

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Saturday April 14, 2018

The Department of Illinois Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission met at Legion headquarters in Bloomington, Illinois on April 14, 2018. The meeting was called to order at 10:00. The following members were present:

Rodger Bennett (4th. Div.) Chairman
Tom Nebgen (3rd. Div.) Vice-Chairman
Elizabeth Elliott (5th. Div.) Absent
Raymond P. Toczek (1st. Div.)
Ashley “Dave” Davis (2nd. Div.)

Guests: Mike Monroe and Wayne Macejak

First item on the agenda were the highlights of the recent Washington D.C. conference:

The Legion will be pushing to extend the “Caregivers Act” to cover severely disabled vets who served prior to 9/11/01. This law gives a stipend to the spouse or other family member who cares for the vet in his or her home.

The Veterans Administration’s National Call Center (1-800-827-1000) added staff. Wait times have been reduced from 45 minutes to under 2 minutes. It also is now open from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm Monday-Friday.

VA has 1000 CBOC’s, 300 Vet Centers and 130 Medical School affiliates. All medical facilities now have same day service, either by face to face, call or e-mail response.

There were 9 million episodes of TeleHealth and they now cross state lines e.g. Indiana vet deals with Illinois VA doctor via this program. This is a fantastic idea where specialty doctors in different areas can consult with patients via TV e.g. skin problems.

The veteran’s crisis center (previously named the suicide line) has also added staff and call wait times average 8 seconds. Twenty vets commit suicide daily and of those 14 have never used a Veterans Administration hospital. Put the Crisis Line in your portable phone: 800-273-8255. You never know when you may run into a situation and need to use it.

Hepatitis C is a silent killer and sometimes takes 20+ years for symptoms to develop. A new oral medicine taken over an eight week period has a 95% cure rate. Talk about a miracle drug! Any vet not already screened should request a blood test at their Veterans Administration hospital. The target group is those born between 1945 and 1965.

The claims backlog is getting better but still too long a process. On the average the Veterans Administration conducts a C&P exam every 3 seconds nationwide.

The new “Forever” GI Bill for school has no delimiting date. Those of us from the Vietnam Era remember that we had only ten years to use it or lose it.

The number one service-connected condition that is filed for and granted is Tinnitus.

Almost 133,000 vets and family members were buried in Nat'l Cemeteries in 2017. An App is coming to read the name on a government headstone and listen to their story if of record. Over three quarter of a million Presidential Memorial Certificates were processed.

A new appeals program will start in February of 2019 to help make a dent in that backlog. Currently there are over 500,000 appeals nationwide. Two hundred new attorneys and 8 judges have been hired.

Through the VA health care system there are over 7 Community Care programs. The VA hopes to reduce this into one program within 3-5 years.

The Cemetery service is still looking for land in the Chicago area to open up a columbarium, expensive. It was noted that the Cemetery service also oversees cemeteries overseas.

Finally the government is partnering with certain colleges to help I.D. remains of those who may be MIA's.

Wayne Macejak, State Dep. Service Officer discussed a new office at VHA Hines near Chicago. The mini-office is open on Wednesdays and has complete computer access to the computer systems used at the main VA&R office in Chicago. It is being well received by both the Social Workers and veterans there. The Chicago office has rehired Carolina Contreras full-time. She is fluent in Spanish and can also help female veterans with their special claims e.g. Military Sexual Trauma. To make an appointment to see her or just to talk call 312-980-4266. He went on to say that Bill Slider, who is our hospital rep. at Marion continues to have a very heavy caseload as the word gets out to the patients that the Legion has a presence there. Feelers are going out to interested individuals to do some sort of Service Officer work at Danville.

Since we have a new Congress many of our resolutions must be reiterated (resubmitted). Members of this committee were asked to get the word out to the Divisions, Districts and Posts to start writing up new ones, getting them approved and sent in. Remember, although it is nice to have resolutions approved by the Post, then the District and finally the Division it should be noted that Posts, after approved at their meeting, can send the resolution directly to Department for consideration at the state convention.

The budget for next year was discussed and approved as follows:

Three meetings @ \$300	\$900
Three Per Diems (\$35) per meeting	
@ \$105 x 3 meetings	\$315
Postage	\$40
VA&R Washington D.C. conference	<u>\$3,000</u>
Total	\$4,255

Note: On the Washington D.C. conference, capped as follows:

1 or 2 reps \$1,500 each

3 reps \$1,000 each

4 res \$ 750 each

5 reps \$ 600 each

Having no further business the meeting was adjourned at 10:55. The next meeting of this Commission will be Wednesday, July 11th @ 4:00 in Springfield, location TBA.

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond P. Toczek
Secretary, VA&R Commission