

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, March 10, 2026– 10:00am

Illinois Department of Affairs

WebEx

Attendance:

NAME	APPOINTED BY	PRESENT
Bruce Blackmer	Marine Corps League	X
Al Reynolds	Disabled American Veterans	
Senator Mike Porfirio	President of Senate	
Senator Craig Wilcox	Minority Leader of Senate	X
	Speaker of the House	
Rep. Dan Swanson	Minority Leader of the House	X
Robert Norman	IDVA Director	X
Frank Gutierrez	IDVA Director	X
Kevin Wathen	IDVA Director	X
Vince Long	IDVA Director	X
Bill Wolff	IDVA Director	X
Larry Miller	IDVA Director	X
Elizabeth Roxworthy	Department of Military Affairs	X
Shannon Yount	Attorney General	X
Adam Broshous	IL Secretary of State	X
Jorge Bermudez	IL Department of Securities	X
Michael Peck	The American Legion	X
Joseph Bartley	AMVETS	X
Peggy Arick	Blue Star Mothers of America	X
	Catholic War Veterans	
	Jewish War Veterans	
	Military Order of the Purple Heart	
Lee Lopez	Military Order of the World Wars	X
Ray Dieter	Reserve Officers' Association	X
John "Dutch" DeGroot	Veterans of Foreign Wars	X
	Vietnam Veterans of America	
Bob Tyler	MOAA	X

New Members:

Alternates / Guests: Hugh Shown, George Mulvaney, Greg Padovani, Courtney Sanders, Dr. Mia Garcia-Hills

Call to Order 10:00am

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

Moment of Silence

Introductions:

IDVA Staff:

Terry Prince, Director

Anthony Vaughn, Assistant Director

Jassen Strokosch, Chief of Staff

Maureen Hartigan, Public Information Officer

Jenny Franklin – Director's Executive Assistant

Kimberly Yantis – Central Region Field Supervisor

Mark Patterson – Field Supervisor

Asia Gentry – Deputy Chief of Staff

Renysha Brown – Director, Veterans Accountability Unit

Alexa Koziol – Legislative Director

Dylon Hopp – Legislative Aid

Margo Watson – Women Veterans Coordinator

Approval of December 16th, 2025, minutes

Motion to approve the Minutes by Mike Peck

Bill Wolff seconded the motion

Motion passed to approve the December 16, 2025 minutes

Chairman Tyler:

I really don't have much to say today. We're going to try and move through this and keep us on schedule. I appreciate all of you taking your time. Somebody needs to mute. We're getting feedback. Make sure you're muted, please.

Director Prince

Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and hello everybody. Welcome to the quarterly IVAC meeting. Just coming off of national testimony, and one of the things that they put in front of you is a five minute clock. So, while you're talking, the clock is counting down right in front of your face. So, we're going to try and get through this quick so we get everybody a chance to give their report. From a national perspective, I'll start with that. NASDVA, as many of you know, I took over as president of the National Association of State Directors this past Sunday. It's the first time since 1947 that Illinois has been represented as the president of NASDVA, and that was Homer Bradley who was IDVA director at the time, and ironically, the first ever president of NASDVA. This also runs with Andrew Tangan out of Lake County who is the president of the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers. So, for the first time ever, Illinois has two of the key positions in the national level leadership for veterans affairs. So, we're super excited about that. During our conference last week, we had a chance to meet with Secretary Collins of the VA who talked about the claims processing and that for the

first time in many years, the VA is below, I said 80,000 claims and it's taking about 50 to 60 days to get claims done. Now, a corresponding issue was that the quality has gone down and they're saying they are supporting the data that says it's not going down. They're processing just as many and the quality rate is the same. And for purposes of this committee, it should be noted they are not using AI to make decisions on claims. It's a human being reviewing and making decisions on each claim. You saw recently access to faster scheduling that just really came out the announcement of working on making it easier for veterans to schedule appointments with community providers and more importantly the clerks at the VA making appointments for veterans in a faster and more streamlined way. There is a potential restructuring of the health care side of the VA from 10 visions down to four. That hasn't been fully developed, but it is being worked on. What impact it'll have on us I'll be able to report at the next meeting. And then for our Chicago regional benefits fair. You'll see a flyer on your table. I believe that's being worked on by our team and organizations and many of the organizations with the IVAC in the Chicagoland are part of the Illinois vet veterans benefit fair on April 13th. And lastly, Memorial Day. I will most likely be representing Illinois and NASDVA at the wreath laying in Arlington on that day but our IDVA leadership stands by for anything that you need us to do in regards to Memorial Day. From a state perspective, we have our women veterans leaders event next week, Monday, from 11 to 1, at Malcolm X College in Chicago, where we will announce this year's class of women veteran leaders, 25 different women veterans, including our vice chair of the IVAC, Shannon Yount, who is one of the honorees this year. So, congratulations to you. I was looking at also IDVA's budget hearing if you're into that sort of thing or you need help falling asleep that will be on March 26th. That information is available. Also Melissa Beckford from IDVA is an honoree and you'll see a lot of things on our website in regards to the honorees throughout the year especially as this is women veterans month and national women's day was on Sunday I believe, so where we celebrate our women veterans. Crystal would want me to announce the glo bingo to raise money for the fair which will be on April 11th at the VFW post 755 in Springfield. I'm looking forward to being there this year. It's an awesome event. We're also working on veteran homelessness through the Illinois summit which is happening 12 to 13 May in Springfield and our next IVAC meeting is potentially scheduled for June 9th. That's the state and national picture. From a veterans homes perspective, we continue to do great things in our veterans homes. You'll see in the minutes there's not a lot of new information to report. We are looking forward to getting our survey from the VA to certify the Quincy Veterans Home and move more residents into the home. Right now, we have 25 in there. That's the max you can have. We expect to get that scheduled soon considering I met with the lady while I was at the conference last week to get that scheduled. I'll have Mark discuss the field situation followed by Asia who'll give you a quick overview on our headquarters operations and then I'll shut up. Just clarify one thing, the max of 25 until we get it the survey done from the feds. Just want to be clear on that. We don't have a maximum of 25 there.

Mark: All right. Thank you very much.

Okay. The the main thing that I wanted to bring up today was obviously the collaboration that we have with our federal partners or more specifically the collaboration that the federal partners have with us. So, we're going to have approximately 19 veteran service officers at the event on Monday, April 13, 2026 with the University of Chicago David Rudenstein Forum. So, we will be triaging and having

all of our capabilities there. So, we'll be able to do everything from getting somebody's records if they're in the DoD system, do a records request if they're not in the DoD system, and also file claims. So that's our our major emphasis right now is to be able to assist our federal partners with this huge statewide undertaking. Although it is in the Chicago area, this is statewide. So Chicago is the jurisdictional location for Illinois and so we're partnering with them.

Chairman: Mark, how are we doing on VSOs, please? How many do we have now?

Mark: I didn't bring that exact number with me in the stuff that I gathered. The number is approximately 61. So the spot has opened for the hiring of VSOs. We have more that are being done right now. One of the most recent ones is we're getting ready to go into interviews for our Christian county office which we have had a VSO move from that office to the St. Clair Bell office. So, we still have that staff member, but now we're getting an additional one in there. We also have the Southern region supervisor position that should be getting filled here very very soon. So, we are currently three out of four of their regional supervisors and uh approximately 61 out of 68 of veteran service officers.

Chairman: Thank you, Mark. Good report. Appreciate it. Asia, what's going on at the headquarters?

Asia: Hello, everyone. I just want to bring your attention, and she's going to hate this, Alexa Koziol. So, she has been on the last couple meetings. She is our new legislative director. She joins us with a decades worth of legislative experience from another state agency. So, we're super excited to have her on. Alexa's grandmother was a Marine, which I think she's very cool and talked a lot about that. So celebrating her this month. In keeping with new staff members, we do have also have a new HR director who comes to us from another state agency with many many years of um state experience. So we're really excited to have Michelle Cusamano join us. She just started on last Monday. We also added a grant special specialist to our grants team which is great. We currently have now two grant specialists in there which is really helpful. Previously just had one and so having another there will be really great and helpful and as you all know Danielle Miller has left, she's taken a promotion at a different agency but we will be sure to continue to provide grant updates.

Chairman: A new chair of your lottery grant committee too, right?

Asia: Yes. Yes, we do. We got that through last week. We have a new chair, a chair member um of our grants committee. Yes.

Chairman: Okay.

Asia: Thank you. And we're super excited. It's on our website. I think Maureen can correct me, but we did a video with the lottery. So, there's a a little video with me and the lottery director talking about the cash grant and lottery program. So, yeah, keeping it rolling.

Director: I would encourage any of you. I went and bought one of those lottery tickets last week and the cashier didn't know that that was tied to Veterans Affairs and she was super excited when I told her it was. She, you know, explained to me that she comes from a military family and she was really happy to know that. So for what it's worth, everybody on this call, whenever you go in and buy one of those, mention it. You

know, it's it's not really common knowledge or maybe you're telling somebody something new for the first time. Get the word out there.

Chairman: Thank you, Asia.

Asia: Yeah, I think that's it for headquarters.

Director: All right, Mr. Chair, that concludes the director's report.

Chairman: Super. Last month at our last meeting we went around and had everybody you know try and give us a little bit about what they were doing in their agencies and that caused us to go really long. So rather than just do for everybody I just say anybody have anything they want to share. I'd put Colonel Peck on the spot right off the bat. I understand, I'm curious how did your day at the capital go? How did the bill that the VFW had hosted everybody going to see the veterans you know for veterans bill was that a successful thing did you have lots of collaboration

Mike Peck: I'm going to give that to VFW because I represent the American Legion.

Joe Bartley: clarified and said he organized the gathering and it was held at AmVets.

Chairman: okay the from the emails it happened in Springfield , so I got that part right

Joe Bartley: on the 25th of February actually was very productive. I mean, we had about 60 people who showed up.

Chairman: How many different organizations were there?

Joe Bartley: Well, we had MOAA, American Legion, VFW, Amvets, I think there was a couple from DAV. There was there was probably six or eight different groups there as well as several representatives. So, there was a pretty wide variety of people that showed up. So, it was about 60 people total. We broke up into four teams and went down to the state capital. We had a packet of bills but the emphasis seemed to be on 3646 which deals with the MVAA and amending it to fix some of the problems within it as well as the one that IDVA has dealing with the eligibility for people to serve as VSOs. So, that was two of the big bills that we picked as far as our major emphasis. But then we had a whole package of other things as well as we continue to push for funding for IDVA to fund the homes and everything else.

Chairman: Well, as the director was talking about about being back in DC and I'm getting ready to go there myself, it's good to see that kind of stuff. The email I got came from the VFW, so I thought that's the guys.

Joe or Dutch: We had and we visited probably 60 representatives and senators and most of those were in person meetings. There's a lot where we dropped off packets and or we talked to staffers or whatever else. There's ones we ran into in the hallway that saw our hats or saw our our shirts and and asked us about things and we just handed out packets. It was very productive and there's several people who committed to getting on as sponsors for 3646 as well as the IDVA bill. We'll see how that washes out. So whether they fall through or not, but hopefully we got the emphasis on the bills we want to see passed.

Chairman: That's a great number of people to to hit.

Dutch: Yeah.

Chairman: Super. Thanks and thanks for all who participated and sorry for getting you confused, Mike. Anyway, anybody else have any

Mike Peck: No, no problem. Mr. Chairman, if I could ask, did we get a decision on the legal opinion of us passing a resolution support 3646?

Chairman: Well what we've come to from what I've been told from folks as far as this committee putting together. This is what we support as far as legislation advocating one way or the other puts members who are government employees who are part of this committee and or legislators in awkward positions. So therefore while we can talk issues and concerns advocating for a particular bill or whatever is something that just puts too many of us at risk so we aren't going down that path. Director, did I misspeak at all?

Director: Is reporting to the governor and general assembly in the annual report describing the issues addressed by the council during the year as well as recommendations for future action which is what we do in our report but individual bills and things from the IVAC. That's why we have members from all different organizations as I mentioned earlier even as the NASDVA president I have to be careful on some things because I represent the Governor of Illinois and so from a NASDVA perspective they also have to be careful on what they're supporting and not supporting. They can put recommendations which is what the IVAC does in a long sort of way but we can't say this has been endorsed by the IVAC and send it to individual members that sort of way.

Chairman: That's my understanding. Okay. Anything else? Okay. Go ahead Dutch.

Dutch Degroot: Good morning everybody. Thanks again for letting me be part of this conference. Couple of things, first, I want to tell Joe Bartley, thank you so much for chairing that event that was very successful in addressing House Bill 4981, which concerned IDVA and getting non-combat related veterans accredited BSOS. I talked to the director and told him the nice part about this is all the veterans organizations even though we're in friendly competition supported that we want what's best for the veterans of Illinois. So I think that really gives credit to all the VSOs that we have here in our state. I'd like to address something that's concerning to many of us right now and that's the non-compliance of some of the veterans commissions with the military veterans assistant act. As you know oversight and accountability within these commissions ultimately rest that the veterans organizations represent right here and it's important to have this responsibility be taken seriously. So we need to clean house or take care of business as veterans organizations when one of the VAC's is not compliant with the military veterans assistant act. I think this is really important and it affects a lot of veterans, a lot of counties. So I'd like to keep that in mind and bring that back to your organizations. That's that's about all I have to say.

Chairman: Thanks, Dutch. That's a that's a good segue. At the same time, I spent some time with my county vet and one of the things he's a vice regional vice president for the veterans assistance commissions in Illinois. And part of what he is in the process of doing is working with a couple of other our adjacent counties to help them become compliant. And the Illinois VAC has put out letters asking those that aren't compliant to become compliant and that and so I would add to what you're saying, Dutch, that we in our organizations need to make sure that we have people that are supporting our county and helping those counties form and become compliant with what's going on. I

think there's a lot of interest and there's a lot of confusion out there right now, but you know in our smaller counties we have the problem of just having enough veterans and enough population to even support it. So, there's a lot going on with that and we need to be engaged in that. And I believe I'm being told Bill, you have your hand up. Bill Wolf

Bill Wolf: I have a question. It kind of bothers me that all of the hospitals are not on the same wavelength with what they will accept and what they don't. As far as clothing, we can bring especially we had a coat drive up in this area and when we took them to the hospital, they said they can't accept them because they're not new unless it has a tag on it and they won't accept them. But yet I can take it to the next hospital and they'll accept it as long as it is not showing you know, heavy wear. It's clean. Has no holes in it or anything. But yet, one hospital won't take it unless it has a brand new tag on it. And that that gets a little bit confusing, like it's also we do a lot with moving essentials that we collect within the communities and then we take them to to one hospital that it'll take them. But it seems strange to me that, you know, one hospital will take it. I don't know how it is down south, but up here with the major VA hospitals that they don't have the same criteria for everything.

Chairman: I'm not knowledgeable about that. I don't know that whether you are or not, director, about who would set those priorities. That sounds like that's a VA issue to me.

Director: Department of Veteran Affairs, not federal.

Bill Wolf: Yeah. No, at at the federal level. Yeah.

Asia: Yeah. So, I think like with anything, the federal hospitals may have guidelines same as state hospitals and reg like profit nonprofit hospitals. I think it just independently has to be reviewed. And so, the individuals that are dropping off items, they probably have to connect with a community liaison with the hospitals to figure out what their donation cost is.

Chairman: Don't know beyond that, Bill, but thanks. Well, you know, I see people taking some notes on that to check on it. We'll see. Frank Gutierrez, you have your hand up.

Frank Gutierrez: Okay. Yes, I do. Thank you. Thank you very much. I am one of them, president of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County. And right now, we have roughly 400 veterans that are on standby for actual processing. Things were backlog because we requested additional personnel to fill the local VAC or VSOs. We were denied that request and as a result veterans aren't being serviced. I feel that in order for the county to adequately serve veterans it needs to provide the support of the VACs, provide the person the funding which will allow us to to hire more VSOs so we can process claims out at a faster rate because right now we are doing a disservice to the veteran community and while we're doing this disservice, we are losing out on federal dollars that could be coming to the county. In addition to that, we always talk about you know, how do we improve transition within the veteran community here in Illinois? And you know, one of the biggest things in transition is economic opportunity. Am I able to find gainful unemployment? Am I able to start a business and watch it grow? And I've been collaborating with several public agencies, you know, I got MWRD at the Veterans Chamber and we've been able to well one advocate for more veteran businesses, too put the words out to the veteran business owners about upcoming bids and put together educational seminars. And not only are these agencies looking to do more business with veteran business owners, but a lot of these contracts, and I'm

talking about over a hundred billion dollars worth of infrastructure contracts that are going to be going out between now and 2030. They also have work they're also tied to workforce initiatives. And these workforce initiatives could be, you know, jobs for veterans returning home in skilled trades. Good paying jobs, good paying jobs, jobs that veterans can live off of, jobs that veterans can be proud of, you know, working. Long story short, you know, there are a few bills on the floor once the business way SB 4008 that will actually help, you know, veteran business owners get more get more of these contracts through procurement goals for veteran owned businesses. And I'd like to see, you know, the veteran community like begin supporting more on economic opportunities, whether it's employment opportunities and contract opportunities without taking away from all the other support we give towards the benefits and maintaining what we currently have. That's all.

Chairman: Thank you, sir. Appreciate it. You know, as we've talked a lot in the past, you know, that economic opportunity starts, you know, that in that transition gives our our veterans an opportunity to not become one of the ones we then see later in in need situations. So, you know, that's helping veterans find that transition and we see that in places like you know, the transition centers at some of our colleges and our community colleges and other places that are helping with that in the economic whatever. I see Christa Hammers, you have a question or comment.

Christa Hammers: Hi. Yes, thank you. For those that don't know, I am the liaison between you all and IACVAC. And a couple things, we are watching the multi-county VAC bill very closely. Obviously, a lot of us would benefit from being able to work together on that. And then as far as circling back to the counties being accountable, VAC's being accountable, we have instilled kind of an accreditation process for our VAC where we have a checklist which is a mile long to get the VAC in compliance with the MVAA and they can assert that to our little committee made up of quite a few of us through the IACVAC and if they pass they get kind of a certificate stating that they are in compliance. It's kind of a way for us has to do checks and balances making sure everybody is in compliance and it is just the bare minimum. A lot of our VAC's do above that and I don't want to say that we don't, but it's it's something that is out there now. It is new. We haven't had anybody apply just yet. Like I said, the checklist is a mile long, but it's out there and we are trying to get everyone in compliance. We have had a few letters sent out like was stated and we've had few responses to those. We are helping those counties get in compliance and stressing the fact that they needed to be yesterday. So that is being worked and just kind of wanted to mention that.

Chairman: Yeah, thanks Christa. That checklist is one Greg and I used at a couple of the counties we were at last week. That checklist is very effective in helping those counties stand up their back and become in compliance. So, thanks for the hard work. Thanks for the hard work you guys are doing. Courtney Sanders, you have comments, the executive director for the Chicagoland chapter of Blue Star Families.

Courtney Sanders: I do have three things that I just want to make everybody aware of. I have put a couple links in the chat for everyone to see. The first is our Blue Star 250 campaign. We are urging everyday Americans to share their military and veteran stories. It's pretty simple. If you go to that link. You can just click it. It sends you a link and you can record it from your phone and upload it. It is our push for America 250 to get America to share their military stories. I would like to have a significant number of those coming from our Chicagoland area if possible. And ideally, I would like to hone in

on those particular stories and utilize them to kind of bring light to military family, military and veteran families in the Chicago land area. So, that is the first thing I would encourage all of you and your family members to do that. The second link is our military family lifestyle survey. We do put out the largest military family lifestyle survey outside of the Department of Defense. Our research has just been released from last year's data collection. You can find all of that research in that link. We are getting ready to start fielding for 2026. That survey will become open in April. It is very sad to report that last year we did not have a lot of surveys come from the state of Illinois. It was very challenging to get people to fill out those surveys in the state of Illinois. And these surveys can be filled out by any service member, veteran, or their family member. It can be filled out by anyone. And so I'm going to be putting out a push on social media as well as probably emailing some of your some of our partner organizations to try and get some assistance in pushing out that survey so that we can collect better data to be used specifically here in Illinois. Again, you can see last year's results on that on that link. And then the third thing, Terry, I'm going to steal a little your thunder here. Illinois has recently signed on to become a do your part state. Do your part is a campaign that Blue star families has at a national level. There are currently, I think, about 20 states that have signed on throughout the United States to be a do your part state. And essentially, these are states that are advancing thoughtful programs and partnerships that strengthen support for military and veteran connected families. If you go to that link, I've already searched Illinois. It's pretty cool. You can see all of the things that our state does to support our military and veteran families just by clicking on that link. I think that's all I have for the moment, but if you have any questions, I'm happy to answer them.

Frank Gutierrez: Uh, Courtney, frankly, I understand you have a couple questions. As far as the survey goes, yes it'd be great to reach out to the VAC's because when veterans are going into the offices to collect or to have services provided, they can easily fill those forms while they're in the waiting room.

Courtney Sanders: A great idea. I'm going to do that. I'm actually going to take it a little bit of a step further and I'm going to try and create a QR code that I can email to the VAC's that they can just have in the waiting room for people to scan.

Frank Gutierrez: Yes, good to go. And two, what role would Blue Star families play when they serve member on military leave is not receiving, let's say, payment differential that their company says they provide while they're serving their country.

Courtney Sanders: That's not really a space that we do a lot of advocacy as far as getting into individual issues with individual service members. That's not really the role that we play. We typically are referring them out to other resources.

Frank Gutierrez: No, I'm only saying because there are certain organizations that, you know, meet federal, meet state, you know, requirements, but as a result of not following their internal policies, you know, veterans have lost their homes, their families while serving their country. And I'm just wondering if even if this group could do anything about that.

Chairman: Thanks for the good discussion as well. And at the risk still making our one legislator feel that he's been slid today. Representative Swanson, do you have anything that you'd like to add to our conversation so far today, sir?

Representative Swanson: Gosh, I don't feel slighted at all. It's been some great discussion going on. So, been taking notes here.

Chairman: Well, we've been taking all the hits of being Marines here this morning. So, I didn't want you to feel bad as just being an army guy that slid.

Representative Swanson: Not at all. But you know it's an interesting time again right now as we think about our soldiers deployed all across America and taking care of them is just as important taking care of our veterans back home here. So I appreciate all you do and take care of and watching for our veterans and being the the great steward you are of managing and working with our most valuable veterans. So thank you. I guess I could add as a chair the veterans committee so far a lot of the legislation is still held up in the rules committee to assign legislations to the various committees. I think right now we have one piece of legislation in the veterans committee. So until we get some more through rules committee we're I've not had a committee hearing yet for this session. So, kind of where we're at there.

Chairman: Superb. Thanks, sir. I appreciate it.

Representative Swanson: thank you.

Senator Wilcox: So, this is Senator Willox. If the House would ever come down to Springfield and do some work, that's changed. But to the previous speaker's question about members on leave or deployed and not getting their differential pay from their employer, I believe the attorney Military Veterans Rights Bureau is the appropriate spot for those individuals to reach out to for help and our local VAC should be able to help them make those connections.

Frank Gutierrez: Thank you, Senator. And can I touch on that because the attorney general's office did send a letter to the employer stating that they're not following their own internal code, but because they're not breaking federal or state law their hands are tied from forcing them to comply with their own company policy.

Eric Bermudez: Good morning everyone. As far as that is concerned, Eric Bermudez from the Illinois Department of Employment Securities, I would contact the Department of Labor with you Sarah. They might be able to assist in that as they work a lot with claims cases about that and the other thing I just realized my hands still up. Sorry about that one. The other thing was when we were speaking about employment opportunities, I just wanted to welcome everyone to our American Job Center here that I working with. We fall under the wheels a lot of times, but any office that any veteran who's conditioning or veterans who've been out of the military for any amount of time, they're more than welcome to come in where we have veterans appointment reps and we also have staff that will be able to assist that veteran, make sure they receive priority of service, not only in the job hunt, but also in receiving assistance or training. So, I just wanted to throw that out before.

Chairman: Super. Thank you.

Frank Gutierrez: Sure. I don't mean to take everyone's time, but this particular employee, yes, we went to the AG's office. We went through the Illinois Department of Labor. I even reached out to the US Department of Labor. The problem is it's another entity that had a policy that was above the user. Nobody was able to enforce it because of that. It was on their website. It was in their code that they were required to pay and it

resulted in a veteran losing his house while on military leave. And every individual, every group that I reached out to constantly stated that it is out of their wheelhouse. It is none of it's not their concern. And it's frustrating being a veteran advocate having 26 of my service members that I deployed with take their lives coming home. It is frustrating. Very frustrating having every department you think that would help this individual turn their back on them.

Director: Well, let's do this, Frank. Shoot me an email and we'll work on it together. Even if we have to take it to our defense at the state level. We have to take it higher, but we may know them. We'll work on it together and we'll try to get to the solution.

Chairman: So, I think this is a great point right now where we need to move on. We do have members that want to touch base on what they're working on and we are pretty close to our time limit. So, Jonathan, you have your hand raised.

Jonathan Horsley: Hi, everybody. Just wanted to do a quick introduction. I am Jonathan Horsley, Army retiree. I am with IDES. I am the state veterans program manager and the JBSG grant manager. So, by all means, if there's any opportunities for collaboration with any of us, please let us know and look forward to continuing to work with this group. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. And Senator Wilcox, did you have anything else you wanted to say to us?

Senator Wilcox: No, just I know Senator Porfirio has got a number of these bills. We've had one veterans committee meeting so far. We're down here this week and I'm sure some of these will start moving through the Senate.

Chairman: Super. Thank you, sir. And I'll see you next week, Senator Wilcox.

Senator Wilcox: Oh, I hear you. I just been missing you the last couple weeks.

Chairman: Well, I will see you next week, but you're not in session next week, are you?

Senator Wilcox: A lot of work done.

Vice Chairwoman: All right. So, I'm Shannon. I am the vice chair for IVAC. I'm going to briefly talk about what the Illinois Attorney General's Office has been doing for the veteran community and what we're planning on doing in the near future. So, last year we did our webinars and then we started something new called Hip Pocket Classes. We pulled it from our military background. They span for 25 to 30 minutes and it's on a topic. So if you guys have any ideas like recommendations for the hip pocket classes you can send them over to mvrbilag.gov. Right now we are kicking off our webinars. Earlier this year we did state charter. In April we are doing MVAA and May we're doing ISERRA which will cover the new information and the amendments that was passed in August. So, it's going to be new. It's going to be revamped, but I'm going to let you know that AAG Bill Phillips is going to be conducting the presentation. So, there is going to be history in it. So, some of those that love history, this is right up your alley. I will be on, but I will be taking questions and then right after that, we have our vet consumer webinar, and that will range about an hour, hour and a half, and that will touch base on for-profit companies trying to do VA claims. It would be pension poachers. It's going to cover on known scams targeting service members and we highlight that if you get aware of these things, we highly recommend you reach out to us. That way, if it's something that is happening more and more, we can do a press release, we can do a

consumer alert. So, in 2020, 2021, we utilized the information given by the veteran and service member community and saying, "Hey, service member, if you're getting a text message saying that you got overpaid and you need to go in and get a gift card, it's probably a scam. And so we sent out a consumer alert about it. Um because it was happening across the the nation and people were concerned that if they didn't do the gift card that they would lose their security clearance. They use these terminologies to get them to comply with their requests. So vet consumer is a big one. And then if you want to be on that just let me know. mrbilag.gov is the best email for that. And then any concerns and I just want to talk about it. So for IVAC specifically for Illinois Veterans Advisory Council any concerns pertaining to a VAC, you should probably vet it through the Military Veteran Rights Bureau. File a complaint with us. I know that people want to voice it during this meeting, but it takes away from further communication as to what we can do as a group to work on the things that we want to work on. So over the time span, we probably touched on it for maybe 12 minutes today, 10 to 12 minutes. And so in December in the same time span, we were talking about other things, we took away the opportunity to have a lot of discussion and come up with things this upcoming year's plan. But now we're maybe 10 minutes away from ending the meeting and we're still doing introductions. So I just wanted to bring that up so that we're aware of our time. So sorry to be the buzzkill,

Chairman: speaking of things we still need to talk about, your bylaws update, have you met again a couple times with that?

Vice Chairwoman: We have communicated on that and there is a second reading and with the second reading, we have been in correspondence and communication with IDVA. So my understanding is with the second reading it's not clear and because it's not clear we're going to go with what IDVA or the intent of the law and that's to allow us to continue to operate and what we believe the general assembly would like us to do.

Chairman: Okay, super. Thank you. Did you get through all of the people that you wanted to have report because we didn't get anything from our your legislative person as far as anything going on other than there's not much other than what Congress or Representative Wilcox mentioned.

Alexa: Correct. I have nothing more to add just that our VSO hiring bill did pass out of Senate committee as Wilcox mentioned.

Chairman: Okay. Super. And is there anybody else online that wants to to talk about what their organization is doing or things upcoming that we need to be aware of?

Mia Garcia: I'm not sure if you can hear me. I'm not online. I'm on the phone. This is Mia Garcia Hel from UIC's Office of Student Veterans Affairs.

Chairman: Super. Go ahead. We can hear you.

Mia Garcia: Hi, one uh question. The ivac@illinois.org addresses on the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council web page doesn't seem to be working because I had requested the WebEx link a couple times and it have returned to me multiple times. The thing that I'd like to share with you is that the University of Illinois is working in partnership with the National Government Art Museum to do an art exhibition for the 25th anniversary of 911. We did 25 portraits and 25 interviews with alumni, faculty, staff, current students, 19 of which are veterans that will be featured during the exhibition. And I just wanted to share this information with you because I was at a conference a

couple weeks ago and I learned that there weren't a lot of institutions that had already done some work to honor and remember 911. So, I think that this was a really good opportunity for us to bring some resources together. I had a question about the upcoming events that are posted given the number of things that I'm hearing about today that I'm not seeing on the Illinois Department link. That's totally empty. I think that it would be helpful, especially for an organization like mine that services one of the largest groups of veterans in the city to have this as a resource to share what's going on around the state. So, just wanted to throw that out there. My contact information if anybody is interested on connecting with us on this exhibit is Mia123uic.edu. I'm also on LinkedIn. You can just look me up, Dr. Mia Garcia.

Chairman: And we got that. Thank you very much and when we were talking about transition, the Chez center there at the U of I is really an exceptional model of how to help people in that transition. So the work that's going on at U of I is impressive. Thank you very much.

Mia Garcia: Want to make sure we're clear. I'm talking from University of Chicago.

Chairman: Thank you. Any other comments that need to be made or stakeholders that want to share something?

Vice Chairwoman: Are you planning on restarting or regrouping for the transition working group?

Chairman: We're still working on that.

Vice Chairwoman: Okay.

Chairman: Okay. Still trying to deal with the issues around that is we've talked to some today on that. But yes

Vice Chairwoman: so for those that are interested in joining the group, they should reach out to you.

Chairman: They should.

Vice Chairwoman: Okay.

Chairman: We will move forward with that. Director, anything else?

Director: I just had a question regards to the IACVAC in the comment about not what are they not in compliance with? Dutch, did you hear that?

Chairman: That's Christa Hammer.

Dutch Degroot: What was the question again?

Director: What are the VAC's not in compliance with

Chairman: the MVAA?

Director: Right. But what's the big sticking point?

Dutch Degroot: Oh, well, what's happening is they're by law to have VSOs for one thing. My understanding is that we have a couple of superintendents that say, "Well, we don't have the money for this, this, and that." And my answer to that is that the superintendent themselves can be accredited and that would make them comply with

the law. So, it's not a matter that it can't be done or it would cost more money, but if you don't have a VSO, well, let the superintendent get a accredited. Simple.

Director: Okay. Thank you. I'll talk to you offline. I just wanted to get in my notes of what the major issue was for the group.

Chairman: Is there any old business? Any new anybody wants to bring up? We still got just very quickly I just want to mention something that I've noticed for everybody social media. There has been a lot of sites going on social media. It seems making a push. So beware. Thanks

Chairman: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Is there any new business? See no hands. Okay. Any for the good of the council things that we should know or talk about?

Unknown Speaker: Real quick, the several veterans groups from here in central Illinois go over to Quincy Hall on Armed Forces on Friday of Armed Forces Day. We always have the picnic over there and we feed all the staff and all the veterans and basically anybody over at the Quincy home. So that's happening on May 15th and we'll be going over there again. We take all the food and everything over there and cook the picnic and provide entertainment and for lunch.

Chairman: and which day is that?

Unknown Speaker: That's May 15th. We always do it on the Friday before armed forces day.

Chairman: And for the good of the council, the state fair, Veterans Day at the state fair is coming up in August. And we are still looking for financial support to provide the meals for both the ROC (ROTC?) guys and for the veterans lunch there. So, if your organization can help find a corporate sponsor or whatever, please let the state fair committee know. We appreciate that. Any other still taking still taking comment for the for the council from the from the phone call?

Nathan H: Hi, my name is Nathan H. I'm a grad student here at the University of Chicago. I for the good of the council there's currently ongoing competition state governors can put in to develop contracting or excuse me connecting talent to opportunity and it's to create education pathways. One of the things about that challenge though is it is required that the state governor puts it in. So there's no way that you can say I want to develop a veteran pathway to future employment opportunities or education. I'm wondering if the council would take that as part of Illinois's commission which I'm sure they're making as part of their investment into quantum development, workforce development in the state of Illinois. Specific call outs or ways that veterans can be plugged in. I believe I heard Frank and others talking about creating economic opportunity and employment. I just finished a course here at the University of Chicago at the Wood School of Business on quantum employment. States putting a lot of money into it. I think there's a lot of opportunity there. There's a lot of other different competitions that are also emerging, but I think veterans could be a really powerful force in that. I'm wondering if that's being advocated on behalf of veterans in Illinois as part of the Illinois workforce development program or if the state of Illinois can champion our veterans as a pilot program as part of that connecting town opportunity challenge which ends again here uh coming up in April. I would love to talk more with people about it. It's an opportunity that's out there um by email and held that's

in November hostel.echo.delta.chicago.edu. We'll put some proposals together from the policy school side. Would be open to working with anyone but I think it's a great opportunity to really champion veterans where other states might be helpful just because of the state workforce development program. Thanks.

Chairman: Thank you. I think that'd be a good thing to work with the economic you know the department of economic advancement.

Nathan H: Okay.

Chairman: Can you coordinate or do something?

Frank Gutierrez: Yeah, we'll follow. We'll reach out.

Chairman: Still got two more questions on the board. Yeah. I say uh Colonel Norman, you have a question or comment, sir? Go ahead.

Colonel Norman: Yes, sir. Just a comment. Thinking about starting at the front end of future veterans. The Southwest Illinois area will be holding its second annual our community salute and enlistee recognition ceremony on April 30th down here at the First Baptist Church in Illinois. Anybody who would like to attend, I would ask that you please register and I will provide that information.

Chairman: Super. Thanks, Bob. And Christa, you have your hand up again.

Christa Hammers: Hi. Yes. Sorry so last time I shared just kind of in the chat a little bit about Objective Zero. If you guys have not already kind of looked at that, I suggest you do. It's a free app made for veterans by veterans. It's a mental health app. It's free peer support in your pocket. We have a lot of veterans in our rural communities that don't have the resources to get care right away and need somebody to talk to right away and these people have gone through basically the VA save program but a little bit more in depth. I've looked into it I've downloaded it it's resources are connected to it both VA resources and outside nonprofit resources as well as caregiver resources they also do like my mindful things like yoga and meditation as well as just check-ins from your peers. And the nice thing is is you can look at who you're talking to, where they're located and be able to connect with them more based off of your branch of service or what you did even. So I recommend that everybody kind of look at it and download it. It's worth it and you can be as detailed as possible you don't have to give your name if you don't want to.

Chairman: Superb. Thanks, Christa. Jonathan, you had your hand up and then you lowered. Did you still have a comment?

Jonathan Horsley: No

Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Hugh Shown:: Just a quick comment. I'm here local representing the Reserve Organization of America and Ray Deiters is online. If you Ray, if you have any if I make some mistakes, please let me know. But the Reserve Organization of America, the objective is to support reserve units, members, and their families. And that's what we try to do. We're in Washington DC. We have different departments. Illinois for example. And I'll just mention with the Operation Epic Fury, the six members that came home and now the seventh member are reserve members. They were doing their job. They're part

of the operation epic fury. They're reserve and they're military. They're veterans and sometimes the reserve and the guard members get overlooked and I just wanted to mention that and bless our hearts and our hearts go out to those reserve family members who lost their loved ones.

Chairman: Thank you. Thank you,

Director: Mr. Chair. On that note, if I could take a point of personal privilege, I think they call it, if you don't mind, I think it'd be remiss if I didn't mention Director Dolgos, who passed, former IDVA director, US Army soldier, battle buddy of Dutch DeGroot, who passed away on Christmas of last year. He will certainly be missed and his and as director appreciated his console from time to time. I just want to get into the record into everybody's ears that he will be missed.

Chairman: Thank you, sir. He will be missed. Any other comments? Public comments. Next meeting is June 9th.

Ray Dieter: Ray Dieter here.

Chairman: Yes.

Ray Dieter: I just want to thank you for mentioning the ROA and our interest, but also mentioned I've been attending these meetings for a couple years and I feel today was one of the more informative meetings we've had and I'd like to thank our chairman and all the attendees. Thank you.

Chairman: Well, thank you, Ray. The chairman felt kind of disorganized today for most of it. So, but that's that's good to hear some positive feedback from me stumbling through the meeting. So, thank you. And with that, uh the next meeting, as I said, June 9th. And if there's a motion to adjourn,

Unknown Speaker: move second.

Unknown Speaker: So, move. All those in favor can leave. Goodbye.

Unknown Speaker: Thanks everybody. Have an awesome week.

(Sometime during the Director's dialogue with Dutch regarding VAC/MVAA compliance, Christa Hammers spoke about a letter and checklist. She explained that the checklist is voluntary)