colesville Rd., Suite 100
Silver Spring, MD 20910
vi@vva.org

The POW/MIA Affairs Committee: Grant T. Coates, Chair; Skip Hochreich, Vice Chair. Members: Terry Courville, Pattie Dumin, Dennis Howland, Ted Wilkinson, Leslie De-Long, Chuck Renevier, and Jaycee Newman. Staff Support: Sharon Hodge. Special Advisers: AVVA Kaye Gardner and National League of Families Susie Stephens. VIP Staff Support Mokie Pratt-Porter and Special Adviser Gary Jones.

PTSD & Substance Abuse

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



Military service is different for each one of us, yet it is always intense. Many veterans have described their combat experience. As former Vietnam War Marine John Musgrave put it: "Combat is a lunatic asylum. You're just so terrified and so filled with hatred because the hatred gives strength to your terror. You can use terror if you hate enough. So, none of us were in our right minds."

Combat and other war experiences can present many challenges when returning to civilian life. Many facets of coming home require attention and adjustment—such as going from having to make few decisions to making many decisions, and from living with mission-driven focus to what may feel like unmoored civilian chaos to be navigated without a map.

As Vietnam veterans, we know what it is to be dropped into a civilian world without any practical cover or guidance for handling the very different emotional and psychological challenges of life as a civilian. We have shouldered the fight both in another country and back at home.

Working with our representatives and the VA, the committee continues to build upon the emotional, psychological, and physical supports offered by the VA and other agencies to help bring our brothers- and sisters-in-arms all the way home. Our goal is not only to survive, but to thrive.

Learning to function in wartime gave us effective skills for surviving in the military during a war. For example, we experienced psychic numbing and hyper-alertness and focusing fear to advance the mission. But these same skills, when left untranslated to civilian life skills, bring many unintended side effects. The amped-up chaos and high level of energy we experienced in combat did not simply go away when came back to the States.

For years we have fought for the support and services that all veterans now enjoy. From expanded access to education to improved access to benefits, Vietnam veterans have very often led the way for quality-of-life improvement for all veterans. But the battle is far from over.

As part of our effort to bring all veterans all the way home, the VVA PTSD/SA Committee has long advocated for many of the goals outlined in the Post-9/11 Veterans' Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2021 (S. 3293). We are proud to support the bill, which works to provide for veterans' mental health needs, develop the VA workforce, and improve VA research. The background portion of the bill illustrates in no uncertain terms the need for us to continue to advocate on behalf of veterans.



According to the most recent VA data, the youngest cohort of veterans, Post-9/11 veterans aged 18-34, have the highest rate of suicide. Mental health injuries continue to have a disproportionate impact on the Post-9/11 generation. In Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America's latest member survey, 65 percent reported service-connected PTSD and more than half reported anxiety (58 percent) or depression (56 percent). Meanwhile, the nation and VA struggle to keep up with the demand for mental health care and mental health care providers such as psychiatrists and psychologists, which are the top two clinical staffing shortages at VA facilities across the nation.

During 2022 we will have plenty to advocate for. What follows is our mission for the year.

- Checking that the expansion of Vet Centers in Sierra Vista, Ariz.; Solana County, Calif.; Saipan; the Northern Mariana Islands; and Leesburg, Va., happens
- Encouraging local VAs to work with local veterans groups to address rural veterans suicide, urban veterans suicide, and women veterans suicide, to name just a few groups currently underserved
- Lobbying local VAs to provide the education and clinical support to their communities promised by each VA suicide prevention coordinator
- Supporting survivors of military sexual trauma in all branches of the military by making sure they have access to medical and behavioral health resources
- Clearing a path to address the restoration of benefits to veterans discharged under less-than-honorable conditions in cases that involve PTSD, MST, and other misdiagnosed psychological and physical conditions
- Continuing to advocate for the VA behavioral health and specialty clinics, including those addressing PTSD, to re-establish continuing-care groups to help veterans maintain gains made in VA evidence-based treatments and for veterans who did not respond to traditional approaches

The committee needs to hear from members about their experiences with the VA and with Vet Centers. Our primary concern is finding ways to support all veterans, whether or not they are involved in the VA system.

You can help improve benefits for all veterans by contacting your legislators and asking them to support the Post-9/11 Veterans' Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2021 and letting the committee know about your experiences. It's time to get involved.

The PTSD & Substance Abuse Committee: Thomas C. Hall, Ph.D., Chair. Members: Dan Stenvold, John McGinty, Craig Wade, Sandy Miller, Ken Rose, Tom Brown, Charlie Stapleton, and Sam Brick. AVVA Advisers: Nina Schloffel, Theresa Rangel, Rosa Fuentes, and Richard Brundage. Staff Support: Mokie Porter.

Public Affairs

BY DENNIS HOWLAND, CHAIR



"It is very likely that the events on Veterans Day and at The Wall celebrating the fortieth anniversary will be two of the most highlighted public news events coming out of the Capital this year. I also believe that this might be a last major opportunity for Vietnam veterans to partici-

pate on a large scale in commemorating our brothers and sisters on The Wall."

That is how VVA President Jack McManus described two upcoming events that VVA is a major part of: the first at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., on March 29; the other at Arlington National Cemetery on Veterans Day.

On March 29 at 1:00 p.m. VVA will host a ceremony to observe the fortieth anniversary of the groundbreaking of The Wall, which took place on March 26, 1982. The project—including landscaping—was completed in November that year.

The ceremony will honor all who fought, those lost, and those blessed with coming home. President McManus will be joined on the podium by former VVA President Mary Stout and singer/songwriter John Flynn, who will perform "Deeper Family," a song he has written for this occasion. The colors will be presented by Baltimore Chapter 451.

VVA Officers, Directors, State Council Presidents, Committee Chairs, and Special Advisers received travel information from President McManus in an email. Further information, if necessary, will be forthcoming. I hope we see a great turnout, even though I realize we all have programs at home on March 29.

As everyone should know by now, the October BOD, CSCP, and committee meetings have been changed to the week leading up to Veterans Day. This will give everyone the opportunity to be in D.C. for VVA's participation in Veterans Day Ceremonies at Arlington. More information will be available at the April BOD meeting.

Committees have been asked to provide our visions for the future. I think many times visions are also "druther" lists, wishing or looking at reachable goals.

For the Public Affairs Committee I would like to see more emphasis by all chapters in serving veterans—not only Vietnam War veterans, but all veterans. Too often we get complacent sitting at an information booth, participating in a parade, or holding a ceremony on a special day. All these things are great as they place us in the center of attention in the community.

However, we still have brothers and sisters who are homeless, hungry, ill, or just plain lost. I commend those who report their many veterans service projects. By reading those reports in *The Veteran*, other chapters may discover new ideas for community and veterans service that perhaps they never thought about.

My vision includes VVA running out of JROTC or Eagle Scout medals because many more chapters have jumped on board to participate in a program that gives us many opportunities, including the opportunity to share our story about our war and our service with the younger generations. It also affords us the opportunity to gain access to students through Vets in Classrooms and close contact with JROTC cadets.

The JROTC medal may be presented to any outstanding cadet in your schools anytime throughout the school year. Often chapters present these medals at a JROTC Unit Formation at the school. The recipient does not have to be the Top Cadet in the unit. The medals also could be presented at the recommendation of the unit commanders or someone else in the JROTC unit. The Top Cadet of your state council chosen out of all those submitted from your chapters, and only that Top Cadet, is sent forward to compete for the monetary awards.

Also on my wish list is that we use a bit more space in *The Veteran* to honor our members' projects, successes, and great work. I believe we could ask for more information and pictures from our chapters and state councils. Combine this with the outstanding *Veteran* staff and we can see more of what is happening throughout our organ-

ization. So my vision would be that we make sure our chapters know they have a place to send their information, a place for their work to be recognized.

But most of all, I stand with my opinion that every committee can have an impact on public affairs and vice versa.

The Public Affairs Committee: Dennis Howland, Chair. Members: Charles Stapleton, Roland Mayhew, John McGinty, Dave Simmons, Jaycee Newman, Chuck Renevier, Greg Pauline, Tom Brown, and Grant Coates. AVVA Adviser: Region 9 Director Kelly Frederickson. Staff Support: Mokie Porter. Dan Stenvold is chair of the Awards Subcommittee, with Grant Coates and Ned Foote as members.

VA Voluntary Service

BY KEN ROSE, NATIONAL REP



Back in the May/June 2017 *VVA Veteran*, I wrote that VVA's VAVS program had a total of 59 Representatives, with an "attainable" goal of 65 Representatives on VAVS Volunteer Advisory Committees. We were slowly approaching that number when the pandemic hit. Then our volunteers were restricted from coming to the VA, and many of us developed our own health problems.

VVA is present in 71 VA hospitals. We have Representatives in 31—down from 59. I am working to contact those missing Representatives. Some, I am afraid, have died. Others may never return to the hospitals as volunteers.

VVA's future may not stretch far into the distance, but that is no reason to stop serving our fellow veterans. My plan is to rebuild the VVA/VAVS program. One important step is for state council presidents to appoint VAVS chairs. Only a few have done this; we need more, especially in larger states with multiple VAMCs.

In addition, I will recruit new Reps and Deps among VVA volunteers and encourage VVA members to come back to the hospitals. And I will continue to report on VAVS in *The Veteran* and the Web Weekly.

I will continue to attend VAVS and Veteran Advisory Committee meetings, and I encourage others to do the same. I also will attend National Board of Directors meetings, as well as the VA National Advisory meeting in April in Denver.

If you have questions or problems, contact me at kröse@vva.org

Veterans Against Drugs

BY DAVE SIMMONS, CHAIR



The ninth annual VAD Skating Party was held once again at the Silver Spring Skating Rink near the VVA national office in January. We had the best weather, and we had a great turnout, with 138 sets of skates rented.

The manager of the rink was delighted. Everyone had a good time. We distributed plastic bags with VAD t-shirts, coloring books, crayons, and stickers.

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VAD members had requested information on the Just Ask program. At a 2020 committee meeting, Just Ask made a presentation. The program is focused on middle and high school students who are being courted and recruited to become the slaves of gang members through threats of violence against family members or the teens themselves.

Long before the pandemic this issue was fast becoming the most dangerous problem for America's adolescents. While law enforcement and parents are looking for runaway children, some may already have been forced into lives of drugs, prostitution, and crime.

The Just Ask program deals with blackmail, intimidation, violence, scouting, trapping, and teen trafficking. Its lesson plan, which takes 90 minutes and can be broken into two 45-minute sessions, includes how to deal with social media and how to talk to students.

CRIME ALERT

Gang members in Texas and Louisiana are robbing people at truck-stop ATMs. If this happens to you, don't try to resist; just call 911 when you are safe.

ONE PILL CAN KILL

Criminal drug networks are flooding the U.S. with deadly Fentanyl. The networks are producing counterfeit prescriptions that look like Oxycodone, Percocet, Vicodin, and Xanax. These counterfeits are available everywhere; all you need is a smartphone. Young people are breaking into houses and substituting counterfeit drugs for real ones.

These drugs go by many street names, including 30s, 40s, 512s, Beans, Blues, Buttons, Cottons, Greens, Hill-billy Heroin, Kickers, Killers, OC, Roxy, Shorts, Whites, Bars, Bicycle Parts, Handle Bars, Bricks, Football, Hulk, Ladders, School Bus, Sticks Yellow Boys, Zannies, Z-Bars, A-Trains, Abby, Amps, Christmas Trees, Co-Pilots, Lid-Poppers, and Smart Pills.

Committee members discussed H.R. 2364, which would fund a public awareness campaign about synthetic opioids, with special emphasis on the dangers of Fentanyl.

The Veterans Against Drugs Committee: Dave Simmons, Chair; Patty Dumin, Co-Chair. Members: Lew Broughton, Ray Bates, Rodney Farley, Allen Manuel, Charlie Montgomery, Ted Wilkinson, Carlton Coates, Dennis Andras, Terry Courville, JD Soileau, Adolph Gardner, Wayne Reynolds, Herb Worthington, Elaine Simmons, Patsy Chinn, Margaret Wojciechowicz, Betty Pike, Kaye Gardner, Felicea Catapano, Diane Nicholson, and Kathy Andras as the AVVA Special Adviser. Special Advisers: U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and his aide, Mara Boggs. Staff Support: Deborah "DJ" Johnson.

Veterans Benefits

BY JOHN H. RILING III, CHAIR



It is vital that any vision of VVA's future include the Veteran Benefits Committee. VVA's national, state, and chapter veterans benefit programs have served veterans and eligible family members for almost four decades. In the early years we fought not only for the same benefits our fathers and grandfathers wanted, but for our own issues, which were not popular or supported by other veterans organizations.

We were leaders in arguing for increased benefits for post-traumatic stress disorder and the whole realm of health effects suffered by Vietnam veterans due to exposure to Agent Orange. We kept up the fight through our strong legislative advocacy and persistent claims and appeal processing for many years. In fact, they continue today.

At this point in our journey, VVA needs to have a firm and workable veterans service benefit program to turn over to the next generation of veterans. I believe the strongest option we have to accomplish this goal is Veterans Voice of America, Inc., which will help build our legacy and help all veterans well into the future to receive the benefits they have earned and deserve.

An MOU or other legal agreement should be drafted that will mutually benefit Vietnam Veterans of America and Veterans Voice of America. Our goal is not to harm VVA or the veterans we represent. Rather, we want to continue our good work and proceed on a positive path.

It is the unanimous recommendation of the Veterans Benefits Committee that such an MOU be drafted.

The Veterans Benefits Committee: John H. Riling III, Chair; John Margowski, Vice Chair; Gary Estermyer, Secretary. Members: Gumersindo Gomez, Dick Southern, Marc McCabe, Greg Pauline, Vern Peterson, Pete Peterson, Ned Foote, Tim Susengill, Randy Schriver, Gerry Corrigan, and Joe Jennings. Veterans Benefits Program Staff: Greg Nembhard, Director; Felicia Mullany, Deputy Director; and Alec Ghezzi, Deputy Director. Special Adviser: Tom Burke, Vice President. AVVA Adviser: Sharon Hobbs.

Veterans Health Care

BY CHUCK BYERS, CHAIR



The Veterans Health Care Committee focuses on VA health care and its delivery to veterans, and tries to make sure we are provided with the best quality of care with the best practices. In particular, we want to make sure veterans are receiving timely and better access at VA hospitals and outpatient clinics.

In 2018 when the MISSION Act became law, it gave us more access to community care with outside providers by providing timely care with specialists and reducing waiting times and delays. But it has been difficult navigating that system at times. Veterans were told we had a choice with health care providers, but all referrals for community care must go through the VA for approval. That can be frustrating and cause delays or even postpone veterans' health care needs.

These frustrations have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to fewer timely appointments and delays and postponed procedures. The VA offers Trans Telephonic, a remote diagnostic monitoring tool, to reduce some of this frustration and it has helped get health care into the rural community.

The veterans' health care paradigm has shifted, and now we need to focus on long-term care options for seniors. Vietnam Era veterans make up the largest group of living veterans and our average age is 74.

The MISSION Act also expanded the VA's Caregivers program for Vietnam Era veterans.

This October all veterans will come under the Comprehensive Care Givers Program and will only receive two Caregiver stipends rather than three, and will have to comply with all eligibility requirements. The final rules for these eligibility requirements are so strict that it is extremely difficult for Vietnam War veterans to qualify for any Caregiver stipend. We have asked the VA Secretary to look more closely at the eligibility requirements.

We need to get long-term care programs right because a lot of us will be affected in the coming years. I encourage members to contact their legislators and ask them to fight for a better long-term care program. For more information about the Comprehensive Care Givers Program, please contact me or join the Veterans Health Care Committee.

This will be our legacy.

Veterans Incarcerated & in the Justice System

BY DOMINICK YEZZO, CHAIR



The VINJUS Committee resumed face-to-face discussions at the recent BOD meeting. The meeting was not well attended because of COVID travel restrictions and members' illnesses and conflicts with other committee meetings held at the same time.

VVA President Jack McManus attended our meeting and listened to our agenda of service to veterans facing the justice system. Logan Lecates, a young lawyer now working as a legislative assistant for the VVA Government Affairs Department, joined the committee as a special adviser.

We explained to President McManus what we have developed and what we do to serve veterans incarcerated, veteran treatment courts, and veterans' needs upon release from incarceration. We also explained that our initiative is national in scope, but our budget is limited. And we demonstrated the effects of PTSD and TBI.

Before concluding, we presented examples of veteran inmates who have created meaningful advancements in their own lives, their communities, and the institutions that incarcerate them.

The Veterans Incarcerated and in the Justice System Committee: Dominick Yezzo, Chair. Members: Joanne Blum, Larry Frazee, Adolph Gardner, Larry Googins, Tom Haberkorn, Joe Jennings, Don Jones, Allen Manuel, John McGinty, Gary Newman, and Dave Simmons. Special Adviser and Staff Support: Logan Lecates. ■