



Veterans' Affairs Committee

Wednesday, February 8, 2023 - 6:00 pm
Virtual Meeting via TEAMS

MEETING NOTE: Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have prompted declarations of a public health emergency at the local, state and federal levels, this meeting will be conducted using measures to protect public health. This meeting will be held remotely through technological means, as permitted under Arizona law. In-person attendance by member of the public will be prohibited.

Legal Action Report

1. Call to Order / Establish a Quorum

Virtual online meeting called to order by Rocio (Rosie) Kary at 6:00 p.m. Those present and absent were:

Present:

Gary Smith
James Louis (arrived 6:04 p.m.)
Michael St. Ores
Terry Byron
Henry Johnson

Ann Hollis

Marlon Ruiz

Martin Belden
Melvin Morgan
Georgia Wise (arrived 6:14 p.m.)
Rocio "Rosie" Kary

Luke Johnson

Absent:

Gaeton Briseno
Jessie Allen

Staff Members Present:

Robert Hunter
Delma Sanchez

Representing:

American Legion Department of Arizona
Arizona Department of Veterans Services
Esperanza En Escalante
Marine Corps League, Marana Night Hawk 72
Marine Corps League, Marana Night Hawk 72 and
Post 81 Scottish American Military Society of
Southern Arizona
Military Officers Association of America
Tucson Chapter
Military Order of World Wars, Department of
Arizona
Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 106
Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 106
VFW Post 549 (Arrived at 6:14 p.m.)
Women in Military Service for America Memorial
Foundation
SAVAHCS, Non-voting Advisory

Representing:

Korean War Veterans Association, Pima Chapter
TAA, Non-voting Advisory

City Clerk's Office, Recording Secretary
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2. Invocation

Invocation was provided by Committee Member Johnson

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3. Introduction of Guests

- a. Jennifer Gutowski - (SAVAHCS)
- b. Keith Hamblin - Veteran's Center Presentation

4. Approval of Legal Action Report for January 11, 2023

It was moved by Committee Member Belden, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 9 to 0, (**Committee Members Briseno and Wise absent, Committee Member Louis had technical/audio issue**), to approve the Legal Action Report from the January 11, 2023, meeting.

5. Treasurer's Report

Committee Member Belden stated the beginning balance at the start of the month for January 2023 was \$2,663.28. He noted there were no expenses and the expenses reflected were for December not January and the correction would be made. He stated there was currently \$2,6163.28 on hand.

Committee Member Byron asked if the expenses from the Four Chaplains Ceremony would appear on next month's report. Mr. Belden confirmed the related expenses would be reflected in the February report as the check went out in February and checks were only recorded as an expense when they have cleared the bank.

It was moved by Committee Member Morgan, duly seconded, and passed by a roll call vote of 9 to 0, (**Committee Members Briseno and Wise absent, Committee Member Louis had technical/audio issue**), to approve the financial report as presented.

6. Committee Reports

a. Southern Arizona Veteran's Affairs Health Care System (SAVAHCS)

Jennifer Gutowski, Director of SAVAHCS provided a report on behalf of SAVAHCS. She announced they reopened their Quarters 13, where their Veterans Service Officers in partnership with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) were located. She noted a veterans claim representative was there in January and while she did not have a complete schedule, they would be back to Tucson on a more regular basis to process claims for veterans.

Ms. Gutowski noted their new partnership with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, stating they had been very intentional about hiring veteran liaisons on their workforce, both in Tucson and Yuma. She noted their support for them on their Family Day and future support for events to come.

Ms. Gutowski noted their participation in the Point-in-Time Counts that happened across Southern Arizona. She stated she had the opportunity to participate in the Yuma Point-in-Time Count and was interested to see the data derived from the efforts.

Ms. Gutowski noted this was the 95th year for SAVAHCS and a celebration was being planned for October 27, 2023.

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Ms. Gutowski apprised members on the PACT Act, noting claims processing had begun by the VBA on January 1 and as of the end of last month, they had screened over 14,000 veterans for toxic exposures. She stated the Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment Act of 2020 (Compact Act of 2020), started mid-January and it was important to get the information out that veterans in acute suicidal crisis could go to any Veterans Administration or non-Veterans Administration healthcare facilities for emergency healthcare at no cost. She said this included inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days. She stated veterans did not need to be enrolled in the VA to use the benefits and noted there was a link in her report for additional information. She further pointed out suicide prevention was the VA's number one clinical priority.

Ms. Gutowski stated screening for toxic exposures was one facet of the PACT Act, which also eliminated copayments for Native American veterans and removed barriers to access of VA services.

Ms. Gutowski also stated they would be holding a local resource fair in the near future.

b. Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery

Committee Member Louis reported former Director Colonel Wright was replaced by Dana Allman via gubernatorial appointment.

Mr. Louis noted Sierra Vista had 30 internments and Marana had 40. He also stated between the two cemetery internments, reimbursements were close to \$58,000.

Committee Member Hollis stated a golf tournament was scheduled for May and flyers would be sent out to members.

c. Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Committee Member Louis reported they had seen an increase in claims and calls related to the PACT Act. He pointed to the value in getting people connected to services, which benefitted families.

Mr. Louis stated they administered over 4800 direct services and received 326 claims, and they maintained a 96% approval rate for the claims submitted and returned.

7. Veteran's Center Presentation – Keith Hamblin

No presentation was given.

8. Military Lounge – Update/Discussion

No presentation was given.

9. Recruitment of New Members and Review of Recruitment Process - Discussion

Committee Member Byron noted she has asked individuals if they would be interested in serving on the VAC and followed that up with the letter, which stated what they needed to provide in order to become a member.

Discussion ensued on the details of the letter.

Ms. Byron stated the importance of new membership to strengthening the committee and encouraged members to reach out to individuals and organizations to recruit new members.

10. Fundraising – Update/Discussion

Committee Member Byron asked members to review the fundraising letter and make any recommendations for changes. She noted the letter should be sent out sooner than later, and Dignity Memorial would print it and cover the costs for postage.

Discussion ensued on the details of the letter.

Ms. Byron requested members submit the names of anyone they wanted the letter sent to and she would let members know when the letter was finalized, they could print it out and take it to places.

11. Costco Membership - Discussion

Committee Member Belden noted Costco would not accept the VAC checks without a Costco membership in the VAC name. He explained the previous practice of having someone purchase needed items and reimbursing them was sometimes difficult.

Committee Member Johnson inquired about the legality of the VAC acquiring a Costco membership.

Committee Member Belden offered to obtain information from Costco on the requirements for obtaining a Costco membership for the VAC.

City Clerk's staff, Delma Sanchez advised members she would seek clarification and advise the committee at the next meeting.

12. Four Chaplains – Update/Discussion

Committee Member Byron stated she was grateful to everyone who came out and participated in the Four Chaplains Ceremony. She noted KGUN 9 news was there to record the event and it was live-streamed and posted on Facebook.

Ms. Byron noted the event went very well and she only wished the time had been set for 30 to 45 minutes later, in order that it was a little darker for the candlelight service.

Committee Member Johnson stated the KGUN 9 news feature on the event was longer this year than it was last year, and they included an interview with Chaplain Zink.

Committee Member Kary stated she liked the time of the event, noting the temperature would have been colder later and the sunset contributed to the event.

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13. Veteran's Day Parade 2023 – Update/Discussion

Discussion was held.

The committee agreed the Veteran's Day Parade 2023 should be made a permanent agenda item.

14. Report on Current Events: For the Good of the Order

Reports on upcoming current events were provided by Committee Members Byron, Johnson, Kary, Ruiz, Smith, St. Ores, and Wise.

15. Future Agenda Items

Veteran's Center Presentation – Keith Hamblin
Costco Membership
Review of VAC Purpose and Mission
Invitations to VAC Meetings to Mayor and Council Members
Future Meetings – In-Person/Virtual - Discussion
Closing Prayer

17. Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 7:11 p.m.

Next Meeting: March 8, 2023