

**Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission**  
1688 W. Adams Street, Phoenix, AZ 85007

**January 9, 2025**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Philip Cushman, Chair (in person)  
Gene Crego, Commissioner (in person)  
Chris Gibbs, Commissioner (virtual)  
Matthew Kenney, Vice Chair (in person)  
Kathy Gallowitz, Commissioner (virtual)  
Charles Byers, Commissioner (in person)  
Andrew Meshel, Commissioner (virtual)

**AZ Department of Veterans' Services**

Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant (in person)  
Julia Gusse, Legislative Liaison (virtual)

**Absent**

John F. Scott, II, Director

**Guests**

Patrick Lynch (virtual)  
Joshua Rubin (virtual)

**Call to Order** – The Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission (AVSAC) meeting, via Google Meets: <https://meet.google.com/jgq-vm-sc-uux>; Dial-in: (US) +1 475-222-5532 PIN: 275 244 224# Chairman Cushman called the meeting to order at 10:01 am.

Chairman Cushman led the commission in the pledge of allegiance followed by guest introductions.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Cushman called for a motion to approve the AVSAC meeting minutes from November 14, 2024. Vice Chair Byers motioned to accept the meeting minutes. Commissioner Crego second the motion. The commission approved the minutes unanimously.

**Agency Announcements and Updates**

**Director's Department Update** – There was no department update. However, there was a department update handout provided to the commission.

**Legislative Update** – AZDVS Legislative Weekly Updates will resume (January 20, 2025) at the start of the Fifty Seventh Legislative Session on January 13, 2025;

<https://dvs.az.gov/about/legislative-updates>.

Director Confirmations will take place at the pleasure of the Senate after the start of the first regular session. Thank you to those that have submitted letters of recommendation in support of Director Scott. AZDVS will lead a bill revision proposal for the use of the Veterans Donation Fund, more information to follow next month. As of today, 53 House bills and 43 Senate bills have been pre-filed prior to the start of this legislative session. As mentioned, we will post updates on the website as of January 20<sup>th</sup>. All legislative bills may be viewed at the AZ Legislative website <https://www.azleg.gov/bills/>

## **New Business**

### **Letter of Support for Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Director John Scott-**

The advisory commission discussed and agreed to provide a letter of support for Director John Scott's Director Nomination hearing. Commissioner Kenney agreed to write the letter of support before January 13, 2025. Chairman Cushman called for a motion to write a letter of support for Director John Scott on behalf of the commission and submit the letter as written. Vice Chairman Byers moved to write the letter of support for Director John F. Scott's nomination and submit the letter as written. Commissioner Crego second the motion. The commission unanimously agreed for Commissioner Kenney to write a letter of support on behalf of the Commission.

### **Next Steps - Arizona Military Museum Matter-**

The commission discussed next steps regarding the Arizona Military museum. The commission was divided; some commissioners believe this matter is not within the purview of the commission, while others believe it is. Commissioner Kenney expressed his concern that the Governor's office is who needs to take the initiative in regards to this matter, not the commission. Chairman Cushman reminded the commission this matter can become political and the commission must remain bipartisan.

The Commission would like to write a letter to the Governor and her staff to inform them of the matter that was brought to the Commission's attention in regards to the closure of the Arizona Military Museum and the interest from the Veteran community to re-open the museum. The commission would like to facilitate discussions regarding this matter on both sides of the situation.

Commissioner Gallowitz suggested the commission write the letter to the Governor's staff to make them aware of the matter, explain how the museum is a community asset, and inform them the veteran community would like to see it re-open. She would like to express the commission's interest in being part of the solution. She also suggested the commission send a letter to the Adjutant general, stating the commission's concern regarding the closure of the museum and ask how the commission can be part of the

solution. Commissioner Crego agrees the commission should send a letter the Adjutant General in hopes to get a meeting scheduled and frame the letter in a way that is soft and will keep the National Guard informed. Commissioner Byers motioned to write a soft letter explaining the matter brought to the Commission's attention regarding the closure of the Arizona Military Museum. Chairman Cushman made an amendment to that motion stating the commission will write two letters, one to the Governor and her staff and the second letter to the Adjutant General. Commissioner Gallowitz made a second amendment to the original motion. She would like the letter to state the Commission believes this is an important issue, veterans care about this issue, and the commission would like to see a resolution. Commissioner Gibbs expressed his objection to the motions. The commission voted to write both letters. The motions passed with six (6) approval votes one (1) opposing vote.

Chairman Cushman called for volunteers to join a sub-commission group that will be working on both letters. Joining the sub-commission is Joshua Rubin, Patrick Lynch, and Commissioners Byers and Cushman. Commissioner Meshel volunteered to review the letter to ensure the commission remains within its scope. The commission will meet in early February, date to be determined, to review the letter to the Governor's office and the National Guard.

#### **Commission Meeting Planning for Calendar Year 2025**

Chairman Cushman requested the commission provide speaker suggestions for the year. Commissioner Kenney suggested Boulder Crest as a speaker. Julia Gusse suggested the commission allow time for legislators to speak to the commission regarding veteran related bills they are trying to push through on both sides of the aisle. Chairman Cushman suggested Julia share the Legislative Update space with legislators so they can update and inform the Commission.

Commissioner Gallowitz suggested House Representative, Aaron Marquez, come and speak to the commission. She suggested the Arizona Chamber of Commerce Authority or Arizona Coalition for Military Families be asked to speak at a commission meeting regarding veteran employment and veteran suicide. Commissioner Gallowitz mentioned the Glendale Commerce authority is initiating a military work force consortium. She would like them to speak to the commission.

Commissioner Gibbs agrees the commission should hear from Boulder Crest and Aaron Marquez. Commissioner Byers would like to hear more information regarding veteran homelessness in Arizona.

Commissioner Meshel would like to stay informed regarding Veteran Treatment courts around the state. He also expressed interest in learning about the unhoused veteran matter.

Joshua Rubin is interested in hearing about citizenship for Veterans. Commissioner

Crego is interested in learning more about affordable housing.

Chairman Cushman suggested the Arizona Elks society hunting for heroes program as a speaker and Travis Manion Foundation, a high school student who started a veterans' chapter.

Vice Chairman Byers suggested the commission speak to the VA regarding rural healthcare.

Chairman Cushman asked that the commissioner who suggests a speaker contact the speakers themselves and provide the contact information to ADVS staff.

### **Commission Meeting Planning for Flagstaff and Kingman**

The Advisory Commission meeting scheduled for May 8, 2025, will be held in Kingman, Arizona. The location is still to be determined.

The meeting scheduled for July 10, 2025, will be held at the Arizona State Veteran Home in Flagstaff, Arizona. Chairman Cushman asked which commissioners plan to attend each meeting in order to meet quorum for each meeting. The commission also discussed matters they would like on the agenda for each meeting. The commission would like to discuss the possibility of a veteran home in Kingman and would like to determine what the next steps are. The commission would like a Starlink presentation while in Flagstaff. They would also like a Flagstaff Home update. Vice Chair Byers suggested, the commission visit the Arizona State Memorial Cemetery – Camp Navajo. Patrick Lynch will research issues within the tribal veteran community the commission can discuss in at the commission meeting in July.

### **Old Business**

#### **Strategic Policy Objective Issues, Inquiries, and Answers**

Commissioner Gallowitz thanked the commission for helping update the Strategic Policy objective in calendar year 2023. However, she expressed she and the commission would like to see actual data in regards to the veteran community in the following areas to begin with: Update on demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, ranks), data regarding Veteran suicide in Arizona, and data regarding veteran employment. The commission asked that the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services reach out community partners and or subject matter experts that can provide this data. The commission would like civilian entities to present as well as Veteran organizations. The commission would like a speaker from each entity to present this data to the commission. Chairman Cushman would also like to request a separate meeting between him and Director Scott to discuss this matter. This item will remain on future commission meeting agendas.

#### **Commission Positions and Recruitment Update**

Chairman Cushman provided veterans Patrick Lynch and Joshua Rubin with an opportunity to introduce themselves to the commission. Chairman Cushman stated Boards and Commission does not have an updated regarding the applicants. The commission is also

waiting on the status of Gene Crego and Kathy Gallowitz's renewal application.

### **Outreach Activities for Commission**

Commissioner Gallowitz attended the American Legion National Commander visit to post 44. She attended the Fountain Hills veteran's discussion group and hosted a military ministry in Fountain hills, "called to serve." She continues to be involved with Women who read; she is planning a summit on May 7, 2025. Hiring our Heroes is holding a career fair on January 15 and 16, 2025. She is actively supporting the west valley military work force consortium.

Commissioner Crego mentioned Be Connected has scheduled the Symposium for April 16 & 17, 2025.

Commissioner Kenney had nothing to report.

Commissioner Gibbs states Safford had a successful stand down. He mentioned Veterans Day was a huge success with one of the biggest parade ever in Safford history. He states there were 650 veteran flags at the field of honor.

Commissioner Byer will be attending the Veterans Caucus. He also plans to attend the veterans stand down. He mentioned the Maricopa County stand down will be held in February 2025.

Commissioner Meshel had nothing to report.

Chairman Cushman had nothing to report.

Joshua Rubin mentioned he would be meeting with the Eisenhower School of National Defense. They will discuss the issues with migrants and the border. He is also dealing with a new port of entry.

Patrick Lynch attended the grand opening of the Flagstaff home. He also attended a Navajo Nation Veterans recognition event in Flagstaff at Twin Arrows Casino. He will continue to meet with the Navajo Nation and other veteran groups.

### **For the Good of the Order**

Business Cards – The commission would like new business cards.

### **Open Floor for Comments**

None.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Cushman called for a motion to adjourn the Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Commissioner Crego motioned to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chair Byers second the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.