

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, January 9, 2013

Present:

Commissioners

Bob Archuleta, Chair
Carvel Gay, Vice Chair
Ramon Rodriguez

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Tatiana Rosas, Executive Secretary
Ruth Wong, Acting Director

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Bob Archuleta called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m., and welcomed everyone for attending. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Ramon Rodriguez. Due to a lack of a quorum, only three Commissioners present; the approval of minutes was postponed.

Roll Call

As noted above.

Chairman's Report

Chair Archuleta welcomed everyone and wished all a Happy New Year! Congratulated Stephanie Stone, a former Commissioner on her appointment as Chief Deputy Director to Military and Veterans Affairs. We also have a new Acting Director, Brig. Gen. Ruth Wong. "I've told my two daughters that sometimes the best person for the job might be a woman."

Colonel Smith will be missed by the entire staff and the Commission. He has thirty-years at the Marine Corps and a solid foundation and corner stone for the Department. We were all there yesterday at the Board of Supervisors meeting where he was honored by all five Supervisors. There was a private ceremony spearheaded by Supervisor Knabe prior to the Board meeting where the Supervisor acknowledged the Colonel. Pictures with the Colonel and his family were taken.

Commissioner Gay stated the Board meeting will be publicized today on television.

Chairman Archuleta introduced Chase Wickersham, 2nd District Representative, Orange County, Veterans Advisory Council.

On a personal note, I was able to visit with both my sons for about twelve hours during the holidays.

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Comments from Audience (three minutes each)

Veterans Advisory Council, Orange County

Mr. Chase Wickersham, 2nd District Representative, Orange County, Veterans Advisory Council, has nine members appointed by the Orange County Board of Supervisors to serve 150,000 veterans in Orange County.

Mr. Wickersham is an Army veteran who served in Vietnam in 1970. He worked in a for profit organization and then worked three years in a non-profit with Dwight Radcliff, US Vets. He left 4-5 months ago when he was asked by John Morlock to serve on the Veterans Advisory Council.

He is here looking to establish a partnership between Orange and Los Angeles County and stated that both counties have things in common.

Commissioner Rodriguez inquired when they meet and Mr. Wickersham responded that every second Wednesday at their Veterans Service Office on South Grand Avenue.

Mr. Wickersham stated that one of the things we have in common is we share the Long Beach VA who supports Orange County and Los Alamitos.

Chairman Archuleta stated the Commission is willing to help and suggests a joint meeting at the VA Hospital and Secretary of Veteran Affairs, Peter Gravett should be invited. Chairman suggested the joint meeting should be scheduled for March or April 2013.

American Legion Los Angeles Post 381

Peter Bernard, Police Post 381, and a member of the American Legion. They are the largest post in the Los Angeles County and the second largest in the State of California. He stated that he received the second matrix from the County on the organizations requesting space at Patriotic Hall. He noticed that some of the organizations are not legal veteran organizations. Mr. Bernard stated that he has provided the County with military code 1262 which it explains, "what is a legal veteran organization" by the Internal Revenue Service.

Mr. Bernard stated that only legitimate veteran organizations should occupy Patriotic Hall and not organizations that want to use the County and veterans to get space in the building.

Lastly, he wanted to inform the Commission about The Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge whose mission is to educate and inspire an awareness of the principles upon which the United States was founded and the responsibilities of citizens in free society. In particular to inspire young Americans to become informed, responsible and active citizens in the social, political and economic life of our nation, states and communities.

The Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, founded in 1949, celebrates the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights and their relevance in our daily lives. Our goal is to educate and inspire students and their teachers with the words, meaning and emotion that these founding documents convey, utilizing interactive programs that explore our history and debates that focus on Constitutional concepts in this changing world.

Each year, students are sent to our historic Valley Forge campus and Washington, D.C. to learn about America. At the Foundation students are immersed in a living history educational experience that engages them in topics critical to the future of freedom, ranging from constitutional rights to the private enterprise system.

At the Post we receive calls to assist primarily with veteran burials. Veterans do not prepare for when they pass, we assisted a Councilwoman in Beverly Hills with the burial of a Jewish veteran that needed to be buried within 72 hours, they needed a DD 214, a color guard, etc. The Post assists in a number of areas.

Chair Archuleta thanked him for everything he and the Post does and the Chair stated there will be a process to make sure that Patriotic hall will be used for serving veterans. "We appreciate and welcome all the veteran organizations in the building."

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Commissioner Gay stated that he is proud to sit beside someone who was given an honor by the President of the United States.

Chairman Archuleta stated President Barack Obama appointed him to the Board of Visitors to the United States Military Academy. Rep. Linda Sanchez, D-Cerritos, wrote a letter of support for the Chairman last March 2012. The Board of Visitors oversees the United States Military Academy at West Point and meets quarterly to review its academic, physical and military programs. The Board oversees West Point's morale and discipline, curriculum, instructions, physical equipment, fiscal affairs and academic methods. It consists of a panel of senators, House members, and presidential appointees.

The Vet Hunters Project

Mellanie Villarreal, Executive Director and Co-Founder, The Vet Hunters Project, announced they will be releasing an Annual Report for 2012. They have successfully ended homelessness for 3,000 veterans in 2011. Their mission is to continue to do the good work we are all doing and eliminate the red tape.

- January 29-31, The 2013 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, they will lead a team to skid row.
- March 9th Veterans Empowerment Yellow Ribbon Project.
- March 9th a benefit dinner for Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day

Chair asked if once they have a veteran that needs help are they finding coordination with the VA hospital. Ms. Villarreal responded that yes with the help of Hector Elizalde and Dr. Tommy Sowers, Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA of the VA).

Chair Archuleta suggested she meet with General Wong for access to other County services available. Also, if you encounter a homeless person that is not a veteran you'll be able to provide them with information on services available throughout the County.

Commissioner Gay inquired if she had contacted someone in the City of Glendale; in Glendale they have the National Guard Armory that opens its doors to homeless veterans. Ms. Villarreal stated they work with Mayor Frank Quintero in Glendale.

Chair Archuleta thanked Ms. Villarreal and sent regards to Joe Leal.

Congresswoman Gail Napolitano

Chair Archuleta stated that Congresswoman Grace Napolitano whose district includes the City of Pico Rivera and San Gabriel and is a great supporter of veterans. He stated that he could not have received his appointment with the President without her help. "I know her daughter is not well; please everyone pray for her and her family." Mr. Elizalde stated he would convey the Chair's heartfelt message. He stated that his job with her is a blessing. "She's giving me the freedom to address the issues involving federal agencies, especially those involving veterans. She's headed up committees with Congresswoman Roybal-Allard also a supporter. The issue of homelessness and veterans is a reality."

Hector F. Elizalde, Veterans/Military Liaison for Congresswoman Gail Napolitano, reiterated his first experience with The Vet Hunters Project. The local Pomona YMCA was being shut down within the week and there were going to be forty-eight veterans on the streets. The Vet Hunters proceeded to pick up their phones and called the VFW and by the end of the day on Saturday each provider took a case and helped each veteran. Not one veteran was left on the streets.

This experience opened his eyes on how they can work together as a team and duplicate the work on an ongoing basis. "I don't think there is another organization that does this." He stated that Dr. Sowers reports directly to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Erik Shinseki and hopefully there will be some type of funding for Vet Hunters."

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Ruth Wong stated she has spoken with Mr. Elizalde and he has facilitated a meeting between the Department and Congresswoman Grace Napolitano.

Escorting the Pledge Vet to Board of Supervisors Meeting

Commissioner Rodriguez requested the Agenda Item be carried over until next month's meeting.

Transportation Foundation of Los Angeles

Tamiko Hirano, Executive Director, Transportation of Los Angeles, Western Region Representative, Department of Defense (DoD) and Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) stated she received a certificate of appreciation by the City of Los Angeles for taking a whole bus full of Filipino veterans to the First Annual Veterans Appreciation Festival on November 10th on the USS Iowa. The bus was provided by Councilwoman Jan Perry's office. She arranged the transportation as well as the 200 patriotic Harley Riders that went over the bridge in San Pedro. In appreciation she was presented with the certificate.

Chair Archuleta congratulated her and her team for a job well done.

American Legion Women's Veteran

Patricia Jackson-Kelley, retired Lt. Colonel, U.S. Army, was appointed by the American Legion as the Women's Veteran Outreach Coordinator for the State of California. She stated she needs everyone's help because the women veteran services are very limited and she wants to change that and bring more light on their issues in 2013. Chair suggested she make contact with Deputy Director Stone who is a great advocate for women veterans; she has many contacts. Ms. Jackson-Kelley stated she is already in touch and working with Stephanie Stone.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report – Brig. General Ruth Wong

Brig. General Ruth Wong, Acting Director stated she was sworn in on December 27th. She extends her enthusiasm and is excited to be in this new position. The CEO will support us in our mission; there's been a strategic plan committee which Commissioner Gay is a part of and the goal is to bring the Department and the Commission together in the strategic planning.

Brig. General Wong provided the following information in addition to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Department Report:

- Two new partnerships being developed with the Probation and Sheriffs Departments on services to parolee and inmates.
- Salute to the Troops event at Arcadia Park, the 16th year hosted by the Fifth District; extend invitation to the Commissioners.
- The second set of the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall questionnaire matrix has been sent out by Capital Projects to the various organizations that stated they were interested in space. The second Stakeholders meeting will take place at the end of January.
- The USC School of Social Work is looking into adding three more interns within the next six months.
- The Fifth District is in the process of recruiting a candidate for their vacancy on the Commission.

Chair Archuleta asked Ruth to elaborate on the 688 college fee waivers. Ruth explained that these are students who are eligible through their father or mother's service. The months from February – August are the busiest for processing college fee waivers.

Chair Archuleta requested that a more human interest story for next month's meeting. Brig. General Wong stated she would have an anecdotal story for the Commission.

Brig. General Wong stated that on the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Questionnaire Matrix that was sent out by Capital Projects is the second version with some modifications. She feels confident that those organizations requesting meeting space we'll be able to accommodate. There are a number of organizations that requesting storage space

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Jan Takata gave us all a briefing on the lack of storage space at Patriotic Hall. Storage space is going to be an issue for everyone at Patriotic Hall.

New Business

Commissioner Rodriguez stated that CalVet is constructing the county's first service enriched Habitat for Heroes veteran village, CalVet has set aside more than \$21million for Habitat for Humanity San Fernando/Santa Clarita Valley (Habitat SF/SCV) to build homes for California veterans and their families living in the Santa Clarita and Sylmar areas of Los Angeles County.

Habitat for Heroes Sylmar:

- 12 Homes
- Community playground
- Urban community garden
- Commitment to the environment

Commissioner Rodriguez inquired about the request to have a Commission meeting onboard the USS Iowa and Brig. General Wong responded the ship has hesitations with the number of public attending coming to the meeting and their meeting rooms are very small and might not be able to accommodate a large crowd.

Item's for Next Month's Agenda

- VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center – Ralph Tillman
- VA Long Beach Healthcare System – Alice Martinez
- Escorting the Pledge Vet to Board of Supervisors Meeting – Ramon Rodriguez
- Fisher House
- Habitat for Heroes Sylmar
- Commissioner Dave Culmer will invite two Veterans for November's meeting to offer the Invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Good of the Order

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

Commissioner Gay; stated that at a council meeting in Glendale the guest speaker was former Commissioner Stephanie Stone, the new Chief Deputy Director. She spent 1½hours in the council meeting room answering questions. "She did a Great Job! Representing this department with her new position."

Chair Archuleta; stated all the Commissioners get along well together; they're all friends. They have reached out to the Board of Supervisors requesting that the vacancies be filled. A letter was also sent to Steve Rosmarin thanking him for his service and hope he gets stronger. "The love of veterans is in this room and I witnessed it yesterday when Colonel Smith was acknowledged by the Board of Supervisors and all the veterans present there."

Chair Archuleta adjourned meeting at 2:45 p.m.

Tatiana Rosas
Executive Secretary
January 9, 2013

Note: The next Commission meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, February 13, 2013 at 1:30 p.m. in Suite 100 at the Department of Public Social Services site at 2615 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA.