

**Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission**  
4141 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (North S. Herrera Way), Phoenix, AZ 85012

**April 11, 2013**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners**

George Cushing, Chair  
Jeff Olson, Vice Chair  
Jefferson Begay  
Philip Hanson  
Wayne Krula  
Brett Rustand  
Lionel Sanchez  
David Toliver, Sr.

**Absent**

Ronald Perkins (Excused)

**AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)**

Robert M. Barnes, Interim Director  
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer  
Colleen Rundell, Veteran Home Administrator  
Katherine Harding, Exec. Asst. to the Interim  
Director  
Judy Smith, Admin. Secretary

**Guests**

Monica Cabrera, Public Affairs Officer, Veterans  
Administration Regional Office (VARO)  
Jim Dugger, Administrator in Training-ASVH  
Ray Thomas, Adjutant-VFW Office, Scottsdale  
Royce Jenkins, Hopi American Legion-Post 80  
Ian Pino  
Darlene Pino  
Tropix Knight, Hopi American Legion-Post 80

**Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman George Cushing. Mr. Cushing asked if there were any corrections to the March minutes. There were none. Commissioner Hanson motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Krula seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**Communications** – The secretary reported there were no communications since the March meeting. Chairman Cushing noted he had received a letter from Terri Gent thanking the commissioners for lunch at My Mother's Restaurant after the March Advisory Commission meeting.

Commissioner Hanson commended Judy for the outstanding detail in the March 14 minutes; there was information in the minutes he hadn't remembered was covered at the meeting and he appreciated the detailed minutes.

Chairman Cushing said he and Judy have had this conversation before when she questioned whether her minutes were too detailed. Mr. Cushing said he personally feels it is necessary that the meeting minutes are detailed so the public can clearly understand what transpires in our meetings. We must remember that the minutes are posted on the ADVS website and anybody who is interested can log on and read the minutes and learn what the commission is doing.

Commissioner Hanson made a motion to approve the March 14 minutes. Commissioner Krula seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**Resignation of ADVS Director Joey Strickland** - Chairman Cushing spoke about the unfortunate resignation of ADVS Director Joey Strickland.

Chairman Cushing called on Vice Chair Commissioner Olson who requested to comment.

Vice Chair Olson stated that two weeks ago, comments to the press were made by a potential employee of the Department of Veterans' Services, relating to Women Veterans in combat.

He noted that the commission recently spent time reviewing, revising and improving its Strategic Policy Objectives, which included strengthening the commission's support of all Minority Veterans and Women Veterans Programs.

In no way did the potential employee's comments reflect the policies of the commission. Commissioner Olson wants the record to show that the commission clearly supports all Veterans, Women Veterans in combat and Minority Veterans.

Even though the commission approved changes to its Strategic Policy Objectives only a few months ago in November, 2012, the commission needs to review them again to be perfectly clear what the commission's stand is.

Commissioner Olson made a motion to review the Strategic Policy Objectives to be sure they are perfectly clear in what the commission's stand is on all Veterans. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Toliver. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Cushing said the commission would like to do something special for Colonel Strickland. He asked members for ideas of whether to plan a luncheon, a dinner, or present a gift.

Chairman Cushing asked for 3 volunteers to form a committee to plan a special event to honor Director Strickland for his years of service to the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, his support of the Advisory Commission and the entire Veteran community in Arizona. Commissioners Olson, Toliver and Begay volunteered for the committee. They will make a decision and report to Chairman Cushing.

Commissioner Hanson remarked that the commission is very pleased with the efforts Director Strickland has put forth in his position and he deserves recognition for his years of service for the agency.

Commissioner Begay inquired about the position of the commission and whether it supports or objects to the forced resignation of Director Strickland. He inquired whether the commission accepts the current decision of the governor, or will it be discussed?

Chairman Cushing said the commission is not saying what happened is correct but it is not a charge of this commission to be involved in personnel issues between the Office of the Governor and cabinet members.

Chairman Cushing advised the commission that it is under Open Meeting Law rules. The commission has to be careful what it discusses and how matters are discussed.

There was not enough time to plan a special meeting and issue a public notice before today's meeting. Chairman Cushing personally chose not to talk with the commission at a public event. Because there was not enough time to hold a public meeting, he elected to wait until today's meeting to discuss the matter with commissioners. If this was a wrong decision, he will accept responsibility. Chairman Cushing does not want to speak on behalf of the commission unless members agree this is what they do or don't want to do.

Commissioner Toliver remarked that as a personal testimony to their friendship for Director Strickland and for what he has meant to the commission, putting politics aside, the commission needs to write a letter and plan a special time with him to show their appreciation.

Chairman Cushing said he spoke with Colonel Strickland last week. Colonel Strickland gave him his explanation of what happened by saying, as the ADVS Director, he must be held responsible and that he made the decision to resign.

Arizona Revised Statute 41602 states that the commission's job is only to talk to the governor and director about veteran policy issues and that the commission serves at the pleasure of the governor. Arizona Revised Statute 41604 states that the director serves solely at the pleasure of the governor and the deputy director serves at the pleasure of the director.

Commissioner Olson said it has been many years since the Advisory Commission has been allowed to be a part of the selection process for the director or a termination process for the director.

Commissioner Olson received an email regarding Director Strickland's termination stating it was immoral, outrageous and illegal. It can be considered outrageous, but it is certainly not illegal.

Mr. Olson stated that as a commission it does not have authority to send the letter. However, as Americans, the members have every right to send letters on their signatures to the governor, stating they don't like the termination, which is the proper way to air a grievance.

Mr. Olson doesn't have a problem writing the governor as a member of the commission and telling her what he thinks of the matter, however, Mr. Olson will abide by what the commission decides

Commissioner Krula inquired, as members of the Advisory Commission, is it appropriate to advise the governor that we are dismayed because of her abrupt dismissal of an excellent director and therefore we urge her to reconsider her actions?

Chairman Cushing stated that according to the news article in yesterday's newspaper, it was quite clear the governor will not consider reinstatement of Director Strickland. Mr. Cushing encouraged members to write their personal opinions.

Commissioner Hanson said he called the governor's office, told them he was a member of the ADVS Advisory Commission, and related to them that Joey Strickland had done an outstanding job as Director of ADVS and he felt a suitable replacement could not be found. Mr. Hanson sent a similar message to the governor's Facebook page, as an individual.

Mr. Hanson said he has known Governor Brewer for 25 years. She is a consummate politician, does not follow a straight party line, and has the courage of her convictions.

Mr. Hanson knows the governor well enough to know that she doesn't do anything without good reason. The ADVS Director is a cabinet position on her staff and if she cannot trust that person, she is not going to work with them. She does not like to be caught unaware of situations and she found out about the job offer to Terri Proud through a news report.

Mr. Hanson is certain the governor will not change her mind and he believes the commission should not press the issue. He said Governor Brewer has been a friend of Veterans in the past. The commission can send letters but Mr. Hanson is firmly convinced she will not change her mind.

Commissioner Krula wants to make it clear that his comments were A-political. He is a strong supporter of the governor. Considering the gravity of the situation and the position of the commission, as a collective group, the commission needs to express the fact that it is disappointed in her decision to remove Director Strickland from the agency. This is not an anti-governor situation; it's the integrity of the commission for the work Director Strickland has done. This should be reflected by the commission.

Chairman Cushing said he was asked to contact the governor's chief of staff office, which he did. He expressed very simply the commission's disappointment in her call for Director Strickland's resignation and the fact that everybody in the state recognizes the good work Joey Strickland and his staff has done during his years as ADVS Director.

Director Strickland brought in Colleen Rundell, who has great experience in this business and she turned the Phoenix Veteran Home operation around so that it is now a guiding light for other Veteran Homes. Mr. Cushing also pointed out many things that were done by Director Strickland for Native American communities and homeless Veterans.

Commissioner Toliver agreed with Mr. Krula, the commission should advise the governor's office of their position on the matter by sending a letter. If individuals are so inspired, they should also send a letter.

Commissioner Olson stated that as an advisory group, the statute states clearly that the commission advises for policy, not personnel. Mr. Olson is of the impression that a face to face meeting is being planned with the governor's chief of staff and people from the Veteran community. He questioned whether a member of the commission or one of today's guests should be involved in that meeting.

Mr. Olson believes it is important that the governor's chief of staff understands how important it is to have a strong, credible director to work with everybody, including the governor's office. When you have good policy and a strong commission such as we have, good things happen in Arizona with strong leadership.

Those good things include a Veteran Home being built in Chinle and the introduction of tele-medicine throughout the state through the VA. It should be noted that Director Strickland was instrumental in forming partnerships with people in the VA Medical Center to get tele-medicine into medical facilities throughout the state. The governor is busy with many issues; and it may need to be pointed out that many good things were accomplished under Director Strickland's leadership.

It would not be to the commission's advantage to irritate the governor badly enough that she would think less of this commission. There is a lot of good being done and continues to be done. Commissioner Olson is still in favor of a face to face meeting and exercising our rights as individuals to send nine letters instead of one.

Commissioner Begay said he appreciates the comments of Chairman Cushing, Vice Chair Olson and other members of the commission and their years of experience in politics and how the situation should be handled.

The commission understands the governor has the authority to hire and fire at will, with or without just cause. Mr. Begay appreciates that the commission wants to honor the services of Joey Strickland. He would still like to see a document, whether individually or collectively, sent to Governor Brewer saying the advisors believe she made a wrong decision in requesting Director Strickland's resignation. The letter should say it is understood that her decision is firm; however, the advisors believe Director Strickland was inappropriately fired, forced to resign, or words to that effect.

Commissioner Begay is personally offended at Director Strickland's firing. Joey Strickland is of Choctaw Indian descent; they are brothers and Joey Strickland is a brother to many in the state. Native American Veterans are very upset with the way the governor handled the resignation. They feel Director Strickland was not given due process, that the situation was handled unfairly, and that it reflects her attitude and respect for the Veteran community.

Commissioner Hanson interjected that, as far as we know, Director Strickland resigned. We do not know what was said during the conversation between the Director and the governor's chief of staff, but Director Strickland would have been better off had he not submitted his resignation. The governor would have had a choice to terminate or not. He took that choice away when he resigned.

Commissioner Sanchez said he does not support the governor's request for Director Strickland's resignation. Mr. Sanchez will submit his resignation from the Advisory Commission to Chairman Cushing after today's meeting. Mr. Sanchez remarked that Colonel Strickland is a good friend who

has done a lot of good for Veterans. As a result of Director Strickland's resignation he feels he cannot continue with the Advisory Commission.

At this point in the discussion, Commissioner Begay presented a letter of resignation, indicating his decision to resign from the Advisory Commission, effective today. Copies of his letter were distributed to the commission.

Chairman Cushing stated he is sorry it has come to the point that the commissioners feel they need to resign from the commission, but he certainly respects their decisions and accepted their resignations. He wished Commissioners Sanchez and Begay the very best in the future.

Commissioner Krula inquired of Commissioners Begay and Sanchez that if the commission chose to send a letter to the governor expressing their dismay, would this affect either of their decisions to resign? He noted that Commissioner Begay represents the Indian community and that he and Mr. Sanchez are both very important members of the commission. Commissioner Krula urged the commissioners to reconsider their resignations.

Commissioner Sanchez said he will not reconsider his resignation.

Chairman Cushing in one final comment asked the members to reconsider their resignations. He respects the commissioners' decisions to resign but asked them to give more thought to their decisions, although he will honor their resignations.

He noted that the commission worked a long time to bring a Native American to the Advisory Commission in an attempt to represent all Veterans. Commissioner Begay's presence has brought a better insight of Native American issues that the commission was not aware of before. He asked the members to reconsider their decisions and think about the good they can do, not only in the Native American community, but for all Veterans.

Commissioner Begay responded by saying he has lost confidence in the governor's support for the Native American communities. He was honored to be appointed to the commission, but doesn't believe the governor will do much for the Veteran community for the rest of her governorship.

The Indian Veteran community is very upset over this matter. Mr. Begay said it's a difficult decision to leave the Advisory Commission and he believes a Native American representative should be on the commission.

Mr. Begay is upset and feels that the governor and her staff, who are non-Veterans and who have never put their lives on the line as a Veteran, are not supportive and with the governor's attitude and mode of operation, he sees no reason to continue his efforts on the commission.

Chairman Cushing once again asked the commission whether they want a letter from the entire commission or letters sent individually. The commission can write individual letters or, if the commission wants, Mr. Cushing will write one letter on the commission's behalf.

Commissioner Hanson said if the commission sends a single letter it needs to expound on the virtues of Director Strickland and not in any way attack the governor or the governor's decision. She is the state chief executive who appointed the commission and she could revoke the commission's statute.

Commissioner Olson expressed his wish that Commissioners Begay and Sanchez remain on the Advisory Commission. The governor can appoint people who do only what they are told and this commission has been that way; that needs to change. He wishes the commissioners would stay, as they bring valuable insights to the commission.

Commissioner Krula said the situation has already taken a toll on our Veteran community in losing two commission members who are very serious in their decision. The letter needs to reflect the commission's seriousness, with all due respect to the governor. This is a historic development and to be silent would be wrong.

Commissioner Toliver suggested the letter be from all the commissioners with all of their signatures and to be supplemented by individual letters.

Commissioner Olson said it is proper for the Chairman to sign for all members and send the letter. Response needs to be instantaneous; to get all signatures would take too long. Ten days have passed and it needs to be done.

Chairman Cushing agreed it would take too long to get everyone's signatures on the letter. He will write the letter on behalf of all the commissioners expressing their concerns and hand deliver it to the governor's office.

Chairman Cushing asked for a motion. Commissioner Toliver made the motion that a letter from the Advisory Commission be sent to the governor, followed by individual letters from the members. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hanson. The motion carried unanimously.

**Agency Announcements and Updates** – Robert Barnes, Interim Director reported that as leaders go and leadership is taught, some basic things that are taught are succession planning systems and this has been done. ADVS has over 300 employees within the state who are caring for Veterans. ADVS is interring Veterans, helping them through illnesses in our Veteran Homes, and advocating for Veteran benefits. We are taking care of more than 180 Veterans through our Fiduciary guardianship and conservatorship programs. The Financial Services staff in Phoenix is making sure we have funds and that we are remaining solvent. Our Human Resources Department is hiring staff and that is going well. We are moving forward; everyone is working for the Commission and for Veterans.

Construction updates include 50% of the construction plans for the Flagstaff Cemetery that are to be sent to the Cemetery Administration in Washington, D.C. for approval next week.

Chairman Cushing inquired about the status of the Marana Cemetery project. The last update from Homer Rodgers was that ADVS was trying to have the land transferred from the owner to ADVS. Mr. Cushing frequently receives verbal questions and e-mails asking about the status of the Marana Cemetery.

Homer Rodgers, Assistant Deputy Director, who is in charge of the project, presented two land descriptions to Mr. Barnes. One includes 6 acres if a road is built by 2020 and the other excludes 6 acres if a road is not built by 2020. Pima County will take care of building the road for the project.

The deed for the Marana Cemetery is being drawn and will go to our state attorney next week to be reviewed. When approved, the land will be transferred to ADVS.

The state will review the deeds and if they find them in compliance, the attorneys for the Ki family are to forward the land deeds to ADVS. We expect to receive the land deeds next week.

The improvements and expansion in Sierra Vista should be completed in June. After completion, the agency will announce a cemetery re-dedication.

There is a local project underway to raise funds to build a chapel at the Sierra Vista Cemetery. The funds raised for the chapel are at \$180,000. There is great community support and the goal of \$250,000 for the chapel is expected to be reached. It will be a wonderful addition to the cemetery.

Road work is underway to correct the road from Indian School Road to the Steele Indian School Park entrance for a smooth roadway to the Phoenix Veteran Home. ADVS had asked the city more than a year ago to correct the roadway and we are pleased to see the project is underway; it has been needed for a long time.

ADVS received notice of a \$1.2 million grant in Federal monies to rebuild the front foyer of the Phoenix Veteran Home and to build a chapel on the second floor. Several architects are proposing descriptions for another set of doors at the main entrance.

A new nurse call system is going to be installed and we are well into the training for a new electronic billing system. Training is being held on all shifts.

The Federal VA wants an electronic billing system whereby the Veteran Home bills and receives payments electronically. The electronic system is in effect at the Tucson Veteran Home and everything is in place for a smooth implementation at the Phoenix Veteran Home.

The forecast of the Phoenix Veteran Home's budget through June is \$500,000 going into the reserve Rainy Day Fund for the two Veteran homes, which will make a total of \$2.7 million in the fund. \$3.2 million would allow 60 days of operation at both facilities, should the need arise.

Tucson opened a new Alzheimer's/Dementia building this week, which is a controlled area where residents can move around but are not in harms way. The Tucson home is accepting four new residents a week. We hope to open the last building in June.

Commissioner Krula inquired whether the new building is a Dementia wing or a subsection. Mr. Barnes explained that it is a 30 room building with its own outside area.

Commissioner Krula inquired if there is a waiting list to get into the Tucson Home and how many current residents are there at this time.

Mr. Barnes said a waiting list is being used to bring patients into the home. At present, there are 56 residents, soon to be 59; 48% are service connected Veterans and 38% are Medicaid patients. There are five or six private pay patients.

Mr. Hanson presented an aerial photo of the Tucson Veteran Home and asked for clarification of which wing was being opened. Mr. Barnes pointed it out to him.

State surveys for the Tucson Veteran Home are overdue and expected at any time within the next three to four weeks.

The Auditor General's Office completed a follow up of the ADVS Fiduciary program. Eighteen months ago, they audited the Fiduciary program and presented 22 recommendations on how to improve the Fiduciary Division. All of the recommendations have been implemented with the exception of two.

One recommendation, which was not applicable, was to consider disbanding the Fiduciary program.

Another recommendation we are still working on is the procedure for reporting to the court and to be sure reports to the court are being reviewed. There have been no late court reports. We are looking at a new software and management system that will flash notification on the computer screen when court reports are due. The Auditor General's report is online if anyone wants to review it.

Commissioner Hanson inquired about the financing portion of how much ADVS can charge for Fiduciary services and has the matter been resolved?

Mr. Barnes said ADVS submitted its recommendation to the Legislature of what the fees should be. Mr. Barnes said we now receive 5% of income on conservatorships. We've asked for 10%.

ADVS did implement a flat fee of \$85.00/month for services on guardianships that includes mandatory court visits.

Fiduciary expenditures have increased and, after figuring the hourly cost of each employee for the year, including transportation, lights, and everything they need, we charge accordingly.

Fiduciary increased its revenues and also decreased its expenses by downsizing employees to match the number of cases. Three Fiduciary employees were absorbed into other jobs within the agency; one found other employment.

Between downsizing and increased revenues, the Fiduciary Department is operating on an equal plane and not using other resources.

ADVS received notice from the Auditor General's office of sunset factors for the Veterans Donation Fund (VDF) and the Military Family Relief Fund (MFRF). We have implemented all of their recommendations in those areas. The report has gone to the Auditor General's office.

Commissioner Begay inquired about the status of the Chinle Veteran Home. Mr. Barnes said it is being built by the Navajo Tribe and the Navajo Nation Housing Authority is funding it 100%.

Commissioner Begay inquired about the issue of the oversight to comply with VA standards and whether those standards would be modified. He wants to know ADVS' involvement and the current status.

Mr. Barnes said ADVS is serving as subject matter experts on construction and design. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, a Request for Qualification (RFQ) went out from the Navajo Nation to select an architect and engineering firm for the project, which means the project is moving forward quickly.

ADVS will be involved in the project as much as the Navajo Nation wants them to be. ADVS will help get the plans to the VA and assist the Navajo Nation in speaking with VA representatives on any issues they may have.

Mr. Barnes noted that Homer Rodgers, Assistant Deputy Director, is in meetings on the issue. Mr. Barnes will follow up on the oversight matter and get back with Mr. Begay.

Assistant Secretary of the Veteran Administration's Department of Inter-governmental Affairs, John Garcia, was here in March and spoke with the Navajo Nation president. The law needs to be changed so Indian reservations and tribes have the same rights as states in getting 35% reimbursements and per diems and in working with the VA as the states do. The request made its way to Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs in Washington, D.C., but ADVS has not heard any more on the matter.

John Garcia was of the impression that the 35% reimbursement that applies to Cemetery projects also applied to Veteran Home projects. It does not. There is no way for tribal governments to get the 35% match and per diems, or the many benefits Veteran homes get in caring for Veterans, without changing the law.

The oversight will continue to be an issue and since the Navajo Nation is building the Veteran Home in Chinle, it will continue to be a current issue until resolved. The VA doesn't have the option to review this matter later; it must be addressed now. The Navajo Nation will have full support of ADVS who will remain vigilant in this issue and intervene to help where needed.

Other states are becoming aware of this issue and will address it with the VA as they see fit.

Commissioner Begay wants to assure that with the support of ADVS to make it a reality, all Native American Veterans are afforded the same level of services as anywhere in the U.S.

Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer, said he helped Representative Albert Hale write the memorial that is going to Congress; ADVS is very much involved.

Mr. Barnes met with council members of the City of Maricopa. ADVS was asked to attend a Veteran Town Hall event with them on April 20<sup>th</sup>. ADVS provided them contacts with the Department of Economic Security (DES), the Federal VA, and other offices that could be of help to them.

The City of Maricopa is interested in having a Veteran Service Officer in the town of Maricopa. There are about 3,000 Veterans in Maricopa.

ADVS pledged that if the city can find a suitable area to place a service officer, we can staff the office one or two days a week, or once a month; whatever would work for their area. ADVS will consider placing a Veteran Benefits Counselor in Maricopa on a part-time basis.

ADVS held an education summit in Yuma and will hold one in Flagstaff this week. We are trying to educate educators that the state has a supported campus initiative and there is legislation supporting this initiative. We are giving them guidance on how to accomplish goals to become a state supported College University.

ADVS had an executive council meeting with the Federal VA yesterday and meetings with the Surprise Veteran Military Affairs committees.

ADVS is meeting with Federal VA Women Veteran coordinators for the upcoming Military Women's Veteran Conference. The Federal VA is providing Military Sexual Trauma (MST) specialists for the conference. We appreciate the assistance of Sandra Flint of the Veterans Administration Regional Office (VARO) in providing these specialists.

Mr. Barnes will attend a meeting April 29<sup>th</sup> in Flagstaff regarding the Veterans Day Parade to be held May 18. ADVS recommended that Flagstaff become a partner since the parade is being held in their city and their resources will be used. They graciously agreed to be a partner for the event.

Chairman Cushing said it was a privilege to work with Director Strickland and that someone wisely appointed Robert Barnes as the Interim Director. He assured Mr. Barnes that he has the full support of the Advisory Commission and the commission looks forward to continuing the great work that has been started.

Dave Hampton presented the latest Legislative Update and drew attention to three bills that are important to the agency.

SB-1286 - Nursing Facility Provider Assessments (Bed Tax for Nursing Homes). A bed tax was passed last year without our knowledge. In conjunction with the governor's office, ADVS was able to get a bill through the legislature and signed by the governor last week. Due to an emergency clause, the bill took effect upon the governor's signature, which exempts the Phoenix Veteran Home from being charged a bed tax and saves \$500,000 a year. The Tucson Home was not involved because it is new and there were no figures on which to base the tax.

Neeraj Deshpande, ADVS Chief Financial Officer, was able to retrieve \$112,000 that had already been paid before the bill was signed into law.

Mr. Barnes noted that this bill protects all future Veteran Homes from being assessed a bed tax.

SCR 1014 – Vietnam War Commemorative Partner. The bill was passed by both houses and sent to the Secretary of State which will make Arizona the second state in the union to become a Vietnam War Commemorative Partner; Alabama was the first.

Dave Hampton contacted the Pentagon and will be filing paperwork next week to make Arizona a Vietnam War National Commemorative Partner.

SB 1128 – Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day. The bill was sponsored by Senator Al Melvin, signed by the governor on April 4<sup>th</sup>, and will become effective 90 days after the last day of this legislative session. We don't know when that will be; we expect this to be a long legislative session.

Commissioner Toliver commended Dave Hampton who was behind the Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day proposal. Because of Dave's efforts, this proposal became a bill and a reality. Dave deserves kudos for his efforts.

Commissioner Hanson inquired about SB 2243 – Military Retiree; Pension Exclusion Amount. He asked if the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) had given an estimate of what it will cost to raise the exemption from \$2,500 to \$5,000.

Dave said the bill is being shelved until budget discussions start and those will decide the future of money bills. The bill was not going out of the House Ways & Means Committee; Senator Gail Griffin was able to strike the bill onto a bill that had already passed the House so that when it goes back to the House, it won't have to go back through the Ways and Means Committee. Dave gives it a 50-50 chance of passing.

**Introduction and Welcome to Invited guests** – Chairman Cushing welcomed guest, Monica Cabrera, Public Affairs Officer, of the Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO). Mr. Cushing asked if she had any questions to bring before the commission. Monica thanked the Commission for their support and did not have any questions.

Chairman Cushing recognized Colleen Rundell, Arizona State Veteran Home (ASVH) Administrator, Mr. Cushing personally commended Colleen for the great job she is doing as the Phoenix Veteran Home Administrator. He has talked with residents of the home who are happy with the care they are receiving at the Veteran Home. The good reviews of the state surveys and audits also attest to the great care our Veterans are receiving.

Visitor, Jim Dugger, Arizona State Veteran Home (ASVH) Administrator in Training was in attendance to learn about the Advisory Commission and what it does.

Ray Thomas, VFW Adjutant, was recognized, but had no questions or comments.

Chairman Cushing welcomed Mr. Royce Jenkins, a 22 year Army Veteran and representative of the Lori Piestewa American Legion Post 80. Mr. Jenkins is here today to support Director Strickland, a good friend who mentored him when he was trying to pursue personal matters.

Mr. Jenkins spoke about how Commissioner Begay and Director Joey Strickland have brought awareness to the Native American communities. On behalf of the Lori Piestewa American Legion Post, Mr. Jenkins supports the reinstatement of Joey Strickland as Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services.

Chairman Cushing recognized Darlene and Ian Pino who are family members of Commissioner Begay.

Chairman Cushing welcomed visitor Tropix Knight of the Hopi American Legion Post 80. Ms. Knight is a member of the Lori Piestewa American Legion Post 80 originally from Hard Rock on the Navajo Reservation. She is currently working with Native American Women Veterans.

Ms. Knight said she attended the dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial 20 years ago and wants to see more women Veterans involved in Veteran activities. She will work toward that aim for Native American Women Veterans. Chairman Cushing told Ms. Knight to forward her information to the commission and they can help get it distributed around the state.

Ms. Knight is looking forward to attending the Military Women's Veterans Conference this year in Phoenix and would like to know more about what is happening with Veterans.

Chairman Cushing thanked Ms. Knight for coming to the meeting and sharing her information. He told of making two trips to Chinle last year when he was an American Legion Post Commander. He encountered female Native Americans who expressed interest in starting an American Legion Post in the Navajo Nation. He sent them information to help them get started. His trips to Chinle were an eye opener for a non-Native American. There are miles and miles of dirt roads and the houses sit way off the main roads. He found new respect for Native Americans and how they have to endure. Chairman Cushing told Ms. Knight she is always welcome at the Advisory Commission meetings and thanked her and Mr. Jenkins for coming. They traveled a great distance to be here today.

Commissioner Cushing acknowledged all the visitors and appreciates their efforts to attend today's Advisory Commission meeting.

**Outreach Activities for the Commission** – Commissioner Hanson attended the Job Fair at the Memorial Coliseum with Commissioner Perkins and Ron Shackle of the Chandler Veteran Benefits Office. There was steady traffic from 10 to 3 and beyond. They ran out of Veteran pins.

There were state and Federal agencies set up in a separate area. Employers came with jobs to fill. They were not just taking applications; they were filling jobs.

The Department of Corrections had people completing forms for employment. Mr. Hanson talked with one of their officers who said they weren't the best paying agency but their agency usually has a demand for employees and the benefits are good.

This was a good opportunity to let people know about the Advisory Commission and what it does; many people were unaware the commission existed.

Chairman Cushing asked Commissioner Begay to give an insight on the project at the Heard Museum. Commissioner Begay presented a report on the American Indian Veterans Memorial Initiative which was held March 27th at the Heard Museum.

The initiative was started by the Seminole Tribe Veterans Association in Florida several years ago by the Chairman of the Seminole Tribe. About eight years ago he visited the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. and noted there were Black, White and Hispanic soldiers on the Vietnam Memorial and he thought an American Indian should be included. Mr. Begay pointed out that most American Indians in combat situations were usually chosen to be the point man and out in front of the others for their innate sense of hearing and knowing what's out there. That was the Seminole Tribe's reasoning for proposing a memorial and the initiative was started. Commissioners Cushing and Begay met with 50 Native American Veterans on March 27<sup>th</sup> to discuss the initiative.

Mr. Steven Bowers, a U.S. Army Vietnam combat Veteran spoke at the meeting and provided information. Today there are about eight tribal associations across the country that are supporting the initiative. Those eight associations represent 176 tribal governments. Twenty-three individual tribes have signed resolutions. The Navajo Nation will consider supporting this initiative the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of

April. The National Congress of American Indians, which represents over 500 tribes, will consider it in their next meeting this summer. This is a very significant group.

The policy of the Mall Committee in Washington, D.C. that is responsible for all the memorials, states that no changes can be made to the existing memorials. The proposed memorial would have to be at another location within the Mall.

Mr. Bowers has talked to Senator Jan Scruggs who is initiating the effort to build an education center next to the Vietnam Memorial and his committee has agreed to allow the American Indians to put their American Indian Memorial on the site next to the Vietnam Memorial. The proposal has been accepted and is being finalized.

The proposal now has to be accepted and adopted by the Mall Committee. There is still work to be done but Native American communities from across the country are in full support and the National Congress of American Indians is expected to support it.

Commissioner Begay said attendees were told at a previous National Congress of American Indians event that a resolution was passed for another location. That location is along the border of the Mall area, on the premises of the National Museum of American Indians.

The commissioners listened to some impassioned speeches at the American Indian Veterans Memorial Initiative. A comment made by one of the Veterans was: "We're not relics—we do not want to be shown as relics and artifacts. Our warriors are real and we want to be placed in the Mall area. We are the original land owners—this is our country."

Ron Lee, Legislative Aide from Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick's office spoke about her current bill to build a similar American Indian Memorial. Legislation for Ann Kirkpatrick's proposal is for the memorial to be on the museum property. She introduced a bill that authorizes the National Museum of American Indians to raise funds for the memorial. However, there are few tribes or American Indian Veterans supporting it at this time.

Ron Lee told of the difficulty in proposing a monument on the Mall because of the policies and criteria that must be met. However, with the education center location being proposed, it might be possible. Ron Lee is relying on the tribes and tribal governments and other agencies to provide funding for the memorial and is asking for support.

Colonel Joey Strickland, when he was ADVS Director, attended the meeting. He supported and pledged his support for this memorial through ADVS.

Senator Albert Hale provided a supportive statement about American Indian warriors and their contributions to American wars. He said American Indians volunteered to fight for their land prior to being allowed to vote or become citizens of their own country. Arizona warriors have helped win these wars through the use of their languages, the most recognized being the "Code Talkers", which were represented by the Hopi and Navajo Tribes. A memorial on the Mall will preserve the history of our American Indian Warriors.

Commissioner Begay would highly encourage support from the commission, within policy guidelines, through a formal act of the commission for the memorial.

Chairman Cushing thanked Commissioner Begay for his report and remarked that the perfect place for the memorial is in front and on point, as was noted in the report. The word "Chief" comes to mind, as Indian warriors were called "Chief".

Mr. Begay agreed that American Indians were called "Chief" and it was not a derogatory but an endearing term.

Chairman Cushing said as he listened to Mr. Bowers in the meeting he realized an element had been left out of the Vietnam Memorial; the Native American. The matter needs to be rectified. He said the meeting was a very passionate display of energy from Mr. Bowers who is dedicated to this project. He travels around the country at his own expense. He spoke with a great deal of passion for the project and Mr. Cushing commends both Mr. Bowers and Mr. Begay for pressing on with the memorial project. The memorial is long overdue.

**Open Discussion for the Good of the Order** – Commissioners Cushing and Perkins will attend the “Hiring Our Heroes” Job Fair at the University of Phoenix in Tempe on April 25<sup>th</sup>. They attended a job fair at American Legion Post 41 in Phoenix. People came by who weren’t aware of the Commission and what it does in working for fellow Veterans.

Commissioner Cushing met two ladies who were interested in the Advisory Commission and gave them the ADVS website so they can read the meeting minutes.

Commissioners will honor Arizona Indian Vietnam Veterans on May 25<sup>th</sup> at the Heard Museum. There is limited seating of 250, so reservations for the event need to be made now for those who wish to attend. There is a phone number to call for reservations on the flyer.

The commission is invited to attend the Armed Forces Day Parade in Flagstaff on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Krula inquired about transportation to the event in Flagstaff. If there are any others going, could they coordinate a car pool?

Chairman Cushing will attend the parade and leave immediately for Tucson for another engagement later in the day. He encouraged any others who are attending to car pool.

The Arizona Coalition of Military Families at Northern Arizona University (NAU) will be held May 15 and 16. There are breakout sessions and good information at these events with an opportunity to interact with Veterans.

This year will mark the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Arizona Military Women’s Conference. More information on that event will be forthcoming.

In regard to the departing commissioners, Mr. Krula is sorry to see them leave and asked if they could recommend replacements for their positions. It is important to continue a good representation of our communities and to have a complete absence of representation of the Native American community would be extremely serious.

Chairman Cushing said notifications were sent out to all Veteran organizations to apply for vacancies on the commission. He encouraged the Native American visitors to canvas their memberships for new members for the commission.

The deadline to enter applications for membership on the Advisory Commission is in June. Applicants were encouraged to apply as soon as possible as it takes time to get an application recommendation from a Veteran organization, file an online application, present a DD-214, a resumé, and a letter from an individual stating the applicant can sit on the committee. After a selection is made, the new commissioners come on board at the July meeting.

Commissioner Begay suggested visitor Royce Jenkins as a good candidate for the commission.

Chairman Cushing said he had the pleasure of installing officers at the American Legion Post 80 on the reservation last year. He was treated well and enjoyed a nice dinner and conversation; it was one of the highlights of the year for him.

Commissioner Olson asked to adopt a motion to thank our friends and outgoing members Lionel Sanchez and Jefferson Begay for their service in the military, service to the community, and their service in the Advisory Commission and that we wish them well in the future and for them to stay in touch. Commissioner Krula seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Cushing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hanson. The meeting adjourned at 11:44 a.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held May 9, 2013.