



NH State Veterans Advisory Committee MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: 1 September 2020
Location: Virtual ZOOM

MEMBERS:

Paul Lloyd, Chair
Diane Domenicis-Vice Chair
OPEN, Secretary
Joseph DiChiaro, Chaplain

Air Force Association

Kevin Grady (prim)

Air Force Sergeants Association

American Legion

Mike Lopez (prim)
Bill Roy (alt)

AUSA Col. Cross Chapter

Greg d'Arbonne (prim)

Catholic War Veterans

Denise DeBlois (P)

Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association

Raymond Schwendeman

Disabled American Vets

Andrew Patterson (prim)

Korean War Veterans Assoc

Marine Corps League

Military Officers Association (MOAA)

Peter Burdett (prim)
Joseph DiChiaro, Jr. (alt)

Military Order of the Purple Heart

National Guard Association of NH

(v) Peter Duffy (prim)

NH Army Retiree Council

(v) Frank Musmanno alt
Mike Rice (alt)

NHNG Enlisted Association

Mike Rice (alt)

NH Veterans Association

Kelly Dobens

Reserve Officers Association

Dave Kenney (prim)

Rolling Thunder

Bruce Garry (prim)

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

Darwin Beeman (prim)
Chris Pierce (alt)

Vietnam Veterans of America

Ray Goulet (prim)

Legislative Members:

Senator Regina Birdswell

LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS: (non-voting)

Governor's Office –Jane Graham

Senator Hassan –Justin Troiano

Senator Shaheen-Chris Scott

Congressman Chris Pappas-Patrick Carroll

Congresswoman Kuster-Tom Giancola

ADVISORS/AGENCIES:

Amy Cook, DHHS

Kevin Forrest, Acting Director, VAMC

Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General-NHNG

John Reed, Martins Point

GUESTS:

Dave Tille, Regional Administrator HUD

Peter Kelleher, President and CEO, Harbor Care

Henry Och, COO, Harbor Care

Erin Skoloff, SSFV, Harbor Care

Thomas Groulx, VFR Care Coordinator

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

- **Invocation:** Joseph DiChiaro
- **Remarks of the Chair:** Paul welcomed everyone.
- **Introduction of New Members/Guests:**
Dave Tille, Regional Administrator HUD
Peter Kelleher, President and CEO, Harbor Care
Henry Och, COO, Harbor Care
Erin Soloff, SSFV, Harbor Care
Thomas Groulx, VFR Care Coordinator
- **Secretary's Reports:** Secretary's Position is Open
- **Remarks of the Treasurer-**Kelly Dobens reports we have \$897.67.

Speakers: Dave Tille, Peter Kelleher, Henry Och and Erin Soloff updated the members on the efforts to end homelessness in NH.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

VA Update: Kevin Forrest/updated the members on the status of VAMC, Manchester
No update from WRJ

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

- Annual report was sent to everyone, being no corrections it will be submitted to the Legislature.
- Greg d'Arbonne invited folks to join a zoom meeting on Sept 18, guests speakers will be Chad Stanley and Matt Morsey
- Andy Patterson updated members of the DAV's Headquarters opening in Manchester at 212 Coolidge Ave on Oct 1st
- Warren Perry updated on the Cares Funds 56 approved applications that will receive 56% of demonstrated need.
- Amy Cook updated on "together with Veterans" starting up in the Lakes Region, Veteran Friendly Business Program extended to September 30, Logo Contest deadline is Oct 2.

LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS;

Legislative Briefing-Kevin Grady. Attached

Legislative reports that have been received are attached.

Calendar of Events:

1st Wed-Monthly POW/MIA Vigil-19:00 Veterans Park, Manchester, NH

4th Tues- Monthly POW/MIA Vigil-19:00 Langdon Park, Portsmouth, NH
Every Thurs-Weekly POW/MIA Vigil-19:00 Hesky Park, Meredith, NH

Next meeting:
6 Oct 2020 via zoom

The full recording is attached.

On June 8th Senator Hassan cosponsored legislation to help make it easier for veterans to dispose of unwanted medication. *The VA Directly Returning Opioid Prescriptions Act* or DROP Act would create safe, anonymous, and continuously available drop off centers for veterans to easily dispose of unwanted medications, including opioids.

Also on June 8th, Senator Hassan and Senator Shaheen joined a bipartisan group of their colleagues in introducing legislation to give the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) greater flexibility in caring for and meeting the needs of homeless veterans in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among other provisions, the bipartisan *Homeless Veterans Coronavirus Response Act* would loosen certain regulations and enable the VA to use existing resources to offer homeless veterans the additional assistance that they may need, including transportation, communication devices and services, and basic amenities, like clothing, blankets and hygiene items. The law would also allow the VA to work with partner organizations to help it set up shelters on VA properties. Finally, the bill ensures homeless veterans have access to the VA's telehealth services.

On June 15th, Senator Hassan joined Senator Shaheen and a bipartisan group of their colleagues in calling for a permanent expansion of telehealth services that Congress included in bipartisan COVID-19 relief legislation. The bipartisan CARES Act, which Senators Hassan and Shaheen supported back in March, included a provision to expand access to telehealth services for Medicare beneficiaries in New Hampshire and across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Senators also joined a bipartisan group of their colleagues in urging the Federal Communications Commission to increase support to health care providers through the Rural Health Care Program to help them deliver and expand telehealth services for rural communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On June 30th, Senator Hassan joined colleagues in filing a series of NDAA amendments to help protect service members and veterans from predatory higher education practices.

The Senators' amendments come as for-profit colleges have seen an uptick in enrollment due to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it more important than ever to hold predatory institutions accountable. The push also follows President Trump's veto of a bipartisan measure that would have overturned the Department of Education's "borrower defense" rule, a proposal that will effectively deny students who were cheated or defrauded by predatory for-profit colleges of the debt relief that they are entitled to under law.

"Veterans and service members have sacrificed bravely in defense of our freedoms, and it is abhorrent that for-profit colleges use deceptive and fraudulent practices to take advantage of American heroes," said Senator Hassan. "The amendments my colleagues and I have introduced will help hold predatory institutions accountable and ensure that those who have served our country receive the high-quality education that they deserve."

On July 2nd, Senator Hassan cosponsored legislation introduced by Senators Gary Peters (D-MI) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) caregiver program. According to reports, caregivers and veterans have been arbitrarily discharged or downgraded from the program, with benefits subsequently revoked or reduced. The Senators' bipartisan legislation would

take a number of steps to give caregivers and veterans an opportunity to appeal any downgrade or termination of benefits and ensure that all caregivers are recognized as part of the clinical team attending to veterans.

“This bipartisan bill takes much-needed steps so that veterans who have put their lives on the line for our country can receive necessary support from caregivers,” said Senator Hassan. “As the mother of a son with complex medical needs who has received truly invaluable support from caregivers, I know firsthand the essential role that caregivers play in people’s lives. This bipartisan bill will strengthen the VA caregiver program so that veterans can count on receiving the support that they deserve and have earned.”

On July 17th, the US Senate Passed the *National Defense Authorization Act* for 2021. The Bipartisan Defense Bill, included key provisions introduced by Senator Hassan to protect the national security of Granite Staters and all Americans.

Support for Service Members & Military Projects

- Three percent pay raise for all U.S. military personnel
- \$160 million for the first phase of construction for a new Portsmouth Naval Shipyard dry dock
- Senator Hassan’s bipartisan provision to better protect service members abroad by improving the Defense Department’s response to threats from small drones, a concern that U.S. military leaders raised with the Senator during her visit to Afghanistan
- Amendment cosponsored by Senator Hassan to ensure that Vietnam War veterans can more easily access care for additional diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure; the measure is based on a bill that Senator Hassan is an original cosponsor of
- Increased funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) PFAS study at Pease
- A provision based on a bill that Senator Hassan cosponsored to report on and assess the implementation of military personal protective gear that is better adapted for female service members
- The establishment of a commission to study and remove all Confederate names, symbols, displays, monuments, and paraphernalia from Defense Department bases and other assets; this is related to a bill that Senator Hassan previously cosponsored

Cybersecurity & Technology Provisions

- Senator Hassan’s bipartisan provision to establish a cybersecurity state coordinator in New Hampshire and every state
- Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) and Senator Hassan’s bipartisan provision to help shore up cybersecurity vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure systems
- A provision based on a bill Senator Hassan cosponsored to assess and address the rising threat of deepfakes, which are hyper-realistic, digital manipulations of real content that depict events that did not actually occur
- An amendment that Senator Hassan cosponsored to require a report on the Defense Department’s strategy on Artificial Intelligence standards

Provisions to Address Rise of China

- An amendment cosponsored by Senator Hassan based on a bipartisan bill she helped introduce that would encourage the U.S. to partner with allies in the Indo-Pacific region, Europe, and elsewhere to develop a unified approach to address the rise of China
- An amendment cosponsored by Senator Hassan based on a bill she cosponsored that helps spur American-based manufacturing of semiconductors, in order to increase competitiveness and decrease reliance on China, which has invested significantly in semiconductor manufacturing

On July 23rd, Senator Hassan joined with the entire NH Congressional Delegation in reiterating concerns over a change in policy at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that limits veterans' ability to access non-drug related therapies, such as muscle massage services and acupuncture, which can help veterans experiencing chronic pain.

In their letter, the Delegation asks the VA questions about why it implemented such changes, as well as what outreach it did to consult veterans and providers prior to the changes, and what outreach it is conducting to veterans and providers now regarding the policy.

On August 6th, the Senate unanimously passed the *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act* – bipartisan legislation cosponsored by Senator Hassan and Shaheen– to improve veterans' access to mental health care. This landmark legislation is a comprehensive and aggressive approach to connect more veterans with mental health care. This bill will bolster the VA's mental health workforce and increase rural or hard-to-reach veterans' access to VA care, while making sure veterans have access to alternative and local treatment options.

The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act will improve outreach to veterans and their mental healthcare options in five major ways:

- Bolster the VA's mental health workforce to serve more veterans by giving the VA direct hiring authority for more mental health professions, offering scholarships to mental health professionals to work at Vet Centers, and placing at least one Suicide Prevention Coordinator in every VA hospital.
- Improve rural veterans' access to mental healthcare by increasing the number of locations at which veterans can access VA telehealth services and offering grants to non-VA organizations that provide mental health services or alternative treatment to veterans.
- Study and invest in innovative treatment options by expanding veterans' access to alternative programs and investing in VA research on veterans' suicide risk and identifying and treating mental illness.
- Hold the VA accountable for its mental healthcare and suicide prevention efforts by examining how the VA manages its suicide prevention resources and how the VA provides seamless care and information sharing for veterans seeking mental healthcare from both the VA and community providers.

- Establish a grant program that requires the VA to better collaborate with community organizations across the country already serving veterans. This collaboration will result in earlier identification of veterans who are at risk of suicide and will provide the ability to intervene with preventive services.

On August 17th, Senator Hassan joined Senator Shaheen in demanding immediate action following reports of significant delays in veterans' prescription medications through the U.S. Postal Service (USPS).

In a letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy and VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, Shaheen, Hassan and a group of Senators urged USPS to correct operational changes that are needlessly delaying veterans' access to life-saving prescriptions.

The VA fills about 80 percent of its prescriptions through their Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP), which primarily uses the U.S. Postal Service to deliver to veterans' homes. The VA CMOP fills almost 120 million prescriptions a year, with deliveries arriving daily to about 330,000 veterans across the country. According to the VA website, "prescriptions usually arrive within 3 to 5 days." Reports from veterans and VA staff have said that recently these medications are sometimes taking weeks to be delivered and causing veterans to miss doses of vital medications.

"Veterans and the VA should be able to count on USPS for the timely delivery of essential prescription drugs," the Senators wrote. "No veteran should have to wonder when their antidepressant or blood pressure medication may arrive – and the effects can be devastating if doses are missed."

In State Activity:

On July 10th, Senator Hassan and Dr. Laura Landerman-Garber of Hollis visited the New Hampshire State Veterans Home to drop off cards to veterans that were written by Granite Staters as part of the Cards 2 Connect program. Senator Hassan and Landerman-Garber announced the Cards 2 Connect program to help spread some joy to New Hampshire veterans who have been unable to see their loved ones due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator Hassan and Landerman-Garber are encouraging Granite Staters to continue writing cards to New Hampshire veterans, which will be dropped off at VA medical centers in Manchester and White River Junction.

"I want to thank all of the Granite Staters who took the time to write a card letting veterans know that we're thinking of them during this challenging time, and I also want to give a huge thank you to Laura Landerman-Garber, who has done an incredible job with this project," said Senator Hassan. "It was wonderful to have the opportunity to drop off these cards and visit with some of the veterans to thank them for their brave service to our country."

On August 24th, Senator Hassan joined Senator Shaheen, Congressman Pappas and Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment Charles Williams in a visit to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. The visit comes as the Shipyard resumes full scale operations amid the COVID-19 pandemic and continues construction projects that will support the Shipyard's role in support of American national security. During the visit, Shaheen, Hassan, Pappas and Williams received a briefing from PSNY leadership on the state of these projects, as well as the facility's efforts to protect workers from the spread of COVID-19.

