

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council-Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 13th, 1000

Wetherell: First, thank you all for attending via virtually or in person. Today's meeting we'll go through a few things, but predominantly, it'll be some follow through with some other things that we talked about throughout the year that being said. First, I need to get a motion to approve the minutes from June and September. There was some technicalities with the minutes that I got figured out. So, they're all caught up on everything. However, we haven't approved June or September minutes. If somebody oh, Mike. Motion we approve June 2nd, motion and seconds to approve the June minutes. All those in favor, signify by saying hi.

All right, all those opposed, thank you. Um, I should ask those questions is there, we get a motion for the September minutes to. How Reynolds makes that motion that's. We got a motion in a second to approve the September minutes. Uh, any questions. Okay, hearing none. Signify by aye, if you're in favor

All: Aye

Wetherell: All those info posed by the same side. Okay, moving on um, the First thing I was going to ask is Sara on the line Augustinas. For an update regarding St. Clair County.

Augustinas: Thank you.

Wetherell: Hi, Sara you might have given us a brief update on St. Clair County and how things are going or what's going on with that. What's coming up and so on and so forth please.

Augustinas: Absolutely, so most of you already know me, but I'm clear on the zenith legislative liaison and as many of you already, there were some challenges with the administration of the homestead exemption for veterans with disabilities this past winter and spring.

Having different interpretations of the language that red honorable discharge with different challenges with how the counties were administering to benefit what paperwork they were accepting, et cetera. So last year, we met with lawmakers and made them aware of this issue from all four caucuses and language to address the ongoing situation in St. Clair County where the assessor was taking a new interpretation of honorable discharge and essentially sending out letters saying people would no longer be eligible for the benefit that they're audit.

We have submitted some language to address that that ended up in House bill, 25, 7, the property with the language that came from this group, there were two other provisions that has been kind of flooding around the general assembly for a while related to the [inaudible 00:06:54], for the exemption as well as an exemption for World War 2, so that passed the house and the Senate last spring at the end of May. And how spell 25 or 7.

However, it received in a mandatory veto from the governor in August and the last time I spoke with this group was June. That mandatory veto was not related to the veterans' provisions in the bill. It was related to another provision in the 146 page bill that was related to nursing. So, what happened was

representative and other law makers some of them today, address this in the fall veto fashion. The language from 2507 was moved on to Senate bill 2315 now, for everyone's awareness, the fall veto session was only 5 days long. So there wasn't a ton of time to do this.

The languages tweaked a little there was another provision again, not related to veterans that needed to be rewritten and they removed the provision. That have caused the mandatory veto that Bill 315 the modified property tax on the best passed out of the house and then it got over to the Senate on the very last day where it's sitting right now. So, a couple of things just to note, is that the general assembly can take action on it in January, but it's unclear if they will when a bill goes to the other chamber and can be called, it can be not called. It's possible staffs reviewing it.

So, at this point of time. Why a couple of different theories going around maybe they're just doing a check with the bill. Maybe there's another non veteran provision. That's a challenge there, but the general assembly, specifically, the Senate will need to choose to take that bill up in the spring. Now, they're not back in session until the 3rd week of January, if I can check my dates here, that's going to be to January 16 and they're only in session for that week in January so if they don't address the then we're getting into the spring session and there could be some scheduling challenges.

So, for everyone's awareness, none of the provisions that we discussed in previous meetings that you may have seen in summaries from veterans' connections are logged yet. So, right now the statute as it was last year, the year before is still in place.

And so that's my update for this group and I'm happy to take any questions or clarify on anything that they have been unclear.

Wetherell: Are there any questions for Sara.

DeGroot: I just want to make sure. Bill also includes the 200,000 dollar assessment. Right. That's important where you're getting a lot of questions about values, like, growing up around now.

Augustinas: That's correct, the language from the two bills for veterans was identical and then I'm happy to send you over a summary, but for everyone's awareness on our website, on the communications tab, we have our monthly veterans' connections and monthly newsletters, and I leave legislative updates in there. So if you ever want to pull that summary or send it to that trends, you're speaking with that is available for you.

Rep. Swanson: Sarah, this is Rep. Swanson? Yeah, I think one of the things that is being looked at is the property tax, the real estate property tax issue in some of our counties. How the state can reimburse those counties for the loss of that real estate property.

You hearing that, too, that if we could, if we could back fund the loss to the schools, and some of the local governments, because of the benefit of the property tax relief benefits. I think that that is what's being looked at this time. I think that's what kind of bolded and slowed it down in the Senate somewhat.

Augustinas: Representative Swanson I agree with you. Um, so for everyone's awareness, it is stalled in the Senate and, and it's definitely, um. The provisions are there's discussion among spectrum advocates county assessors, um, a lot of different stakeholders, especially because we're dealing with property tax, which can be sensitive. Representative Swanson, I can speak about 15Million that was appropriated to in

the budget implementation bill. But if you would like to address it um, you're obviously very familiar with it, too.

Rep. Swanson: Well, I think that 15Million was just a starting point. I think they're looking at more of how much is it actually. How much does it actually cost that tax relief? It's 15Million is going to be enough, or it's going to take 2025, 50Million dollars. And I think that's what's still being looked at through the Senate Chambers is how much is enough to offset those costs to the schools and that property tax abatement. But it also then it opens up another can of [inaudible 00:12:18].

If we do that for the veterans, what about the senior freezes? What about all those other taxes? So it's, it's a bigger animal and just this part of the bill was being looked at.

Augustinas: Correct and I, I didn't want to presume with this group really wanted to focus on just the veteran aspects. Um, what representative sponsor is speaking to is obviously there's a shift in property tax, um, with any exemption and so counties that are disproportionately affected by this exemption, because they contain a military base, um, have been vocal about their concerns and so there is a department of revenue property tax study. That's on their website on the general assembly Web site that this group can review. There are conversations around that as well.

In this year's budget, implementation plan, Bill, there was 15Million dollars appropriated to the Department of revenue to essentially find ways to reimburse these counties that have significant property tax losses due to exemptions and one of the elements in the property tax bill this year we're different additional exemptions, so, to reference point, I do think there's probably a review of what is the fiscal impact I think that very well could explain the being stalled from the house to the Senate to make sure those numbers are being crunched accurately.

Rep. Swanson: But just to relieve any concerns, what's in place today remains in place moving forward. Are our veterans benefits were still be eligible. It's just tweaking that to that 250,000 dollars. Um, well used to be a 250,000 dollars cap on is now no longer than 250,000 dollar. Really you get the benefit of 250,000 anything above and beyond you pay property taxes on.

Wetherell: What major changes to this? Yeah.

Is there any other questions or comments regarding this.

Thank you very much Sarah. That was very informative. Thank you. Very much representative.

Thanks, Sarah.

Wetherell: Okay, moving on the next thing I was going to check on the progress. Um, do you have a progress on the secretary of state in the gold star plating all those stuffs?

Luevano: Yes. Yes. So last time we spoke, I was working on two separate projects with Secretary of state. Um, retrieving the demographic information on the veterans who are going into all of the DMVs for the veterans designation on our driver's license. And then I was also working with the secretary of state. We I shouldn't say I, because it's been a group effort. We were working with Secretary of state on the gold star plate process and procedures. So since our last meeting, we have gotten to access to the secretary of state's database and we are pulling their information on a scheduled IT job. So all of that

information gets pulled dropped into an Excel and then upload it into our system cyber. So we are receiving the information as of the 13th of October.

I've been a few tweaks we've been working with our IT section, but that is the good news. And we've also worked with Secretary of state on the gold star plate procedures and we have started a process where the special license plates division will reach out to DVA before issuing a gold start plate. Um, not necessarily asking us for confirmation or denying um. But just kind of getting our take on the application and also saying, if we've already vetted that family through the gold star program.

Wetherell: So, from my understanding, the gold start plates, uh. There's what are the requirements right now to be able to get those plates, it's not like family wide. Right? We were talking about that director. There's, we're trying to basically kind of outline and get some more continuity on who's allowed to have those.

Luevano: The Continuity is what we're searching for here. Yes. Um, but we also don't want to snag plates from individuals who already have them.

Wetherell: Yeah, it's definitely a delicate situation. It is.

Wetherell: Yes, thank you very much and just go ahead. Representative?

Rep. Swanson: Is it a plate or the sticker?

Luevano: It's the plate.

Rep. Swanson: Is there a minimum number of plates that has to be ordered before they'll produce. Many license plates require a 2000 minimum order before they will produce.

Luevano: I don't, I don't believe that they have, they do already have the gold start plate produced, and they have to submit their application to the Springfield office and then they will produce based on that just one at a time. Now, they're not mass producing them. And our goal star place yes.

Yes, excellent.

Any other questions regarding this?

Director Prince: Yeah, this is an there are 42 different 41 different military plates. Yeah. And this one we're working on would make number 42 and so it has been.

I need to be a creditor, so yeah, thank you Dan for your work on this. What we're working on is the DoD. I don't want to overdo it with this, but the DoD definition of gold star family. Every state is kind of doing it differently, so our team is working on what's the best scenario?

Right now, if you're if you're considered gold, sorry, your family, your kids, your everybody, and they're all putting in for those plates and it's kind of the same thing. Like, at some point, the secretary of state's, like, hey, we can't afford to give everybody a plate, but no one wants to be the one to say, we're not going to give you a plate. And so it's kind of a delicate balance that we're working with the Cubs office. So very delicate one.

Wetherell: you. So, going back to the names and stuff that you're getting from those, those were going to be just to reiterate with. We're trying to get that that information, so we can provide better transitioning veterans the information and the different programs and stuff like that, I just wasn't just wanted to make everyone else because that's something that's been talked about for a while. So that's a huge thing. I think that's giants steps, so thank you very much for all the work. Like the director said that's much appreciated and That'll be super helpful data to have going forward I'm sure.

Is there any other questions? Regarding that no.

Next, I was going to discuss, um, progress on some outreach with Mr. Patterson and any other you would like to share with us today? Sure. I had a feeling so gotcha.

Patterson: So, since our last meeting, we put on the seven additional service officers and currently, and some process of the hiring, uh, we have ten additional that are fill it up, so we're making some long needed the great progress on improving ours. The saturation of veterans service officers out there. So right now, we're at 77% of our head count for veteran service officers.

This next 10 when it goes in, you know. Will take us to, um. 60, and our head count is 65. So, that's where we're at on that as far as the locations we've got, uh, the ones that have started already. Or, uh, maintain that principle. Manteno, Deerfield, Centralia, Bellville, Bloomington, Southwest Chicago on Sacramento. Uh, in Springfield, those are the positions that have already came on board and their and their training process. So, it's a 6 week training process so, uh, the. There's a class that's about two thirds of the way through. And then another class is just starting.

Wetherell: Oh, excellent. Yeah, thank you. Mr. Patterson. Is there any questions regarding Mr. Patterson's report?

Vaughn: I have a question regarding yes. Mr. Mark, I know that there's been some movement on also.

Transfers.

Patterson: Yeah, some transfer. So, have you have some, some transfers to previously? Unfilled positions that are now we're able to provide services in those areas.

Yes. And I didn't include those in. This is all brand new staffing, but we have had a vacancy in the coupon that is coming from Christian County, so that one will open up a. It's a swamp, there's going to be a position Christian county that will ensue. So, and also up in help grow or? Yeah, no growth. We've had it. We had a, it was really an administrative clarification that required a posting in the process so.

Wetherell: Yeah, I know, you know, that's a big difference between transfers and brand new because it takes so long for and so much experience for to get completely up online. I mean, it takes a couple of years, in my opinion, for someone to get completely fun and work. So it's a progress thing. So that's, you know, 2 different piles. I think if you already have an experience via so. They're worth their weight in gold honestly. So thank you for that. Update any other questions for Mr. Patterson. No, I was going to ask for a home report.

Director Prince: We're also I just want to add a little bit. Is that map on our website the one we looked at with the triangles and circles. No, it's not. We can get it up. We're updating our accessibility for our have been into our homepage and things like that. We put the locator right smack dab in the center of

the splash page because now people can search by county, and they can type the county in our ITs is working to make it more friendly on the mobile app. I borrowed from our friends in Ohio where it's really smooth, and it looks really good. So, they're kind of working on that because we recognize that need and when people are reaching out, I'll have the statistics, but you can guess that.

That's the number one hit on our website so not just hiring and training, but also making it more accessible. The second, part of it is for those kind of armed service we have, either if we'll have companies help, obviously working with our partners deal and our joining forces. But also our 1800 number that dials right into our headquarters. Where the call can be triaged and immediately dispatched to the right or someone who can help.

So, we're excited about the expansion of this program as Mark is announced and really, really in 24 we expect basically to be fully staffed. While we analyze the areas of the state where we need more coverage. It's a conversation for a different day, but very exciting time seeing the world. Thank you. So, as far as the home update goes, we did hire a homes coordinator and unfortunately he's moving out to another state job.

Now, before you like, really another one leaving, because I asked myself the same question. I went through a meeting recently where they showed a slide in 2019 or 20. There were 9,500 people hired in the state of Illinois. 5,500 of those hires came from other state agencies. Only about 3000, unique and 2500 short of what they need and.

Second part of this just for long range thinking is that 50% of all employees state employees are eligible for retirement within the next 6 years. Yeah, because of things that happened 20 years ago, I think I heard some push to hire here push to hire their military same thing, right? And so all that being said is just something for the to think about, as we work forward into the future of what. Things that we're doing, I'll keep it brief on the home report. I think Quincy is the big thing that everybody wants to know about. We're spending somewhere in the neighborhood of 230 to 250 Million dollars and the Quincy home. I toured it just a few weeks ago.

There were about 75% done with the domiciliary is the independent living facility that will have individual rooms that are amazing from studio to one bedroom apartments. We don't think we're going to have any problem with filling that in. We expect that to be a planning purposes if anybody's ever done their kitchen or built a house. The last 25% is where the fun is. But we expect to be working on getting people into the sometime in spring, early summer and then the nursing home a little bit further down the road.

But some of you have seen it, it's amazing even the way that the building is shaped, it's all Windows on the outside. What I mean, by that is curved Windows, large, letting a lot of light in, in areas for gathering onsite kitchen. I mean, it's just going to totally transform the campus out there.

Now, on the other end of the spectrum is a little less, but not just as important is construction going out Indiana with Sal and Montana. So, all total ladies and gentlemen over the last several years, including the Chicago home, there are nearly 500 Million dollars of tax money going into new construction and improvements at our veterans selves.

And so, I think that's a really great sign from the administration, our legislators that these are important, and we're going to keep making sure that they have the best in most modern facilities.

Wetherell: Excellent, thank you. Director. Is there any question regarding the home report? Mr. Olenjack.

Olenjack: I was wondering why. At this meeting, or the last couple meetings that is committee does not get a census report anymore on the home.

Wetherell: Basically, what I understand, we're getting away from doing, like, specific reports at each meeting and also there's been a turnover with some, uh, with some of the personnel available. When who used to give that report she has since retired. So, you know, that that information might not be as available as it once was. Um. But at the same time, we can, we can kind of look at maybe getting those numbers in the future, um, future meetings possibly. Yeah, I'll ask.

Olenjack: We talked a lot of times, you know, the questions we have comes from that report, you know, why this why that. You know, so when you compare. How's it going on? But better admitted. You know, it wasn't slowing down here, you know, there's a lot of questions be asked and answered off those reports when you. Like I said for it. And we can't ask another question. You know, we don't know what's going on right now business at home and you're at home.

Wetherell: Sure, isn't that a bit of information available on? I saw it on an email I thought, or something recently. Maybe, we're on the on your website, or?

Director Prince: No, no, no. Typically, we will send out. We send an internal document that shows it, but that's also a great subject for the local veterans. Yeah. Advisory councils for the homes. They have regular meetings at the individual homes and so the idea was to have those conversations with the actual Illustrators and Agilent who are in that facility, because they can much more answer it necessary for all of us right. That's what I get. Where it stands coming from me.

It's a good information. For sure.

Wetherell: Did you hear that miss rolling Jack? Okay.

I'm sorry, didn't hear you can see the.

Is there any other questions regarding the home report?

Yeah, represented slowly. You need help us with the restaurant.

Thank you.

Yeah, I'm representing sponsor

Rep Swanson: When Quincy home is completed. Is that going to increase the capacity First, at quickly.

Vaughn: I don't believe so. I actually won't.

It won't. Okay. The capacity will remain the same for individual capacity.

Director Prince: Capacity, or remain the same frequency or it may even go down a little bit.

Vaughn: Yeah, the new one's going to have 216 beds, but if they. And then we also have other buildings, other buildings, and with the, with the big move from double rooms to single rooms that increase the comfort of the veterans who are, who are there. Okay. Very small loss, but then again we will still have the Hammond hall building that won't be going away in the foreseeable future that we anticipate.

Rep Swanson: Oh, that's a miniature 1 that we might.

Vaughn: That's the one that's off campus yes. That's called what we call Hammond hall and call them.

Director Prince: Named after Lester Hammond MOH.

He's buried at sunset cemetery. I believe so really? Okay.

Patterson: As far as the though. We're actively admitting and we have vacancies at all of them. Correct? So, I mean. We are actually you don't have nothing stopped.

Director Prince: So, the good of the order for this conversation I'm going to throw it. We continue to struggle with hiring, like, everybody else, especially in our sales and support service folks. So, our entry level positions. Uh, it's a challenge and we can only admit to the staffing that we have is we have to maintain a certain we're working with CMS. We've got a new HR manager. We're coming up with some good ideas working with some of our state partners on things that they're doing to get people in the door, but just like, for example, Chicago is up to 50 residents, so they're working their way up.

Wetherell: Yeah, and that's not a new problem that problems existed.

Director Prince: Right, We throw in Kobe, which continues to, which is quite the fact that drop down. You still have to put people into covid isolation, which means it's part of the facility part of the facility is nearly blocked off to ensure we have a place to move positive covid residents in the event that we need to do. So, it's a real chess match going out there sounds like it. Yeah.

Wetherell: Any other questions regarding this manner.

Mr. Olenjack, I think you're muted.

Olenjack you're muted. Okay. Go ahead.

Olenjack: Okay, the question is, is CMS offering a bonus for hiring?

Wetherell: I don't know that answer I don't know.

Director Prince: Most recently signed a 6 and a half percent pay increase for our asked me employees. Okay the state benefits are by far the finance benefits that are out there. Understanding that those things are out there in the fine print. When you read the homes that offer that. It's you have to do this, this and this, and if you're late for work one day, but we're confident that the state benefits. And the mission that we have are enough to attract 1 of the things we are going to look into, and our senior home administrators working on it as we speak is training people in our homes to be nurses. Yeah. So they would just come to us.

We would pay their salary and teach them how to be in nursing and then help them go through. What's otherwise? And that's really kind of the hang up is getting into the facility speeding up that process, but also giving them an opportunity to train with us.

Wetherell: Instead of saying, come back when you have your success, right?

Director Prince: Because some other places, we'll scoop them up right.

Nine times ten ladies, and gentlemen, when I talked to [inaudible 00:33:44] have worked for the other side, they're like, oh, yeah I missed the state because we have all the resources you have the people. And they'll find out in a hurry, they could be the only nursing for 25 people. Yeah.

Womack: Justin Miller posted in the chat says, is there an opportunity to work with a recruiting partner or company to identify and attract great candidates for these vacant roles?

Director Prince: Now, we've actually cross that bridge a few times, and we use these contracting companies to fill in gaps right now, for our staffing and because of what happened around and the appetite to get this traveling paid money. It's really been a struggle for even the contracting companies to provide. It's a nursing level we are doing kind of what we're doing pretty well with our ends and other staff it's nurse aides and they're just not out there.

Sure, and there's an explosion in home health needs over the next 10 years. So, we can expect a nearly 50% increase in the need for home health and long-term care aides. With a almost a 500% explosion in the need for, like, the population is just getting older. And so yeah, it's a real challenge for us. So, even contracting has it.

So, we have to do outreach, we have to figure out ways to let people know that we're available and it isn't impossible to get a state job. Right? So, you know, a lot of those monitoring that closely with our HR department.

Wetherell: level positions people stay at the entry, they're not going into those positions to stay there for the rest of their lives. What we're saying is springboard to move up to something else. So there's going to be turnover.

Director Prince: We've got nurses who've been doing it for 30 years and then proceed with that level of experience can take care of so many things as a nurse saved myself. Before I have my license Labs. It would take me an hour to handle one. I came out of the room and there were 30 guys taking care of like, wow, I mean, that's how good there. So, when they leave. You're talking about 2 or 3 people and replace the one, just that experience. And so.

Olenjack: So the question was CMS giving a sign on bonus? When you're walking down?

Vaughn: No, no,

Olenjack: There's no. Uh.

Wetherell: I was listening in the staff that allows yeah, yeah.

Okay, yeah, that's not allowed by statute. They cannot give bonuses for those.

Olenjack: Bonuses for people, starting the new job.

Yeah, hiring bonus or anything else.

You know, to come and be a state employee. Like, a lot of companies that are coming to the sign on bonus.

Director Prince: Yeah, like I said, 1 of the bonuses is getting the insurance program and amazing. I mean, yeah, yeah. Our ministers are making almost 24, I think with overtime, they can make up to 25 bucks an hour or more. Right? So we are.

Olenjack: And all that, I'm a retired and employee. For 20 years, and I know all about the benefits and everything there too. You want to have people in the door sometimes you not have. You know, put some money on the inefficient pole and get them in. Now, I guess.

Director Prince: CMS credits and analyzing the best ways to pay, for example, America, and looking at other opportunities and what we can do to attract more people into the state. This is an issue that's facing all of our state agencies.

Wetherell: Not unique to.

Olenjack: Okay, thank you.

Director Prince: Thank you Stanley.

Rep Swanson: Maybe reach out to one was at the Lincoln challenge graduation ceremony, Sunday, and there are about 20 some young men, and women who graduated with their CNA. And maybe a good resource mean, these people been through a military style Academy. May want to be a part of a military institution working with veterans might be a good.

Director Prince: Now you're going to mess around and get board member of the month.

Rep Swanson: I'm careful because, you know, these kids. You have men and women come from all across the Illinois mainly from up North eastern side, but Danville area and other places where we have. Maybe, you know, we talked to him about joining the military. Well, they may not want to join, but they didn't want to continue their service and start out as an 18 year old.

We're going to follow up with that. Yeah, absolutely.

Wetherell: I think it's, you know, very valuable, you know, to be a state employee, you know, that's a valuable position. That's. You know, looked sought after by many, but I just feel like the, the, the numbers of people right now are just, it's just across the board. Everywhere is having problems finding people. I don't know anywhere where they're like oh, I've got too many people that are trying to hire. I mean, it's just not the case. Maybe it's in crystal's department army of one over.

Well, congratulations.

Rep Swanson: Lincoln's challenge. Okay. It's a great tool right? Is that right? Tool?

Rantoul-Air Force base, the only enforcement

Wetherell: Any other questions regarding homes or anything your comments. Any hands up now. Okay. Moving on. So, I just wanted to go through, like, a follow up on a few issues that we had spoke about throughout this last year. It's hard to believe that we've been the chairman for a year. Now we've been this our 4th meeting. We've tried some different things and, you know, some of it were successful. Some of it was not so much. But, uh, I think we're on track on this. You know, finding something that where we could find a common ground and find a resolve on some issues where we're helping to state veterans and such.

That being said between September, and now I've had several phone calls from committee members and non committee members regarding issues and things that they would like to see brought up. Or discussed, or whatever some briefly. So I'm not. Um, but one of the things that I had a couple people ask about and talk about was the, um, claim sharks.

Um, I'm sure Mr. Patterson familiar with claim sharps and different things of that nature is. Mr. Mr. Murray's not available. Is Ms. Hammer on the line by chance.

Mr. DeGroot. Did you want to speak about this? You had mentioned it to me, just go ahead, I mean, it just so everybody knows there's some numbers that I have here last year, there was 120,000 claims and a 415 Million in claims that were produced by these various groups basically taking those money out of veterans hands. So, it's a pretty big and serious issue and, um, I, I didn't really know too much about it. I kind of educated myself a little bit about it, but I, I'm by far not and, uh, content expert on this.

But I would yield the Mr. DeGroot if you'd like to clarify some things or, um.

DeGroot: You know, I'll be brief on this. This is sure no problem. We're not sure that we can fix it on the national level. Even know all the service organizations are working diligently with Congress.

But we had talked with center portfolio, and also with who's on here about fixing this, perhaps at the state level, and we're going to probably meet Friday. But I'd rather, uh, RAM would talk about he's much smarter and maybe he can, uh, give a brief on it.

Wetherell: Mr. Tyner are you available?

Tyner: Uh, yes, uh, I'm available and I am here. Uh, I didn't have anything prepared, uh, because I didn't I should ask you yesterday. You're a smart guy actually sits on. This committee and she was not available today. So Tom was going to sit in for her, and I had a conversation with Dutch this morning time with and so about 40 minutes ago, I was told, hey, you should probably sit in on this meeting because they have questions about what is going to talk about. You know, used to be there to answer, um, short, short version. Um, I don't know if anyone is aware that our office led 44 attorney general across the country to write a letter in support of a piece of legislation.

That's currently before submit to the house part of the US Congress called the guard benefits act um, the purpose of it is, we're trying to reinstate criminal penalties. For claim charts and pension poachers out there that have been taken advantage of veterans and their families.

Since those criminal penalties or removed from the statutes in 2006, it's a really big business, billions of dollars a year going to these companies. Basically, if you're familiar with. I'm talking not just service connected claims. Also someone's got a train passing by, um, so. So, anyway, to to help a veteran or veterans, surviving spouse, or other family members, fill out a claim for any sort of VA benefits. Monetary benefits statutorily. There's, you're supposed to be VA, accredited through the VA's officer general counsel, um.

There are a lot of companies out there claim charts pension poachers. We like to refer to them, uh, as basically just unaccredited individuals. No training. And unfortunately, a lot of them, and some of the bigger companies are actually veterans themselves. And what they're doing is they're taking advantage of the fact that the VA can't do anything to them, uh, when they do these things being not accredited. They're going out and charging veterans and their family members. Very excessive amounts of money to

help them file claims for VA benefits. Sometimes up to 5 times, whatever, the veteran or surviving spouse receives in new monies from the BA, monthly, they'll take 5 times that amount.

I mean, the worst 1 I've seen is 15,000 dollars. The problem is, they only care about the money they say, you know, we really care about helping veterans we want to do, you know, want to help the veterans and their families get the money that they've earned.

But really, they just want to pocket as much of it as they can and because of that. And because. For them, it's a volume business they really do very little assistance with the veterans and because they're not VA accredited. Once that claim has been filed, whether it's been filed by them, or by the veterans. With their assistance, they're completely out of the process. They can't make sure that everything was right on the claim. They can't even make sure that the VA received the claim they can't follow up, make sure notices of intent were filed on time they can't, uh. If the VA reaches out to the veteran and says, hey, you know, there are problems with your claim. We need this, this, and this. They don't return phone calls or emails to the veteran, because once that claims been filed, they've moved on to their next victim.

Like I said it, it's a volume business for them. They only make money when they're filing claims, they don't make money following up on claims that, you know, that have problems. And so that's really what a Dutch is talking about our office I wrote with the Alamo Department of veteran's affairs.

A couple of years ago, a piece of legislation, which was an amendment to Illinois Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Businesses Practices Act. And it is, uh, something that we can do in the state to help enforce those federal regulations that the VA can't.

Recently a new lock along the same lines came out in New Jersey and VFW National, I've been on the phone with them quite a bit, and some zoom meetings and emails. And they have put together a template that they want to float around to all of the States hoping to do a grassroots movement where each individual state can do similar legislation to what we did. And what New Jersey did to start combating this problem in each individual state. Because the VA, since they can't do anything about it. Other than send a cease and desist letter, which are routinely ignored.

They then refer those matters to the state and ask the state, you know do you have any laws on your books that you can use? 24, 6, federal statutes? And again, most states don't in fact. I'm only aware of hours from they went into effect last January and recently enacted law in New Jersey, I think, was in September August or September.

So, Dutch and I, and Senator Porfirio. Senator reached out to our office, but also. And wanted to know if there was something we can do similar to the New Jersey law. I don't think either 1 realized we already had something in place because all the publicity in New Jersey was, you know, were the first state in the country to do this. They weren't, we were, but there are things in the New Jersey law that I think would be a vast improvement. So we're. In conversations about that right now. Sorry it wasn't brief as I thought it was no, that's kind of the whole thing in a really large nutshell all.

Wetherell: Um, good question. Yeah. Um. Thank you and I didn't mean to just put you on the spot there and there was probably a half dozen people that asked me about this subject. And I noticed that I don't see hardly any of them on this call. So, when I was going to refer to them, it kind of went back to you. So, anyway. Mr. Tyner,

Tyner: don't want to talk about it. I am very passionate about this subject I have been since I started in the office in February of 2020. And this is, I've made a lot of presentations both around the state, and a few on a national level through the National Association of attorney general. I talk on this all the time and I'm happy to talk about it.

Wetherell: Sure, well, thank you. I know representatives wants made a point. Um, has Sarah, is she aware of any of the moving going on with this at all or aware of the situation with this or anything? Ms. Augustine's.

Augustinas: I was very familiar with some of the efforts at the federal level, I think was working on a lot of that as well. Um, so I brought up on it there but Mr. Tyner, if you could send me the bill number from last year, I'd be happy to take a look. And then obviously I'll keep an eye out for the bill with Senator Porfirio this spring but am I correct in the type of legislation. Amending that, I don't know the criminal code civil code. It'd be something that go through judiciary.

Tyner: Was that a question for me I'm not sure which. I mean, the last piece of legislation that we wrote from last year. Uh, that went into effect last January. Representative, but that forward for us. And it's a civil law. It's not a criminal law. So, you know, there are no criminal penalties attached to our protections against claim sharks and pension poachers, but if you're referring to the federal legislation, the two builds that are pending before Congress. Those are you referring to last year's bill or this year's current bill? They both have a lot of bilateral support. So, unfortunately, though, I've been speaking a lot lately with VFW national legislative team specifically and I'm not sure if Dutch is aware, but one of the last conversations I had with that Murray was, whether or not, he felt there was any way that the guard benefits that what's going to pass and it's probably the third Congress that it's been brought up and this is the Congress. Really has a lot of bilateral support. But he still said, it doesn't look like it's going to pass in this Congress.

So, I mean, I can send you those two bill numbers if you're interested in following that. And I can send you the legislative or the bill number or law, I guess, now, for a citation for our amendment to the CFA, if that would help. I should get started, thank you. To interject, I should point out that there is another piece of legislation called the [inaudible 00:52:33]. And I don't recall right off the top of my head again. I would have been better prepared.

Anyway, it is trying to legalize what claim charts are currently doing and speed, you know, expedite their applications for change the statutes as they are. Now that you can't charge. Any better for any additional claim, they want to change it to where you can charge them.

And they don't want caps on the amount that you can charge them. They're the, the plus act actually. Which doesn't really have a whole lot of support right now, but it's still a very dangerous thing. Sure is also pending Congress and it's nowhere close to being approved, or find in this Congress, but you should be aware that that's out there.

Wetherell: you for that information. Thank you again for discussing something that you are planning on it. That's very helpful. Um, is there any questions regarding this matter? Again, I just wanted to bring it up. I had several calls regarding this and, uh. I kind of got into it a little bit and it was really kind of surprised how big some of these numbers are. And it seems like the primary mechanism is these groups,

uh, tell the veteran that they have to go to a specialized medical place. And then they extra charge them for those.

So, there's, there's just, it just seems nefarious throughout and I hope we can find some continuity to get all that done and fixed up, so. Any other questions, or anything regarding that matter.

Director Prince: One of the areas with this is that we're not in advertising. Like, they do a quick Google distributed different sites. In a secondary thing it's important to remember is World War 2, Korea, Vietnam veterans. That wasn't what they talked about every day, their percentage now it's a professional from the moments you enlist. Write everything down if you got an ankle, you had anything.

And so, even one of the ads, I just looked up. Oh, you didn't get 100%. We can help you get 100. yeah, so this is not only taking money away from veterans. It's also causing consternation at the back level the, because if a works their butt off and helps the person, and they come back with a 50% rating. That wasn't good enough, right? So now I'm going to go to the back because they can maybe get it and then it's. So, not only is it doing? It's creating more and more work. So, veterans never really get out of this cycle of disability, that's a bigger problem for the V. A. to deal with.

But back to my thought is and I talked to the couple folks the other day over in Ohio, when I was there, every county had a billboard come to brown county for your veterans assistance, their advertising, the crap out of their stuff and we don't yeah, we don't have a budget for that kind of thing. We don't have a budget for. We do radio spots and TV, but we don't have budgets for billboards and buses and stuff like that.

That could be a good recommendation for the moving into the next year is. We need to be more public and say this is your benefit just because it's free doesn't mean it's not a good deal. Yeah. Cause we don't get to pulverize your memory if you're in zoom. That's all. You see. And they're promising as you've heard. We'll get your claims through quicker, which is Daniel crap. No, no, there's no. Once it goes into that little world, there's one here even I can't help with that process now and believe me, I get all the calls. Hey, can you help me get through? Because I'm that important that I'm going to shoot me.

Shown: These sharks called VAC.

Director Prince: No, sir, veterans assistants commissions of the counties have veteran service officers we do as well and so these folks are working in between the lines, and their promising things that they can't deliver on we're going to get it done for you quicker. You're going to get more money. That's not true. And whereas the, we don't take any money from the yeah. So, yeah, don't let it be recorded then I said the backside. Yeah. Let me turn it off.

Wetherell: Any other questions regarding this subject.

Womack: Mr. Tyner has his hand.

Wetherell: Mr. Tyner

Tyner: I don't have a question. I just want to invite Terry join in this conversation. We're already collaborating with Terry on some other stuff. And we would love to have you collaborate with us on this effort as well, you certainly welcome.

Director Prince: Hey, buddy, I'll be there for you.

Tyner: Thank you.

Wetherell: Yes, um, that kind of Segways into my next point. Um, I had received an email regarding a secretary of state, had started a, uh, veterans committee and it kind of created a warm whole, if you will looking around other state agencies, there's a lot of state agencies that have veterans committees.

And discussing this with the director, um, come to find out a lot of them don't even share information with the IDVAs, and, and so on and so forth. So, I just wasn't sure directory. Did you want to speak on that at all or?

Director Prince: I think we need to do a little bit of work. I mean.

Wetherell: Yeah, I think some continuity between all these veterans' groups and a loop it in the would be something that I would think is a natural. But, unfortunately, it seems like some things get disconnected and I think. My opinion, um, this body would be high would behind IDVA the being involved in those committees in some form or fashion. So,

Rep Swanson: And you bring up an interesting point. I know the [inaudible 00:58:33] has a veteran's guidebook. Mm. Hmm. Yeah. Sits on the tight desk. Um, does the IDVA have any put a review of that book.

Director Prince: I'm so glad you brought that up, because that's something we've been working with the office over the last year. So the next version will actually have both of our logos. And we discovered that we were create. Mark told me that yeah, we did this book, but we didn't offer. So we've got 2 books going on. Yeah, that's a really amazing product that we can contribute to. And so we're like share the workload and the wealth and make it less confusing and then we'll down. We'll have that on our website as well for access. Our logo should be bigger. Of course. Sorry Randy with our QR code. Yeah right. Okay.

Wetherell: Moving on, um, the next thing I was just going to say, is there any other items to report or discuss? Um, Senator Rezin? Is it Shannon chief of staff? Shannon? Do you have anything? Mr. Gutierrez, I see your hands raised. Go ahead, sir.

Gutierrez: Yes, I apologize for the background music, but again, I actually just wanted to follow up on veteran set aside I, I look at all these tax payer funded projects that are in the billions of dollars. You know, we have our. We have Forest Park branch, rebuild your new blue, the Damon station. You know, a lot of these programs altogether, I mean, we're looking at nearly 10Billion dollars. About 30% of those funds are earmarked or B. E. S. P. yet.

I continue to talk to veteran business owners one, actually, disabled, 100% service, disabled veteran that unfortunately cannot not like. We're working actual job, but she's able to run her company, but yet she cannot, she cannot score a contract because there aren't any veterans set aside.

And I understand that better. Certain veteran demographics are able to utilize the and program. But when it comes to taxpayer projects, taxpayer, infrastructure projects. And the fact that, you know, there are 0 veterans set aside for them that just sits wrong with me.

And, you know. With those same projects, they also have workforce initiatives. The initiative. Were you know, they hire a certain amount of minority, a certain amount of women. Certain amount of individuals from certain area codes. That there aren't any workforce initiatives for veterans. I may. I'm a big

advocate of handouts that handout. I believe the veteran community needs additional economic opportunities, and if you're provided that, I guarantee you, they will not let you down. That's all I have.

Wetherell: Thank you very much. And that's a great point. I agree with you. 100%. Does anybody else want to discuss that at all, or have anything else to say regarding that matter.

Rep Swanson: We have any thoughts on a solutions.

Wetherell: Yeah, what type of solution would you suggest? Mr. Gutierrez?

Gutierrez: Well, it's funny you say that, because I don't have a true solution yet, but I do know that New York, New York MTA, and only metro do have set aside for their capital infrastructure project. So, the solution, the wheels already created all we would have to do. Who is adopted sure that it could be interesting including veteran businesses into their diversity initiatives.

Wetherell: Okay, thank you. That's all point.

Yeah. Very helpful. Reinvent the wheel if you don't have to reinvent the wheel, saves time and everything else. So yes, that's excellent. Information.

Any other points regarding this, man. Thank you again. Good information. Um. Representative Yednock did you have anything. You share.

Wetherell: I have representative Swanson, did you want to say anything else? I was going to circle back and follow up on your you had talked last meeting regarding the numbers of veterans preference, and you were going to you were requested some information from hiring veterans specifically with Ion. Yeah, still working on that.

Rep Swason: Okay. We've had several meetings. I just had it on my notes. I just wanted to appreciate that. Thanks for circle back.

Wetherell: Anything else? You'd like to share?

Rep Swanson: I think I've used up my time.

Director Prince: Sounds good. Right? Director, you told me that, hey, here's the, here's the board member of the month.

Wetherell: For that is, uh, Senator Porfirio online. No, no, if there's any other legislators?

DeGroot: He talked to me this morning and he wasn't on the email chain. But he will be, I emailed, uh, crystal, and he's very interested in. He's just saying another amendment this morning.

Wetherell: Is there any other legislators that I missed? They would like to say something. No.

Director price do you have anything?

Director Prince: You've covered? Almost everything. There was 1 last thing. We kind of talked about off the record, but our new administrator for the Quincy home begins on Monday of next week. So the senior administrator who's been serving as the acting out there, and I will be there to welcome him and get them on board. He's actually got about 35 years of nursing home experience, and he's from the Quincy area. So it's kind of a win-win all around and.

As we always talk about it, we're not in we have no worries that the Quincy community isn't kind of, surrounding with love and help us, get these projects going and keep doing what we're doing for veterans and Mr. chair. That was everything I had on my excellent. Okay good.

Wetherell: Any other staff members, or anything? Strong strategic group. Go ahead.

DeGroot: I, it seems like we're going into new business or go to your order here, but just 2 items. One is at 13th, March, we are going to institute and Illinois veterans, legislative day in Springfield. I think you're aware about this chairman. I'll put the information on here at the point of contact will be to VFW for this one, but we want all the service organizations to be involved. Spend a day in Springfield and, uh, rub elbows with all our legislators. Maybe even a meeting. It's a loose, but it's going to be, uh, Wednesday, 13th, March I will put the contact information for our state office up there on the chat. The other thing that I would like to. Again, I'm really good at surround myself with smart people. But we were talking about an Department of veterans daycare drop off and Colonel peck this is his brainchild so he's still on here. I like him to address it and my good [inaudible 01:06:19] kind of guy.

Wetherell: I don't think he's on Mr. package on scheduling late. Oh, he did? Mr. Peck. Did you have something you wanted to?

Peck: I'm on mute now. Yes. Um, Florida is adopted a daycare program, uh, for seniors and, um, if we looking at something like that for Illinois and our, um, by better I had spoken to the director about this previously and, uh, it's something that we need to work at. Um, we're living longer. Our veterans are getting dementia. And our daycare veterans, take care of service. There is.

So, Mr. chair that's actually something that's in our strategic plan. We recently did a study with the University of Illinois that talked about this as well. It is certainly the way that wants us to move and by virtue of the fact that we get more money for, for Delta healthcare than we do for down the silver. And so the VA, is all about, as am I keeping veterans at their homes as long as possible? Sure. And so I reached out to my colleague at the Long Island state veteran's home. He's a heavy hitter in [inaudible 01:07:36] community that National Association of state veterans, they have a fully operational adult day health care. I've got photos all their documents. Everything. So, part of it is just getting the team together to put this particular thing and find the location where it's going to work.

It's easy to think, let's put it at the veterans home, but there are a lot of things and codes and have you have to have a certain number of bathroom shirts and so on and so forth. But I think that's great. I appreciate colonel texting. Not me about that, because it's important to me. It's washer.

Mr. chairman I've got one question from representative Swanson. Is the cutoff date January 17th on bill being submitted?

Rep Swanson: Yes, that's cut off date. Not to say that we can't do some shell bills. And possibly do some shell shady. I didn't mean change work. There's always that possibility, but the, the intent is to have everything in by that's 17, January.

Peck: And that would include having spent new bills for the 3 bills that we had been told.

Rep Swanson: Correct? Well, no. No, because there there's already been a bill addressing the veto. That could be moved forward, already drafted I believe. Sarah, that kind of help me out here. You said that those bills that were, they had another bill drafted and replace.

Augustinas: Yes, we're fine on the property tax omnibus that wouldn't require a new bill. They just need to address that or they could amend that. So you're good there.

Rep Swanson: Yeah, and did you have you said three bills Mr. Peck.

Peck: Well, there was the bill that, uh, in which we extended the appraisal of property, um, be above the, uh, remove the cap I should say above 750. And then, of course, the providing for the surviving spouse is given them. Hopes that exemption.

Rep Swanson: I believe they're all in that same. Problem with Bill.

Peck: Okay, thank you. Yep.

Wetherell: Does anybody else have anything any items anything to discuss? Any good welfare? Any new business? Anything at all.

Hello. Bob, do you have anything.

Okay, the next meeting will be in March apparently not going to be March 13. Because it sounds like that day it's kind of take it, but sometime in March and, we'll pass on information. The minutes from this meeting will be turned over very soon a lot sooner than the last 1. so I appreciate everyone's patience on that matter for a long time since I had to do minutes. So, Mr. Stanley you have 1 comment Jeremy.

Olenjack: Yes, I just want to bring up good point that the. The veterans, Illinois scratch off ticket is getting short changed. Anybody who goes out and gets a lottery tickets. Here you have a call a board, and the board has a picture of all the lottery tickets that are available.

And the new folders out. And the veteran's scratch off ticket does not on it. That means somewhere it's not available or sales in fact. I ran into one of the guys who fills up the service lottery machines and Houston. You take it away and I said, well, this is not a board here. It's a machine they say well, it's. That trend has done a lot we're not, you know, promoting it anymore. Out there, we go all the introduce the 7th of November. And by the 7th of December that's done. You get about 30 days to shell that lottery, you know. And there's a lot of organizations in Illinois. You know, that could use that grand money so to work with veterans and health.

And right now we used to have, I think her name was Connie [inaudible 01:12:05], she used to join our meeting all the time, you know. I understand, you know, she left, you know, when I end up whatever it was going to. Now, so we don't know what's going on with a lottery ticket.

You know, and we do. You're not able to go any word Alisha, [inaudible] county or drive around. Or anything,

Director Prince: So I like to go with the lottery director actually verify the tickets were being sold here in Springfield at the high. V. so I'll go back and look at what the board is. As far as the press release, we do a press release Quarterly for the grants that go out. And what agencies received, and how much they received. As well, so we do professor and some other state to speak to Mr. Olenjack.

Rep Swanson: You're absolutely right. It was terrible legislation. It put 10 special lottery tickets in one pool of money to be divided equally amongst those 10 lottery tickets. And 10 was established as a maximum. So, what we used to get for our veteran's tickets is going to be divided. I think our veterans'

tickets was probably one of the top sellers of all those 10, one of the biggest producers of the funds. That money now is going to be shared amongst 9 other organizations.

It may not be as successful in their lottery ticket sales there's been a part of that legislation included, setting up a task force or working group, whatever you want to call it. And I've been I've been appointed to that group just because of this specific veteran's ticket. That's been take it away from us to my opinion. It's terrible legislation. So, I'm going to be on that board.

And I will look out for our best interests, but it's going to be a difficult fight and the limits only 10. And, you know, I've had some thoughts of other ways of doing this too, but yeah, you're absolutely right. That was bad piece of legislation I spoke up in opposition to it. And because of my opposition, I've asked to be on that board to try and fight for what I believe is. Is not right? Thanks for bringing that up.

Olenjack: Yeah, thank you.

Womack: The board that Stanley's talking about there was two launches for holiday tickets. So, I just, I just ask about this because I always do stocking stuffers for with our veteran tickets. So, the first launch for holiday tickets started in November when we launched ours, the second launch became December 3rd and they launched a whole another set of holiday tickets. And our ticket fell off that poster board is what.

Wetherell: Thank you Crystal.

Is there any questions Mr. Olenjack?

Olenjack: Yeah, thank you.

Wetherell: You're welcome

Shown: Just a comment on the minutes. Very, very nicely done. Very detailed. Lots of information, they're good to review so very good. The only comment I'd have a couple of if, if we would number the pages, and maybe number the lines you got it so that we could refer back to them more quickly. And then on both those most recent minutes. The Army Reserve minimized scholarship was mentioned. And I'll just mention it now again, because this is available 170,000 dollars for a 4-year scholarship for somebody going into. So, if you know of some young people. That could benefit from this scholarship. Please get that. I did have some handouts over there. That's available. And the other thing dimension was the army Navy game, which was interrupted.

But on the little flyer, that's always available. It's the only game where everyone playing. Is willing to die for everyone watching it. Yeah, and so yeah, go on go on me, thank you.

Wetherell: Thank you. Anything else well, thank you very much for your time. I hope everyone has some great holidays and we'll see everyone in March. You can call or email me with any items or anything you want to talk about and, um. Otherwise, thank you very much for your time. Save travels. Thank you. Yeah.

I'll make a motion to adjourn.

Oh, get a motion is 2nd to adjourn the question all those in favor. Signify by saying, aye. Oppose.

Thank you very much, a great day to.