

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, December 14, 2011

Present:

Commissioners

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

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Colonel Joseph Smith, Director
Tatiana Rosas, Executive Secretary

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Vice Chair Carvel Gay called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m., and stated that Chair Archuleta is on his way. He also wanted to inform the Commission that Chair Bob Archuleta was elected as Mayor of the City of Pico Rivera. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Steve Rosmarin. 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

Vice Chair Gay stated that the Chair would give his report upon his arrival.

Comments from Audience (three minutes each)

Lt. Colonel Tom Lasser retired Army veteran, resident of Redondo Beach stated that the Redondo Beach Veterans Memorial is still fundraising and the park celebrated its first Veterans Day on 11/11/11 in honor of our military veterans. He encouraged everyone to visit the park. The next big event will be on Memorial Day.

Lt. Colonel Lasser stated that General James P. Combs is retired and there is some concern on the vulnerability of the Veterans Center at Los Alamitos especially with budget cuts at the Base. He stated that Colonel Smith and Commissioner Culmer have both visited the Center and encouraged the rest of the Commission and the audience to visit as well.

Lt. Colonel Lasser informed the Commission that the Department website was very out dated and requested that he be added to the monthly email so he can assist with outreach to the veteran community. He strongly suggests that

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the social media is the new way of doing outreach. Commissioner Stone responded that one of her goals when she was Chair was to assist the Department in updating the website and to have more information on the Commission on the website. She is a strong advocate for the social media and also believes the way to funnel information and do outreach is through the social network.

Jeanne Bonfilio, Public Information Officer, wanted to update everyone on the Veterans Homes and thanked the Commission for always welcoming her. She distributed handouts on the Veterans Homes and a fact sheet on the West Los Angeles (WLA) Home including a benefits overview for the veteran homes. She stated that the WLA Home has 84 residents and Barstow has 15 vacancies and many amenities and levels of care. The Barstow Home is great for a homeless veteran or a veteran that has no other alternative. She also stated that Fort Irwin is doing a march today to the Barstow Home, only there are not many referrals from the Base.

Ms. Bonfilio informed that she's left flyers before and she brought more to leave in the lobby. She stated that to be eligible an applicant must be 62 years of age or older (or younger if disabled) a resident of California and have served honorably in the military. A Statement of Intent to Apply is available on the Internet at: www.cdva.ca.gov/Homes/DocAndImages/statementofintentform.pdf or contact GLAVC temporary office at (818) 742-1761 and an application will be mailed to those interested.

Commissioner Rosmarin stated that as a resident of the Home he cannot speak enough of it. The Home has all the amenities you can need, a television in every room, three meals a day and snacks plus medical and dental care.

Chair Archuleta arrived and with a quorum the Commissioner Rodriguez motioned to approve the Minutes of November 9th and it was seconded by Commissioner Culmer and they were approved unanimously.

Chairman's Report

Chair Archuleta asked that everyone look to our veterans for guidance on the spirit of Christmas, of belonging. Let's bring our veterans home safely; and those in Iraq coming home and not knowing what the situation will be once here. Say "Thank you for the men and women serving." "We resolve that we're going to do something to help our veterans. This is an election year, those that handle the dollars and cuts send a letter or a phone call to our Congressional leaders to put up a fight in 2012 for our veterans. On a personal note, one of my two sons will be home for the holidays before he gets deployed to Afghanistan."

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Renovation – Bill Gelpi

Mr. Bill Gelpi was unable to attend meeting.

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) – Jerry Yamamoto

Mr. Jerry Yamamoto, Chapter 53, President and Chair of the National Minority Affairs Committee. He is a member of the VVA National Board of Directors. They have a 501©19 and assist Vietnam veterans and their families. He was a Specialist in 1968 at Fort Gordon, Georgia, 26 years veteran of CalPERS, he retired 9 years ago.

Mr. Yamamoto stated that VVA has 250 veteran service representatives nationally to assist veterans with VA claims and have an 85% of success in the military court with 5 attorneys. He distributed, The 2010 Edition of VA's *Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors* booklet which is available for viewing on-line or for download in portable document format (PDF) at http://www1.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp.

The booklet provides the rates for certain federal payments and outlines many programs and services provided by VA and other federal agencies. It also includes toll-free phone numbers, Internet addresses and a directory of VA facilities throughout the country.

He also distributed the VVA Self-Help Guide to Service-Connected Disability Compensation for Exposure to Agent Orange for Veterans and their Families; this booklet was completed in the summer. They have over 40 partners and they're trying to do outreach with the 80% of veterans that aren't using the services.

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Chair Archuleta stated he was very impressed with the brochures and the way it enlightens the veterans so they can go get the help they need with the various ailments including addressing the women veteran issues; it's veterans helping veterans. Chair Archuleta thanked Mr. Yamamoto for his presentation and complimented him and the VVA for all they do for our veterans.

CalVet Home Loans Program – Ross Ornelas

Ross Ornelas, Veteran Home Loans, thanked the Commission for the invitation. Mr. Ornelas reported that there are three offices State-wide one in Orange, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino Counties. He works with veterans filling out their loan application. Many handicap veterans are in need of loans so they are trying to put together a refinance home loan program that should be completed in early spring. Mr. Ornelas stated that loans went down from 31,000 loans to 8,000 since the last administration and each office approves about 10 to 20 loans. He visits a VSO office every Wednesday and works with John Parent, Bob Saxon and Bill Mosley.

Mr. Ornelas went over the list of the top individuals at the Department of Veterans Affairs: General Peter Gravett, Secretary, US Army and National Guard; Larry Gonzales, Under Secretary, Colonel; Robert Umberg, Under Secretary, Veteran Homes, Brigadier General Army; and Trevor Albertson, Lt. Commander, Navy.

Chair Archuleta inquired why did loans go down from 31,000 to 8,000 what is it lacking? Mr. Ornelas responded that interest rates were too high at some point. He stated they have a great earthquake insurance rate and use to have the lowest deductibles at \$500 or 5%. Mr. Ornelas stated that domestic partners qualify in the loans.

Chair Archuleta stated that CalVet Home Loan Program is not user friendly or veteran friendly. "We need to let the legislature know so they can do something about it; we need to ask our State Assemblyman so they can make the necessary adjustments. We need to change the system."

Mr. Ornelas stated that he is here at the office every 3rd Wednesday of the month between 10am – 2pm and he can be reached at 866-653-2504.

Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin

Commissioner Steve Rosmarin stated that 8 months ago a resolution was passed to have a support committee and still on track. Mr. Darren Selnick and Mr. Fitzgivens will be on the committee and are putting together the paperwork to process the 501©3 form prior to the next meeting. He stated that they are getting a lot of support.

Commissioner Rosmarin stated that he hopes to have another Commission meeting at the Home. "We still need to let the community know that the VAC meets once a month."

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.

New Business

No new business.

Item's for Next Month's Agenda

- Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin
- VA Long Beach Healthcare System – Alice Martinez or a representative
- Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Renovation Update – Bill Gelpi
- Ronald Hamm, M.D. – VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center

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- Richard Beam – VA Long Beach and on the January 25th Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.
- Ralph Tillman – Veterans Administration Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center
- Commissioner Stephanie Stone will invite two Veterans for December's meeting to offer the Invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice Chair Gay asked if there were any stats on recruits returning and Mr. Lasser responded that no stats on recruits available at this time.

Commissioner Stone commented on an invitation from New Directions on the Enhanced Use Lease meeting "Working Together to Eliminate Veterans Homelessness" and invited all to attend tonight.

Chair Archuleta stated that veterans are getting better. PTSD is an injury not a disorder. We need to eliminate the stigma and need to get the veterans in the system.

Good of the Order

Commissioner Stone; stated that she wanted to publicly thank staff for researching the history of the Commission for her and finding the Commission was formed to initially find jobs for veterans. She is creating a career path for veterans to into the hospitality field. Many groups and industry groups that want to connect with veterans and somehow there is a disconnect somewhere that needs to be fixed. The Workforce Investment Board is providing funds for program that are placing veterans with jobs and trainings to better meet the needs of Los Angeles County veterans.

She stated there will be a women veteran's breakfast on December 20th sponsored by Goodwill but strictly for women. Women share and talk of things not shared in public. She will send out electronically the flyer to distribute.

Commissioner Rodriguez; stated that he apologizes for not attending last month's meeting. He is now the Director of Security at Boeing. He's been in touch with Cindy Campbell and she said that Long Beach is in line to have a Fisher House.

Commissioner Culmer; stated he had nothing for the good of the order.

Commissioner Rodriguez; stated that Commissioner Culmer is very modest because he didn't mention that he's received a Congressional Gold Medal. "Congratulations to Dave Culmer and to our Chair for being elected the new Mayor of Pico Rivera!"

Commissioner Gay; stated that he had nothing for the good of the order. "Happy Holidays from his family and city." He will be having lunch with 500 kids and Santa at Los Alamitos.

Chair Archuleta; thanked the Commission for the participation throughout the year. For the men and women who served our country. I've been sworn in last night as Mayor of Pico Rivera. I'm ready to serve that community and will continue to term of office is over. How can we communicate better? We will look into the website and see what we can do to better serve our veterans. Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Hanukkah!

Motion to adjourn meeting by Commissioner Rodriguez and seconded by Commissioner Stone. Chair Archuleta adjourned meeting at 3:15 p.m.

Tatiana Rosas
Executive Secretary
December 14, 2011

Note: The next Commission meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, January 11, 2012 at 1:30 p.m. in Suite 100 at the Department of Public Social Services site at 2615 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA.