

Department Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Fall Conference Committee Meeting

Friday, September, 14, 2007

The meeting of the Department VA&R Fall Conference Committee was called to order by Department VA&R Chairman Kenneth Clawson, in the Zoo Bar of the Boyne's Highland Resort in Harbor Springs Michigan at 2:00 p.m. Chairman Clawson opened with a moment of silence for our MIA and POW's, prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Clawson asked Dick Chatman to be acting secretary of the committee and welcomed both him and Art as new members to the committee; he also thanked Tony Licari and Ed Rushlow for their past service on the committee.

Roll Call

Roll call of VA&R committee persons was taken by acting secretary Dick Chatman.

Present:

- Committee Chairman Kenneth Clawson
- Committee Vice Chairman Robert Doan
- Acting Committee Secretary Dick Chatman
- Committee Member Donald Chmielewski
- Committee Member Arthur Thompson
- DVSO Emeritus Richard Morrison
- VAVS/VHVS Subcommittee Ronald Pearson, Chairman, Mqt. Home
- VAVS/VHVS Subcommittee Henry Altman, Saginaw VAMC

Districts Represented: 10 of 16, 1st, 2nd, 5th, 8th, 10th, 12th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th.

Election of Convention Committee Vice Chairman and Secretary

Donald Chmielewski nominated Robert Doan to be Vice Chairman, 2nd by Arthur Thompson; No other nominees were cast one unanimous ballot for Vice Chairman Doan

Robert Doan nominated Dick Chatman to be secretary, 2nd by Donald Chmielewski, no other nominees were cast, one unanimous ballot for Secretary Chatman

Minutes of the previous meeting

Motion by Robert Doan we suspend the reading of the June 15, 2007 VA&R minutes, 2nd by Donald Chmielewski, motion carried.

Introduction of DVSO's

In the absence of VA&R Director John Nelson who was attending the Department Finance Committee meeting, Assistant VA&R Director Ray Moore, handled this task. Ray gave a report on the just concluded Veteran Service Officers School at Higgins Lake. Ray stated that it was a success with attendance just topping out at 130. The DVSO's continue to work through the backlog at the Detroit VARO. Many cases and much effort by both VA and Legion staff will be necessary before the light is seen at the end of the tunnel. The staff continues its professional demeanor while continuously working toward maximizing the well earned VA benefits for their clients. DVSO staff in attendance: Jim Simmons, and Pat Kline. Department DVSO awards will be awarded at the DEC meeting tomorrow. Ray concluded in welcoming Dick Chatman and Art Thomas to the committee, expressed a personal thank you from Director Nelson to chairman Clawson for his and the committee's hard work and to the VA&R staff.

Chairman Clawson asked VAVS/VHVS Subcommittee Chairman Ronald Pearson to give a brief report and introduce members of his committee. Chairman Pearson stated that they did not have a quorum at their committee meeting and this is becoming a problem. He and Henry Altman were the only members to show up; he then proceeded to give a brief report of what took place during his committees meeting. Ronald did point out that department still showed Raymond Lloyd on the committee as Detroit VAMC and it should be Curtis Wynn, which has to be corrected. Chairman Clawson stated that he would get with Ronald later to discuss what could be done about the lack of reports and poor attendance of the VAVS/VHVS subcommittee.

Chairman Clawson introduced SAL VA&R committee chairman Dennis Larson. Dennis stated that he looks forward to working with the Legion VA&R committee and supporting VA&R programs.

Commander Williams paid us visit and the floor was given by chairman Clawson. Commander Williams emphasized that we have done some things to enhance the Veteran Post Service Officer Program in the Department. Shortly each post service officer in a district will be notified where their post service officer schools are going to be. The letter informing them of this will be coming from the commander's office encouraging them to attend. The commander emphasized that the VA&R committee and the DVSO's have the full support of his office and that we were the front line for one of the most important of the 4 pillars of The American Legion, service to our veterans.

Correspondence

Chairman Clawson covered a email received from department Adjutant Lafferty concerning pending Michigan Senate Bill 374, which directly threatens vets of WWII and the Korean Conflict. If enacted in Michigan any person who is in any nursing home and who has Medicaid make payments must pay Medicaid back out of their estate after they die. Since the Medicaid program only allows a recipient \$2000, a car and a home this means, "The government will grab their homes. Much discussion followed. With no decision on what action the VA&R committee should take on this issue. While the committee disdains the fact that the government would take the homes of our veterans, we also realize that Michigan is receiving a lot of pressure from the Federal Government to comply with a law that has been on the books since 1993. Michigan is one of the last hold outs, and is in danger of losing 5 billion dollars of federal Medicaid assistance. Governor Granholm would be hard pressed to lose 5 billion dollars coming into the state at this time. Chairman Clawson will inform Department that the VA&R committee is unanimously opposed to Michigan Senate bill 374 and will get further clarification on the department's stand on this issue and report back to the VA&R committee at the next meeting.

Unfinished Business

Chairman Clawson addressed the finance committee today concerning providing increase of mileage payments to DVSO's. He pointed out to the finance committee that the DEC had previously approved the IRS recommended reimbursement rate for all employees, this has not happened for DVSO's, he urged the finance committee to follow the DEC's ruling. He was told that the matter would be discussed at the January Finance Committee Budget meeting. Chairman Clawson was also informed by the Finance Committee's Advisor that the DEC does not have the authority to tell the Finance Committee how to run their business. There was much discussion on the matter with everyone in attendance agreeing that the DVSO's were the backbone of the Department and should receive just compensation for the great work they do. Vice Chairman Doan made the motion that the Finance Committee follows the recommendations approved by the DEC that DVSO's received IRS approved mileage reimbursement rates, supported by Donald Chmielewski, motion carried. The VA&R committee will resubmit a previous resolution, with a little tweaking, to address this issue.

New Business

There is an issue with a couple of DVSO's, Mr. Fetish and Mr. Ratche's computers communicating with the Detroit office when they are on the road or when they attend venues such as the Service Officers School. This necessitates them carrying paper files on the road which creates obvious problems. The solution is to purchase 2 new laptop computers for these DVSO's. Chairman Clawson will have further discussion on this issue with Director Nelson.

Good of The Order

Assistant Director Moore informed those in attendance that the Department's legislative committee was devising a plan to generate some funds from the state to supplement the funds available for state VSO programs. That plan is to tack on a .50 cent charge to the registration fee for each automobile registered in the state of Michigan.

Chairman Clawson informed us that Ray Moore has generated a beautiful document listing all the District Post Service Officer Schools and the DVSO's responsible. Everyone was urged to take a copy and share with their respective districts.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Robert Doan, 2nd by Arthur Thompson, motion carried.

Chairman Clawson thanked everyone for their attendance, and declared the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dick Chatman

Secretary.