

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

May 9, 2013

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners

George Cushing, Chair
Jeff Olson, Vice Chair
Philip Hanson
Ron Perkins
Brett Rustand
David Toliver, Sr.

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Robert Barnes, Interim Director
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer
Homer Rodgers, Assistant Deputy Director
Katherine Harding, Exec. Asst. to the Interim
Director
Judy Smith, Admin. Secretary

Absent

Wayne Krula (Excused)

Guests

Gene Crego, AZ State Council President, Vietnam
Veterans of America

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 April minutes. There were none. Commissioner Perkins motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Toliver seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Review of Advisory Commission Strategic Policy Objectives – Chairman Cushing called on Vice Chair Jeff Olson for a report on his review of the Strategic Policy Objectives. Mr. Olson said the Policy Guidelines clearly state that we support the need to track all minority Veterans and the policy was repeated in one of the goals with nearly the same language. Having served on the committee, Mr. Olson is comfortable that the commission's stand is very clear in support of military Veterans.

Per the Advisory Commission's direction, and on its behalf, Chairman Cushing wrote a letter to Governor Brewer regarding Joey Strickland's resignation. Chairman Cushing read the letter.

Chairman Cushing reported that he had attended a meeting with the Governor's Chief of Staff. Many of the participants were Veterans from the community and all were allowed to express their concerns. The Chief of Staff acknowledged that the situation concerning Joey Strickland could have been handled differently.

The state issued a job opening and is accepting applications for the Director's position. A selection committee was formed and interviews will be held May 20 and 21. Two members of the Advisory Commission and representatives of the Veteran community will be part of the selection process. Mr. Cushing said they will all do their best to select the proper person for the ADVS Director position.

Commissioner Toliver inquired whether the commission should expect a response to the letter to the governor. Chairman Cushing said in his five years on the Advisory Commission and the 5 or 6 letters that have been sent to the governor, none has ever received a response. The message from the Chief of Staff's meeting was that the matter is over and they are moving on.

Communications – The secretary reported two communications since the last meeting. The commission received an invitation to attend the Four Peaks Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Flag Day Celebration and Luncheon to be held June 15th in Fountain Hills.

An email message was received from Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission (AVSAC) Stakeholder Dan Freeman who asked to be removed from the stakeholder list for receiving AVSAC

meeting agendas. The email was forwarded to Chairman Cushing before the meeting. Chairman Cushing read the email remarks which stated, "the vast majority of the Advisory Commission's information is irrelevant in the Show Low area; it's as if we really do not matter and I will not be driving to Phoenix, Tucson or Yuma to be ignored." Mr. Cushing asked Judy to review previous meeting minutes to see if Mr. Freeman had attended a meeting. Records do not indicate that he attended an Advisory Commission meeting. Chairman Cushing asked to have Mr. Freeman's name removed from the stakeholders list.

Agency Announcements and Updates – Robert Barnes, Interim Director reported there has been recent talk in the press about VA claim backlogs. The VA has come up with a way to take care of the backlogged of claims.

Mr. Barnes held a conference call with General Allison Hickey, Under Secretary for VA Benefits, and learned that the VA is going to form teams at their regional office to review claims 2 years old or older.

These teams will make provisional decisions whereby they will grant everything they can and deny what they cannot grant, according to the file information. Their goal is to get some type of benefits and compensation started for the Veteran.

Then, as a provisional decision, they will offer the Veteran a year to submit additional information for those parts of the claim that were not decided due to lack of evidence, or for an increase in benefits if the VA decided the ratings were not equitable to the disability.

Mr. Barnes spoke with Sandra Flint at the VA Regional Office (VARO) today. Her office is preparing for this effort and they are determined to resolve the 2 year old claims.

Sandra Flint said the provisional decision panel will consist of two doctors; one mental health specialist and two general practitioners from the VA hospital who will be stationed at the VA Regional office to form opinions when a medical opinion is needed for rating Veterans. The Veteran will be seen on the spot.

Mr. Barnes has concerns with VA doctors being on the rating board. It was done many years ago and the VA owned those doctors. Some of the decisions that came from the doctors were less than equitable to Veterans. He will discuss this matter further with Sandra Flint.

Mr. Barnes is concerned about how ADVS will know if the doctor rendered an opinion, and how and when he did so. We don't know how the provisional decisions are going to work out. The VA is doing everything it can to take care of the backlog.

Provisional decisions will be coming from the VA; ADVS Veteran Benefit Counselors will see the decisions and give more information such as file notices of disagreements or submit for more evidence if it is needed.

Chairman Cushing asked if ADVS Veteran Benefit Counselors would be involved in making provisional decisions. Mr. Barnes said ADVS Veteran Benefit Counselors are not involved in the decisions, however, the claims the ADVS is power of attorney over will still be reviewed by our VBC's. The VA will pass claim files on to ADVS to be sure we are seeing files before decisions are made.

Mr. Barnes talked with members of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) at the National level to garner Veteran Service Organization (VSO) national support to help the VA make better decisions on these claims.

Commissioner Rustand inquired what the backlog of claims is for the state. Mr. Barnes said there are 22,000 claims for the state in process that are 100 days or older and 800,000 for the nation. He believes the national number is higher.

Mr. Barnes said General Hickey reported that 500,000 claims were completed and 500,000 more new claims were submitted. They can't get up to date on claims at this rate.

Mr. Barnes noted that ADVS is an advocate for Veterans. Our job is to be sure the VA makes the proper decisions for Veterans. There are many Veterans who have submitted claims long ago who want a decision so they can get compensation started. Some Veterans would agree to a 30% disability rating when actually it should be a 50% or more disability rating. ADVS will look for decisions of this nature and continue to monitor the process closely. We want to be sure the VA makes the correct decisions for Veterans.

Mr. Barnes will continue to be in contact with Sandra Flint at VARO to see how their program is progressing.

Chairman Cushing inquired if we know how many VA staff will be working on the provisional decisions. The national level will send providers when the hospital doesn't have enough providers and people from the appeals team will be used.

Chairman Cushing is concerned that every time the VA makes a decision to look at old claims, newer claims are being pushed back and not getting processed. At a meeting he and Jeff Olson attended, General Allison Hickey said 30% of her staff was looking at Agent Orange claims only, so 70% of her staff was getting backed up with other claims, causing the backlog. We seem to be headed in the same direction by looking at the 2 year old claims and taking staff members away from looking at other claims.

Commissioner Olson shares Mr. Cushing's concerns. The new VA program doesn't sound like a good program at all. He is concerned about Veterans whose claims are denied and, when reviewed, will find that the Veteran had a valid claim from the beginning.

Mr. Olson attended all three conference presentations at the meeting with General Hickey, which included slide presentations. It is unfortunate that the information didn't coincide in all the presentations. One said the average backlog was 207 days, another said 257 days and yet another said 307 days. If the VA doesn't know how large the backlog is, we certainly can't know.

He noted that there are over 200 claims pending in the Green Valley area that are 2 years old. That comprises 90% of the people in Mr. Olson's area.

Mr. Olson noted that the VBC's and the National Service Officers of Veteran organizations are already very busy and now the VA has added another step that needs to be monitored closely. He doesn't consider this a good idea.

Commissioner Rustand voiced concerns in having doctors on the determining panels; they may see the patient through the paperwork and look at a claim differently than through the merits of the claim; this should not happen.

Mr. Barnes is trying to get as much national support as possible and asked commissioners who get a chance to talk to national leaders to reiterate our concerns. Mr. Barnes said the official response from the VA is that there will be doctor opinions and addendums. This is of concern to ADVS. The doctors are paid by the VA; it is in a money crunch right now which could cause the VA to go back to the old way of handling claims.

To answer Chairman Cushing's question as to where the VA will get staff to process claims, Mr. Barnes noted that the VA stopped doing Eligibility Verification Reports (EVR's), the annual evaluation reports for pensions, and those employees will be reassigned to other positions since the VA is working to implement a fully automatic claims process.

General Hickey stated in a briefing that the VA still has segmented lanes that are processing fully developed new claims and are trying to process them in 90 to 100 days while they are still planning to fully automate the claims process. We don't know if this is enough people to handle the backlogged claims or not. This is how the matter stands today.

Mr. Barnes noted that ADVS held a conference call with the Secretary of Defense Personnel office. Their office also wants to go to paperless files.

ADVS received a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) from the Defense personnel records center. ADVS and the Attorney General are reviewing it and upon signing and some education, our agency will get access to electronic military records for all branches of the service.

This access will give our agency instant access to DD-214's needed for job preference points, Education, the need to prove citizenship, or a form of I.D. ADVS is looking forward to the service records access. There have been a couple of reviews and we are making sure our systems are capable and our staff is ready on the security and confidentiality side. ADVS will be the 5th or 6th state to embark on this program.

Commissioner Perkins inquired if electronically transmitted DD-214's are certified and fully legal. Mr. Barnes said they are the same as when a Veteran sends in a Standard Form-180 or calls to request a copy of their DD-214. The requests go to a Defense Personnel Military Information Systems (DPMIS) that creates a query for an electronic DD-214 or service records. We don't know what all service records are included because we haven't seen the program in action yet. Through this program, the DD-214 is to be available from 1994 forward.

The program was first tested in Ohio and showed the following results. Requests from the VA for military records through the system in one month were 100 while State Veteran Benefit Counselors (VBC's) made 230 requests to look at service records.

Mr. Barnes announced the Women's Health Knowledge Fair that will be held August 17th in the basement of the VA Hospital.

ADVS is working with the Phoenix and Prescott VA's and the Tucson Medical Center for a Women's Health Knowledge Fair that will replace the former ADVS Arizona Women's Military Conference. The event will be full of content and offers access to the VA Hospital and medical providers who will provide access, information or education on health and mental health issues.

All VA Hospital women coordinators are on board. All aspects of the Health Fair may not be held on the same day, but they will be held within the same month and all hospitals will open up to a full day of women's health. There will be health providers onsite to address various health issues and assist in completing Military Sexual Trauma (MST) claims. Women Veterans will complete the claim right there and doctors won't be sending them for appointments to see a doctor or counselor. Their issues will be addressed in a private area that same day.

Information on Education and Physical and Mental Health will be addressed by women coordinators providing one full day of access to health providers to address health issues.

Commissioner Perkins inquired if the conference would be held at all locations on August 17th.

Katherine Harding said the Women's Health & Knowledge events will be broadcast either simultaneously or within the week. The event is proclaimed to be a Women's Health and Knowledge Fair week. She asked that any inquiries the commissioners receive be sent to her and she will get them to the board so information can be sent.

Commissioner Olson inquired whether he and Commissioner Rustand should attend the Tucson program to hear the concerns of the Women Veterans. Mr. Barnes acknowledged that their attendance would be appropriate. Commissioners Olson and Rustand will attend the Women's Health Knowledge Fair in Tucson.

Chairman Cushing agreed that it would be good if the commissioners attended in Tucson and if any of the commissioners have the opportunity to attend in Phoenix or Prescott, he encouraged them to do so.

Mr. Cushing said he has learned from several outreach programs, Women Veterans still don't feel that their needs are being addressed. The Women's Health Fair is a good thing for Women Veterans.

Mr. Barnes noted that hospitals all have outpatient clinics and our goal is to get the hospitals on board. The next thing is to get the clinics on board so the access is there in the community and not in one central location where people have to travel a distance for care.

Katherine noted that it is cost effective and that tours will be held because most women Veterans will not go to the VA Hospital—they feel it is the hospital of their grandfathers and is not suitable for their needs. The theme is that this is no longer your grandfather's VA; it is for all Veterans who have served.

Commissioner Olson said his experience with the clinics is that they provide good care but are not always easy to work with. He inquired whether they going to be easier to work with on this event.

Katherine said the clinics are on board.

Mr. Barnes said each clinic does not have a Women's Veteran Coordinator but they do have a Women's Veteran Liaison or somebody identified as a Women's Veteran Coordinator/Liaison. We hope the clinics will open on the day of the Health Fair for 3 or 4 hours and the providers will spend time with Veterans.

Chairman Cushing said we need to be sure the information gets out to the Veteran community across the state and VSO's should be notified. He directs people to the ADVS website for information when he gets questions at events.

Katherine said we are 2 days away from presenting the final event flyer for publication. When completed, it will be posted on the ADVS website and Facebook page.

Mr. Barnes noted the Native American Vietnam Veterans recognition will be held May 25th at the Heard Museum.

Mr. Barnes noted that Memorial Day Services at the Sierra Vista Cemetery will include a presentation of the National Excellence of Appearance Award from the National Cemetery Administration. The award is the state cemetery equivalent to the shrine status that is given to national cemeteries.

It is a well-deserved award; the National Cemetery Administration looked at everything the cemetery does when it considered the award. It is quite an accomplishment for the Sierra Vista Cemetery.

Mr. Barnes reported that the Department of Health Services (DHS) survey is underway at the Tucson Veteran Home this week. Mr. Barnes was at the Veteran Home yesterday and all is going well in the survey. The exit interview will be held later today or tomorrow. There are 64 residents in the facility. Jim Ross, the administrator says anything less than a 4 star rating is unacceptable. The friendly rivalry between the Phoenix and Tucson Veteran Homes has now begun.

Commissioner Hanson inquired that since the City of Phoenix is to replace the VA Medical Center as primary supporter for the Veteran's Day Parade, what is ADVS' role in supporting that event?

Mr. Barnes noted that ADVS' role in the past has been strictly monetary.

Commissioner Hanson inquired whether Mr. Barnes could see that changing in the future. Mr. Barnes said we haven't had any conversations as to what role the City of Phoenix wants ADVS to play. He advised Sharon Helman, Director of the VA Hospital, that ADVS will support in whatever role they need.

Mr. Barnes concluded his portion of agency announcements and updates and turned the meeting over to Homer Rodgers for a project update.

Mr. Rodgers reported that the Sierra Vista project is 80% complete. The current completion date of July 1, according to the contract and his report, has been extended 45 days until mid-August, due to waiting on limestone caps from a supplier in southeast Arizona. Completion in mid-August is still on track, other than this delay.

Mr. Rodgers presented photo renderings of the three buildings for the Northern Arizona Cemetery project in Flagstaff.

The first phase development of the 60 acre site is 8.6 acres. The rendering shows the interment capacity and types of interment. Mr. Rodgers noted that, statistically, the first phase of the project is expected to last 10 years, however, he expects to go into Phase 2 sooner than 10 years, based on data from the VA. Application for an expansion grant will need to be made based on data separate from the VA estimates and other things that occur.

Commissioner Hanson inquired what Pre-placed Crypts are, as noted in the renderings?

Mr. Rodgers explained they are concrete vaults placed below the surface. Pre-placed Crypts are placed with an 18-24 inch depth below the surface to the top of the casket. Pre-placed Crypts are double interments; one on top of the other, as opposed to side by side.

Commissioner Hanson inquired if the interred must be related.

Mr. Rodgers said the double burials must be the spouse, an underage child, or a child who was under the deceased's care due to medical illness. On the headstone the VA provides, the name of the Veteran appears on the front and the spouse and/or child's name appears on the opposite side. When appropriate or a cremation urn is interred, two names appear on the opposite side of the headstone.

Commissioner Toliver inquired whether there is a law or requirement for permission to place an urn of cremated remains within the crypt on top of a casket. He noted that in the state of Louisiana where he comes from, they do not need permission from the state or city to place an urn on top of a casket.

Mr. Rodgers said the vault is reopened to add an urn. Cultural respects are taken into consideration. We have learned a lot about this type of interment.

Commissioner Olson said the new burial process is a step forward and more functional. In Minnesota and other cold states during the winter, the state Veterans' cemetery had to burn through 12 feet of solid sand to dig graves. They burned 400 lbs. of propane in a specially designed container to heat the ground in order to dig six feet down. It was costing the state \$1,000 for propane per burial; the new process is less costly and a welcome change.

Mr. Rodgers said 95% of the plans for the Flagstaff cemetery have been submitted to Washington, D.C. and are already in review and closing of the plans process should be complete by mid-June. The 100% review of plans will be developed based on comments from Washington on the 95% plans. By this time next month, the plans should be out for bid by contractors.

Chairman Cushing inquired if an expected date of September 1 for the construction start date was still on target. Mr. Rodgers said the September 1 date is still on target.

Mr. Rodgers reported that Marana project title searches are complete. He talked with the attorney for the Ki family and they are preparing documents and will forward them to the Attorney General's (AG) office for review. If there are no comments by the AG's office, the land will be deeded to ADVS.

Mr. Rodgers talked with the National Cemetery Administration in Washington, D.C. and found that funding for the Marana project is on their list for fiscal year 2014 funding, beginning October 1. Nationwide, \$46 million for discretionary spending for new cemeteries and expansions is being proposed. The Marana project is on the discretionary spending list and unless something critical arises, ADVS expects the Marana Cemetery project to be funded in the next fiscal year.

Commissioner Hanson said he was happy to learn that Pima County had agreed to pave the road to the project.

Mr. Rodgers reported that the Marana Cemetery, which is located in Pima County, with a small portion in Pinal County, will consist of two parcels of land; 80% is 25.6 acres and the other 20% is 6.4 acres which is going to be deeded separately because the Ki family wants a road to come from Pinal County through the area. There is a reversionary condition in the deed that if the road is not completed or committed to by the year 2020, the 6.4 acres would be excluded from the project.

ADVS has been in contact with the county supervisor for the district and received notice from the board of supervisors who is planning the road.

Revisionary restrictions for the project will be minor, one being that the land has to be used for its discretionary purpose or it reverts back to the owner.

ADVS received conditional approval for the grant bid tabulations for the new nurse call system and updated security system for the Phoenix Veteran Home Alzheimer's unit that are to be submitted by June 15th. Bid tabulations will be sent to Washington D.C. and after approval, ADVS will be awarded a bid grant and notice to proceed.

Chairman Cushing remarked that the newly paved road from Indian School to the Veteran Home entrance was quite enjoyable when driving in today.

Mr. Rodgers made a personal announcement that on June 27th, he will be 65 years of age and plans to retire from ADVS effective July 6th. He and his wife Janie plan to remain active in the Veteran community by volunteering for Veteran organizations. They are associated with other couples who will work with them in helping Veteran groups.

Mr. Rodgers noted that the Navajo Nation has issued a solicitation for an architect. Proposals are due today and tomorrow they will start the review process for selecting an architect by June 1. Mr. Rodgers will meet with Navajo Nation officials to assist in the selection process.

After his retirement, Mr. Rodgers plans to volunteer as technical advisor to the Navajo Nation for the building of the Chinle Veteran Home.

Chairman Cushing asked where we stand at the Federal level on the 35% reimbursement issue. He feels we need to keep a close eye on the situation until it is resolved.

Mr. Rodgers said we still don't have an answer from the Veteran Administration's Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. Meetings were held with John Garcia and Stephanie Birdwell of that office in March. The matter is to be handled at the VA level in Washington D.C. ADVS will continue to follow up with Washington, D.C. officials on the matter.

Dave Hampton said ADVS gave John Garcia a copy of the resolution at the March meeting. He was to present it to Congress for them to look into the matter.

Mr. Rodgers said he met with the San Carlos Apache Tribe last week and they are serious about building a tribal cemetery on the reservation. Last week Mr. Rodgers participated in a conference call the tribe made to Joshua Delagon, Director of the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program in Washington, D.C. He spent 1-1/2 hours on the phone with tribal members and plans to help them with the project.

Chairman Cushing said on behalf of the commission he appreciates all that ADVS is doing for our Veterans through their office, the Veteran Homes, and the Sierra Vista Cemetery. The benefit of the hard work and expertise has paid great dividends in state of Arizona. Every veteran he has talked to in last five years is appreciative of all the agency is doing for Veterans in making sure issues are being addressed. We are seeing results from all the efforts that are put forth.

Dave said there are no new legislative updates since the May 3rd report. He noted that the legislature is on a 3 day work week; Tuesday through Thursday. They are in a standoff until an agreement is reached with the governor over the Medicaid Bill. After this matter is resolved, many pending bills will go away.

Commissioner Rustand inquired about the status of Senate Bill 2004 –Veterans' Home; Tribal Lands.

Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer, said the bill has been put on the consent calendar and is ready to go to the floor. He doesn't see a problem in it passing.

Commissioner Toliver inquired if any last session date has been determined. Dave said it is hard to predict but eventually the legislature have to do what the governor wants and the bills left with no action taken will go away.

Introduction and Welcome to Invited guests – Chairman Cushing recognized guest Gene Crego, AZ State Council President of Vietnam Veterans of America, who also serves on the Board of Directors for UAV and is chairman of communications.

Mr. Crego advised the commission that Jim Vail, Director of the VSO Program for Veterans of America is in Tucson and will be in Phoenix next week to train Veteran Service Officers (VSO's) for the Vet Pro Program, which is similar to the state's training. He will meet with the director of the VA Regional office and with ADVS Assistant Deputy Director Mike Klier.

Jim Vail was at the University of Arizona in Tucson for 3 years and served on the Blind Veterans Commission in Tucson.

On April 17th Mr. Crego and a group of Arizona Vietnam Veterans visited two Senatorial offices and nine House of Representatives offices in Washington D.C. They did not get to meet with elected officials but were assigned liaisons who were active duty people on loan from the U.S. Congress who escorted them around. He said they were warmly received.

Gene Crego's team gave out "I Support Veterans" pins which were a big hit.

Mr. Crego presented several copies of the new Arizona Veterans Magazine noting the magazine contains an article about Colonel Strickland and Chairman Cushing and other commissioners are pictured on the front page.

Mr. Crego brought 10 Vietnam Wall 25th Anniversary Commemorative books for anyone who wanted one. He said Government Affairs plans to present the books to the Congress sometime this year.

While in Washington, D.C., Mr. Crego and the Vietnam Veterans visited the “In Memory Plaque”, a 2’ X 3’ granite slab with an inscription that reads, “In Memory of the men and women who served in the Vietnam War and later died as a result of their service. We honor and remember their sacrifice.”

The plaque is in the ground even with the surface, without protection, where people can walk on it. It was hard to locate or see at night. Because it is hard to find at night, and to keep people from walking on it, and leaves and debris from covering it, a black chain was placed around it to preserve it. Each member of Congress the Veterans visited was made aware of the plaque and its current location and the fact that it has not achieved sufficient “presence” to honor those it commemorates.

The plaque was installed because of actions Congress set forth in Public Law 106-214 and it was intended to honor and pay homage to men and women who died from causes related to their service in Vietnam, yet who are ineligible to have their names inscribed on The Vietnam Wall. The plaque needs to be raised above the ground so it can be easily read and properly lit for viewing after dark.

If Congress is 100% in agreement, the plaque will be replaced and cared for differently. Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) is working with the Department of the Interior to see that this is done.

Mr. Crego said Veterans have an ally in Representative Ann Kirkpatrick who is on a Veterans committee in the House of Representatives. They have someone to help them on issues when needed.

Government Affairs suggested to the visiting Veteran group that they stay in touch once a week with their elected officials and keep them posted on Veteran issues. Mr. Crego noted that at Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV) meetings, they are now seeing more U.S. Congress representatives and people from the Arizona State Legislature in attendance.

The representative for Congressman Matt Salmon said the Congressman is trying to start a Women’s Veteran Commission. He is interested in having Mr. Crego serve on a committee and invited him to his office.

Terry Araman, the Program Director of the Madison Street Veterans Association, said Congressman Salmon visited the Mana House for homeless Veterans to learn what it was about.

Chairman Cushing thanked Mr. Crego for his remarks and details of his trip to Washington, D.C. The commission appreciates his insight.

Outreach Activities for the Commission – Chairman Cushing called on Commissioner Perkins for a report of outreach activities. Mr. Perkins presented a report and noted that when the Town Hall meetings were discontinued, a decision was made for commissioners to reach out to VBC’s and join them in their activities for access to Veterans

The American Legion held a “Hiring Our Heroes” event sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. It was strictly for Veterans and their spouses. Veterans had an opportunity to learn resumé writing and interview techniques. One of the goals the commission had was one-on-one communications with Veterans and any issues they had with the VA Hospital, VA claims, and to let the Veterans know the commission is representing the governor but also representing them as a go between to help them where needed

Ron Shackle, VBC from the Chandler office invited Commissioner Perkins to attend a Veterans Job Fair on March 20th at the State Fairgrounds. The job fair was for anyone to attend. It was a huge event with 4,000 in attendance and 170 employers representing various industries, banking, law enforcement, customer service, engineering, etc. At the end of the exhibit building, an area was screened off with a sign marked “Veterans”. Veteran organizations were set up inside to talk privately with Veterans.

Chairman Cushing and Mr. Perkins attended the University of Phoenix “Hiring Our Heroes” Job Fair on April 25th. The University of Phoenix has signed a contract with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to help support the “Hiring Our Heroes” events. The Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, the Dept. of Labor & Veterans Employment, and the AZ Dept. of Employment Security were involved in sponsoring the event.

The event was strictly for Veterans and spouses. Employers were set up four to a room for holding private interviews. The employers were there with jobs and ready to hire Veterans.

The University of Phoenix provided Veterans a room diagram showing the name and location of each employer so those Veterans with multiple skills could apply with more than one employer.

Mr. Perkins said the Chamber of Commerce will host another national event in Tucson at a date to be determined.

Commissioner Perkins said these events are good exposure for the Advisory Commission and it would be good if the commission could be notified of these events by ADVS Veteran Benefit Counselors.

Commissioner Toliver inquired whether these events are tracking their success to see how many Veterans are actually being employed as a result of the job fairs. Mr. Perkins asked Ron Shackle about it and learned employers report their job fair hirings to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Barnes said the results are tracked at the national level and he is not sure if they are being tracked at the state level.

Chairman Cushing noted that the commission seems to get more exposure at these events than at town hall meetings.

Commissioner Perkins said the table top display draws attention. People are curious and inquire about the Advisory Commission. Most people had not heard of the Advisory Commission and wanted to know what it does. The Veteran Flag Pins are very popular and are usually gone by the end of the day.

Mr. Perkins encountered a man at the job fair who was looking for work with the Veterans Administration (VA). Mike Klier was there and asked him for a resumé; the man gave Mike a resumé to forward to the VA.

Commissioner Hanson announced the “Stand up for Veterans” event that Glendale Mayor Jerry Weirs is proposing to be held September 28th. Mr. Weirs will involve Glendale Community College in the event for hiring Veterans that will feature food and entertainment. The Glendale campus is opening for this event and the Advisory Commission is invited to enter an information table. Participating employers are expected to have jobs to fill.

Mr. Hanson knows Jerry Weiers well and said he has the ability to go out to organizations and get funding for things for the community. When Mr. Weirs served in the legislature, he got funding to have flagpoles installed in front of the capitol that did not cost the state.

Chairman Cushing said when asking Veterans at the job fair in Tempe if they had been successful in finding jobs, some comments were that they were told to log onto the employer’s website to apply. Anyone who has traveled a long distance wants to know if they have a job; they do not want to hear that they should log onto a website.

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order – Chairman Cushing sent an email to former Commissioners Jeff Begay and Lionel Sanchez to inquire if they will be participating in the Veterans

Day Parade in Flagstaff on May 18th. He has not heard from Lionel, but Jeff Begay plans to attend. Mr. Cushing has to leave immediately after the parade for an event in Tucson, but encouraged the commissioners to stay for activities.

Mr. Cushing received an email from Commissioner Krula inquiring if he could get a ride with someone to Flagstaff on May 18th. Chairman Cushing asked Commissioner Toliver if he would contact Wayne Krula about riding together to the Veterans Day Parade in Flagstaff. Mr. Toliver said he would do so. Commissioners Cushing, Toliver and Krula will be in attendance along with Jeff Begay.

Vice Chair Olson commented on the private "For Profit" Colleges and "Public Colleges" around the U.S. Unfortunately, a number of "For Profit" Colleges with Veterans attending classes through the GI bill are finding the classes are not accredited for VA purposes.

Veterans are taking classes that won't allow them to graduate from an accredited school and therefore the G.I. bill will not be paid.

The practice is becoming more prevalent around the U.S. and is a policy the commission needs to look into and discuss relatively soon.

Mr. Olson noted that the VA made some changes and there is some reasoning behind it. Before the next Advisory Commission meeting, Mr. Olson will research the subject and make a report.

Commissioner Olson noted that at the April meeting, he and Commissioner Toliver were tasked in choosing a date and place to honor Joey Strickland. They have chosen Macayo's Restaurant on Central Avenue. On June 13th, Joey Strickland and his wife Leila will join the commissioners for lunch at 12:30. Mr. Olson has made the reservations. Commissioners will present a plaque; Mr. Toliver and Mr. Olson will talk more about some other ideas to honor Joey Strickland.

Chairman Cushing called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Olson. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Perkins. The meeting adjourned at 11:23 a.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held June 13, 2013.