

National Executive Committee Meeting
October 8-9, 2011

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission

The meeting was opened at 9:00 am October 8, 2011 by Chairman Williamson.

Roll Call:

Chairman: Bruno Williamson (IL)
Vice-Chairman: Thomas E. Kurk (NY)
Members: Milton Chatham (TX)
Douglas Murphy (GA)
Steven Tansel (IN)
Thomas Glander (AL)
James Murphy (PA)
James Hunter (IL)

Guests:

Robert J. Avery (NY), Steve Pintarich (CT), Jim Gelwicks (CO), Joe McPeters (TX), Steven Blank (AZ), Bob Jones (UT), Gary Crockett (TN), David Raymond (ME), Kent Hehl (NJ), Gary Swanlund (WY), Stephen Catlett (OH), David Swafford (UT), Bill Patterson (SC), Ernest Hoitt (LA), Jeff Frain (AZ), PNC Tommie Cisna (IL), PNC David Stephens (IN)

Resolutions:

NEC 1- F11 "Support of American Legion Resolution No. 19 (May 6-7, 2009): the Ride to Recovery Program" was read by Robert Avery, following which, Thomas Kurk made a motion to recommend it's approval to the NEC, which was seconded by Douglas Murphy and carried

NEC 2 – F11 "Support of American Legion Resolution No. 36 (May 4-5, 2011): Improvements Needed for the Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits for Veterans Who Have Served in a Combat Theater" was read by Robert Avery, following which, James Hunter made a motion to recommend it's approval to the NEC which was seconded by Thomas Kurk and carried.

NEC 3 – F 11 "Support of American Legion Resolution No. 37 (2011 National Convention): Protection of Religious Rights and Ceremonies at National Cemetery National and State Cemeteries" was read by Robert Avery, following which, Milton Chatham made a motion to recommend it's approval to the NEC which was seconded by Thomas Kurk and carried.

NEC 4 – F 11 "Support of American Legion Resolution No. 109 (2011 National Convention): Veterans Treatment Courts" was read by Robert Avery, following which, James Hunter made a motion to recommend its approval to the NEC which was seconded by Thomas Glander and carried.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

Thomas Kurk spoke on the Veterans Walk-a-Thom held annually by the Detachment of New York that raised over \$30,000 last year. Tom explained the program in New York and encouraged other Detachments interested in pursuing this program to contact him. Tom will forward all information to assist in this endeavor. It should be noted that funds raised should remain within the individual states.

The “Help Hospitalized Veterans” program was presented by Chairman Williamson. This project started in 1971 to provide for rehabilitative programs for hospitalized veterans including arts and crafts, leatherworking and model making. This is a nationwide program in 280 facilities and 5 overseas locations.

Douglas Murphy explained the “My HealtheVet” program which is administered by DVA. It is an award winning e-health website offering veterans, active duty, dependents and caregivers anytime internet access to VA healthcare information and services. With HealtheVet, one can access nine healthy living centers, disease and condition centers, mental health information, health and medical information, VA benefits and services, local VA events and activities, personal health journals, vitals tracking and graphing, military health history and activity and food journals.

James Murphy provided an overview of the “Heroes to Hometown” program which was created in 2005 by the DOD to assist communities in developing programs to support veterans and their families when the veteran is returning home. Along with The American Legion, the National Guard is a national partner in this endeavor.

Milton Chatham presented background and statistics regarding our Nation’s homeless veterans. Homeless veterans tend to be older with 46% being 45 years old or above compared to only 20% non-veterans. The effects of combat exposure do not disappear as the years go by. 10% of Vietnam veterans still suffer severe PTSD symptoms and their combat exposure continues to place them at risk for negative social and psychological consequences. Females make up 15% of our military forces and that percentage has doubled over the last 30 years. Since 2010, the number of female veterans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico has grown to over 1.8 million. As the female veteran population grows, so will the number that will be at risk of becoming homeless. Dangers inherent to homelessness are easily known and include lack of adequate shelter from the elements and food. There is also an increasing threat to the safety of the homeless. The number of violent crimes against the homeless that have been reported has risen drastically in the past few years. Our membership needs to assist these veterans through donations and assistance at shelters, and by contacting the Homeless Coordinator at their local VAMC.

PNC Dave Stephens noted there is a local shelter in downtown Indianapolis. He would be glad to arrange a tour of this facility if the Commission is interested.

The “Missing in America” project was outlined by Thomas Glander. Cremated remains of veterans are sitting on the shelves of funeral parlors and morgues across America. This project focuses on the release of these remains for a proper burial. There are only a few states that have passed legislation in support of the program. Members of the Sons of The American Legion living in the other states can support the project by requesting endorsements from their state legislators. The program cannot operate without accompanying legislation to require the release of these remains

Leading Candidate for National Commander Christopher Huntzinger addressed the meeting. It is important that the Detachments share information amongst themselves regarding the various VA & R programs. The daily American Legion News emails provide a wealth of information on VA & R programs.

Steven Tansel discussed the “Honor and Remember” program which creates, establishes and promotes a nationally recognized flag that would fly continuously as a visible reminder to all Americans of the lives lost in defense of our national freedoms. The flag recognizes all military lives lost not only in action, but also in service from our Nation’s inception.

National Commander James Roberts spoke briefly, thanking the Commission for all of their efforts and stressing the importance of communication. Commitment is also vital for the success of our VA & R programs.

James Hunter presented the “Wounded Warriors Project” that originally began as a program to provide comfort items to our wounded OIF/OEF veterans. It has now become a complete rehabilitative program.

Chairman Williamson discussed the “Ride to Recovery” program that is partnered with the DOD and the DVA. R2R provides mental and physical rehabilitation programs for our country’s wounded veterans, featuring cycling as the major activity. The American Legion and The American Legion Auxiliary are official sponsors. PNC David Stephens urged support for this very successful program.

Second Leading Candidate for National Commander Joe Gladden addressed the meeting. The VA & R program is our most important one, and getting the information down to the Squadrons is critical. Joe thanked everyone for their efforts.

National Veterans Assistance Day will take place on May 19, 2012 and is in its fifth year. This is a day to promote our work with veterans. This year’s proposed poster was reviewed. A motion made by Thomas Kurk to approve the proposed Assistance Day poster was seconded by Milton Chatham and was carried.

The Chairman indicated the FY 2012 budget line items for VA & R will be unchanged from the current year.

Chairman Williamson announced the Washington Conference will take place on February 26-29, 2012. The VAVS National Advisory Committee meeting will be held March 13-15, 2011 in Charleston, SC.

Various handouts were made available to those in attendance, and Chairman Williamson will email any of the program information from this meeting to anyone who asks.

Steve Pintarich conducts a program that revamps used laptops that are then given to active duty servicemen and women overseas. He is also involved with a project that forwards used golf equipment to those stationed abroad.

There being no further business to come before the Commission, a motion to adjourn was made by James Hunter and seconded by Milton Chatham. The motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 10:23 AM.

RJA