

Michigan Commanders Group
Victor Building in Lansing, Michigan
10 December 2019

Prior to call to order, Mark Sutton (American Legion) distributed a List of Veterans Bills 2019 for later discussion and MVOY Packet for later discussion.

1. Call to order 11:05a.m. By Commander Dr. Edward Hirsch (JWV).
2. Moment of silence for POW/MIA and Victims of Terrorism and Natural Disasters.
3. Invocation done by Reverend Jennifer Smith (WAC).
4. Pledge of allegiance led by Dr. Edward Hirsch.
5. Roll call of Commanders Group:
PRESENT: American Legion, AMVETS, Catholic War Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Marine Corps League, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Military Officers Association of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Woman Army Corps Veterans Association.
ABSENT: Disabled American Veterans, Non-Commissioned Officers Association, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Polish Legion of American Veterans.
6. Guests introduced:
 1. Nicole Noll-Williams (US Senator Gary Peters' Mid-Michigan Regional Director)
 2. Kate Melcher (Fisher House Michigan Executive Director)
 3. Lindell Holm (Michigan Veterans Trust Fund)
7. Corrections and Approval of minutes from 21 August 2019 meeting:

Motion by American Legion to accept, 2nd by VVA – Carried.
8. Treasurers Report by Ray Moore (American Legion):
 - A Mr. Moore distributed a document reporting a balance of \$3,736.44. He noted a typo on the document; August 2019 reported balance should have also been \$3,736.44. No dues have been received and no checks have been written since the prior report. 2019-2020 dues are due at this meeting. Received today from: AMVETS, JWV, VVA, MCL, Amer Legion, MOAA, and WAC.
 - B Dr. Hirsch asked what we spend our money on. Mr. Moore read last 4 checks written before today (\$1,000 to Fisher House Sept 14, 2018, \$200 to Scouts Program May 2018, Donation [no amount given] to WW II Memorial May 2018, \$500 to Legislative Breakfast [LB] no date mentioned).
 - C Mr. Moore explained American Legion paid for bulk of LB and we contributed some. Legion has decided to no longer do LB.
 - D Dr. Hirsch asked about audits. Mr. Moore replied audit is not worth the effort since we write only 2 or 3 checks a year.

Motion by Marine Corps League to accept the report, 2nd by WAC – Carried.

9. Legislative Committee. Mark Sutton:

- A Mr. Sutton introduced Ms. Noll-Williams who described work being done by Senator Peters:
- 1) Apprenticeship Program bill has passed in the Senate. Takes the State out of the apprenticeship approval process. Per Mr. Sutton, State of Michigan “sucks” at approving apprenticeships.
 - 2) Rep. Slotkin in the U.S. House of Representatives is proposing a bill matching Sen. Peters’.
 - 3) Sen. Peters urging Trump Administration to lift the benefits freeze now in place for Vietnam Veterans impacted by Agent Orange.
 - 4) Sen. Peters investigating rising prescription drug costs.
 - 5) Addressing the need for additional customs & border patrol agents. Pushing to add 600 agents.
 - 6) Also need more Agriculture inspectors. #2 and #3 most busy entry points are in Michigan (#1 is southern border).
 - 7) Sen. Peters pushing for \$9 million for Great Lakes Initiative.
 - 8) Fire-fighter foam (PFAS) needs to change. Cancer risk. Bill for training & Education on PFAS.
 - 9) Michigan (Traverse City) cherries need tariff protection from Turkey! Our cost is \$6/lb. Turkish cherries are coming across at \$1/lb.
 - 10) Ms. Noll-Williams took questions. MOAA said there is a severe shortage of qualified Cyber Security people. Ms. Noll-Williams replied Sen. Peters is working on it within the Homeland Security Bill. VVA asked for more info on Agent Orange funds being held up. Ms. Noll-Williams replied it is a recent issue (last 3 weeks). Not related to Blue Water Navy. She will issue a press release with more info.
- B Mr. Sutton resumed his report. Relayed message from Sen. Stabenow's office that the new CBOT (not otherwise defined) in Traverse City is built, ribbon cutting scheduled Jan 30th. Also pushing for Selfridge ANGB to get F-35's.
- C Explained Veterans Bills 2019 document he had distributed prior to meeting. State legislation – not Federal. Tighten licensing requirements for Veteran service dogs, eliminate extra fee for Veterans License Plates, expand Vietnam Veterans bonus.
- D Gave background on Legislative Breakfast. CG formed to protect VSO training fund grants. Nine years ago, they were cut/replaced with different process. By-Laws were changed to say CG purpose is push Veteran's Legislation. American Legion decided no bang for the buck, so breakfast is out. Instead, Amer. Legion identified 3 dates identified that Legislature is in session: 3rd week in Feb, 3rd & 4th weeks of March. Proposes that meetings of CG be scheduled with State House, State Senate and Gov's office on one date. Commanders & Adjutants will be split into 3 groups – some to Gov, some to House, some to Senate. Talking points would be developed beforehand. Perhaps morning with House, afternoon with Senate, separate group to Governor? Mr. Sutton asked, “how does everyone feel about that?”. Dr. Hirsch felt this was a big improvement.
- E Mr. Sutton took questions. Kate Melcher (FHM) suggested building relationships with legislators. MOAA said they did that and it has helped them.
- F Dr. Hirsch asked Mr. Sutton about Michigan Veteran of the Year. Mr. Sutton referred to MVOY Packet sent by Phillip Smith (not present) and distributed prior to meeting: Letter to CG, nomination form, & SOP document. Smith is in process of getting date & time for 2020 Veteran Night. Encourages all to, “get the word out about this award.” All CG orgs should send somebody to “represent.” Good P/R. Usually a Tigers night game in June. Discounted tickets. Amer. Legion suggested getting Governor to attend/present award. Sutton will check. Dr. Hirsch asked who votes for VOY. Mr. Sutton replied previous winners of VOY award. Discussion about who pays postage to mail all applications (18 in the far past, 4 last year) to all previous winners for voting. Consensus that Phillip Smith absorbed postage costs previously; his passion.

- G Mr. Sutton warned all orgs – this is an election year. Don't invite/allow politicians to your halls to speak. We do not endorse candidates. Take caps off & remove logos during pictures unless ALL candidates for an office were invited.
10. VSOR. Gary Easterling is sick. VFW representative spoke for the coalition:
- A Signed-off on next year's grant in Sept. Still \$3.8 Million (for advocacy for Veterans and their dependents across Michigan).
 - B Just completed audit. FY2018 secured \$3.199 Million of the 3.8 max granted. FY2019 (just done) secured \$3.688 Million.
 - C Spoke about VA “stay” on distributing Blue Water Navy benefits, until ships impacted can all be identified. 1,800 ships identified so far. “Stay” to be lifted 1 January. Nationwide, 8,000 claims already submitted since Blue Water Navy bill passed. Prior to that bill, 90,000 claims denied. Those 90,000 widows and Vets must re-file.
11. Old Business.
- A Dr. Hirsch asked Mr. Sutton about Commanders and Adjutants Training. Mr. Sutton looking to January to have something ready.
 - B Dr. Hirsch asked all organizations to send in rosters and by-laws. He said we already have JWV, WAC, VFW, VVA, and Marine Corps League. American Legion, AMVETS, and MOAA said theirs were submitted
12. Dr. Hirsch asked group, what is our objective? Mr. Sutton responded: *Legislation and Advocacy*. Mr. Sutton also referenced an American Legion folder on Scholarships (just distributed to all) and said we should be *sharing our programs*. We also need to *promote (publicize) Michigan Veterans Trust Fund* and work with Lindell Holm (MVTF) to ensure all local county boards for MVTF are staffed.
13. Dr. Hirsch introduced Kate Melcher, Executive Director for Fisher House Michigan:
- A All organizations present have contributed to FHM.
 - B \$20 Million goal in Michigan. \$7.5 Million raised so far, \$2 Million of that specific for Detroit.
 - C Detroit VA Hospital is land-locked (all property around it is taken). Had identified a site at John R and Palmer, but it had chemical contamination, so it is out. Still looking for property.
 - D Ann Arbor site: June 19, 10am dedication ceremony. All our orgs invited. Expecting to house 1st guests this Feb or March! (They don't want to hold the dedication ceremony in winter.)
 - E Iron Mountain VA Hospital indicated it also wants a Fisher House. Will apply next year.
 - F Ann Arbor House already has an Amazon Wishlist. Go to FHM website, “Contact Us” page. Click on “Amazon Wish List Program” takes you to Amazon. Need stuff like Toilet Brushes, Makeup Towels, Umbrella Stand, etc.
 - G Once open, the house will be looking for Posts to volunteer for serving spaghetti dinners or such.
14. Dr. Hirsch introduced Lindell Holm, Director of Michigan Veterans Trust Fund:
- A Processed about 1,550 Trust Fund applications last fiscal year. A little bit less than prior year. Credited strong economy for the drop.
 - B About 900 approved (16% increase in approvals over previous year). There has been an increase in dollar amounts approved: FY2018 \$854,000, FY2019 \$1.36 Million.
 - C Value of fund is currently \$64 Million. About 580,000 veterans in Michigan. Predicted to go down to 270,000 by 2045. Because of drop, board is considering where else the Trust Fund can help.

- D This summer began collaboration with Greenpath Financial Wellness. A dedicated phone line to them for all Michigan veterans. Call 1-800-MICHVET and ask for the Greenpath dedicated number. Financial counselor will help setup a budget with them for free. More help for those in deep debt.
- E American Legion asked if MVTF could contribute to FHM. Lindell said under current guidelines, probably not. Board would have to consider it.
- F Lindell said a concern is where are the future Veteran leaders going to come from. Maybe MVTF could help fund a leadership training program. Up to us to identify young members for that training.
- G Catholic War Veterans asked if Lindell could help them get Email notice of MVAA meetings. They haven't received a meeting notice for the MVAA quarterly meeting in over a year. He said he would pass the message along.
- H Lots of discussion on getting **qualified** board members on County level. Call Lindell (517-284-5299) to get an application for local board position. Larger county boards meet every 2 weeks, might review 5 or 6 cases and vote on them right there - following policies approved by the board of trustees. Smaller rural counties might not meet until they see an application. American Legion said some county board members are too elderly and need to be replaced. Local board positions should not be a reward for years of service. Board members need financial and social services skill sets.
- I VVA asked for a list of their members that are on local boards. They said they used to get it, but then it stopped coming. Lindell said everything sent to VVA started "bouncing" about 4 yrs ago, so he started mailing it to a local VVA office. VVA and Lindell exchanged contact information.
- J Lindell said MVTF audit was done last spring. Previous audits had indicated administrative expenses were too high. This audit, they liked what they saw (25% reduction).
- K VVA asked about construction of the homes. Lindell said he didn't have that information except he knew they had broken ground on Grand Rapids and the Macomb County home is going along very well.

- 15. Dr. Hirsch talked about JWV "Naturalization" Ceremony participation. Done twice, so far. At last ceremony, a number of Macomb County and state employees and the presiding judge were thrilled and asked for copies of the material. He said JWV would email a copy of the talk and the Bill of Rights document. Mark Weiss (JWV) added we are committed to doing this once every 3 months; there are two ceremonies a week in metro-Detroit. JWV doesn't have the people to cover each ceremony – other orgs were welcome to join us.
- 16. Good of the Order – none offered.
- 17. Because Legislative Breakfast is no longer, next meeting location, date, and time is not yet determined.
- 18. Salute to Colors & Adjournment 1:05 p.m.

Ed Hirsch
Chairman