

DEPARTMENT VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMITTEE

February 16, 2013

The meeting of the Department Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee was called to order with Prayer and Pledge by Chairman Raymond Moore at 1:45 p.m. in the Washington Room at the Holiday Inn Gateway Centre in Flint Michigan.

Members present were; Chairman Raymond Moore, Donald Howard, Donald Chmielewski, Anthony Licari and David Spencer. Also present were VA&R Director James Topps and DVSO Phil McCaskey.

There were 12 other guests in attendance.

Chairman Moore read the minutes of the previous meeting held at Fall Conference. Motion and support to approve the minutes was offered and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Chairman Moore noted that the committee did not elect a Vice Chairman and Secretary at the fall meeting and a Motion to elect Tony Licari as Vice Chairman and David Spencer as Secretary was duly made supported and passed.

Mr. Topps was asked to present the Director's report. He noted the establishment of the Veterans Affairs Agency by Governor Rick Snyder by Executive Order 2013-2 on February 2, 2013. The details of the operation of this Agency are still being established with an anticipated startup date of March 30 with a Director, Deputy Director and 5 Service Officers and 2 Secretaries, and more information will be forthcoming from the Michigan Department of Military and Veteran Affairs. Mr. Topps also reported on the hiring of five (5) new Service Officers under the State College Initiative which will place the Service Officers in five (5) regions of the State to interact with Veterans who are attending selected colleges in an effort to enroll them for additional VA benefits. The American Legion received grant money from the State and has been assigned two (2) Regions which will be covered by the hiring of two (2) new Service Officers who are assigned to these areas. To date the equipment to be used by these Service Officers has yet to be delivered by the State and they are unable to effectively perform the duties which are required of them. Mr. Topps is following up on this. Mr. Topps also noted the backlog in the VA Regional Office and the continuing increasing work load in the Legion office and field areas. Recoveries last month exceeded \$14 million. Average processing time is reported at 262 days for new claims in Detroit and the office work load has increased 46%. Staff will be leaving for their annual training in Washington D.C. on Tuesday. Ms. Suzette Price has left our employ for a job with Ohio and a new Service Officer is now on staff in Detroit to fill this vacancy. Jim thanked all for the continued support of the VA&R Davison. He also noted that the annual PSO / DSO report forms have been mailed and should be completed and returned to the Chairman after April 30.

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Chairman Moore highlighted portions of the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs especially the Veterans Services Delivery Initiative request for \$8 million for FY 2014 and \$4 million for FY 15; The Veteran Service Officers increase from \$125,000 in 2013 to \$600,000 in FY 2014 and \$.00 in 2015; and a Supplemental Appropriation of \$2,997,500.00 for FY2013 for the Veterans Service Delivery Initiative. He also noted that a new website for the State which includes contact information for the Coalition members and county locations is available at www.michigan.net. He also noted that he and others will be attending the Washington Conference and visiting with members of Congress regarding American Legion issues which may be viewed on the Legion.org website.

Earl Ruttkofsky spoke regarding SAL representatives at all VA Hospitals and the State Nursing Homes and the contributions made by the SAL to each facility.

We also discussed the new initiative by the Michigan Secretary of State to have Veteran status imprinted on the Michigan Drivers Licenses and the Veteran ID cards being issued by some Counties.

Chester Trail of Detroit asked about the short hours for the Legion Service Officer at the Detroit VAMC and it was explained that this is due to the loss of funding from the State and a reduction in staff which resulted from this lost funding.

Don Chmielewski reported on VAVS/VHVS subcommittee meeting held earlier today. He noted that the year to date Volunteer Hours at Ann Arbor VAMC are 518 hours.

There being no further business to come to the floor a motion to adjourn prevailed at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond W. Moore, Chairman

David Spencer, Secretary