

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

2615 S. GRAND AVE., SUITE 100
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90007



United We Stand



Joseph N. Smith
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, May 11, 2011

Present:

Commissioners

Bob Archuleta, Chair
Carvel Gay, Vice Chair
Ramon Rodriguez
Steve Rosmarin
Stephanie Stone

Absent:

Commissioners

Mark MacCarley
Dave Culmer
Fred Flores
Rudy Garcia

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Colonel Joseph Smith, Director
Tatiana Rosas, Executive Secretary

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Bob Archuleta called the meeting to order at 1:45 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by veteran Ron Hansel. Due to a lack of a quorum, only five Commissioners present, the approval of minutes was postponed.

Roll Call

As noted above.

Chairman's Report

Chair Archuleta expressed his thanks to everyone and stated he was honored and excited serve and to have his first meeting at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System. Chair Archuleta stated that veterans issues are starting to come up into the spotlight. Reminded everyone of the upcoming Memorial Day and encouraged all to come together to honor our fallen who have served country. Thumbs up to the Armed Forces Team 6 who took out Bin Laden with no Americans hurt in the mission.

The Chair referenced a Los Angeles Times article in the Commissioner's packet on the VA and PTSD. He stated he'd like to acknowledge the VA Long Beach and Alice Martinez for her compassion and is there room for improvement? Yes, there is he stated and there are always two sides to every story. PTSD goes back to the 60s and has affected many men and women, from Korean War veterans to Vietnam veterans. As we approach Memorial Day give thanks to our veterans!

VA Long Beach Healthcare System – Alice Martinez

Alice Martinez, VA Long Beach Healthcare System, presented greetings from Mrs. Isabel Duff and welcomed the VAC to Long Beach and introduced Mr. Tony D. Francisco, Associate Director. The following updates were provided:

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- Ongoing major construction still underway in Long Beach. The Blind Center is scheduled to be open this summer and will be available for meetings, events and hopefully future VAC meetings.
- Two and half years into construction and the new Mental Health Building will be completed at the end of July 2011.
- Approval to replace the Community Living Center aka: Nursing home/Mental Health facility.
- Numerous projects with infrastructure and patient areas.
- The valet parking is working very well.

Commissioner Stone stated that the paradigm shift has changed in treating patients. Mr. Francisco responded that patient services care is a system and is focused for care deliveries not designed as to what is best from a patient perspective. He stated that the next step is putting together a One Stop and deinstitutionalize things; make it more comforting for the veteran.

Commissioner Stone said, "Great Job VA Long Beach! This new process is very comforting and innovative."

Commissioner Rosmarin stated that he with Commissioner Stone visited with about half-dozen patients prior to the meeting. The patients expressed their satisfaction with their treatment and staff is excellent at what they do.

Mr. Tony Francisco excused himself from the meeting.

Alice Martinez reiterated that there is still lots of construction going on and will be completed this summer and the parking will be more accessible. They are partnering with the Regional Resource Center for training for the employees. Also:

- This summer the Canteen and Retail store will open.
- The women center and the mental health center will cost \$2½million.
- The spinal cord expansion - \$278million.
- Will continue to renovate a number of spaces especially the specialty clinics, dental, lab, etc.

Commissioner Rodriguez asked about the Fisher House project and Ms. Martinez responded that the 9-hole golf course is still being saved for the Fisher House and they are on the list. Depending on the funding availability, but she stated that VA Long Beach is in the top tier; possibly in 2013.

Commissioner Stone asked if there are any restrictions the VA has in soliciting money. Alice Martinez stated that only Rex Jennings can solicit and he gets donations from various veterans groups as well as individual. She also apologized to Ms. Martinez for not getting her the Letter of Support the Commission motioned for while she was Chair.

Commissioner Ramon Rodriguez introduced retired 1st Sgt. Johnny Byrom, past Commander of AM VETS, Vietnam veteran. He stated that AM VETS was the first veterans organization to go to campuses and strictly work on claims. There are many Vietnam veterans that don't know they have a claim. There are 83 AM VETS service offices available.

Comments from Audience (three minutes each)

Elizabeth Cordova is with the Tribal Veterans (TVR) who is collaborating with AM VETS in helping the tribes understand the services that are available to them. There is a huge disconnect with the tribes and the veterans organizations and the services they can provide to them.

Commissioner Rodriguez stated that AM VETS will have the first Tribal Veterans Service Officer.

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Ron Hansel told the San Gabriel Valley Stand Down scheduled for October 22-25, 2010 had been postponed until October 2011. The Army Reserve Unit doing the training got deployed. They had been working with the Department of Parks and Recreation at Whittier Narrow Park to get the park ready for the Stand Down. It was estimated that 500 veterans would be helped in 4 days. Mr. Hansel informed he will continue to provide periodic status reports to the Commission on the Stand Down. He wanted the Commission to be aware that Los Angeles County has returned 10,000 homeless vouchers and something needs to be done to streamline this process.

Chair Archuleta requested that this be an Agenda item for next month's meeting; "how the voucher program works and how we can make it work."

Stephanie Navarro, Public Relations, Veterans Hunter Project, stated their focus is on homelessness. Ms. Navarro stated that Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki's plan is to end veterans' homelessness in five years, saying that without action the improvements of recent years could be lost because of the bad economy.

In the past, the VA focused largely on getting homeless veterans off the streets, but Secretary Shinseki said he wants to prevent them from ever going homeless. One area for potential improvement is finding jobs and homes for the estimated 56,000 veterans who leave prisons each year. About one-third of all adult homeless men and nearly one-fifth of all homeless adults served in the military. About 3 percent of the overall homeless population served in Iraq or Afghanistan. About 3,700 from the recent wars have been seen in VA homeless outreach programs and more than 550 have been treated in a VA-connected residential program. It is estimated that 130,000 veterans are homeless on a typical night in the United States. Secretary Shinseki has said that this is down from 195,000 six years ago. But, because of the poor economy up to 15 percent more veterans could be on the streets in five years. Ms. Navarro stated that Secretary Shinseki has invited them to present him their numbers and demographics on July 27th at St. Louis, Missouri and in return the State will report it at the National level and then it will be reported at the Federal level.

Duke Russell, founder of Abe Lincoln Remembrance, and WW reiterated the need to have a sports field not a failed field like the one on the rooftop at Los Angeles City College. He reissued his request that the Commission assist in petitioning the Governor Brown to save the field. He stated that most colleges have 2 fields and that the surrounding high schools are dependant on LAC College for the sports field. Commissioner Rosmarin stated that nothing could be accomplished at this time without a quorum that the Commission should discuss their involvement at next month's meeting. He also stated that he would be excusing himself at 3:00pm to attend a meeting regarding the Home Support Committee.

Commissioner Stone asked Mr. Russell if the best course of action was to write to the Governor instead of the Board of Trustees and Mr. Russell responded that the Governor appoints the State Chancellor so he feels that appealing to the Governor is the best course of action.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report – Colonel Joseph Smith

Chair Archuleta suggested foregoing the reading of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Department Report in lieu of Colonel Joseph N. Smith, Director's absence and accept the report as written. Secretary Tatiana Rosas provided the additional Department updates on behalf of Colonel Smith:

- All components made or exceeded their quotas.
- All branches of the Armed Services met their Active Duty and Reserve Forces Recruiting targets. Quality of recruits comparable to young men and women accepted to local community/state colleges.
- The Quality and Productivity Commission will visit the Department on May 16, 2011. Colonel Smith is proud of the Department and the 99.9875% score on the accuracy of claims processed with one minor error.

Chair Archuleta thanked staff and the Colonel for the Department Report.

Grants available in each of the five Supervisorial Districts

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Rolled over to next month's meeting.

New Business

None.

Item's for Next Month's Agenda

Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin
Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Renovation Update – Bill Gelpi

Commissioner Flores will invite two Veterans for Junes meeting to offer the Invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Good of the Order

Commissioner Gay; stated he enjoyed his first visit at VA Long Beach Healthcare system and extended invitations to everyone to visit the Commission's home once Bob Hope Patriotic Hall opens in 2012.

Commissioner Stephanie Stone; announced that Cal Vet now has an app for the iPhone and Android and you can find out your benefits and various service available. She encourages everyone to try the social media and she can be followed on Twitter and Facebook on various veteran issues.

Commissioner Rodriguez; stated that the California Department of Veterans Affairs is going into a partnership with California Department of Motor Vehicles effective July 1, 2011. On the drivers license there will be a box checked off if that person is a veteran; this will be a way to track our veterans. CDVA has a Secretary, retired LAPD Commander Peter Gravett.

Commissioner Gay; stated that Secretary Gravett was his Commander during the LA Riots. He will be a great for the VA.

Commissioner Archuleta; extended his congratulations and stated that Secretary Gravett is a friend to him and to veterans. He encouraged everyone to give thanks and honor our veterans on Memorial Day. To our homeless, he stated, "doing everything we can to better their lives."

Chair Archuleta adjourned meeting at 3:07 p.m.

Tatiana Rosas
Executive Secretary
May 11, 2011

Note: The next Commission meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, June 08, 2011 at 1:30 p.m. in Suite 100 at the Department of Public Social Services site at 2615 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA.