

## Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Saturday April 13, 2019

The Department of Illinois Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission met at Legion headquarters in Bloomington, Illinois on April 13, 2019. The meeting was called to order at 10:00. The following members were present:

Rodger Bennett (4<sup>th</sup> Div.) Chairman  
Tom Nebgen (3<sup>rd</sup> Div.) Vice Chairman  
Raymond Toczek (1<sup>st</sup> Div.)  
Ashley "Dave" Davis (2<sup>nd</sup> Div.)  
Krystle Huelsmann (5<sup>th</sup> Div.)

Guests: Carolina Contreras (VA&R Service Officer)

Rodger Bennett and Dave Davis went to Washington D.C. to discuss issues with our representatives. Out of the 12 issues at hand only 6 were able to be discussed. The Blue water issue and the change of time frame of war (WWII to present) for Charter were the two that were pushed. Another topic of discussion was the recovery of remains; which has been making great strides due to the joint cooperation of both countries and DNA technology. Both Bennett and Davis discussed the presentations and joint sessions held in Washington D.C.

The Dept. Commander Michael M. Carder and Sr. Vice Commander Roy Weber stopped by for a few moments to encourage us for the upcoming year and thanking us for our commitment to veteran's issues.

Report from Carolina Contreras consisted of how the VA is running smoothly with 2 part time workers and 4 full time officers. The Back-log issues are still being addressed and is improving. Carolina mentioned the Secretary of the VA will be at the Region Office on Monday.

For those who were exposed to the burn-pits are encouraged to sign up for the burn-pit registry. The aftermath effect is still in the early stages and 3,000 claims have already been granted.

A project is underway to allow dental for every veteran. Calling your local congressman will help show support for this is to be accepted.

Raymond Toczak's report covered the Vet Nursing home, which is going along well. He also mentioned that those who live in Chicago will get a veteran city sticker for free.

The Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) is now in full swing. Veterans can now elect three different claims processing lanes depending on their individual situation. This new program will help cut down the over 450,000 appeals backlog which the VA has nationwide. What was once a 3-5 year wait for an appeal to be heard will now take under six months. As with all VA claims veterans should use an accredited veterans service organization like the American Legion for assistance and guidance.

The pension for the non-service connected will now have a look back period of 3 years or to the date of application. They will add the income with eligibility up to \$123,000.

The Veteran lotto has changed. It will be marked on the back as IVO. For now, it is called Winter Green. The name will be changed every 3 months.

Ray mentioned that the VA will accept the Blue Water veterans bill once it is passed. Hypertension is on the table to be added to the list for Agent Orange.

The committee worked on the upcoming year's budget and will submit for the amount of \$4,315.00. This amount will cover mileage to meetings, hotel per diem, postage, and travel/scholarships to meet with our representatives.

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:17. The next meeting will be held July 10<sup>th</sup> at 4:00p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Krystle Huelsmann  
Secretary, VA&R Commission