

**Call to Order****Chairman Nicholas Taylor**

The Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

On February 3, 1943, an extraordinary act of heroism occurred in the icy waters off Greenland after the U.S. Army transport ship Dorchester was hit by a German torpedo and began to sink rapidly. When it became apparent there were not enough life jackets, four U.S. Army chaplains, a Methodist minister, Jewish Rabbi, Roman Catholic Priest, and a Dutch Reformed Church minister, on board removed theirs, handed them to frightened young soldiers, and chose to go down with the ship while praying.

Commission Introductions

BG (PA) John Pippy	TAG
BG (PA) Maureen Weigl	DAG DMVA-OVA
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	SVC Chairman, President - MOAA
Mr. Tim Liezert	VA-Healthcare, VISN 4
Mr. Mark Baylis	Member-at-Large
Mr. Leonard Johnson	Member-at-Large
Mr. Michael Brooker- TEAMS	Member-at-Large
Mr. John Fritz	Commander, The American Legion
Mr. James Hogan	TAL
Ms. Constance Snavelly	SVC V-Chairwoman, Representative, Korean War Veterans
Mr. Richard Fine -TEAMS	Commander, Jewish War Veterans
Ms. Diana Henry	Commandant, Marine Corps League
Mr. Gerry Hawk- TEAMS	Adjutant, AMVETS
Mr. Paul Foresman- TEAMS	Commander, AMVETS
Ms. Barbara Loncar	Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. William Hines	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Robert Hammaker	Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans
Ms. Wanda Grover - TEAMS	Commander, Blinded Veterans of America
Mr. Michael Rang	Commander, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Alvin Loveless	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Larry Googins- TEAMS	President, Vietnam Veterans of America

Absent

Mr. Stanley Majocka	Commander, Italian American War Veterans
Mr. Philip Arnold	Commander, Military Order of Purple Hearts
Mr. Jesiah Schrader	CDVA
Ms. Lisa Kaye	Member-at-Large
Mr. Chris Fidler	Director, Keystone Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America

Mr. Peter Verbos	MOPH
Others Present	
Mr. Richard Hudzinski- TEAMS	VVA/LVMAC
Mr. Marc Ferraro- TEAMS	DMVA-EDS
Mr. Richard Hamp- TEAMS	DMVA
Mr. Nathan Silcox	Executive Director, PA Senate VAEP
Mr. Dusty Durand- TEAMS	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Seth Benge	DMVA- PPL
Mr. Jeff King	DMVA
Mr. Bruce Lindsey	Former Marine Captain
Mr. David Cowgill-TEAMS	VISN-4 Direct of Communications
Ms. Michelle Brandt-TEAMS	Closed Captioner
Mr. Brian Natali	DMVA
Mr. Joel Mutschler- TEAMS	DMVA
Mr. Edward Cherry- TEAMS	DMVA
Mr. Craig Andrews- TEAMS	DMVA
Mr. Joseph Butera- TEAMS	DMVA
Mr. John Noll- TEAMS	DMVA
Administration of Oath	TAG- BG (PA) Pippy
Mr. Mark Baylis was reappointed his position as Member-at-Large.	
Vice-Chair Opening Remarks	Vice-Chair Constance Snively
<p>I manage a private cemetery. When I have an interment of a veteran with a non-VA provided headstone, I let the family know about the free VA service medallion that they can request for placement on the headstone. Since we all probably attend far more funerals than we'd like, I had Becky provide a copy of the VA brochure on medallions and the form in the read ahead so that we can all spread the word. Also, about two weeks ago, Becky sent out an email providing a press release on the VA's expanded access to the Veterans Legacy Memorial, which now allows Veterans to chronicle their life story. The Veterans Legacy Memorial is the nation's digital platform dedicated to the memory of Veterans and service members. The new "Your Story, Your Legacy" feature will allow Veterans who were approved for VA's pre-need eligibility determination for burial in a VA national cemetery, to log in to a secure website where they can privately submit images, autobiographies, military and life milestones, and historical documents to tell their own story before they pass away. I provided the Veterans Legacy Memorial brochures.</p>	
Chairman's Opening Remarks	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcomed Nate Silcox the Executive Director of PA Senate VEAP • Mr. Taylor started off with offering Apologies to the committee for not following the bylaws back in June almost 2 years ago. "Specifically, when a MAL committee submitted recommendations for women's Veterans and the General MAL position, I should have brought that committees recommendation forward to the commission for full body approval. This would have been in accordance with the operating policies and procedures of the PA SVC dated 2 June 2023 paragraph 7F entitled committee operations." "Secondly, late last calendar year a couple of the commissioners approached me and expressed their opinions about the number of meetings and how frequently those meetings were. And some months we tend to rehash the same old items. I took it upon myself to publish our calendar year 2025 calendar meeting dates again without presenting it to this commission." 	

- Congratulated Mark Baylis for his reappointment as Member-at-Large. Governor Shapiro approved the recommendations from General Pippy and signed 8 Jan. 2025. Welcomed and Congratulated Ms. Pauline Bozdech-Veater as the women’s Veteran Member-at-Large on the commission. Governor Shapiro approved the same recommendation and signed her appointment on 7 Jan. 2025
- Attended the PA Veterans War Council meeting in Jan and on 6 Feb. Represented the SVC on 5 Feb. at Governor Advisory council for Veterans services.
- Participated in an office call with BG Pippy, presented a slide deck that explained what the SVC does and successes. Received his guidance, direction, and priorities.
 - What came out of the meeting was the general’s intent to reach more Veterans with information and increase VA outreach activities
 - Copy of slide deck was emailed out to all the commissioners
- Emailed current organization chart that identifies the members of the current legislator session.
 - Looking for a complete list of all the legislators that have served or currently serving in the military. Seth stated he will get a copy of that information so it can be sent out to the commissioners.
- Participated in biweekly VTCs Tuesday morning with Vice Chair, BG Weigle, Rick Hamp, Keith Graham, and Brian Natali. Received a suggestion from a commissioner to provide highlights from the meetings. For information purposes only an email with the highlights from the meeting will be sent out to the commissioners.
- Introduced Rebecca Yeagley, Becky, as the new administrative officer and SVC Coordinator.
 - Becky sent out the Bylaws, Title 51, and operating policies and procedures to Ms. Veater. Confirmed that Pauline received them.
- On 8 Jan. signed a memorandum of appointing a MAL Commissioner, Michael Brooker, as designee to serve on the Veterans trust fund evaluation committee.
- Will be providing commissioners with Presidents Day message early next week.
- Was informed by BG Weigl that 2nd annual VetCon is set for 22-25OCT 2025 at the Valley Forge hotel and casino.
- Was informed by Mr. Ferraro that the Old Lickdale Elementary school estimated opening date will be in late May 2025. Information to come on the ribbon cutting ceremony.
- Future activities: 25 March at capitol center Mr. Mastriano is sponsoring Vietnams Veterans’ Day, Connie Snavelly is going to attend in place of Nicholas Taylor to represent the commission.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Nick Taylor Asked a question to the DMVA -If a Veteran’s service organization wants to submit content to the Veterans registry who is the POC? BG Weigl answered: Angel Watson and CC Keith Graham

TAG’s Opening Remarks

BG Pippy

- Thanked Mr. Silcox for managing the process of him being confirmed as the 55th Adjutant General. Hoping to get orders back from DC and in a couple of weeks will have another ceremony, will invite everyone to attend. Introduced 1LT Jacob Arquisola as BG Pippy new aid, will hand out business cards once received.
- Looking into how we can be innovative in everything we do, how to reach more Veterans, how to make sure that you get the same service and benefits no matter where you are in PA.
- Now that he is confirmed he is ready to do a road tour to spend one on one time with the commissioners, to listen to issues and work with the team to problem solve.

- Established an AA program held at the Chapel here on post, eventually will be moved to the new Lickdale building once completed.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Approval of the December 6, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Motion: Ms. Barbara Loncar, Commander, Veterans of Foreign War, made a motion to approve the minutes.

Second: Ms. Diana Henry

The body agreed; motion carried. Minutes approved with correction of Nick Taylor affiliation.

Reading of Official and Other Communications

Chairman Taylor

- Sent out a link recently of the 2025 Federal benefits for veterans, dependents, survivors, and care giver guide. It's a publication produced annually by the federal VA the link is a 125-page brochure. Recommends distributing it throughout your organizations.
- Request for Mr. Silcox to keep the information coming. Reminded Mr. Silcox and Mr. Hillman that the more advance notice on upcoming bills the better the officers of the organizations can poll their organizations to get their feedback so it's not just the opinion of the officers of the organizations. Asked Mr. Silcox if he could provide what bills he thinks will be voted upon this legislative session?
 - Nate Silcox responded that he will do his best to communicate within his confines and realms of possibility.
 - Seth Benge explained things moved quickly last week, next session is in March and that the more his team knows the more the team will relay the information.

Deputy Adjutant General-VA Remarks

BG (PA) Maureen Weigl

- Introduced Becky as the new SVC Coordinator.
- VETCON 22-25OCT 2025 at Valley Forge, will be having the SVC and War Council meeting at that timeframe, it will be very similar as last year. More details to come.
- March 27 recruit military is having a big hiring event at the Pittsburgh stadium, will send out details.
- Information to come about in Philadelphia, Hired Heros, Chamber of Commerce employer round table where they are bringing employers together to talk about hiring veterans.
- Will share notes on the GACVS meeting. Main topic discussed was hard to place Veterans.
 - Planning to do pilots and action some of the initiatives that were discussed.
- Jerseys will be delivered to the Philadelphia nursing home from the PA wounded warriors for the Superbowl.

Questions/Discussion

None

- Reviewed the new House of Representatives VAEP Committee members, Senate VAEP Committee members, House of Representatives Appropriations Committee Majority members, and House of Representatives Appropriations Committee Minor members.
- Discussed a few bills that are being passed and where they are in consideration. By next meeting the information will be put on a slide to show. A lot of bills get dropped at once and it takes a little to get caught up, there's another session date in mid-March. Most of legislation will be introduced and as soon as PPL knows what could possibly be moving will brief the Chairman with the information.

Questions/Discussion

- Robert Hammaker asked question about property tax.

- Last year there were over 40 inspections from different regulatory bodies. So far, this year have completed the Department of Human services annual surveys at Southeast Veteran center and Holidaysburg. Department of Human Services was in Erie 6 Feb., and they are wrapping up their annual survey.
- Reviewed the updated surveys and COVID-19, Influenza, RSV Data across the homes
 - COVID positive residents across 4 homes. 14 total residents? 10 staff members currently tested positive.
 - Currently have an outbreak of the flu at DVVH- 10 Residents currently being treated in house. 4 Staff members across the 6 homes with the flu.
- Currently 1130 residents in care, nursing side only, 80% of the beds filled
- Continue to have staffing issues with over 400 vacancies.
 - Mentioned the upcoming incentives
- Construction standpoint-working on 3 projects now. The biggest one is in Holidaysburg hit some delays with transfer switch, don't have an ETA of opening yet. Once date is set for ribbon cutting all members will be getting an invite.
- Multiple 100-year birthdays, Thanks to General Weigl for celebrating in DVVH, Erie, and SEVC.
- Advisory meeting in DVVH and sending commandants down to DC for the National Association State Veterans home meeting next week.

Questions/Discussion

- Mr. James Hogan stated the PA American legion did a hospital tour over the holidays and appreciated allowing the group into the homes.
- Mr. Nick Taylor asked if the Veteran homes have a long-term plan to expand the capability for treatment for mental health in veterans due to an increase of dementia an Alzheimer's patients. Travis answer: That's a big challenge that we are facing today. There's an increase training on mental health for the clinical staff.
- Mr. Mark Baylis asked: Do you accept early-stage dementia or later stage Alzheimer's patients into the homes? Travis answered: Yes

- Transportation still an issue throughout the region. Welcoming any ideas that you may have to help be more effective.
 - Region 3 has worked with Rabbit transit in multiple areas to get free transportation for veterans and shuttles.

- Have long care concerns with VTA Grant as the account that replenishes the fund is basically driven on donations. It used to be taken out of line item but now pulling out of the Veterans trust fund. Looking forward for ways to address the VTA grant in the future.
- VetConnect: Digital front not quite perfect. It's challenging to develop a website that is good with people of various age groups. Continuing to work with Angela and her team to refine the process.
- Outreach center: First facility looking to occupy sometime in May-June timeframe with an opening June/July timeframe. Veterans outreach center will be there a couple days a week, labor and industry, Career Link, DMVA teams. Great resource for individuals.
- At the Farm show about 200 people enrolled in VetConnect. Enrolled dozens into VA Healthcare.
 - Thanked Mr. Liezert, Marine Corps League, and DAV for sending reps to assist.

Questions/Discussion

- Mr. Taylor was contacted by the spouse of a Veteran. I directed her to VetConnect and said please look at the website. Has everything from health to clinics to you name it, it's there. She called me back three days later and said she was amazed an impressed and didn't know there was that much information out there.
- Ms. Lancor brought up the Rabbit transportation issues of getting Veterans to their appointments, time frames, sometimes they don't show up and have a veteran waiting. Mr. Graham stated that there are still some challenges, and that rabbit transit is still brand new, and they are learning as we are learning.

State Veterans' Programs

Mr. Jeff King

- Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans Pension serving about 2,463 veterans right now, about 15% increase of the last five years
- Blind Veterans' Pensions sticks to about 100 Veterans on this program.
- Educational Gratuity this program has really taken off. With a five-year trend of 150% increase.
- Veterans' Temporary Assistance currently at 72% of budget in this program.
- Military Family Relief Assistance \$48,177 in total grants SFY to date
- Disabled Vets' Real Estate Tax Exemption almost 22,000 veterans on the program
- Provided a screenshot of the proposed regulations on the State Veterans' Programs that is now on the Independent Regulatory Review Commission docket.
 - The SVC voted unanimously to adopt the draft proposed regulations at their public meeting on January 6, 2023. The IRRC is now directly soliciting comment from stakeholders. The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking will be published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin on February 15th, and the public comment period will extend from that date to March 17, 2025. Public comment can be made to RA-Regulations@pa.gov. Here's the IRRC website: <https://www.irrc.state.pa.us/regulations/RegSrchRslts.cfm?ID=3444>

Approval of State Veterans' Programs Reports

Motion: Mr. Robert Hammaker, Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans, made the motion to approve the programs report.

Second: Ms. Barbara Loncar seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried. Programs reports approved.

VISN-4

Mr. Tim Liezert

- VA secure sign-in is transitioning to a new platform - ID.me and Login.gov

- Public service announcement on vaccines, VA is experiencing more influenza-A reports than COVID. An increase of 100 more inpatient reports than last month.
- National Program Virtual Health collaborated with PennDot. There are 17 service plazas in the Commonwealth, more information on the VA virtual health platform.
- Secretary Collins was confirmed as Secretary of the VA.
- Mr. Liezert explained the process of the executive orders
 - How it comes into operation with V.A., starts with Executive Order at the present level, then comes to the agency. And V.A. adds certain implementing guidance. And sometimes, it could be several weeks before we can implement a guidance to fully understand the Executive Order and how to operationalize that.
- Executive orders discussed
 - Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion / Protecting woman / Hiring Freeze / Deferred Resignation Program / Return to work
- Mr. Liezert announced his retirement of 38 years will be at the end of March 2025.
 - This position is under the hiring freeze, but there is a nomination in mind.

Questions/Discussions

- Keith Graham asked: With the restricted space allocations do you see the VSO being displaced?
Mr. Liezert Answer: I do not
- Robert Hammaker asked how do we justify the unused vehicles that the VA is just sitting on? Mr. Liezert Answer: Do not have an answer right now, will get one to you next week.
- Mark Baylis asked who is responsible to initiate the paperwork to get the plates and registration done? Mr. Liezert Answer: Responsibility clearly starts with us getting transfer title and then we get the license. I think we own that but will dig in.
- John Getz asked what is being done about the privacy issue? Especially in Lebanon. Mr. Liezert Answer: will circle back.
- Nick Taylor asked about GAP Study? Mr. Liezert answer: Still a work in progress.
- Larry Googins asked why does it take so long to get the RSV vaccine? Mr. Liezert answer: I do not have an answer, I will get back to you.

Committee Reports

Legislative Committee

TDB

No official Report

Questions/Discussion

None.

Pensions/Relief/Grave Markings/State Military Cemetery Committee

Mr. Larry Googins

Had no additional reports after DMVA brief.

Questions/Discussions

Brian Natali was asked to discuss the open forum that will be held on Tuesdays from 2-3. A link will be sent out to the commission.

RETX

Mr. Alvin Loveless

No official Report

Questions/Discussions

None.

MAL

Vice-Chairwoman Constance Snavelly

The next Member at Large position to fill will be the seat that is currently held by Mr. Booker, whose term expires on 27 July 25. Per the Member at Large SOP, the Vacancy Announcement and application instructions should be advertised on the DMVA website 100 days prior to the expiration of the MAL term making that date on or about 17 Apr 25.

Board Name	Seat Name	Member Name	Term Begins	Term Expires
SVC	Seat 1 – Vietnam Veteran	Mr. Leonard Johnson	7/27/2023	7/27/2027
SVC	Seat 2 – Female Veteran	Ms. Paula Vosdech Veater	7/27/2024	7/27/2027
SVC	Seat 3	Mr. Michael Brooker	7/27/2021	7/27/2025
SVC	Seat 4	Mr. Mark Baylis	7/27/2024	7/27/2027

Questions/Discussions

- Robert Hammaker introduced Bruce Lindsay former Marine Captain who may be interested in the MAL position.
- Mark Baylis asked if the date could be moved back the opening date to avoid extension. Constance Snavelly explained that the reason for the extension was due to not having any women applications, so they had to keep extending until there was a pool of women applications to choose from. BG Pippy mentioned that his team will investigate the rules and see if maybe there could be a pre-publish of the information about the upcoming MAL position.
- Jeff Harrison asked if there were any restrictions with the MAL position. Nick Taylor answered there are only two positions that have requirements. One must have a Vietnam Era Veteran, and one must be a woman Veteran

Transportation Committee

Mr. William Hines

- New Van coming to Elk County which they contributed 55% of their savings spent on the van, state pays the rest.
- In Altoona a service officer called stating that the 2009 van was not road worthy, this van is currently not being used. A new van ordered to replace.
- Erie Received 3 vans- 2 vans that need pictures of VIN # to get registered.
- Pittsburgh wants to expand their territory
- Total 7 vans ordered. Looking to get \$70,000 from national. 18 vans going to auction. Cleanliness of the vans have decreased.
- December reports: 297 Drivers, used 4,901 hours, 87,550 miles, transported 2,740 veterans. Currently have 128 vans, including 12 new vans for 2024. Waiting on SF-97s for 11 vans unused, out of those 11 vans 4 are brand new that haven't received plates or credit cards.
- New van, with only 31 miles on it, sat almost a year in Philadelphia, squirrels and chipmunks ate at the wires which has been repaired. The garage that repaired wires would not inspect van because it didn't have over 100 miles on it.
 - VAMC returned the van to the garage for inspection so the Mechanic at that Ford garage took the van for a ride to put over 100 miles on it and when the mechanic returned the Check Engine Lite went on the dash. This van is still not in service.

Questions/Discussions

- Leonard Johnson checked on a van recently that is still not inspected that has been sitting since 2023.
- Robert Hammaker mentioned the grant hasn't been increased but the cost of vehicles has increased. Answer: Nick Taylor mentioned that it would be something he would like the commission to look into to see if we can get an increase of funds.

Veteran Health Committee

Mr. Mark Baylis

No Official report

Questions/Discussions

None

VSO Grant Committee

Mr. John Getz

- Application for grant received and due 17Feb2025.

Questions/Discussions

None.

Womens Health

Ms. Lisa Kaye

No Official Report

PAWVC

Mr. John Fritz

No Official Report

Questions/Discussions

None

Unfinished Business

- Leonard Johnson asked if someone could shed light on the Paralyzed Veterans Pension. Is it to stay at 150 or does it need to come to committee to vote on.
 - Seth Bengé states no pensions legislations have been introduced yet. Hopefully by next meeting
 - Nate Silcox will be introducing the senate version will double check to see if the cosponsor memo has gone out. Very interested in the issue and will continue to work with the DMVA.
- Leonard Johnson asked to verify the RETX exemption from 5 years to 10 years to submit?
 - Seth Bengé believes it still 5 years. At next meeting hope to be able to brief more on this.

New Business

Chairman Nick Taylor asked for commission's approval to appointment of individuals as committee chairs: Governance committee- Mr. Michael Brooker / Legislative committee- Mr. Mark Baylis / Member at Large- Ms. Constance Snavely / Pensions, Relief, & Grave Markings- Mr. Larry Googins / RETX committee- Mr. Alvin Loveless / VA Transportation committee- Mr. Robert Hammaker / Veterans Health Committee- Mr. Leonard Johnson / VSO committee- Mr. John Getz / Women's Veterans committee- Ms. Pauline Veater. If approved have the chair nominees to meet no later than February 28, 2025 and look forward to having the full commission meet and provide the report at the next meeting, April 4, 2025.

Questions/Discussions

- Mark Baylis asked if anyone heard about a new center that is possibly turning into a Senior Veteran Housing and substance abuse facility combined.

Approval of Committee Members

Motion: Mr. Mark Baylis, MAL, made the motion to approve Committee Members

Second: Ms. Barbara Loncar seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried. Committee members approved.

Good of the Order

- Barb Loncar asked if there's a DEERs office being put in Erie.
 - Keith Graham answer: VA does not manage the DEERs office that's part of the DOV system. Looking to potentially put an outreach center and will try to coordinate to put an DEERs center in there.
- Rich Hudzinski asked what is the possibility of reintroducing Veterans assistance line item to the Governor's budget?
 - Nick Taylor answer: Will need to research more information about why it was dropped and little bit of the history behind it.
- Michael Brooker asked the members who have interest in serving at the Governance Committee to let him know.
- Mr. Nate Silcox: On March 25th at 1130AM, Senator Mastriano is hosting a Vietnam Veterans Day at the capitol.
 - Anniversary of Victory in York Day as well as Victory in Japan day events will be held in May and September.
 - PA Department of Education has information on their website for the Purple Star schools.

Agenda for Next Meeting

Please email agendas to Chairman Nicholas Taylor

Closing Remarks

Thank you to BG Pippy for allowing the SCV committee to use the Hartranft Conference room to hold this meeting.

Next Meeting

Friday, June- 6th, 10:00 AM
 Forum: Arrowheads Community Center, FIG
 Annville, PA 17003

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

BG (PA) Maureen Weigl
 Deputy Adjutant General
 Veterans Affairs