

## **NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**Meeting Date:** 6 October 2020

**Location:** Virtual ZOOM

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### **OFFICERS:**

Paul Lloyd - Chair  
Diane Domenicis - Vice Chair  
Denise DeBlois - Secretary  
Joseph DiChiaro, Jr. - Chaplain  
Kelly Dobens - Treasurer  
Chair Emeritus - Dave Kenney

### **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 (prim)

### **Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association**

Raymond Schwenden (prim)

### **Disabled American Veterans**

Andrew Patterson (prim)

### **Korean War Veterans**

### **Marine Corps League**

### **Military Officers Association (MOAA)**

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

### **Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)**

**National Guard Association of NH**

Peter Duffy (prim)  
Roy Hunder (alt)

**NH Army Retiree Council**

Frank Musmano (alt)

**NH National Guard Enlisted Association**

Mike Rice (alt)

**NH Veterans Association**

Kelly Dobens (prim)

**Reserve Officers Association of NH**

Dave Kenney (prim)

**Rolling Thunder**

Bruce Garry (prim)

**Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)**

Darwin Beeman (prim)  
Chris Pierce (alt)

**Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA-41)**

Ray Goulet (prim)

**Legislative Members:**

Patricia Klee  
Regina Birdsell  
Al Baldasaro

**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS: (non-voting):**

**Governor's Office** - Jane Graham - unable to attend

**Senator Hassan** - Justin Troiano

**Senator Shaheen** - Chris Scott

**Congressman Chris Pappas** - Patrick Carroll

**Congresswoman Kuster** - Tom Giancola

**ADVISORS/AGENCIES:**

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

**GUESTS:**

Thomas Groulx, VFR Care Coordinator

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

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman

**Invocation:** Joseph DiChiaro, Jr.

**Moment of Silence:** For all service members who have passed since our last meeting.

**Welcome - Remarks of the Chair:** Paul welcomed everyone.

Dave Kenney, Chair Emeritus, mentioned that Arlington National Cemetery is running out of space and input is needed by November 15th. The Army wants to hear suggestions from individuals on who can be buried there. The rules need to change. Input is needed by November 15th. There was some discussion.

The veterans groups and the VA need to advocate for home state veterans cemeteries. NH has a great veterans cemetery. Boscawen (NHSVC) has 104 acres and only one third is used so far. Other states look at the NHSVC as a model. It is one of the most notable cemeteries in the country to visit. The National Cemetery in Bourne does not look that good. The VA is in need of funding to support the National cemeteries.

The Cemetery Board at the NHSVC has positions available for Marketing, Media and Social Media.

**Introduction of New Members/Guests:** No new attendees

Guest speakers: Congressman Pappas

Dalton McLaughlin/Tom Groulx - VFR Healthcare

Lynne Blackenbecker - Count Every Hero

Telephone attendees: 603-498-9051  
603-489-3048  
603-660-1403  
910-308-1319

**Secretary's Report:** Meeting does have a quorum. Motion to accept September minutes made by Ray Goulet, 2nd by Andy Patterson. Unanimous. Motion carries.

**Remarks of the Treasurer:** Kelly reported a balance of \$802.67. There was an expense of \$95 for the Spirit Award.

**GUEST SPEAKERS:**

**Congressman Chris Pappas:**

House Veterans Affairs Committee update: The priority is veterans suicide. About 20 veterans per day lose their life to suicide. A bill has passed the Senate and House and is going to the President's desk to sign into law to bring in community partners.

The office is hearing from veterans regarding the issue of overpayments and debt collection. More veterans are in collections due to overpayment of benefits since the pandemic for various reasons. The VA has overpayments in the amount of one billion every year. Veterans need to be held harmless. They have done nothing wrong.

The office is also working on the backlog of Veterans Choice bills and making sure bills are paid on time. He will update.

COVID Oversight Investigation Committee: There is also the issue of getting medical supplies and protective equipment at the Manchester VA. Dean Kamen and the State of New Hampshire has been coming through for VA's and veterans across the country. There have been 20 plane loads of PPE dedicated to VA only.

Patrick Carroll, representative for Pappas, is here.

Greg d'Arbonne added that active duty has the same suicide rate as veterans. An article in The Military Times indicated that the Guard and Reserve are isolated after deployment. The suicide rate is higher. Regarding the VA and PPE, each VA territory is isolated from the others. There is a supply chain issue. Some discussion followed.

Al Baldasaro asked the Congressman if he was aware that some PPE is sent out to auction from the VA. The VA is saying that they do not have enough PPE. The Congressman mentioned that the VA should work with the DOD regarding where to send supplies. He will investigate.

Peter added that some connections need to be made to home states for active duty retirees. States do not know who is returning. Discharge information is not passed on due to privacy. The DOD funds TAP for active duty members. The Guard and Reserve should be used as a transition point to local agencies.

Congressman Pappas mentioned that improvements need to be made in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The program is tailored to where the veteran is going when discharged. TAP looks at available resources. Veterans should be advised to sign in with VA upon discharge.

Raymond Schwendeman added that veterans need help. Congressman Pappas said that conditions should be added so veterans can get help from the VA.

Al Baldasaro said that the home of record should be sent to the state upon discharge. This information goes on the DD Form 214.

Patricia Klee mentioned House Bill 1582 - the Veterans Omnibus Bill. It speaks to healthcare. NH is working on a benefit program now.

Congressman Pappas added that we should be proud of what NH is doing. The state is working on licensure for military experience.

Dave Kenney asked a question regarding the bill relating to veteran suicide and community partners. Is there sustainability built into the Bill? Congressman Pappas answered that each organization gives \$750,000 annually.

Andy Patterson mentioned that VSO's are on bases. The American Legion and the Disabled American Veterans have Transition Service Officers (TSO's) on many bases. A Veterans Resource Center is opening in Manchester. NH has a lot of veterans per capita.

### **Dalton McLaughlin/Tom Groulx - Veteran and First Responder (VFR) Healthcare:**

Tom Groulx is the Healthcare Coordinator for the VFR group. He retired from the Army. He will not be working with Bill Gaudreau. Warren Perry added that Tom will be working with Amy Cook from the Bureau of Community Based Military Programs.

A video was shown. Slides will be included in the minutes.

VFR is an outpatient mental health treatment program. VFR has a strategic partnership with VA. Response is within 24 hours. VFR networks with 16 health insurance companies and VA. It acts as a liaison with veteran groups. Veterans can still get access to treatment even if they do not go to the VA.

There is a need for more community involvement in suicide prevention. Clinicians are veterans and first responders.

Al Baldasaro asked: Does the veteran get a bill if they do not have insurance? The answer is no. VFR is working with State Medicaid, a sliding scale and scholarships.

VFR Community partners include VFR Pride, Camp Resilience, NG Star Behavior Health, Justice Involved Veterans, Northeast Passage, and Military and Veterans Suicide Prevention Council.

VFR works with local governments. The program does not do homeless care. It works with VSO's and New Horizons.

Dalton added that the Board of Advisors works to develop new programs. Facilities in Manchester are using Telehealth now. This facility is like a VSO not a clinic.

Contact information: [www.vfrhealthcare.com](http://www.vfrhealthcare.com)

Dalton: 603-661-1461  
Tom: 603-341-8816

### **Lynne Blackenbecker - Count Every Hero:**

Lynne had a comment after listening to Congressman Pappas' report. She mentioned Title 10 that was passed and it requires separation physicals for service members. This is a law.

Count Every Hero: She discussed the Absentee Ballot for members of the military. Approximately 975,000 members of the military are eligible to vote by absentee ballot when deployed or away from their home state. Military families and adult children are also eligible for a ballot. Voting gives stake in our community leadership. We get to choose our government leadership. Honor does count. About 26 percent of NH vote does not count. When Lynne was serving on the USS Comfort in New York, she received her care package late. Absentee ballots mailed to the military does not always arrive on time to count. Veterans are at a disadvantage. Every military absentee ballot should be counted before a winner is declared. It is important to work towards a solution. Our vote should count to. Our vote matters.

Lynne encouraged everyone to check out: [counteveryhero.com](http://counteveryhero.com)

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **VA Updates:**

#### **Kevin Forrest, Director, Manchester VAMC:**

He updated the members on the status of VAMC, Manchester.

There are about 530 face to face appointments every day. This is gradually increasing.

The operating room is up and running. The OR is performing 2 surgical procedures per day.

There is still a lot of Telehealth and Video Connect visits. The VA is distributing iPads to veterans without a computer to use for virtual appointments.

There are new providers in house - Nursing staff in Primary Care, Gastroenterology and Endocrinology. The Gastroenterologist will be working on the backlog of colonoscopies. The Endocrinologist just started this week and is fresh out of fellowship.

One hiccup is dental. There are strict guidelines on air exchanges per hour. The clinic does not have correct air exchange. It is an open bay. They are waiting on a construction project. All care for dental is sent into the community. The Manchester VA is working with VA Central Office on creating a safe dental environment.

COVID screening continues at the VA. Staff screens veterans at their vehicles and questions veterans inside. Masks, not face shields, are required.

Flu shots are available in the drive through clinics. They are working on the logistics for the CBOC's. The VA is giving about 800 shots per day.

The Caregiver Support Program is effective 1 October. It was previously available to Post 9/11 veterans only. There are 91 veterans enrolled. Social workers are reaching out to them. Reach out if you feel eligible.

Al Baldasaro complimented Dr. Anderson in dental and Stella in the Director's Office. They are outstanding.

Al Baldasaro asked why veterans using urgent cares cannot fill prescriptions at local pharmacies. How can we fix this? CBOC's provide an insurance number so veterans can take their prescription to a CVS. The veteran is authorized a 15 day supply and must follow up with VA after that. The director will look into how this can be fixed when a veteran uses a community urgent care.

There was a question on why a supplemental flu shot. The high dose flu shot is available at the VA if eligible.

Greg D'Arbonne added that it is easy to do the drive by flu shot. Peter Burdette asked if the VA is doing the shingles series.

Bruce Garry asked a question on why VA is not providing dental care. The Director said that the clinic does not have the correct environment to safely provide care. We need to rely on the community. Get the care that you need.

**Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, White River Junction VAMC:**

This is the most important year to get a flu shot. More veterans are getting the flu shot this year than ever before. The VAMC has the drive through flu shots. The high dose flu shot is for those age 65 and up

A COVID shot may be coming in the spring. He wants everyone to be ready to get the shot.

There is construction and renovation projects going on. They are taking care of the infrastructure during COVID. They are moving clinics and offices around. They are spending a lot of time trying to provide maximal access for appointments. There is a balancing act due to safety. Pipes are about 100 years old. They are replacing the underground pipes with modern pipes. The OR (Operating Room) Chiller project will take place between Thanksgiving and Christmas to renovate the air system. WRJ VAMC will be a state of the art in patient hospital when the renovations are complete.

Al Baldasaro asked: How many New Hampshire veterans go to the White River Junction VA? The response was about one third of NH veterans use the WRJ VA. There are around 27,000 veterans enrolled in Manchester VA and about 10,000 NH veterans enrolled in the WRJ VA (4 counties in western NH).

**OLD BUSINESS:** None

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**Election of SVAC Secretary:** Chairman Paul Lloyd said that Denise DeBlois stepped up. Paul asked if there are any other nominations. A motion was made by Bruce Garry to elect Denise DeBlois as SVAC Secretary, 2nd by Al Baldasaro, Unanimous, motion carries.

**Spirit Award:** Diane Domenicus reported that an individual was nominated at a meeting held on September 9th. This is the 3rd war this year. The award will be presented at the POW/MIA Vigil on Thursday, November 5th at 6:30 pm in Meredith, NH. The name of the recipient was announced at this meeting. It will be a surprise to the recipient.

The Chairman asked if there was any other new business. There was none.

**Legislative Briefings:**

Kevin Grady, Legislative Chair - report attached.

The LSR's started moving. There are 161 bills that have veteran impact. One bill is #53 on use of force at National Guard facilities in NH. This is to align local rules with national rules. Initially, it was attached to an omnibus bill and was vetoed.

Legislative reports that have been received are attached.

**NH State Veterans Cemetery:**

Shawn Buck mentioned the application deadline for the Veteran Business Recognition Program. About 20 businesses will be recognized.

He enjoyed the comments about the Veterans Cemetery.

The DAV is sponsoring the virtual event on Veterans Day.

**Division of Veteran Services:**

Shawn Buck reported for DMAVS. Amy and Bill are attending events.

There are vouchers for veterans programs. Contact Bill or Jamie for any outreach events.

Call Cynthia Fisher for Veteran Services appointments at 603-624-9230 extension 301.  
Email: [cynthia.fisher2@va.gov](mailto:cynthia.fisher2@va.gov)

Bill Gaudreau: call 603-851-1755 or email: [william.gaudreau@va.gov](mailto:william.gaudreau@va.gov)

Jamie Cummings: call 603-486-8148 or email: [jamie.cummings@va.gov](mailto:jamie.cummings@va.gov)

**NH Veterans Home:**

Peggy LeBrecque reported that all is well. There are no residents with COVID. Outside visits are happening. They are in the next phase for inside visits. The rooms are cleaned before and after.

There will be a virtual ceremony on Veterans Day. This will be shared in small groups.

The residents are in good spirits. They are doing visits by FaceTime, Skype, iPad and by the window. Some residents are hard of hearing and are visiting family by window. The home is working around resident needs for family visits.

Peggy advised everyone to get their flu shots.

Al Baldasaro asked: How many veterans are in beds and how many are waiting to get in? Peggy responded that the home has 140 residents. Admissions stopped in March. They started admitting in June. There are 83 active applications.

**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS:**

**Jane Graham (Governor's Office)** - unable to attend.

**Chris Scott (Senator Shaheen)** - oral and written report.

His 8 page briefing is attached.

Compliments to Peggy at the NHVH due to no COVID cases.

Al Baldasaro thanked Chris for his work. Al has been referring many veterans to the Senator's office.

Al Baldasaro recommended that veterans check their credit report since Community Care bills are not received by the veteran.

**Justin Troiano (Senator Hassan)** - oral and written report.

He thanked Peggy from the NHVH for keeping our veterans safe.

Al Baldasaro asked: Is Senator Hassan and Senator Shaheen working with the Republicans to pass a stimulus package? Justin cannot comment.

**Tom Giancola (Rep. Annie Kuster)** - oral and written report.

He discussed the Congresswoman's VA Telehealth Expansion Act; HR 2223 Helping Homeless Veterans Act; HR 4681 National World War II Memorial Commemorative Coin Act; HR 5610 bipartisan NDAA amendment support for Vietnam veterans; cosigning of a letter to the NDAA to clean up PFOA and PFOS contamination; and a letter to authorize service dogs for veterans program.

**Patrick Carroll (Rep. Chris Pappas)** - oral and written report.

He mentioned various bills that passed the House in September. These are HR 5245, HR 6590, HR 6591, HR 1152, HR 7433, HR 7879 and HR 8483.

A letter was sent to Secretary Wilke on disciplinary actions under the Whistleblower Protection.

The Congressman had a video meeting with the VFW and other committee meetings.

Al Baldasaro asked: How many bills will see the light of day? The response was the first 3 passed the House. We shall see on the others.

**Calendar of Events:**

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

Sweeney Post will be open on Veterans Day after the ceremonies and on Thanksgiving and Christmas from 1100-1300.

**Next meeting date:** 10 November 2020 via Zoom

This is tentative since due to the Marine Corps Luncheon and Ball may interfere.

**Adjourn Meeting:** Motion to adjourn meeting at 1900, 2nd, Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise M DeBlois  
Secretary

ALL CODEL briefings received are attached in addendum.  
The full recording is attached.  
Slides from the VFR video are attached.