

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Saturday April 10, 2010

The Department of Illinois Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission met at Legion headquarters in Bloomington, Illinois on April 10, 2010. The meeting was called to order at 10:05. The following members were present:

Rodger Bennett (4th. Div.) Chairman
Tom Nebgen (3rd. Div.) Vice-Chairman
Charles E. Lee (5th. Div.)
Raymond P. Toczek (1st. Div.) Secretary
Arthur Taylor (2nd. Div.)

Guests: Wayne Wagner (4th. Div.), Steve Welty (24th. Dist.), Joseph Piento (7th. Dist.) and Marc McCabe (new service officer at the VA&R Chicago office).

The Dept. Commander, William Flanagan stopped by for a few moments to give us words of encouragement and thanked us for our commitment to veterans issues. He was joined by Dept. Sr.-Vice Commander Richard Groharing

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as published. Discussion followed on the role of the Veterans Admin. Voluntary Services Legion Rep. at each hospital, who they are, who appoints them and who oversees their activities. Also, there is a need to try and attract more Legion volunteers at these hospitals as well as the VA Opt. Clinics and state homes. Each VA&R rep. will report back to their Divisions about this need and Mr. Toczek will publish a "Did You Know" article about this program. It was determined that the by-laws reflect the Director of VA&R for the state (Wayne Macejak) oversees this Legion function. MSC that the Director compile a list of VAVS representatives at the various VA facilities and ensure that either himself or a designated individual be present at all award ceremonies to pass out certificates for hours served.

Third party billing of private insurance carriers for service-connected treatment is still a concern and our National office is aware of the problem. The VA is trying to fix it. In the meantime we need to identify cases where this erroneous billing has taken place. A small article will be placed in the Dept. newsletter and the POC will be Arthur Taylor.

House Resolution HR 3961 was discussed. Its aim is to prevent the 21% reduction of payments to physicians under TRICARE and other medical programs. If this reduction goes into effect it may result in good doctors leaving the system. Congressman Costello

is the sponsor of this bill. Marc McCabe will be attending a meeting on this exact topic in the near future and will report back to us on his findings.

A new 200 bed State Veterans Home will be built in Chicago. On the northwest side of Chicago it is due for completion summer 2011. Speaking of State Homes the Governor has signed a law which will increase the cost of care to veterans at these homes from \$929 a month to \$1,329. This will take effect July 1, 2010.

The three new presumptive conditions for Agent Orange exposure (Parkinson's disease, Coronary Artery Disease and B-Cell Leukemia's) are expected to generate 300,000 new claims with the VA. Added to its current workload this will mean that over 1,000,000 claims will be pending nationwide. The Chicago VA office is being proactive in this area and there are already 400 claims filed and initial development has started. The final regulation will come out later this month.

There are also eight new presumptive conditions for veterans of the Southwest Asia and Afghanistan conflicts. These include West Nile Virus, Malaria and Leishmaniasis. More info will follow as that regulation is finalized.

The current 111th. Congress expires December 31, 2010. All resolutions dealing with legislation must be resubmitted to this year's State convention for them to be on our National Legislative Agenda for the 112th. Congress. This Commission went over its prior resolutions which have been passed several times on the National level. MSC to resubmit the following to our Convention from this committee for consideration:

1. Increase rate for charitable mileage for Federal Income Tax purposes.
2. Increase home loan entitlement when two married veterans purchase a home.
3. Exempt jury duty and election judge stipends from countable income under VA pension programs.
4. Reduce from ten the five years the time a veteran must be at 100% for the surviving spouse to receive DIC.
5. Change the Sept. 30, 1999 date for DIC on certain POW cases.
6. Increase RH insurance to \$50,000.
7. Exempt Purple Heart recipients from the \$8 drug co-payment.
8. Include females in any future draft.
9. Pass on home loan entitlement to the surviving spouse.

10. Adjust the incidental expense rate for certain veterans in nursing homes from \$30 to \$90.
11. Increase the time limit to file with the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to one year.
12. Increase the allowance for Special Monthly Compensation.

The full text of these resolutions will appear in the Convention Resolution Booklet.

MSC to approve the budget for next year without any changes. The Chairman will report back to us if the finance committee deems changes were warranted.

The next meeting of this Commission will be Wednesday July 14, 2010. We will meet at 4:30 and it will be at Bennigan's restaurant in the Hilton Hotel in Springfield, Ill. Having no further business the meeting was adjourned at 11:20.

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond P. Toczek
Secretary, VA&R Commission