

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

**September 12, 2013**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners**

Jeff Olson, Chair  
Ron Perkins, Vice Chair  
Philip Hanson (via teleconference)  
Brett Rustand  
David Toliver, Sr.

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

Ted Vogt, ADVS Director  
Robert Barnes, Deputy Director  
Steve Weintraub, Outreach Coordinator  
Katherine Harding, Exec. Asst. to the Director  
Judy Smith, Admin. Secretary

**Absent**

George Cushing (Excused)  
Wayne Krula (Excused)

**Guests**

Lonnie Sorrell, Veteran  
Tina Allen, Brandon Lefforge, Brian Dozier, Bridget Trice,  
Antonia-Adams-Clements, Timothy Hernandez,  
Melissa Flohr – Mesa Community College (MCC)  
Steve Borden, Pat Tillman Vet Center, ASU  
Walter Tillman, SVA, - ASU  
LéRoy Rowser, Paradise Valley Comm. College (PVCC)  
Ray Torres, Torres & Associates  
Ricardo Pereyda, UAAA Veterans' Alumni Club  
Todd Crane, Cody Nicholls, U of A  
David Lucier, AZVMLA  
Cy Bassett, Veterans History Project  
Jesus Rodriguez, VA Regional Office  
Gene Crego, State Pres., Vietnam Veterans of America

**Guests via Teleconference**

Scott Heflin, NAU  
Marc Hunter, NAU  
Lori Jordan, NAU

**Call to Order** – Chairman Jeff Olson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Members and guests introduced themselves. Commissioner Hanson attended by phone.

Chairman asked for any corrections to the August 8<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes. There were none. Commissioner Perkins moved to approve the minutes as written; Commissioner Toliver seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**Introduction and Welcome to Invited guests** – Chairman welcomed 22 guests to the meeting.

Three guests from NAU, Scott Heflin, Lori Jordan and Mark Hunter participated by phone. Chairman called on Jesus Rodriguez of the VA Regional Office to speak.

**VA CLAIMS**

Jesus Rodriguez reported that as of August, 128,594 claims have been completed, bringing the one year and older claims backlog down to 52%. The overall backlog of claims at the national level as of August is 459,988.

Fully Developed Claims received at the VA office are waiting 77 days. There is an inventory of 1,888 claims to be processed. Of that number, 1,263 are one year old claims; just over 600 are at the two year mark and those are processed right away when received. Jesus noted that claims processing is still requiring overtime and he thanked the Veterans Service Organizations for their help in the claims processing.

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**VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT** - Cy Bassett spoke regarding the Veterans History Project, funded by the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress is working to preserve veterans' stories of their service and is dedicated to interviewing veterans at community living centers. Cy conducts the veteran interviews. A DVD and CD are created; one goes to the Library of Congress and the other to the veteran.

Chairman asked if the commission can assist in the Veterans History Project. Cy said if anyone has a veteran in their family or knows of a family friend's veteran, especially women veterans, who would like to be interviewed, they should contact David Engelhardt.

Commissioner Perkins asked if this project was the same as the Veterans Heritage Project the high schools are doing and if a book is being published? Cy said the Veterans History Project is a separate organization and a book is not being published.

**NAU PRESENTATION** - Scott Heflin, VA representative for NAU, spoke via telephone. The Military Veterans Support Center is certified as an Arizona supported program on the NAU campus, with 34 satellite divisions and VA representatives in the Flagstaff, Phoenix and Tucson regions. The majority of students are on the NAU campus.

NAU's Veterans Center is being remodeled and has been relocated during the upgrade. Upgrades will take about a year.

The CCC to NAU Program encourages veterans to attend Coconino Community College rather than initially attend NAU. Through the program, students have an NAU ID card and access to all NAU facilities. All credits from CCC are transferred to NAU once the student has received their associate's degree.

NAU's Peer Jack Student Mentoring Program is aimed at veteran/students. It provides a part-time, paying job which is an incentive for more veterans to become involved.

Marc Hunter, SVA Chapter President of NAU, who participated by phone, oversees the organization of student veteran activities on campus and works one on one with veteran/students to see that they have what they need in order to meet their mission.

Scott Heflin who is the NAU Certifying Official was asked how many veterans are in the program and the success rate of veterans with degrees through the G.I. Bill. Scott said last year there were 600-650 veterans and this year they expect 700 veterans.

**U of A PRESENTATION** – Todd Crane, President of the Vets Club SVA Chapter at U of A presented in person. The Student Veteran Assistance Program is a part of the national SVA organization.

The U of A Veteran Center inside the student union has 25 computers and seven more on order. Printing, scanning and copying are free to students. U of A recently broke a record with 200 veteran students at the veteran center. There is a 10% increase in patrons at the center from last year.

U of A is opening a satellite veteran center at the Arizona Health Science campus near the University Medical Center. The Medical Center contacted U of A about helping the 100-200 veterans now in the program.

Todd oversees veterans returning from deployment who are being joined with students just out of high school to help reintegrate the veterans into society. Outreach service projects and social programs such as bar-b-ques and tail gate events allow students to interact more with their undergraduate counterparts.

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Through U of A's strong collaboration with the Southern Arizona Healthcare System, Dr. Michael Marks, lead psychologist at SAHS, holds group and individual sessions at the U of A campus. A female veteran counselor meets with veterans in the campus health center. Veterans' only alternative would be to go the VA Medical Center and they might wait hours to be seen, while missing classes.

U of A is partnered with the American Red Cross and Americore who provide eight paid Math, Science and English tutors in the main veteran center.

Question: How are refresher courses or tutoring sessions set up for students who have been out of the classroom for a time and might need a refresher course? Todd said the university has tutors in the office whose services are free for veterans.

If students do not meet the necessary requirements, the university will find resources to tutor students through the think tank, the tutoring center for all students. The VA reimburses for think tank tutoring; there have not been issues with the VA not reimbursing for these services.

Commissioner Perkins inquired how many veterans are in the program and what is the relationship with the law school?

Mr. Crane said in the fall of 2012, the number was fewer than 900 students using the G.I. Bill. He is not positive of the number of veterans but believes there are 500 veterans in the program at present. He will have updated information soon.

The Law School Program heads up the Veterans Court. If the defendant is identified as a veteran in a misdemeanor offense, the veteran has the option of having their case heard in veteran specific court with a veteran judge, a veteran defense and prosecution. Verdict and sentencing are adjusted when the court takes into consideration mental health concerns and other factors.

**UAAA Veterans' Alumni Club Presentation** - Ricardo Pereyda, Board Member, Arizona Student Veteran Coalition, at U of A, is impressed by the spirit and drive of the administration to help student veterans achieve their degrees and get on a successful path in life.

The coalition is crafting bylaws and a strategic plan based on input from student veteran leaders on their campuses.

Commissioner Perkins inquired if the ASU Student Veterans Association had applied for 501 (C) 3 status.

Ricardo said ASU is developing a three member board of directors with plans to include two student veteran representatives on the board. They hope to have the board established by October 31. ASU has not yet filed for 501 C3 status.

Commissioner Rustand inquired how ASU plans to reach the trade schools and community colleges who are not yet participating in SVA Programs. There are more veterans in trade schools and community colleges than in universities; Brett asked if ASU planned to contact Pima Community College.

Ricardo plans to visit Pima Community College today, with student veteran leaders joining him, to tell PCC how the SVA Program works and what is available to veteran students.

Commissioner Hanson inquired if there are any differences in the goals and objectives between community college and university centers?

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Ricardo has gone through both the community college and four year university systems. A community college is a stepping stone to getting into four year universities. The disparity in services occurs with a high veteran turnover rate. Some may stay a semester, or they may be there for a year. Ideally students stay two years and get acclimated to the system before moving on. Veterans are graduating with college credits and transferring to a university setting and spending a semester or two and then moving on.

Chairman Olson said this kind of forward thinking and the use of best practices is why the nation is looking at Arizona to see how their student veterans associations work.

**ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY (ASU) PRESENTATION** - Walter Tillman, President of the ASU Student Veterans Association gave a power point presentation.

ASU's vision is to be sure the organization on the operational and strategic sides is in line with students getting their degrees.

Year 2012-2013 will be considered the year of service for ASU. Student Veterans of America is one of four registered student veteran organizations at ASU. Each campus has its own SVA Chapter.

There are more than 13 scholarships specifically for veterans at ASU, not including the Veteran Education Fund, which is administered by the Pat Tillman Veteran Center. ASU will offer its own scholarship in the spring.

**Jobs** – ASU's mission is to get veterans good jobs, provide career building workshops, resume and interview workshops and work with the career center at ASU and with HR managers and hiring directors for companies they want to work for. ASU has good relationships with local companies who want to hire veterans.

**Camaraderie and fraternity** - Walter is part of a group of 20 veterans who get together in a peer to peer connection. He has found this to be helpful.

**Peer support, counseling and health services** - If veterans have an issue that goes beyond what a buddy can help with, counseling or health resources are provided for that veteran.

ASU is also working with the Veterans Heritage Project and the Veterans History Project in recording veterans stories.

Contact information for ASU is through email at: [www.ASUTempeVets.com](http://www.ASUTempeVets.com); Facebook @AsuTempeVets and via Twitter @asutempevets.

A 30-day calendar of events is listed on the initial webpage. Walter encouraged anyone to attend events.

**MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESENTATION** - Antonia-Adams-Clements represents the ten Mesa Community Colleges. Mesa is the largest Community College in the southwest and one of the largest in the nation with 24,000 students. More than 1,000 of those students are veterans returning from deployment and using the G.I. Bill.

MCC has a large military presence on campus and recently opened a 1,200 square foot new Veteran Center in the historic clock tower building, in the heart of the campus. The building is divided between the Veteran Center and Student Success Center which processes military benefits, tuition, and housing assistance. The center provides televisions, refrigerators, 8 computers, scanners, printers and copiers.

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MCC has a large veteran services staff with seven paid employees.

MCC's Military Student Alliance became a SVA chapter this year and is connecting nationally. Most MCC student veterans are on a certificate program; these are fire, science, EMT or nursing programs, or honors programs. A large percentage of students are transfers between ASU, NAU and U of A.

The Career Center has a veteran job posting board with job postings from military-friendly employers and offers interview skills and resumé writing. MCC is partnered with ASU at the East Valley Veteran Education Center in the Upward Bound Program. All academic or service departments contain military service employees.

Antonia thanked the Advisory Commission for including the community colleges in the snapshot of veteran education and the opportunity to present at today's meeting. She asked that MCC be included when doing support programming and planning.

Commissioner Hanson said he would like to see someone from Maricopa Community College district speak for all their institutions. The Glendale Community College President's Council made a recommendation that was implemented at least four years ago to establish an on-campus veteran center. It has been successful and it would be nice to hear from the district itself.

Director Vogt said it's impressive to see what the community colleges and universities are doing. He thanked everyone who attended today and encouraged SVA chapters to not only develop a community among themselves, but reach out to the community of veterans who are already here. There are a lot of veterans in Arizona who have experienced much of what you are working to help other veterans with and these veterans in the community would like to help you.

Steve Weintraub encouraged the SVA representatives to look to ADVS for resources and connections as they develop their SVA programs. ADVS is integrated throughout the state with resources within veteran communities and through other means.

The AZ Coalition for Military Families with whom ADVS is partnered, has various resources for veterans and family members, *i.e.*, financial, behavioral, mental health that institutions might not be aware of.

Chairman Olson thanked the guests for their past and continued service to veterans helping veterans. The commission's goal is to provide good policy advice to the governor. In the next month he will craft a letter to the governor of what the commission thinks are good policies or policies that should be looked at more extensively. He asked if anyone had any thoughts he could address in the letter and, if so, to email them to the address on his business card that was distributed before the meeting, or call him. Send an email so we can incorporate your thoughts in the letter. We are very interested in attracting as many veterans as possible to go to college in Arizona who can graduate successfully, stay in Arizona and find gainful employment.

Commissioner Rustand said the commission wants their input and values open dialogue. If you have points to bring out or students are having problems, or struggles with the G.I. Bill, let the commission know so they can address the matter. That is critical for getting and keeping veterans in school.

Visitor Gene Crego announced the Arizona Hall of Fame Luncheon & Induction Ceremony to be held October 25<sup>th</sup> at the El Zaribah Shrine Auditorium.

**Communications** – A letter addressed to Commissioner David Toliver was received at agency headquarters on August 19<sup>th</sup> from former U.S. Army Veteran Armando Rico. The letter detailed his injuries while serving in Germany in 1959. He asked the commission's assistance in upgrading his

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10% disability rating. The letter was forwarded to ADVS Assistant Deputy Director Mike Klier for follow up.

Mike Klier advised Chairman Olson that a ADVS Veteran Benefits Counselor is assisting this veteran.

**Agency Announcements and Updates** – ADVS Director Ted Vogt reported that he and Deputy Director Robert Barnes attended the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) Conference in Nashville, TN, last week. About 35 states attended and received an update of issues at the VA.

John Garcia, Assistant Secretary of the Veteran Administration's Department of Inter-governmental Affairs from Washington, D.C., was at the conference and will visit ADVS in November.

The big push with the VA is the fully developed claims initiative from Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki. Director Vogt sent a letter Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> to Secretary Shinseki detailing what Arizona is doing to support the initiative.

Arizona already operates in the paperless claims environment and is waiting for the VA to get digits to digits (D2D) up and running. We send our paperwork to the VA in soft copy format. They print and send claims to Minnesota to be scanned and sent back.

Veterans are being registered on e-benefits, the online service center for the VA. Medical records can be ordered and just about anything can be done on this site.

### **ADVS Events**

The Veteran Women's Health Fair was held simultaneously at the Phoenix VA Medical Center and the Southern Regional VA Medical Center in Tucson. The event was well received with general sessions in the morning, and knowledge classes throughout the day with many vendors providing services. Director Vogt attended in Phoenix, while Robert Barnes attended in Tucson. Veterans, military members and vendors preferred the new format. Steve Weintraub was instrumental in putting this event together.

The Prescott VA sent a representative to observe so they can be involved in next year's event. We hope they will come online and participate next year with tours or open their CBOC's to show veterans what services are available to them.

**Upcoming Departmental Events** - Director Vogt will meet with Director Carter of the Department of Economic Security (DES) about how DES and ADVS can coordinate to address the issue of veteran employment.

DES has Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERS); dedicated labor personnel who work with veterans on employment issues. We want to be sure we are coordinating between the two departments efficiently and effectively in providing the assistance veterans need in getting jobs.

Tribal outreach continues; next week the director and Mike Klier will visit the San Carlos Apache and Salt River Maricopa Indian Nations. In the spring, Director Vogt will visit the Havasupai Village at that floor of the Grand Canyon.

September 21<sup>st</sup>, Director Vogt will attend a veteran celebration at the Tohono O'odham Nation.

September 28<sup>th</sup>, the City of Glendale will host a "Stand Up For Veterans" event. ADVS has been helping the city with this; they expect a good turnout.

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October 1, Director Vogt will host the directors of the Student Veteran Centers from three universities. As community colleges come online and become veteran supported campuses, they will be invited to participate. This is a chance to get to know and find out what is going on at the campuses and share best practices.

October 5<sup>th</sup> will mark the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Vietnam War Commemorative Partners dinner. ADVS continues to try and get communities involved to be official commemorative partners. A few communities have signed up to be commemorative partners.

October 24<sup>th</sup>, Director Vogt will address the U of A Law School and Veterans Court Clinic as well as student veterans. He is meeting with General Gregg Maxon and Justice Bales, who will take over as Chief Justice in 2015. The Supreme Court is going to pursue legislation in the next session as there are some jurisdictional issues they have to overcome in order to set up veteran courts regionally around the state.

### **ADVS Projects Status**

Commissioner Rustand inquired about the status of the Marana project and the Navajo Nation Veteran Home. Deputy Director Robert Barnes said the land is prepped so we will be ready when the National Cemetery Administration grants the monies to go ahead with the project, which should be early October.

Commissioner Perkins inquired if the Marana cemetery site can be seen from the highway? It is between the Pinal Air Park and Marana Road, just past the Marana exit sign from Interstate 10. Mr. Barnes said it is hard to determine from Interstate 10 exactly which parcel of land is the cemetery site. A sign marking the site will go up when construction starts.

Mr. Barnes said ADVS still functions as advisors for the Navajo Nation Veteran Home and that pre-construction meetings have been held with the Navajo Nation. There are money issues but they are moving forward. A groundbreaking date has not been established. Director Vogt said ADVS has done as much as it can; it is now tribal responsibility.

**Outreach Activities for the Commission** – Chairman Olson asked if there were any outreach activities to report.

Commissioner Toliver noted earlier this year that landmark bill SB 1128 was established to mark the fourth Thursday of March as Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day. The State Capitol is hosting a recognition ceremony and reception on September 26<sup>th</sup>. Senator Al Melvin sponsored the bill and Dave Hampton was instrumental in getting the bill before the house and senate for votes; Mr. Toliver is grateful for Dave's efforts. Commissioner Olson and Director Vogt will attend the recognition ceremony.

Chairman Olson referred to the list of sub-committees he distributed to members and their preferences of the committees each wished to serve on. He was able to place a commissioner on at least one of the committees they preferred. Over the next month, he would like the commissioners to talk to each other or email and collaborate on the sub-committee subjects.

He would like the lead person on each subject, to look at each issue and determine if it is good for Veterans and is it good for the state. If the answer is "yes", determine what the commission should recommend to the governor as to what they think policy should be.

Commissioners should be prepared with reports at the October meeting. If it goes well, the commission should be able to come up with a letter to the governor prior to the November meeting.

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At the previous meeting the Commission discussed strengthening bonds with the governor's office, the VA Regional Director and VA Medical Center Director and later possibly getting the VISN Director involved regarding all medical programs in this area.

Chairman Olson contacted Joe Cuffari, Policy Advisor on Veteran Affairs for the governor's office, who said he would like to attend an Advisory Commission meeting in the future. Chairman Olson told Mr. Cuffari he is welcome anytime and extended an invitation to attend whenever he can.

Chairman Olson talked with Director Vogt and Mr. Barnes about hosting both directors for the VMC regional office at a meeting for a minimum of one hour. He will try to get that done in the near future.

We are waiting for the attorney general to tell us if the sub committees received the Directors' agency update ahead of time, would there be any violation of the Open Meeting Law.

Katherine said the commission is not in violation of the Open Meeting Law in sub-committees, provided no action is taken on any items discussed.

Director Vogt said an update from the director before the meeting is not an issue, as the commission is not asked to vote on or take action on anything.

The way subcommittees are set up, without a quorum, no action can be taken.

Visitor, Lonnie Sorrell asked if he could have access to the information being submitted to the governor as he is concerned about the claims backlog.

Chairman Olson said, when issued, the report will be a public document.

Director Vogt noted that Governor Brewer attended the National Governor's Association Meeting in August. The VA gave all the governors an update on the claims backlog and specifically followed up with a letter to the governors detailing what is going on in their states.

Lonnie asked if he could have access to the updates on the backlog information. Mr. Rodriguez from VA Regional Office presented his business card to Lonnie so he can contact him in accessing the backlog update.

**Open Discussion for the Good of the Order** – David Lucier opened his discussion by saying Arizona is the most veteran supportive state in the union in Education, training, jobs, economic opportunities and health and wellness.

The Veteran Courts have the lowest recidivism rate of any system in the judicial system—it is less than 1%. The courts shift and reduce costs of the counties, municipalities and the state.

Commissioner Perkins heard when veteran court is held downtown, anybody who wants to can attend. David Lucier said anyone can attend veteran court and they encourage that. He said Patricia George has been instrumental in the Phoenix municipal courts and to Google her name to get court dates and times. General Maxon, with the State Bar of Arizona, has been involved for several years.

Steve Weintraub said the Federal Veteran Court meets on Tuesday's. This is a new program that replicates the traditional veteran's courts for the federal side.

David Lucier said the National SVA Convention will be held in Scottsdale in January, 2014. It would be good to have commission representation and a presence of the veteran community to show support.

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At last year's SVA convention in Orlando, ASU was one of the four finalists to present their model of what is being done in Arizona. Arizona is far and away the most veteran supportive state when it comes to public education and we would like to continue that trend.

Pima County has an Aquino Work Force Veteran Center that involves the municipalities, county, state and Federal Government. It is an efficient model that makes good sense and David Lucier would like to see it expand to the rest of the counties. Every Friday night, the Aquino Work Force Veteran Center serves free food for veterans and about 50-60 veterans attend.

Regarding the homeless issue, there is movement in the legislature to get support directed toward the Madison Street Mana House.

Commissioner Perkins noted that beginning next week; the veteran status notation on drivers' licenses will start at the Department of Transportation. Getting a veteran driver's license requires going through the entire process of getting a license renewal.

Commissioner Perkins said it's important for colleges to keep track of students who drop or flunk out. At one time, Pima Community College was in danger of being suspended because they were not reporting students who had flunked or dropped out and the college was still receiving G.I. Bill funding.

Steve Weintraub said he has been working with Jeff Borden and the leadership at state universities and community colleges. Student data is not tracked well; the numbers pulled are students receiving benefits. A success plan and transfers will be reviewed during the Veterans Summit on October 10th.

The Federal VA doesn't require the tracking of drop out students, but we want to see what the succession plan for veterans is throughout the state.

Commissioner Perkins said he talked with Cory Harris at the Mana House and was told if they couldn't come up with \$56,000 by the end of September, they would have to close the women's section of Mana House. He asked if Director Vogt was aware of this.

David Lucier said there is a fundraising effort going on and that \$30,000 has been raised toward the \$56,000 goal. There is a need for a long term initiative and a look at that whole program.

Director Vogt said he has knowledge of it. This was an initiative that Mana House made on their own. Mana House applied for VA funding but didn't get it because when the VA did the analysis of the state, they saw there was existing capacity to house homeless women veterans and families. Arizona is at functional zero for chronic homelessness. We have not received any requests for grants.

Last month, the chairman had asked for veteran employment statistics. Steve Weintraub gave the following statistics on veteran employment and provided a hard copy of this information to the chairman after the meeting.

RFI's from last month;

Asked about National Guard unemployment numbers;

End Strength

National Guard 5,078

Air NG 2491; 892 (Phx)

Unemployed

National Guard 12.1 %; Under Employed 27.1% and Family Members unemployed 21.6%

Air NG 22% for Aug, 32% in Jul, Sept/Oct projected worse; 36% projected due to Airmen coming off orders and orders expiring Received 8 requests this month (Sept) so far requesting financial assistance.

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National Guard numbers were obtained from their Yellow Ribbon Program in 2012; Air National Guard numbers are from 161<sup>st</sup> ARW's monthly survey results. The numbers are accurate.

Chairman Olson said the entire agenda of the October meeting will likely be the roll call, introductions, comments, work on the sub-committees, hear from the director and draft a letter to the governor. Commissioner Phil Hanson will be back in the valley and will attend.

Chairman Olson adjourned the meeting at 12:18 p.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held October 10, 2013.

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