

**Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission**  
3839 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012

**November 12, 2020**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Matthew Randle, Chair  
Joan McDermott, Vice Chair  
Arlethe Morrison  
Chris Gibbs  
**Gene Crego**  
Peter Kloeber  
Rebecca Villalpando

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

Colonel Wanda Wright, Director  
Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant

**Absent**

Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison

**Call to Order** – The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission meeting was held virtually via Google Meets. Link: [meet.google.com/bcq-ppmp-grh](https://meet.google.com/bcq-ppmp-grh); phone number (US)+1 617-675-4444; PIN: 429 763 152 6996#. Chairman, Matthew Randle called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes** – Chairman, Randle called for a motion to approve the July 23, 2020, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes, Commissioner, Chris Gibbs moved to accept the meeting minutes. Commissioner Gene Crego second the motion. The motion carried.

**Department Announcements and Updates**

Col. Wanda Wright, Director, updated the Commission. The construction of the Yuma and Flagstaff homes are on schedule and on budget. Construction will be complete the middle of next year, opening will not occur until October of 2021. The Arizona State Veteran Home – Phoenix (ASVH-P) and Arizona State Veteran Home – Tucson (ASVH-T) are doing well. Both Homes are COVID-19 free from a resident standpoint. Tucson had one staff member test positive for Covid-19; however, that staff member was not in the building at the time and had not been in the building. Yesterday, September 11, 2020, the ASVH-P held a Veteran Day parade for the residents at the ASVH-P. All residents were outside and separated six feet apart while people drove their cars past them. Director Wright states the love coming from those cars was fantastic. Both Homes continue to experience issues with staffing. Director Wright states COVID-19 is taking a toll on everyone and the workers are having a hard time keeping staffing levels up.

The cemeteries continue to provide burial ceremonies for small groups of ten people per group. The cemeteries have to be careful of not exposing the caretakers. The Veteran Benefit Counselors (VBCs) are fully virtual. All offices in the Northern Region are closed, most of the offices in the Southern Region are closed, as well as the Central Region. Until COVID-19 is controlled or there is a vaccine available, VBCs will continue to submit claims virtually. There are several offers for itinerate offices for VBCs, these offices will allow VBCs to meet with Veterans in person on a regular basis if a Veteran does not have the technology or does not want to be helped virtually. Veterans can call the VBCs if they need help with their claim or they can meet with them virtually. Director Wright states department staff is doing fine. Executive staff check in on their staff regularly. The department is currently finding ways to hold holiday parties

without being together. The department continues to be part of virtual community events. Director Wright attended a bridge forum to speak about Veteran benefits and services to the audience. Director Wright met with Mrs. Pence and spoke to her about suicide prevention and occupational licensing. The department has a new program, the Virtual Education Series. The department assigns one staff member to virtually speak and educate an audience on services provided by the department. For example, one of our Cemetery administrators spoke about burial benefits.

Commissioner Chris Gibbs states he has spoken with the Eastern Arizona College and is close to arranging an office space for a VBC. He states the office space will be rent free, utilities free and communications free. He states this opportunity would provide Veteran resources to college students who are veterans. Commissioner Gibbs believes the college will agree to the arrangement. Commissioner Gibbs plans to reach out to the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) to review and make the agreement.

Commissioner Peter Kloeber asked Col. Wright for an approximate date of when the Yuma and Flagstaff homes would be open for business. Col. Wright states the Yuma and Flagstaff homes construction would be complete April of 2021. Certification of the homes will take approximately sixty to ninety days, with an expected opening of September 2021, for the Flagstaff Home and an expected opening date of October 2021, for the Yuma Home.

Legislative Liaison, Jennifer Harris was not present at the Advisory Commission meeting; however, she provided Col. Wanda Wright with a brief Legislative update on where the Legislature stands post-election. Jennifer Harris has been watching the 55<sup>th</sup> Arizona Legislature, First Regular Session.

### **55th Arizona Legislature, First Regular Session**

Republican Majority in both the House and Senate:

House- 31-29

Senate- 16-14

#### **House Majority Leadership:**

Speaker- Representative Rusty Bowers, Republican-Mesa, LD25

Majority Leader- Representative Ben Toma, Republican-Peoria, LD22

Majority Whip- Representative Leo Biasiucci, Republican-Lake Havasu City, LD5

#### **House Minority Leadership:**

Minority Leader- Representative Reginald Bolding, Democrat-Laveen, LD27

Assistant Minority Leader- Representative Jennifer Longdon, Democrat-Phoenix, LD24

Minority Whip- Representative Domingo DeGrazia, Democrat-Tucson, LD10

#### **Senate Majority Leadership:**

President- Senator Karen Fann, Republican-Prescott, LD1

Majority Leader- Senator Rick Gray, Republican-Sun City, LD21

Majority Whip- Senator Sonny Borelli, Republican- Lake Havasu City, LD5

#### **Senate Minority Leadership:**

Minority Leader: Senator Rebecca Rios, Democrat- Phoenix, LD27

Assistant Minority Leader: Senator Lupe Contreras, Democrat-Avondale, LD19

Minority Co-Whips: Senator Martin Quezada, Democrat-Glendale, LD29 and Senator Victoria Steele, Democrat-Tucson, LD9

## **Additional Comments:**

There will be 13 Veterans serving in the Legislature in the 55th Legislature. Once offices and phone numbers are assigned, Jennifer Harris will create and share a list of all Veteran Legislators.

Committee Chair assignments should be announced within the next week.

Concerns are being raised on how the Legislature will be able to convene safely while still keeping the legislative process open and transparent in light of COVID19 cases on the rise again and differing opinions among Legislators on requirements such as masks and social distancing.

Jennifer Harris sent an update on Veteran Special license plates to Commissioner Peter Kloeber earlier this week. " Thus far they (ADOT) have permission to use branch seals from the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. In order to streamline the implementation process, they would prefer to introduce all branches of service military plates (veteran and women's veteran) to the public rather than one by one. With that in mind, they are still waiting for an approved design from the Army and Coast Guard. "

The Department needs allies in the legislature that will help the department pass legislature that the department believes are important.

Chairman Matt Randle asked the commission if there were any questions pertinent to legislature. Commissioner Gene Crego asked Director Wright if she knew who the Republican for the Veterans Caucus might be, Richard Andrade is coming back but there is an opening. Jennifer Harris believes it may be Representative Blackman, this is not confirmed.

Chairman Matt Randle asked Director Wright if she is aware of any Veteran legislation that the commission needs to pay attention to. Director Wright states VBC legislation will be coming up again, this legislation is a request for an increase in VBC positions. There are twelve unfunded full-time equivalents currently, legislature could fund up to twelve VBC positions. Last year the department asked for funding of six VBC positions; however, the bill was not completed due to Covid19. The department will seek to put this bill through legislation again. Director Wright states that Legislative Liaison, Jennifer Harris, is working on legislation language for the Military Family Relief Fund and fingerprinting checks for staff that is not already fingerprint checked. Director Wright could not provide further information until the Governor's office allows the department to proceed.

## **Old Business**

Veterans Transportation survey – Director Wright has been in close contact with the University of Arizona (UofA). UofA has created a survey that is currently being tested. Once testing is complete, UofA will send the survey to all Veterans. UofA plans to disperse the survey by January of 2021. UofA will decipher the data and they will be able to tell the department their findings based on the information provided. Director Wright offered to send the draft survey to the Commission. The Commission agreed.

Annual Letter to the Governor – Chairman Matt Randle state he received the departments list of items to be drafted in the letter to the Governor. Commissioner Kloeber provided Chairman Randle with a copy of the 2019 letter to the Governor. Chairman Randle will have the 2020 letter to the Governor drafted by the end of next week. Chairman Randle will send the Commission an email with the drafted

letter for approval. Once approved, the letter will be finalized and sent to the Governor's office. Chairman Randle provided a suspense date for the Commission. All items the Commissioners would like drafted in the letter must be submitted to Chairman Randle via email by November 25, 2020. No further questions or concerns from the Commission.

### **New Business**

Strategic Plan – Chairman Randle states the Advisory Commission Strategic plan was last updated in 2019, and is not due to be modified or reviewed until May of 2022.

Conflict of interested training – Director Wright states she attended a Conflict-of-Interest training for Boards and Commissions a week ago, provided by the Governor's office of Youth Faith and Family. Director Wright took the training before recommending the training to the Commission. The training was good and only twenty minutes long. Director Wright and Executive Assistant, Lupita Santellano, will find out when the next training will be offered. Director Wright recommended the conflict-of-interest form be taken at the same time annually. Chairman Randle states a suspense date will be provided to keep track of conflict-of-interest forms for the Commission. The Commission will wait for Director Wright's direction to maintain compliance.

Commissioner Peter Kloeber asked Director Wright if there would be a form provided by Boards and Commissions or the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) to document conflict of interest compliance. Director Wright states ADVS would take care of the form.

Commissioner Villalpando states there is a state employee conflict of interested training which provides a completion certificate once the training is complete. She believes this is the training that should be taken.

Executive Assistant, Lupita Santellano, provided the Commission with the Advisory Commission Meeting dates for calendar year 2021. The Commission will meet quarterly on the second Thursday of the Month. The meeting dates are: January 14, April 8, July 8, and October 14, 2021. Chair, Matt Randle asked the Commissioners to block off the Advisory Commission meeting dates on their personal calendars. It is presumed that the Commission will continue to meet on a virtual platform to abide by Covid19 restrictions until further guidance. There were no questions or concerns from the Commissioners.

### **Outreach Activities**

Commissioner Peter Kloeber – The Northern Arizona Veterans Coalition held a virtual meeting three weeks ago. He states there is still a lot going on in the Norther Region in regards to helping Veterans and their families, even with restrictions in place. The Military Officer Association of America (MOAA) Chapters have received some ADVS grants and some received MOAA grants. Some have had corporate donations. The 9 chapters in the state of Arizona have donated \$132,000 dollars to scholarships for ROTC students and about the same amount to communities primarily for Veterans and their families. Commissioner Kloeber processed ten MOAA grants for veterans in Yuma.

Chairman Randle thanked Commissioner Peter Kloeber for his help.

Commissioner Chris Gibbs states he has been in contact with Veteran groups. He spoke with students about veteran services most recently. The Lions club in Safford put out the Field of Honor for Veterans. Commissioner Gibbs continues to work with the VBC in Safford to get him a free office space.

Commissioner Rebecca Villalpando states she keeps hearing the dental benefits issue come up multiple times. She asked if there is any way possible the veterans can go to the dentist for a cleaning or to have a tooth extracted, with a small fee. She states there is a huge dental benefits gap within the VA. She questioned why Veterans cannot receive help with dental services. Director Wright states legislation would need to be changed. The VA has requirements Veterans must meet in order to be eligible for dental benefits. If the Veteran does not reach that level, dental benefits are not included. Director Wright suggested arrangements be made with local dental businesses. During stand down, the department will try to offer dental benefits. This is a complicated issue that will take some work, said Director Wright. Commissioner Crego states Veterans can go through Be Connected. He states there is a dental office that will provide Veterans a discount. There is a dental college in the valley that may be able to help as well. He states there is a bill that came out of congress, with the VA, that will improve receiving dental care at the VA.

Commissioner Villalpando states a veteran claimed to be on the Mission Act and was in the hospital, he states the VA paid part of the bill but now he has to pay the rest of the bills, is that true? Director Wright states it depends on his eligibility and his classification in the medical center. Chairman Randle explained there is an appeal process available to Veterans. He states the issues brought up by Commissioner Villalpando is for the Federal VA, not Veterans Services. He recommended reaching out to local federal officials. Commissioner Villalpando also mentioned she and her mother have continued to make masks for the Tucson Home. Director Wright thanked her for her generosity.

Commissioner Crego added to the dental issue. He states around Veterans Day and Memorial Day there are dentist within the state that will offer a free dental exam, tooth extraction or tooth filling at no cost. He also states he is no longer the state president of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). Randy Shriver is the president of VVA. Commissioner Crego states the VVA national grant for Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) has been approved for a ten-thousand-dollar. This year VVA gave national achievement medals to ten employees in Arizona. The Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV) passed bylaw amendments. The UAV has a new Veterans Hall of Fame packet in order to simplify the application process. There is a UAV meeting this Friday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Commissioner Joan McDermott updated the commission on her outreach, as well as submitted her report.

“Veterans Day in Mohave County, Kingman and Bullhead City held Veterans Day events. A week before the day in Lake Havasu City, both the Combined VFW/American Legion and the Marine Corps had Covid-19 outbreaks in their ranks and the ceremonial aspect of the event was cancelled and the VFW was closed. The American Legion did provide free meals to veterans, along with a small recognition of outstanding veterans and auxiliary members. Many businesses and organizations recognized veterans, as well.

There continues to be some confusion regarding the virtual process in place for contacting VSO's.

The local VA clinic seems to be getting 'good press'. Transportation to Prescott and Phoenix VA facilities is still on hold via DAV, so there is some frustration related to that issue.

Veterans Treatment Courts – all 3 continue in Mohave County and a small one in Parker, La Paz County. The Havasu court grant ended in September, is likely to get a 1-year Federal VA grant, and will apply for a 5-year, more substantial grant next summer. In the meantime, our Veterans Resource Team – the loosely formed coalition of veteran organizations and veteran support agencies – will again assist with costs like random drug testing.

The Catholic Charities Community Services Center for Help and Hope has opened and is admitting community individuals and families, including veterans, who are homeless and at risk.

Commissioner Joan states she would appreciate an update regarding how ADVS documents Covid-19 cases with county health departments.

Roy Meek, Arizona State Coordinator for the 2021 Run for the Wall, is soliciting funding for fuel and lunch for the riders.

Be Connected- Aimee Backus, Community Coordinator, North, is making progress with meeting (primarily via virtual meetings) to inform our communities about the organization and how it can improve access to appropriate services for our veterans and families.

Stand Downs – Lake Havasu City held a Stand Down on October 17, 2020, included Covid-19 testing option, along with dental referrals, and other health and social services. A Mohave County-wide Stand Down will be held in Bullhead City on March 5<sup>th</sup> under the direction of the VFW District 8.

Flag retirement ceremony issue update – I met with the new Lake Havasu City Fire Chief 2 weeks ago. The Fire Marshall and I review the history of issues related to the pollution problems encountered in the past with the incineration of thousands of synthetic flags annually. I related that the veteran community held a ceremony to honor approximately 7,000 boxed synthetic flags at the local Veterans Thrift Store before delivering them to Republic landfill. As previously agreed, the Thrift Store has volunteers, including some of our VTC justice-involved vets, sort the cotton flags (only about 100 were found in 1 ½ years) to be used in a traditional ceremony annually.

Vet Center in Lake Havasu City – Alexis Stewart, from Kingman, told me a few weeks ago that she is recommending closing the Vet Center in Lake Havasu. A counselor would come to Havasu 1 or 2 days a week. She said she needed an office space for the counselor. I referred her to the Havasu Community Health Foundation, as they have a suitable space in one of their spaces.

Arnold Plaza in Kingman – now approved for a VA Grant Per Diem to renovate the building; during the coming year up to 25 homeless veterans can be housed at the Rodeway Inn in a transitional atmosphere with JAVC offices in the same building.

And, finally – the VFW in Meadview has a new female commander, who held a lovely women veterans' tea in October in an effort to reach out to women vets, who often find it untenable to travel to the Phoenix area where the most outreach is centered. One of the servers was Rep. Paul Gosar, along with their very own 'Uncle Sam' in full costume."

Commissioner Arlethe Morrison states she has not been out in the community due to a compromised family member. She states the census for the state of Arizona has finally wrapped up. The final report was sent to Governor's office. Commissioner Morrison thanked Director Wright for helping get the message out, allowing Veterans to be counted. She states having veterans counted helps with sustaining services specialized for veterans.

Angela Tate: No updates. Will provide a review of health systems at the next meeting.

Chairman Randle states he has not been out in the community much due to a compromised family member. He states the Superior court conducted a training on the Civil Service Relief Act. He received good information. He found out the legalities of suing someone that is still in the service. He states the court system has been running the best it can. Veterans day festivities were muted.

Angela Tate- Thanked Commissioner Kloeber for connecting her to Mr. Thomas Winkle and Kelly. On October 22, 2020, she met with both of them about Be Connected. She has filled out the application for Be connected, and is looking forward to becoming part of the program.

### **Open Discussion for the Good of the Order**

Commissioner Kloeber – There are nine Commissioner positions total. Four positions are fine, three are in holdover status, and two are officially in holdover status, Peter Kloeber and Arlethe Morrison. Commissioner Chris Gibbs is in holdover status; however, no action has been taken for his term. Joseph Brophy and Carolyn Smith's position are not filled. Commissioner Chris Gibbs states he had his interview two months ago.

Col. Wright states she spoke with Trista Guzman, Director of Boards and Commissions for the state of Arizona, two weeks ago. She sent the names of the veteran recommended for the Commission for approval. Ms. Guzman did not know if they would be appointed by now. Their applications are in the Governor's office.

Commissioner Peter Kloeber states Ms. Guzman is brand new at her job, she inherited a lot of work. However, he is curious as to how three of six names provided to her were not veterans. What is wrong with their initial review process? ADVS sent those names back, only Veterans are allowed to apply.

Commissioner Villalpando thanked Chairman Matt Randle for a wonderful job as Chair.

Commissioner Peter Kloeber states he was spoken with Thomas Winkle and he has a great idea regarding the various grants the Commission helps Veterans be awarded. Commissioner Kloeber highly recommends and encourages the Commissioners to connect Veterans they are helping with become connected to Be Connected.

Commissioner Randle requested plaque for Carolyn Smith and Joseph Brophy. Executive Assistant, Lupita Santellano, will order the plaques. Commissioner Randle asked Director Wright how the Commission goes about nominating a Veteran into the hall of fame.

Director Wright states she has never nominated anyone due to her high involvement in the Veteran Hall of Fame process. The nomination process involves a veteran organization whom will put together the nomination package. They pick a great Veteran in their organization. The organization will gather the Veterans' biography, resume and DD214, and all other items on the checklist. The nomination process is provided in detail on the Arizona Hall of Fame website. The organization will submit the packet to the Veteran Hall of Fame. There is a process that takes week. The Veterans Hall of Fame then sends all the nominees to ADVS for review. ADVS checks demographics, age, and county representation. The Governor's office conducts one more background check and sends it back to ADVS to hold the ceremony. Commissioner Kloeber states the instructions are very formatted and specific. Commissioner Kloeber will send the link to the Commissioners via email. Nominates can be submitted from November 1st through March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Chairman Matt Randle called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Chris Gibbs motioned to adjourn, Commissioner Gene Crego second the motion. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 2:27 pm