

NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: 2 March 2021

Location: Virtual ZOOM

OFFICERS and VOTING MEMBERS in attendance (✓):

Paul Lloyd - Chair
Diane Domenicis - Vice Chair
Denise DeBlois - Secretary
Armand Soucy - Chaplain
Kelly Dobens - Treasurer
David Kenney - Chair Emeritus

Air Force Association

✓ Kevin Grady (prim) Gavin MacAloon

Air Force Sergeants Association

Bob Heichlinger (prim) Ray Hayes (alt)

American Legion

✓ Mike Lopez (prim) Robert Blais (alt) Ollie Brooks (alt)

AUSA Col. Cross Chapter

✓ Greg d'Arbonne (prim) ✓ Ed Harrington (alt)

Catholic War Veterans

✓ Denise DeBlois (prim) Robert Guldner (alt) Armand Soucy (alt)

Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association

Ray Schwendeman (prim) Larry Ward (alt)

Disabled American Veterans

✓ Andrew Patterson (prim) Robert Guldner (alt)

Korean War Veterans

✓ Mike Lopez (prim) Conrad Perreault (alt)

Marine Corps League

√ Shawn Carboni (prim) Mark Lindsley (alt) √ Chris Peirce (alt)

Military Officers Association (MOAA)

√ Peter Burdett (prim) √ Bob Jaffin (alt) Joe DiChiaro Jr. (alt)

Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)

Tony Fowler

National Guard Association of NH

√ Peter Duffy (prim) √ Roy Hunter (alt) √ Mike Horne (alt)

NH Army Retiree Council

Frank Musmanno (prim) √ Mike Rice (alt)

NH National Guard Enlisted Association

Mike Lestage (prim) √ Mike Rice (alt) Jack Howley (alt)

NH Veterans Association

√ Kelly Dobens (prim) Mike Young (alt) Doug Crooker(alt)

Reserve Officers Association of NH

√ David Kenney (prim) √ Mike Horne (alt) BG John Pappas (alt)

Rolling Thunder.

√ Bruce Garry (prim) Keith Hurrell (alt) √ Diane Domenicus (alt)

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

√ Darwin Beeman (prim) Russ Norris (alt) √ Paul Lloyd (alt)

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA-41)

√ Ray Goulet (prim) Alan Grant (alt)

Legislative Members (Voting):

Al Baldasaro
 √ Regina Birdsell
 √ Bob Guida
 Patricia Klee

LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS: (non-voting):

Governor's Office - Jane Graham
Senator Maggie Hassan - Justin Troiano

Senator Jeanne Shaheen - Chris Scott
Congressman Chris Pappas - Patrick Carroll
Congresswoman Annie Kuster - Tom Giancola

COMMITTEE ADVISORS/AGENCIES:

Kevin Forrest, Director, VAMC Manchester, NH
Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, VAMC White River Junction, VT
BG David J. Mikolaities - Adjutant General NHNG
Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General- NHNG
Shawn Buck, NH State Veterans Cemetery
Margaret LaBrecque, NH Veterans Home
Amy Cook, DHHS
John Reed, Martin's Point
Barry Conway, Sage Emeritus
Jorge Dreusicke, American Legion

GUESTS:

Congressman Chris Pappas

Justin Strevig, LTC NHARNG, Recruiting and Retention Battalion

Kari Rosado, Building Dreams for Marines

OPEN MEETING/CALL TO ORDER: Paul Loyd, Chairman, convened meeting at 1700.

Pledge of Allegiance: Chairman

Invocation: Roy Hunter

Moment of Silence: For Patti Fowler

Welcome - Remarks of the Chair: Paul welcomed everyone. He reminded the members and guests that this is an apolitical group. We are here for the veterans.

Introduction of New Members/Guests

Paul Boore, DAV, Senior Vice Commander (next State Commander)

Secretary's Report: Meeting has a quorum.

Message from the Secretary: Thank you to all who submit their reports. That is most helpful in accurately recording the minutes of the meeting. I can cross reference your notes. I need to listen to the recording several times to get all the information. A 2-hour meeting takes approximately 12 hours of listening, typing and proof reading. I also cross reference bills online to ensure accuracy. Please state your full name before speaking and making a motion since several members have the same first name. Stay on mute when you are not speaking to reduce or eliminate background noise on the audio. This helps me when I listen to the recording. If you are attending the meeting by mobile phone or iPad, please let me know who you are in the chat so I can record your attendance. You can also send me an email: dmdeblois65@gmail.com

A motion to accept the minutes of February 2, 2021 was made by Ray Goulet, 2nd by Darwin Beeman. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Treasurer's Report: Kelly reported a balance of \$802.67. We have not spent any money. She will send the balance sheet to the Chairman.

Comments from Chair Emeritus: No remarks.

Special Guest Speaker: Congressman Chris Pappas

He hopes everyone is staying safe. Thank you to Kevin Forrest at the Manchester VA and to Peggy Lebrecque at the NH Veterans Home. Think of those we lost. A number of veterans across the country were lost, approximately ten thousand. The numbers are far too high.

Vaccinations are ramping up. We continue to get more shots into the arms of folks. Four thousand plus veterans have been vaccinated. The numbers are looking better day after day. We are pushing for more. We plan on a number of vaccines to expedite appointments. Appointments will be expedited when the third vaccine (Johnson & Johnson) is available. Every adult should have access to a vaccine by the end of May.

Congressman Pappas will be serving another term on the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Over 20 bills were passed under President Trump. One bill addresses veteran suicide. There is a package for women veterans.

Rep. Pappas is meeting with the VSO's this week.

Priorities are to continue to build on successes and to continue to address economic opportunity for veterans. The issues include:

More resources for expanding mental health, VA provider payments, and strengthening Whistleblower protection at the VA.

Toxic (K2) exposure - cancer is 500 times greater in Afghanistan veterans.

PFAS - so many military bases have been contaminated by fire fighting foam.

Puppies Assisting Wounded Veterans Act (PAWS) - this will be introduced tomorrow.

This will provide service dogs to veterans with PTSD.

Debt repayment - he continues working on this since from the last administration and wants to avoid debt collection for veterans. Veterans do everything right and still receive a bill.

Congressman Pappas thanked SVAC for all the work we do. He always appreciates our feedback. He is happy to answer questions.

Comment by Greg D'Arbonne: He received a letter from a veteran regarding the push to pay back student loans. This is a huge impact for recruiting in the military. He urges not to forgive student loans. You do not want to take away the incentive to serve our country. We rely on that. We need to provide the best benefit.

Guest Speaker: Justin Strevig, LTC NHARNG, Recruiting and Retention Battalion

He was asked to speak about going the National Guard. Covid has impacted recruiting.

Why join the National Guard? The NG has a state and community mission. The NG has an incredible purpose now - mission is to serve state, community and country. The benefits are better - both federal and state benefits. The NG offers full time benefits for part-time service - one weekend per month and two weeks active duty. There is a 100 percent tuition waiver on all state schools. The NG offers travel, training and adventure.

The problem now is that less than 30 percent of folks ages 17 to 24 are not eligible. They do not meet the standards.

He is requesting that we start the conversation with relatives and friends. Point them in the direction of service. We are an influential group.

The NG is struggling to fill 5 behavioral health vacancies - clinical social workers and clinical psychologists.

Contact information: LTC Justin Strevig, NH Army National Guard;
justin.c.strevig.mil@mail.mil
Recruiting and Retention Battalion
Office: 603-225-1377
Cell: 603-545-4286

Question by Mike Lopez: Do recruiters have fact sheets with bullet points on why I should join the National Guard? This can be passed on to the younger generation. How many recruiters are in the area? Can they meet with the general membership and the executive board? Who is the Army recruiter to contact? Why should I join is always the question.

Answer: LTC Strevig will get a fact sheet out. There are 20 recruiters throughout the state who would love to partner with the American Legion, VFW and DAV. A relationship is needed to build communication.

Question by Bruce Garry: Is there a problem with the available slots?

Answer: There are more than 40 positions available. Aviation, combat medic and infantry are the most popular. The NG can only go a certain percentage over.

Comment by Kari Rosado: She has a daughter in the Air Force and may be interested.
Response: There is potentially some opportunity. Pass off the information.

Comment by Greg d'Arbonne: He mentioned that Our Community Salutes will be held on May 20th at the Fisher Cats Stadium. This is also Military Appreciation Night. Young folks are going from high school to college. This is a chance for us to celebrate with them. More details to follow.

LTC Strevig said he is getting interest from families. He is getting a lot of interest in engagement.

Comment by Peter to Greg: He did a wonderful job getting that together with the Fisher Cats.

Comment by Warren Perry: There was a question on empty slots. Justin's problem is empty slots, not full slots.

Paul Lloyd added that we appreciate the information.

Guest Speaker: Kari Rosado, Building Dreams for Marines

She is the Executive Director of Building Dreams for Marines. Her report was included with the meeting agenda.

This group helps New Hampshire based residents. Veterans need an honorable discharge and a service-connected disability. They build ramps and modify homes for veterans at no cost. They want to raise awareness to help more veterans in the state.

Question by Andy Patterson: Can you give a couple of ideas on what was done?

Answer: A contractor was sent to a veterans home in Rochester to redo the whole bathroom along with the plumbing. The veteran had knee surgery. He is now is able to shower on his own without worrying about falling. Another example is a 90 year old veteran with the same issue. He could not go up and down the stairs. Railings were installed.

Building Dreams for Marines has been helping veterans for 10 years. They have helped 5 veterans this past year during Covid. They want to help more veterans. They are having a golf tournament in August to raise funds and awareness. They are happy to have organizations come to events. They help all branches of service.

Contact information: **BDFM.org**

Building Dreams for Marines - Facebook and Instagram pages

Email: **kari@bdfm.org**

Cell: 978-221-1018

Question by Dan Marcek: Are you connected to the North Country?

Answer: No.

Dan Marcek: Mike Hogan has been President of a non profit group called North Country for at least 10 years.

Kari Rosado: They are looking to branch off to veterans and contractors up north. She will get information to reach out.

Question by Bill Gaudreau: Are you helping all veterans? He wanted clarification.

Answer: At first, they were helping Marines and Navy. Then they expanded to help all veterans.

Question by Andy Patterson: How does one donate to your organization?

Answer: They are trying to partner with other organization like Homeland Heroes Foundation. They would like to have a summit so non profits can get together and help each other out. You can donate on the website or come to events.

SUPPORTING AGENCY REPORTS:

Manchester VA Update: Kevin Forrest

Everybody is doing well at the Manchester VA.

Vaccine update: As of today, about 20 percent (over 4000) of enrolled veterans have been vaccinated. The VA continues to move forward. They are lifting the age restrictions for vaccinating now. They are taking all veterans by appointment only. They have been spending a lot of time reaching out. A lot of veterans already received the vaccine in the community. The VA is slated to get the one shot Johnson & Johnson later this week. This is good news. It is easier to work with. The VA had the Moderna vaccine. The focus now is on making and filling appointments. The Public Affairs office is working on getting the information out. The VA is taking veterans of all ages. They will still work through the priorities.

Question by Rep. Jess Edwards: When will you start getting all veterans?

Answer: Tomorrow.

There are plans to do another walk-in clinic the week of the 15th for ages 65 and over. The vaccine clinic is working in Portsmouth this weekend. This is a collaborative effort between the Bedford and Togus VA's. The Pfizer vaccine will be given by the Bedford VA. They plan to head to Maine, the NH Seacoast area and North Conway at the high school on the 12th of March by appointment. They will be using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine on the road. They are looking at receiving 700 additional doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Clinic update: The clinics are seeing all patients. The operating room is busy. Patients are coming in for procedures.

Personnel Updates: Effective yesterday, Dr. Phemister who was Chief of Community Care is now Acting Chief of Primary Care. The Chief of Pain Management is retiring. The VA is interviewing for the position. The Chief of Staff advertisement closes this week.

Physician recruits: Endocrinology, Home Based Primary Care, Nurse Practitioner for urology, Nurse Practitioner for Neurology, 2 Psychiatrists, Radiologist for interim work, Gastroenterologist, and a Neurologist.

This is good news. They are bringing talent to the Manchester VA.

Facilities Update: No update on facilities since last month's report. Other projects are in design.

Comment by Peter Duffy: He sent in his Covid vaccine card thru my Healthy vet for his medical files. He suggests putting the word out.

Response: This prevents further outreach. The VA is pending information from VAMS.

The National Guard was acknowledged for the work they are doing at the state sites. It is a team effort.

Question by Mike Lopez: You mentioned walk-in for ages 65 and up. Can they call or wait for the walk-in clinic?

Answer: Have them call and get in the queue. The VA wants to do a walk-in clinic in one week. They can get a target walk-in clinic for those age 65 and up. The vaccine inventory will come significantly in the coming days and weeks.

Question: How much of a leeway for the walk-in clinic?

Answer: As soon as the number of vaccine doses are available. This will avoid a 10 mile long line.

White River Junction VA Update: Dr. Brett Rusch

He presented slides briefing which included the following information: Covid-19 vaccine mobile walk-in clinic schedule, vaccine news on Johnson & Johnson, Covid-19 vaccination data for employees and veterans, process for scheduling vaccination appointments, CBOC update, and recent events.

Dr. Rusch said that Kevin covered a lot of territory. There will be a walk-in clinic in Littleton at the Elks Lodge. This is between Littleton and Bethlehem. There will be a big event tomorrow. Spread the word to get as many people there as possible. This will target ages 65 and up in the North Country. There will be a walk-in clinic near Burlington, VT at the fairgrounds at Essex Junction near Burlington, VT. Homeland Security and Border Patrol - about 100 have been vaccinated already.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a single dose. This will help get more people vaccinated faster. The VA is grateful for the extra opportunities. They are hoping to get this one at all CBOC's. More than 5000 veterans got the vaccine at WRJ. Dr. Rusch showed a slide on what veterans should do to get vaccinated. WRJ is not ready to vaccinate all ages just yet. WRJ is in the process of getting CBOC's to open. WRJ is very active in getting all services to veterans.

CBOC Update: All CBOC's have now resumed an open door status. We must adhere to all safe practices.

Recent Events: The Women Veterans Appreciation Ski Day was held at Mount Sunapee in partnership with New England Healing Sports Association (NEHSA). This is actively engaging veterans in the lifestyle they expect.

Question by Barry Conway: Do you experience anybody who does not want the vaccine for any reasons?

Answer: Not as many as thought. There is a lot of good information out there. They can better able make a decision. Folks are ready to do what is necessary to get back to the life they want to live.

Question by Kari Rosado: How do you deal with someone who cannot wear a mask to go into the VA?

Answer: On a case by case basis through a screening process. It involves a clinical review to come up with a plan for individual circumstances.

Comment by Kevin Forrest: It is generally the younger veterans who do not want the vaccine for unknown reasons.

Comment by Dr. Rusch: Given that about 8000 have already received that vaccine, it is not that big of a deal. People are sick of this. They will do what they need to do to be done with this. Some employees did not want the vaccine at first. Some were told by their spouse to get it.

Comment by Andy Patterson: Great job to both VA's for coming along on the shot. He added that if anyone needs a ride to the vaccine, the DAV in Manchester will give veterans a ride. Stan Pressler will accommodate veterans with a ride to the VA or CBOC, even on weekends for the walk-in clinic.

Dr. Rusch: It's a great solution.

DMAVS Update: Bill Gaudreau

NH Office of Veterans Services - Bill Gaudreau:

The State Military ID Office in Concord has moved to Building C in room 104 as of yesterday. The phone number has not changed 603-225-1326.

The National Defense Act for fiscal year 2020-2021 has added 3 new Agent Orange presumptions to the list. These are: bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinson's and Parkinson's-like symptoms. The VA is aware of the conditions and is reviewing their policies and will start working on claims. The VA will probably retro the benefits to when the claim was originally submitted. Veterans and survivors need to reach out to a VSO. A lot of work needs to be done

Department of Military & Veterans Services - Amy Cook:

The new Advisory Panel for businesses will start meeting next week. They will provide ideas and help with the program. She is working with two statewide groups for communication, education and outreach to military families. Some states have inquired about Ask the Question Campaign. This has drawn National attention. She spoke with federal partners. New applications are due July 1st.

NH State Veterans Cemetery - Shawn Buck: No report.

Question by Darwin Beeman: What building is that in for ID cards?

Answer: Building C.

Comment by Barry Conway: Great job about the Agent Orange conditions. He likes the retroactivity.

Question by Andy Patterson: Warren discussed last time about Veterans Day Ceremony at the cemetery. Anything else on that. Any decisions made by BG Mikolaities?

Answer: This will be discussed under Old Business.

NHVV Update: Peggy LeBrecque

She is looking for the day when we are all in the same room.

The NHVV is now Covid-19 free; 92 percent of resident chose to take the vaccine; 60 percent of staff took the vaccine. They continue to educate the staff about getting the vaccine. Residents are enjoying outside visits in the conference room and window. They are back to recreational activities at the home and are looking forward to St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

She received updated guidance from Public Health today which highlighted Animal Therapy. She is talking to the Infection Control nurse regarding the updated guidelines. From Central VA on New Public Law: all state veteran homes must enter into a database. The NH Healthcare Safety Network requires data entered on confirmed cases. The NHVV has been doing that already with the state Public Health from the beginning. It is a challenge to enter data into the federal data base. We will be following the law to the letter to make sure data is transparent.

Continue to follow the NHVV Facebook page. Sarah, the Public Affairs lady, has been taking lots of photos. Peggy is looking forward to the day when they can open the door wider.

Question by Bruce Garry: You are doing a fantastic job. Would you consider letting Bruce do window visits?

Answer: Glad you said that. Reach out to the Recreation department. Peggy added that a family with 8 children were outside doing a skit and dancing outside the window.

Question by Dan Marcek: Why do 40 percent of the staff not want the vaccine? Is that about availability?

Answer: It is their choice. We offered it. It is the same with the flu shots. We continue to encourage and educate them every year. Sixty percent is about the annual average.

OLD BUSINESS:**#1. Membership for Camp Resilience**

Kurt Webber, LTC, US Army (Retired) gave a quick presentation. Kurt is the President of Camp Resilience. This is the 3rd time Kurt talks about Camp Resilience to SVAC. The mission of Camp Resilience is to serve veterans, first responders and their families. They have been serving veterans throughout New England. There have been 69 retreats so far over the past 7 years and about 650 plus attendees. About 200 are from New Hampshire. They run a variety of retreats. Some are focused for specific issues - PTSD, MST and family. They specialize in outdoor activities. Camp Resilience uses a 3 pronged approach to community-based programs - peer to peer counseling, facilitated counseling, and outdoor activities.

Post retreat services include keeping Facebook groups so folks can contact each other and keep the group intact. They have testimonials from participants and VA clinicians. We know we have an effective program. We have partnerships with other organizations. We have a Memorandum of Understanding with the VA. We worked with the National Guard and the Wounded Warrior Project. Camp Resilience is primarily a volunteer organization with one full time staff coordinator. There is a Board of Advisors. Ed Harrington is the Chairman. Peter Burdett is on the Board. We would love to have SVAC participate.

Slides were shown to provide an overview and summary.

Ed Harrington asked: How can we help SVAC? What can we do to help the veterans of New Hampshire?

Kurt Webber: Camp Resilience would love to become a full member of SVAC so we can help SVAC serve the veterans of New Hampshire. We did some virtual events this past summer. We were able to get some CARES Act funds. The future goal is to try to spread the word and get more money.

Question: How many retreats were there last year?

Answer: 13 out of 20 scheduled retreats last year. We are planning a minimum of 15 retreats in 2021. There are issues in scheduling right now due to Covid.

A motion was made by Bruce Garry for Camp Resilience to become a member of SVAC. 2nd by Ray Goulet. Unanimous. Motion carried. Welcome aboard.

#2. Alternate Location for Veteran's Day Ceremony

Warren Perry: Back to Andy Patterson's question on What does SVAC want?

This is a two part decision. We are looking for a decision to make a recommendation to the Adjutant General. Do we have a statewide ceremony? If so, Where?

Question by Mike Lopez: So will there be a statewide ceremony invited or not or out in the community?

Answer: We are not having it at the cemetery on Veterans Day again. We can have one statewide ceremony somewhere else or individual ones around the state.

Comment by Andy Patterson: My thought is that we do a statewide one at the cemetery on Memorial Day and somewhere out in the community on Veterans Day.

A motion was made by Bill Roy for SVAC to recommend not having a ceremony on Veterans Day at the NHSVC. 2nd by Andy Patterson. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Warren Perry asked for a motion on a statewide ceremony somewhere else. If you do have one, where would you have it? Warren said he would host it at the Aviation Facility.

Mike Lopez asked for clarification. Will there be participation from the state?

Answer: The Adjutant General would choose where to go around the state if there are individual ceremonies. If there is a statewide ceremony, that is where the General will be. The AG will go where invited at his choice.

A motion was made by Dave Kenney for SVAC to recommend individual Veterans Day ceremonies for this year. 2nd by Ray Goulet. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Comment by Andy Patterson: We are advising the state on what to do. The recommendation is to do a statewide ceremony on Memorial Day at the NHSVC and do individual ceremonies for Veterans Day. We are only advising. The decision is to do individual ceremonies in the community on Veterans Day.

Warren Perry said he is confident the AG will follow SVAC's recommendation. Let's do what makes sense and have SVAC tell the AG what we want. The AG is open to recommendations.

NEW BUSINESS:

#1. Dan Marcek, NH Community Veterans Engagement Board (CVEB) with the VA.

He wanted to say a few words. The VA started these CVEB's since there are gaps in service. The charter is to look at local needs. A few years were spent looking at what veterans want. This is to bring visibility. An award was created. The Goal is to find one person in all 10 counties and to support the military and families. The project is being re-introduced. He is asking for help. He wants nominations for an outstanding person that helps veterans. He is interested in replicability. Send in nominations.

#2. Memorial/Remembrance for Patti Fowler

Dave Kenney has been in touch with Patti's daughter. Patti did a lot for others even when she was ill with cancer for 4 years. She was making face masks. Patti did not specify an organization for donations. Her daughter suggested the Concord Animal Shelter or a Veterans Organization in NH. We can send one half to the animal shelter and one half to a veterans organization.

Comment by Greg d'Arbonne: He suggested that we can name the Spirit Award after Patti and call it the Patti Fowler Spirit Award.

A motion was made by Ray Goulet to rename the Spirit Award. With the families permission. 2nd by Greg d'Arbonne. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Paul Lloyd added that the Concord American Legion will be talking about it tomorrow.

Kevin Grady added that some of us might like to contribute some money. Get Kelly some checks.

Send checks to: SVAC, 1191 Goffstown Road, Manchester, NH 03102

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFINGS: Kevin Grady - Legislative Chair

An email was send out with a brief synopsis of the LSR's being tracked.

HB 117 - relative to the use of force at NH National Guard facilities; passed the House.

HB 317 - relative to the treatment of veterans' disability payments for purposes of determining child support. This took 2 hearings and did not sound promising.

HB 451 - New title: Allowing the New Hampshire Masons to issue decals for motor Vehicles (old title: HB 361 Gold Star Family decals).

HB 443 - relative to an extended term of imprisonment for assaulting military personnel.

HB 580 - requiring the approval of the Governor before the NH National Guard can be deployed overseas.

SB 120 - relative to physicians assistants employed at the Manchester VA Medical Center.

SB 143 - New title: adopting omnibus legislation relative to certain agency requests (Old title: National Guard Enlistment Incentive Program). Kevin recommends supporting this bill. We should vote to support.

A motion was made by Ray Goulet to support SB 143, second by Bruce Garry. Unanimous. Motion carried.

Warren Perry brought up SB 132 regarding about the Veterans Home. Kevin will report on it next time. It is for nursing homes in general.

Peggy Lebreque added that it does call out the NHVH at the end of the bill.

LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS:

Jane Graham (Governor's Office):

The governor was busy with the budget in February.

The vaccine rollout is dominating. The mass vaccination site at the NH Motor Speedway requires an appointment in VAMS. People will get a call or text message to move up their appointment. Everyone needs an appointment in VAMS. It is scheduled for Saturday, Sunday and Monday from 8:00 AM until 4:00 PM. The goal is to vaccinate 10,000 people. They are trying to get through phases 1A, 1B and 2A (teachers) as quickly as possible.

The Governor is grateful for the support of the National Guard. The NG has been running the vaccination sites.

Chris Scott (Senator Shaheen):

He expressed condolences on Patti Fowler.

February 3rd: The Senator introduced S.202 - Emergency Care for Veterans During COVID Act. This would expand veterans' access to emergency care and ensure community providers receive prompt payment from the VA for emergency medical services rendered. It sets forth the payment rate, mandates timely payments, does not require pre-authorization and designates VA as primary payer.

Press Release: Today (March 2nd), US Senator Shaheen introduced legislation to bolster veterans' access to lifesaving health care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She said: "Financial obstacles and red tape from the VA are the last things our veterans should be forced to confront when seeking emergency health care, especially during a deadly pandemic."

Senator Shaheen has fought tirelessly in support of veterans to ensure they have the resources and services they need amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

February 5th: Sen. Shaheen joined the NH National Guard leadership, Director of the Air National Guard (General Michael Joh) and members of the Boeing Corporation leadership team for the arrival of the 12th and final KC-46 at Pease Air National Guard Base.

February 22nd: Sen. Shaheen signed on as an original co-sponsor of S.344 - a bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retirement pay for disability retirees with fewer than 20 years of service and a combat-related disability, and for other purposes.

February 23rd: Sen. Shaheen, a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, joined senior Air Force leadership at Joint Base Andrews for a briefing on the KC-46 refueling tanker program. She participated in a KC-46 refueling mission on a tanker and with a crew from the 157th Air Refueling Wing out of Pease.

Sen. Shaheen said: "The KC-46 is the most advanced aerial refueling tanker in the world and is crucial to the success of future American air operations." The KC-46 is the United States Air Force's next generation aerial refueling tanker. It replaces the branch's 1950's era aerial refueling fleet of KC-135's and will serve as the backbone of American air operations for decades to come.

February 25th: Sen. Shaheen signed on as an original co-sponsor of S.458 - a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide the representative record of a claimant for compensation or benefits administered by the Secretary an opportunity to review a proposed determination regarding that claim.

February 27th: The American Rescue Plan Act passed the House and is at the Senate where it is being reviewed. This bill will:

- secure assistance for unemployed veterans
- increase claims and appeals processing to reduce the backlog caused by Covid-19
- Bolster VA's supply chain modernization
- Support State Veterans Homes
- Fund stronger oversight through VA's Office of Inspector General
- Prohibit copayments for medical care for veterans during the pandemic
- Emergency Employee Leave Fund.

March 2nd: Sen. Shaheen and staff met virtually with Paul Lloyd and the Department of New Hampshire Veterans of Foreign Wars representatives to learn more about the VFW legislative priorities.

Justin Troiano (Senator Hassan):

There was lots of activity this month.

February 8th: Sen. Hassan, a new member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, voted to confirm Denis McDonough as the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

February 11th: Sen Hassan held a virtual roundtable discussion on how the bipartisan Deborah Sampson Act, which is now law, will help eliminate barriers to care and services for many women veterans.

February 18th: US Senator Shaheen led a letter joined by US Senator Hassan and Rep. Kuster and Rep. Pappas to address the housing crisis in New Hampshire by calling on the Treasury to broaden the permissible uses of emergency rental funds.

February 23rd: The NH delegation urged the Department of the Treasury to make changes that expand the use of Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) funds to help address the housing crisis in NH and to assist with other important utilities like internet and telephone services which are particularly important for Granite Staters to stay connected amid the pandemic.

February 25th: Sen. Hassan joined Sen. Shaheen in reintroducing The Veterans Claim Transparency Act, legislation that ensures veterans and their representative have 48 hours to review and dispute disability claims before they are finalized to make sure that veterans don't lose out on the benefits that they have earned and deserve. This would ensure correct benefits determinations prior to VA's final decision.

February 26th: Sen. Hassan and Sen. Shaheen joined a bipartisan group of their colleagues in introducing the Major Richard Star Act, bipartisan legislation to provide combat-injured veterans with less than 20 years of military service their full benefits. This would repeal the unfair offset so that veterans receive both retirement pay and disability benefits.

February 28th: Sen. Hassan, a member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the Veterans Affairs Committee joined others in introducing bicameral legislation to help end the for-profit college industry's aggressive recruiting of veterans service members, and their families. The Protecting Our Students and Taxpayers (POST) Act would prohibit for-profit colleges and universities from receiving more than 85 percent of their revenue from the federal government, as well as change how federal revenue is calculated to include all federal funds, including Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill and Department of Defense Tuition Assistance benefits.

March 1st: Sen. Hassan joined two other Senators in introducing bipartisan legislation that would reduce the financial burden of severely disabled veterans who require special adaptive equipment to drive a motor vehicle. The Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities (AUTO) for Veterans Act would make these veterans

eligible to receive a grant to help purchase a new adaptive vehicle once every ten years helping them to drive safely and maintain their independence. This legislation reduces the financial burden on veterans.

Tom Giancola (Rep. Annie Kuster):

The Congresswoman had a conversation today with the VFW to discuss veteran opportunities.

February 2nd: Rep. Kuster introduced HR 707, the Ghost Army Congressional Gold Medal Act. This would award the Congressional Gold Medal to the ghost army a top-secret unit from WWII that used deception tactics to divert Nazi units and create strategic openings to more easily achieve their objectives. It's estimated their heroic actions saved up to 30,000 Allied lives.

February 8th: Rep. Kuster agreed to co-sponsor the Dental Care for Veterans Act. This bill eliminates the current statutory eligibility restrictions for VA dental care and expands eligibility for VA dental care to all veterans enrolled in the system.

February 24th: Rep. Kuster joined the PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act. This bipartisan legislation would authorize a pilot program in which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs will partner with non-profit organizations who specialize in working with veterans and service dogs.

Atomic Veterans Parity Act - extends benefits to those veterans who participated in the cleanup at nuclear test sites in the Marshall Islands. These veterans will be treated as radiation exposed veterans. The current law only covers those who participated in active nuclear testing.

Patrick Carroll (Rep. Chris Pappas):

Patrick gave a shout out to Denise on the meeting minutes. Excellent job. Very helpful.

Co-Sponsored Bills:

HR 1713: Lonnie Kilpatrick Central Pacific Relief Act.

HR 914: Dental Care for Veterans Act.

HR 707: Ghost Army Congressional God Metal Act

HR 79: Aid and Attendance Support Act.

HR 2094: CHAMPVA Children's Care Protection Act.

HR 1022: Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers Act (PAWS) of 2021

HR 1282: Major Richard Starr Act

HR 303: Retired Pay Restoration Act

HR 1355: K2 Veterans Care Act of 2021

HR 1276: Strengthening and Amplifying Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse Act or the SAVE LIVES Act.

HR 1377: Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Parity Act.

Committee Work:

Rep. Pappas sent a letter to President Biden on the K2 issue. He will be in a conference tomorrow.

Letter to the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs to support survivor's of MST, etc.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 also called the COVID-19 Stimulus Package. It is a 1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill. It provides critical emergency funding for the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals and businesses. This includes construction funding for State Veterans Homes and funding to reduce the backlog of claims.

To get back to Pete's questions, Rep. Pappas is keeping track of the legislation on Burn Pits.

Rep. Pappas is grateful for everything Peggy has done at the NH Veteran's Home.

Good of the Order:

Dave Kenney: He spoke with Becca, Patti Fowler's daughter, and discussed naming the Spirit Award after Patti. Becca approves of the this change. It is a great way to honor Patti. He recommended inviting Becca to the award presentation.

Calendar of Events:

1st Wednesday- Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Veterans Park, Manchester, NH.
4th Tuesday - Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Langdon Park, Portsmouth, NH.
Every Thursday - Weekly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Hesky Park, Meredith, NH.

Next meeting date: 06 April 2021 - Virtual

Adjourn Meeting: 1912

A motion was made by Ray Goulet to adjourn, second by multiple individuals.
Unanimous. Motion carries.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise M DeBlois
Secretary