

NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: 4 May 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)

Camp Resilience

✓ Kurt Webber (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). Paul Boore (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)

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
William Gaudreau, Director, Office of Veteran Services
Amy Cook, DHHS
John Reed, Martin's Point
Dan Marcek, VETFLIX
Barry Conway, Sage Emeritus
Jorge Dreusicke, American Legion

GUESTS:

Dr. Becky Rhoads for Dr. Brett Rusch (VAMC White River Junction, VT)
Robert Hayward - Warrior Scholar Project
Jessie Tossetti - Warrior Scholar Project

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

Pledge of Allegiance: Chairman

Invocation: Armand Soucy

Moment of Silence:

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

Introduction of New Members/Guests:

Guest Speakers from the Warrior Scholar Project: Robert Hayward and Jessie Trosetti.

Secretary's Report: Meeting has a quorum.

Message from the Secretary: 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 April 6, 2021 was made by Ray Goulet, 2nd Andy Patterson. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Treasurer's Report: Kelly Dobens is not present. Chairman Paul Lloyd reported that 2 donations came in. There is a balance of \$1002.67.

Comments from Chair Emeritus:

Dave Kenney mentioned that an email was sent out regarding some veteran stories for our newsletter for the cemetery. These stories will be posted close to Memorial Day. If you have any inputs, we are going to select from these. We are not going to have enough room for all submissions. But that is okay. If you submit something, we can use it in a future publication or for Memorial Day next year. So do not worry about it. Just put your thoughts together and send them directly to me.

Just another reminder, the Memorial Day ceremony will be different this year. It is going to be hosted later on Sunday. We already had some questions about the 100 Nights of Remembrance. This will be starting again on Memorial Day just as it did in the past.

Guest Speaker: Robert Hayward - Warrior Scholar Project, Special Projects Manager.

He just retired from the Marines Corps about 2 years ago. The services and the guidance you provide to veterans is invaluable. Thank you for your continued service. The Warrior Scholar Project is a 501C3 non profit. We were founded in 2011. This year

is our 10th anniversary. It is a pretty big deal for us and we are happy and proud of that.

Our mission is to provide all enlisted service members, active reserve members and National Guard with a skill bridge that helps them make a successful transition into the college classroom. By making the informed consumers of higher education, and increasing their confidence to apply to get into degree programs at top universities or the college they choose to attend.

We also strive to provide them sustained support throughout their pursuit of higher education and beyond into the workforce. We have a large pool of alumni that work to activate and engage veterans. We keep those networks strong and keep everybody supported throughout their post service life. We have partnerships with top colleges, universities, large or small schools, private schools, Ivy League, community colleges, you name it. We have a partnership with a category college that somebody may be interested in.

Over the summer, we host a one and two-week college preparatory boot camps. For enlisted veterans and transitioning service members, we offer boot camps in in three different disciplines. We offer them in humanities, in STEM, and in business and entrepreneurship. Best of all, the courses are taught by volunteer faculty from the host institutions. One of our partners is MIT. If somebody ever wondered what it would be like to take an astrophysics class at MIT, they can get a good idea. Professors from MIT are the ones actually teaching the curriculum.

We help make the cultural shift into college as well. The Warrior Scholar alumni come in and instruct. They discuss their experiences throughout their college educational journey by using faculty lectures, workshops, research projects, tailored assignments, and one on one tutoring. Our participants acquire the the skills to succeed in higher education and navigate that cultural shift from the military into college just like we do before we deploy anywhere. We do a cultural study of where we are going so we understand what we're dealing with and what the landscape looks like. Since we are a scholar project, we want our service members and veterans to have the same sort of feel when they are moving into a college campus so they don't feel alienated and they know what to expect going in.

We also offer workshops tailored to address the unique needs of traditionally underserved veterans. For example, one of the initiatives we have is the Women Veterans Empowerment Dialogues. These monthly dialogues are via Zoom or Google meter. The women can get together to discuss issues pertinent to that group of veterans. We want to make sure that every veteran who wants to earn a degree has the skills and the confidence to do so. The best part of all this, it is available at no cost to all the participants. The only thing a participant has to cover is the cost of travel to and from the host institution.

Right now with COVID, we offer virtual programs. We are starting to go back on campus. If someone chooses an on campus program, they have to pay for travel to and from there. Everything else is included.

I am sure that all of you can attest that making veterans aware of all the programs and benefits available to them is absolutely a never ending task. What we hear most from veterans going through the our program or those that have a degree is that I wish I would have known about this sooner. I wish I would have done that because it would have helped me with x y and z. That is one of the reasons I am here tonight to speak with you. I am asking your help in spreading the word about our program to your network of veterans. It would be much appreciated. We are trying to get the word out there and hopefully give you another resource in your toolbox that you can offer to veterans. This could be a tool to help attract younger veteran members. We serve all veterans of every age. Thank you for your time.

Question by Al Baldasaro: Have you already worked with the Reserve centers and the National Guard in the state? Or is this something new that just came out in the state?

Response: We have been around for 10 years and we have different representation in each state. We are trying to get better representation in New Hampshire. So if you have any contacts for me, I would be thrilled to get a hold of those Reserve centers and National Guard.

Al added that the contact Warren Perry is here. This may be a win-win for a lot of veterans that are in the National Guard.

Warren Perry added that he will connect with Robert Haywood.

Contact information:

Robert Haywood
rhaywood@warrior-scholar.org
[linkedin.com/in/robert-w-haywood](https://www.linkedin.com/in/robert-w-haywood)
<https://www.warrior-scholar.org/>
Tel. 717-781-5279

Warren Perry: warren.m.perry.nfg@mail.mil

SUPPORTING AGENCY REPORTS:

Manchester VA Update: Kevin Forrest

Slides were sent out.

Items of Interest:

The Manchester VA is starting GME rotations with Portsmouth Hospital. These are medical students who have finished medical school. Portsmouth Hospital is starting this new program. We have started discussions with them where we will actually do rotations in primary care for medical residents. This is a really good news story. We have not had residents at the Manchester VA probably since the inpatient care was there. A lot of that fell off when we did not have the full service hospital. One of the task force recommendations was enhancing both research and education. To have residents in here is really exciting for us. This will bolster our training missions.

We are also bringing back and implementing the Veteran Community Partnership (VCP) Program. This is sponsored by the VA. This was done back in the 2012-2013 timeframe. Krista Maxwell, who is our chief social worker, used to spearhead this program. Through the social work resources, they are going to look at and really formalize the partnerships out in the community, many of which exist now. Many of the community partners that we engage with have asked for a more formal partnership. Krista Maxwell and the team are going to be in the lead with that. We depend on all of you and many more to provide services to veterans. It is a good forum and it helps people develop a more robust network.

We are looking to transition to Point of Care vaccinations rather than vaccination clinics. We are starting to look at vaccine hesitancy. There is plenty of vaccines to go around. We are running our clinics Monday through Friday with the Johnson & Johnson and Moderna clinics. We are getting to the point where we are probably going to transition from a straight vaccine clinic into a point of care clinic. Manchester will transition to this in the next month or so.

We resumed the J&J vaccine on May 3, 2021 when the CDC lifted the concerns with it. This is especially important when we do our CBOC clinics. It is easier to the the J&J vaccine on the road.

There will be a Veterans Town Hall focusing on My HealthyVet and secure messaging tomorrow May 5, 2021 at 5:30 PM. We will be doing this with Congressman Pappas who has been assisting with it. This has been advertised through our Facebook page. My HealthyVet and secure messaging will allow veterans to communicate with their health care team on their own terms. We are hoping it will be a good event.

Last thing is we have reopened a lot more. We are doing our call for VA volunteers. We have our red coat ambassadors. As people start coming back to the medical center, we are ramping up our volunteer base. Stella Lareau is our Acting Chief of Voluntary Services. She can be reached at 603-624-4366 extension 6419 if you want to contact her. Anyone interested in volunteering can get in touch with Stella.

COVID Vaccination Data: We had our 10,000th vaccine last week when we were up in Somersworth. We got to advertise that out in the community. We are still vaccinating

everybody covered under the Save Lives Act. We will continue to take the show on the road. We will start to move to the Point of Service over the next month.

Kevin reviewed the following information on the slides:

53 percent of veterans are vaccinated (10,224 vaccines administered to staff and veterans).

Vaccinating all authorities under the Save Lives Act: all veterans, veteran spouses, and caregivers.

74 percent of employees are vaccinated.

27 caregivers vaccinated.

194 spouses vaccinated under Save Lives Act.

FS 28-01 Veteran Copayment Cancellation and Refunds:

Sec. 8007. Prohibition on Copayments and Cost Sharing for Veterans During Emergency Relating to Covid-19

(a) In General. - The Secretary of Veteran Affairs — — -

- (1) shall provide for any copayment or cost sharing with respect to health care under the laws administered by the Secretary received by a Veteran during the period specified in subsection (b); and
- (2) Shall reimburse any Veteran who paid a copayment or other cost sharing for health care under the laws administered by the Secretary received by a Veteran during such period the amount paid by the Veteran.

Period Specified. — — -The period specified in this subsection is the period beginning April 6, 2020 and ending September 30, 2021.

FS 28-01 Veteran Copayment Cancellation and Refunds:

No Veteran copayment or cost sharing will be charged for medical care and pharmacy services from until October 1, 2021.

Refunds will be provided for payment made for medical care and pharmacy services from April 6, 2020 through present.

Refunds will be EFT or check depending on Veteran information available.

“Information Only” patient statements are targeting to resume July 2021 an include charges from prior to April 6, 2020. ARPA insert.

Collections will remain suspended through September 30, 2021.

Kevin added that some refunds have already started. This is a really great thing for veterans. The VA is receiving calls from veterans wanting to get information on exactly when they will get their refunds. That is tough. They are going by the oldest reimbursements first.

Personnel Updates:

Dr. Jen Ault accepted the Chief of Pain position and starts in August.

Dr. Zaiga Sears accepted the Chief of Primary Care position and starts in August.

The Chief of Staff recruitment is underway.

Dr. Brian Phemester is the Acting Chief of Primary Care.

Manchester VA Construction Updates:

Clinical Services Building: New Urgent Care and Mental Health spaces; estimated opening - Fall 2021.

Mountain Entrance: Upgraded entrance with an elevator; estimated opening - Fall 2021.

Women's Health Clinic: New spaces for compliant women's healthcare; currently under design; construction projected for 2022.

Loop Road Project: Upgraded utilities to the building and new road loop around the campus; currently under design.

Specialty Care Building: Upgraded spaces for Ophthalmology, Optometry, and Audiology; currently under design; construction projected for 2022.

Sterile Processing Water Upgrades: New DI/RO system with recirculating loop and UV light; construction started; projected completion May 2021.

Sterile Processing Corrections: New compliant SPS suite; construction projected early 2022.

Nurse Call Replacement, B15 (CLC): New compliant system; construction projected start 2021.

Kevin added that it is going to be really great to get moved in. We just finished an assessment of the old Urgent Care space. We are looking at how we are going to convert that into a procedure suite, either for doing GI procedures or as a Pain service

suite. Dr. Ault and the other pain physicians are really big on interventional pain procedures. Being able to amp that up and being able to offer a lot more of that versus having to send veterans into the community is really good. We have real top notch candidates.

Kevin finished up with information on Suicide Prevention number: 1-800-273-8255 press 1.

The Manchester VA is hosting the Zero Suicide Academy. We are partnering with other community partners, about 6 at this point. The VA is going to provide this training for healthcare organizations interested in really improving or just bolstering their suicide prevention efforts.

VA Suicide Prevention Team:

Beth Alves, Suicide Prevention Coordinator: 603-624-4366 ext 2150.

Amy Frechette, Suicide Prevention Coordinator: 603-624-4366 ext 3271.

Kevin added that we have set June 1st as the target for 70% face to face appointments, 15% via video connect, and 10% telephone. We have been making great strides in the last week to make the shift to face to face. We are about 80% in specialty care. We are at 95% in surgery for obvious reasons, We are making a pretty radical shift in primary care through May.

Comment by Barry Conway: Shoutout to Kevin and his team at the Manchester VA. It was a great presentation. Some comments on the VA: The VA lives in a goldfish bowl. It is a government agency that provides care to veterans. You see the good and the not so good. The VA can be promoted in a more positive way. Doctors in the VA developed the electronic health records.

Kevin added that we need to keep the VA moving forward.

Question by Dave Kenney: Are you getting a decent influx of resumes for the open positions?

Response: Yes, and we are being very selective. We have a number of nurse practitioners coming in. The physicians are high caliber. We are bringing in the best of the best.

White River Junction VA Update: Dr. Becky Rhoads

Email: Becky.Rhoads@va.gov

She presented slides. She is happy to be here for the second month. Dr. Rusch will be back.

Covid-19 Update: Call 802-296-5151 to schedule an appointment.

We are still giving the vaccine in separate clinics separate from the regular outpatient clinics. In the next month, we will be transitioning to giving the vaccine as part of your regular appointment if you have not had one. We are a Moderna and Johnson & Johnson site. Folks can choose the one they prefer. We are going out to all the CBOC's as well. We have the staff and we are bringing the vaccine out on the day of and giving vaccinations at all of our CBOC's.

VA Quality Enhancement Research Institute:

The VA did some research. This is a preview for those of you that are on the meeting tomorrow formally known as the Management Advisory Council meeting. The VA is on the cutting edge of a lot of stuff. The nickname of the group is QERI and it stands for Quality Enhancement Research Institute. They have already done some research on vaccine hesitancy. They conducted interviews with veteran populations and focus groups about why they do not want to get the vaccine.

Reasons for vaccine hesitancy generally fell into several different categories:
Vaccine deliberation: waiting but watching; would like more data on vaccine safety.
Vaccine dissent: not in favor of vaccines in general.
Vaccine distrust: not necessarily targeted at vaccines but more distrust in government.
Vaccine indifference: individuals not concerned about COVID-19.
Vaccine skepticism: includes fear of illness, unnatural substances, and fear of elite conspiracy.

Dr. Rhoads added that if someone falls into one of these buckets, our goal is not to change anyone's core beliefs, but make sure that they have the information necessary to make the decision for them as an individual. Understanding why someone may be hesitant helps the conversation with their physician or provider.

Covid-19 Vaccination Data:

These are overall numbers, that is, shots in the arm. So that is not 17,000 individual people, but 17,000 shots. It includes the Save Lives first and second dose to all caregivers, dependent spouses, humanitarian, etc. We are one of the initial sites that partners with the Department of Homeland Security to provide vaccinations to those employees. So since February, those numbers really haven't changed for us. Any adult over the age of 18 in the VA, age 16 elsewhere, essentially could get a vaccine today anywhere they want.

Construction Update:

Underground Utilities: Visible, on-site construction work if you come to campus.

Ward Renovation Project to begin construction in June/July 2021.

Dr. Rhoads added that anyone coming on campus can see the signs that says construction here, watch for vehicles. They are working on all the underground utility infrastructure to ensure that our aging hospital will be able to support modern healthcare.

WRJ Homeless Veteran Program - HUD/VASH Program:

The WRJ VA team is recruiting area landlords who have available housing in the Upper Valley. The HUD VASH Program is for Veterans who are homeless, have a subsidized voucher, and a VA Case Manager to help support the Veteran in obtaining and maintaining housing.

Interested landlords should contact rachel.Hayes@va.gov or Lauren.Holmboe@va.gov for the Upper Valley area.

For rentals outside the Upper Valley area: Leigh.Russell3@va.gov.

The Upper Valley is broadly defined as across the Vermont/New Hampshire River Valley.

Events:

Veterans Town Hall regarding Burlington Lakeside CBOC on Thursday, May 13, 2021 from 5:30-6:30 PM on a virtual Microsoft Teams platform. Our Congressional folks, VSO's and any interested veterans are invited.

Details are on our Facebook page or contact vhawrjpao@va.gov for more information 802-295-9369 ext 5880.

Memorial Day Ceremony (Facebook Live) - May 30th at 10:00 AM.

Northeast Kingdom Veterans Summit - June 14, 2021. There will be a full roster of WRJ employees attending and lots of subject matter experts.

Question by Barry Conway: Did you say that this will be the last time you are with us?
Response: Yes, I am sitting in for Dr. Rusch.

Question by Warren Perry: So on the housing for the Upper Valley, could you send me the slides? I will connect with Mandy Reagan who works housing issues in New Hampshire for our Department of Health and Human Services.

Response: I will send you the slides.

DMAVS Update: Warren Perry

NH Office of Veterans Services - Bill Gaudreau: No report.

Department of Military Affairs & Veterans Services - Amy Cook

From the Division of Community Based Military Programs and Amy Cook, there is a virtual job fair event on Thursday, May 6th from 11 am to 1 pm. It will feature New Hampshire veteran friendly businesses. These are the businesses that we recognize as part of our program. There are 77 businesses looking for people to work. You can register for the job fair by googling virtual job fairs. The link will be in the chat.

Second is the New Hampshire Veteran Friendly Business Program. Applications are open for 2021. You can find a brochure on the DMVS website. You can go right to the agency - Department of Military Affairs and Veteran Services. Applications can be submitted anytime but we are not going to start reviewing until the July/August timeframe.

We will also be hosting virtual Question & Answer sessions about the program and the applications in June and July. You will find those dates and the virtual link on the DMAVS website where the application is available.

Note in chat from Kevin Forrest: The Manchester VA will be recruiting at the job fair. We are looking for maintenance disciplines and pipefitter/plumbers if anyone knows of anyone looking for VA employment.

Link to the 2021 NH Veteran Friendly Business application: <https://www.dmavs.nh.gov/veteran-friendly-businesses-0/apply>

Note in Chat from Warren Perry: You can google NHES virtual job fair to get to the registration or the link to register is: <https://business.nh.gov/nhesjobfair/Home/Posting/7962c7ba-1368-40bb-8bda-351269720A3d>

Link to Military & Veteran Family Survey:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/S8QRYTS>

Finally, we are seeking input from military and veteran family members. Amy and her team have created a survey to address some of the needs experienced by military and veteran families about their greatest challenges they have faced, where and how they get information, and resources and social support. Surveys are open until 5/31/2021. Paul Lloyd has sent this out so you can share it with your personal and professional networks. So far, there have been 177 responses. The highest response rate has been from Hillsborough and Merrimack counties with 48, Rockingham and Strafford counties

with 20, and the lowest response rates are from Cheshire and Sullivan counties. We really want to get more responses to this so we have a comprehensive understanding of what military families in the state of New Hampshire are looking for and what their challenges are. So, if you could again, share that in your networks. That would be fantastic.

NH State Veterans Cemetery - Shawn Buck

The Memorial Day Ceremony will be hosted by the Disabled American Veterans on Sunday, May 30th at 6:00 PM. That is a change in time. We will not set up chairs. So if you plan to attend, bring your own chair.

We will end the ceremony with the beginning of the 100 Nights of Remembrance.

Volunteers are welcome to place flags on headstones on Thursday, May 27th at 1:00 PM. We will remove flags on Tuesday, June 1st also at 1:00 PM.

Question by Dave Kenney: Is Shawn also planning on live streaming the ceremony?

Response (Warren Perry): Yes, he will do both. It will be live-streamed on the NHSVC Facebook page.

Question by Mike Lopez: When will the National Guard facilities get back to normal?

Response (Warren Perry): We are working on it. Most members of the National Guard have been engaged for a year. So I think we are going to look for less engagement. We need to get them back to work and doing other things. I think that is something we will balance. Certainly, we want to support the communities and get out there and be visible and do all those things that we did in the past. But they deserve a break too. That is the best answer I can give you.

Comment by Mike Lopez: I was just wondering because there is something on July 4th. Governor Sununu is talking about having events and thanking a lot of first responders.

Response (Warren Perry): I do not think that has been specifically discussed. Every time we ask the Guard to do something on the Fourth of July, we take a day away from them.

NHVV Update: Peggy LeBrecque

The New Hampshire Veterans Home remains Covid free as of today. We are doing weekly surveillance testing based on the Covid spread rate in the Belknap County area. We believe that in mid May, we will be able to go back to monthly surveillance.

We are continuing our admissions. We currently have 98 of our veterans who live with us today; 32 are approved and waiting to be admitted. We have 73 active applications that we are working with.

We are looking for LNA's, LPN's, and RN's. I do believe that the NHVH will be on the virtual job fair that Warren spoke about. We are excited to participate in that.

Other exciting news for the Veterans Home is that our barber has returned. The barber returned on Monday and did a slew of haircuts for our guys. We did have to get a new hairdresser for the ladies. The previous hairdresser was not able to return this week for Mother's Day. We have a new hairdresser starting tomorrow. Hopefully, we will be able to do all the ladies hair whether that is a cut, perm or set so they are all set for Mother's Day and looking and feeling beautiful.

We will have our Memorial Day ceremony virtual much like everybody else.

A huge shout out to Kevin at the Manchester VA. Kristen as well as a couple of other folks reached out to let us know that the Tilton CBOC was doing the vaccinations on May 7th. We had a couple of our veterans who had chosen not to be vaccinated and have changed their minds. So we are excited that 3 of them will be going to the CBOC on May 7th to be vaccinated. We have spread the word to our employees as well. If they have changed their mind that they are able to participate in that as well. So thank you Kevin and the Manchester VA.

OLD BUSINESS:

None.

NEW BUSINESS:

#1. Nominations for Vice Chair

Chairman Paul Lloyd opened up nominations for Vice Chair. Are there any nominations for Vice Chair? Can we make a nomination?

Al Baldasaro nominated Dave Kenney. Considering the number of people on this committee, Dave declined and said he paid his dues. He was one of the original founding members on this committee. He had his turn as Vice Chair for many years.

Al Baldasaro then nominated Andy Patterson. Andy will be relinquishing his command as DAV Commander in June.

Andy nominated Greg d'Arbonne as Vice Chair. Greg said no and apologized. After the last year, it took a toll on him. He said he could not give enough energy to this. He appreciates the nomination.

Are there any other nominations for Vice Chair? Any other nominations? Any other nominations? We will close them until next month for the election.

#2. Nominations for Treasurer

Chairman Paul Lloyd opened up nominations for Treasurer. Kelly can be re-nominated. She is on vacation this month. She would not be able to say yea or nay. A motion was made to put her in there anyway. Nominations are closed until the June meeting when we do the elections.

Any other issues from the floor under new business?

#3. Veterans Count Radio-thon

Peter Burdett mentioned that on May 19th, Veterans Count is doing a Radio-thon.

#4. Stolen Valor

Rep. Al Baldasaro is going after someone for Stolen Valor. Someone went to the Veterans Home saying he is speaking as a veteran. Al has a document from the Marine Corps Headquarters that this individual never served in Bootcamp or Officer's Candidate School. It is going to explode soon. He just wants his fellow veterans to know about this. This has nothing to do with politics. It has to do with the Marine esprit de corps.

#5. Our Community Salutes

The Chairman yielded the floor to Greg d'Arbonne from AUSA to talk about Our Community Salutes. There will be about 100 kids at the Fisher Cats Stadium on May 20th at 4:30 PM. General Mikolaities will be swearing in all the kids into the military. The game starts at 6:30 PM. He wants to raise enough money so the kids and their families can attend for free. Right now the recruiters are telling Greg that they are estimating that about 100 kids are going to be there. So if each family has 4 people - mom, dad, kid and a sibling, we expect about 400 people. Tickets are \$9 a piece. He has received donations from the VFW, Catholic War Veterans, and a couple of American Legion and VFW Posts. If anybody wants to donate, please contact Greg by email. Every little bit helps.

Military Appreciation Night begins at 6:30 PM. Tickets are \$9.00 for veterans. Normally, the tickets run from \$12-\$15. A flyer was sent out by Paul Lloyd. The Point of Contact is Nate Newcomb. He is taking all the orders because we have to follow Major League Baseball rules for the stadium. He needs to have the tickets so all family groups or

people that call for tickets can sit together in one place following the rules. We can only fill the stadium 50%. We will be happy if we get 2500 people there.

The team that is playing that night is the Portland Sea Dogs. This is a double A team for the Boston Red Sox. It has been a highly attended game for that reason. A lot of the up and coming stars for both the Toronto Blue Jays and the Boston Red Sox hit the fields for these games. It is a great evening of baseball. It will not hit your pocketbook like it will at Fenway.

The Fisher Cats are the ones that initiated the call with Greg. They have been marvelous working with him and Dave on this whole thing. So we really appreciate their support.

Greg asked the Governor, the two Senators and two Congressional Representatives to attend. If they cannot attend the game, then do a video.

Roy asked when the donations are needed? Response was anytime. The event is on May 20th. John Reed from Martin's Point said that they may be able to help out a little bit. Talk to Brenda.

It should be a good time. Two years ago before Covid, we were able to have 180 people attend. We had a free dinner for everybody. We were able to get enough donations. It's really marvelous. Greg said he appreciates everybody's support. It is really to show that the community supports the decision these kids have made. Some schools recognize those going into the military, others do not. Johnny going into the Marines is just as good as Suzy going to Harvard. That is what we are trying to emphasize.

Greg said to go to his Facebook page under AUSA NH Chapter. Check us out at www.ausa.org or our local NH Chapter Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/AUSANewHampshire>.

Note in chat from Chris Peirce: Reminder that the Protzmann Award nominations are open. Go to NHCares.org. We are looking for outstanding supporters in NH communities statewide.

Note in chat from Dave Kenney: If you haven't submitted your service bio yet for the VHLC Remembrance station, please go to this link and enter it in. We also would like you to include some interesting stories during your service, as these will be read by students who are there to learn about veterans and their experiences while they served and why they served. Thank you.
<https://www.vhlc.org/remembrance-station/veteran-bio-form>.

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFINGS: Kevin Grady - Legislative Chair

The good news is that all the initial public hearings for all the bills that we support have happened. We tracked 5 bills in the house. Only 2 of them are going forward.

HB 117 - relative to the use of force at NH National Guard facilities. This was one of last year's bills.

HB 451 - waive the fees for the decals for the Gold Star Families.

Both HB 117 and HB 451 cleared both houses and are on their way to the Governor for signature. So those are doing well.

HB 317 - relative to the treatment of veterans' disability payments for purposes of determining child support

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.

The first two, HB 317 and HB 443 were inexpedient to legislate. The third one, HB 580, was placed in a miscellaneous category. It falls into that category where we shall speak of this no more. It never went to the floor for a vote. So all those bills that did not get a vote that we shut down on our last session could come up next year again.

Now the Senate Bills:

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

The Committee that has this one has not scheduled an executive session for it yet. He will keep an eye out for that.

SB-132 - adopting omnibus legislation related to COVID-19.

Senator Birdsell did a good job last month of explaining why SB 132, which was going to have a review of all long term care facilities including the Veterans Home as a result of COVID, why it was laid on the table. It basically did not make it into the budget. So rather than kill it, they are looking to sit on that thing and see what happens. So he will keep an eye on it.

SB 143 - New title: adopting omnibus legislation relative to certain agency requests (Old title: National Guard Enlistment Incentive Program).

This one had 12 items in it. We were at the 12th item with the National Guard enlistment incentive program at the executive session today at one o'clock. There were

a lot of amendments that were offered to this bill - take things out and maybe add some other things. They really did not reach a decision. They did get past section 12 which is our section on this thing. Nobody had any comments or amendments on it. So assuming that the bill gets figured out, it is probably going back over to the Senate because there really were some kind of major rewrites. You are going to have this problem when you put 12 bills together into one bill. You are going to have parts of it gone. So what will happen, they will request a committee conference or the whole thing will die. They may not support the amendments. So we will go to committee conference. Both houses will get together. A lot of times when it is at the end of the session, the end of the year, amendments get put on those bills that were tabled and then sent over. He will keep an eye out for that.

LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS:

Jane Graham (Governor's Office): Oral briefing.

We are working on winding down the large vaccine sites. So this month we will do the last county. We are seeing some slowdown with vaccine hesitation. The National level is at 22%.

New Hampshire is first in the nation for percentages. We are under that a little bit. We are starting to see the slow down.

The Governor's office received the invite from Our Community Salutes. Jane is working on Greg's invitation. She has a hold on that night. So she just does not know if the Governor can make it yet. But we will definitely get a video if he cannot make it.

The Governor will be at the Memorial Day ceremony at the NH State Veterans Cemetery.

Chris Scott (Senator Shaheen): Briefing attached.

Thank you for everything that this group does. And a shout out to Greg for the Our Community Salutes program. He apologized for not being able to make the last meeting.

Question by Dave Kenney: With regards to the new initiative on prosecutions, does that imply that any of those proceedings will be extricated from the military system at all? Or is it going to remain with the military system and just sideline to special prosecutors?

Response: As I understand it, the decision would remain in the military. It would sideline to special prosecutors for determination on whether or not to move forward

with charges. As I understand that bill, I would and I am happy to dig a little further into that to make sure I am not providing incorrect information. It would take the decision away from the immediate commander and put it towards military prosecutors on whether or not to move forward. That has been a sticking point. Some of the original proposals would have actually taken the responsibility out of the military all together and put it in the hands of special prosecutors. They would have been civilian, not military. This is a change from the original proposal which is good. It specifically talks about professional military prosecutors. Chris will follow up with more details.

Justin Troiano (Senator Hassan): Oral briefing.

It is great to be back. He has several updates.

April 9, 2021: The POW/MIA flag was raised back on top of the White House along with the American flag. This followed a month long push by Senator Hassan along with several other Senators and VSO's across the country. So good news on that.

April 14, 2021: Senator Hassan joined Senator Marco Rubio in reintroducing the bill to prioritize veterans employment transition and education benefits at the VA. Currently, the VA is responsible for all VA benefits provided to veterans outside of health care and cemetery services. The majority of staff and resources at VBA are currently dedicated to the administration of Disability Compensation and Pension claims. The bill would address this issue by moving transition education and employment programs under a new separate administration. This would create a 4th pillar of the VA. This new administration will be led by a new Undersecretary and use existing resources to avoid additional bureaucracy.

April 15, 2021: At a Veterans Affairs Committee hearing, Senator Hassan questioned the whistleblower protections and what the VA is doing to address backlogs in processing veterans VA benefits.

April 15, 2021: Senator Hassan reintroduced the Solid Start Program. The program was created by the VA in 2019 and designed to contact every veteran 3 times by phone for the first year after they leave active duty to check in as well as help them with VA programs and benefits. The new bill introduced this follows a roundtable that Senator Hassan held with women veterans to VA resources. Another new provision ensures that the VA provides information not just about VA programs, but also state and local resources as well as connections to local chapters of VSO's.

April 19, 2021: Senator Hassan co-sponsored the Tricare Fairness for National Guard and Reserve Retirees Act. This bipartisan bill will expand health care coverage to National Guard and Reserve retirees who are eligible to receive retirement pay before age 60.

Under current law, Reserve component personnel may retire younger than age 60, but not younger than 50. Based on active duty service, this group of 50 to 59 year old retirees are currently eligible for costly TRICARE retired reserve plans. The bill will allow these retirees that are 50 and older to become eligible for much less costly TRICARE health care that is currently only available to those that are 60 or older.

April 20, 2021: Following the release of government watchdog report exposing alarming instances of sexual harassment by employees and management failures at Department of Veterans Affairs, Senator Hassan joined another senator along with New Hampshire Representative Pappas in introducing bipartisan legislation to drastically improve policies and oversight which would crack down on harassment at the VA and improve VA accountability to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination act of 2021. This would implement numerous policy changes within the VA based on recommendations from the GAO.

The report revealed that the VA currently does not require reporting of all sexual harassment complaints as an improper leadership structure for overseeing their sexual harassment processes. It has incomplete and outdated policies, information and training.

April 22, 2021: Senator Hassan joined Representative Pappas and Representative Meeks of Iowa in introducing bipartisan legislation that would help states implement a green alert system when a veteran goes missing so that they can receive appropriate care. These green alert systems would function similar to the amber or silver alerts that most Americans are already familiar with.

April 22, 2021: The US Senate passed a bipartisan resolution through unanimous consent to honor veterans service organizations for their work supporting veterans during the Covid-19 pandemic. The resolution discusses the immense challenges that veterans faced during the pandemic including the loss of more the 10,000 lives to Covid-19 as well as more than 1 million veterans who have lost their jobs. The Senators applaud the VSO's for adapting to unique challenges posed by the pandemic in order to continue to support veterans and advocate for the veteran community and fostering a sense of connection and community amid the pandemic. I think we all know that not much passes through the US Senate on unanimous consent these days. So I think that speaks for VSO's.

Question by Al Baldasaro: Is there anyway to relook at the health care coverage? Many retire at age 40. He also asked about getting the POW/MIA flag back up on the White House.

Answer: The flag was back up last week. It went back up April 8th.

Question by Bruce Garry: Why does the Capitol building have 3 US flags and no POW/MIA flag?

Response: We will look into it.

Tom Giancola (Rep. Annie Kuster): Briefing attached.

No questions.

Patrick Carroll (Rep. Chris Pappas): Briefing attached.

No questions.

Good of the Order:

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.

May 30th - State Memorial Day - Ceremony at NHSVC at 6:00 PM followed by first night of the 100 Nights of Remembrance.

May 31st - Federal Memorial Day - Motor parade in Manchester beginning at 2:00 PM, Dedication of Vietnam War Memorial in Veterans Park, followed by a reception at the Sweeney Post.

Next meeting date: 01 June 2021 - Virtual

Adjourn Meeting: 1834.

A motion was made by Ray Goulet to adjourn, second by Dave Kenney. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise M DeBlois
Secretary

