

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes  
 Wednesday, March 8, 2023– 10:00am  
 Illinois Department of Affairs  
 WebEx

Attendance:

NAME	APPOINTED BY	PRESENT
Bruce Blackmer	Marine Corps League	X
Stanley Olenjack	IDVA Director	X
Al Reynolds	Disabled American Veterans	X
	President of Senate	
Senator Sue Rezin	Minority Leader of Senate	X
Rep. Lance Yednock	Speaker of the House	X
Rep. Dan Swanson	Minority Leader of the House	
Bill Wolff	IDVA Director	X
Frank Gutierrez	IDVA Director	X
Megan Everett	IDVA Director	X
Vince Long	IDVA Director	X
Command Sgt. Maj. Dena Ballowe	National Guard	X
Shannon Yount	Attorney General	X
	IL Secretary of State	
Jorge Bermudez/Rich Wuthrich	IL Department of Securities	X
Michae Peck	The American Legion	X
Keith Wetherell	AMVETS	X
Peggy Arick	Blue Star Mothers of America	X
Tim Kennedy	Catholic War Veterans	
Dr. Jerry Field	Jewish War Veterans	X
Joe Schaler	Military Order of the Purple Heart	X
Lee Lopez	Military Order of the World Wars	X
Ray Dieter	Reserve Officers' Association	X
John Murray	IACVAC	
John DeGroot	Veterans of Foreign Wars	X
Roy Dolgos	Vietnam Veterans of America	X
Kevin Wathen	IDVA Director	X
Bob Tyler	MOAA	X
Senator Craig Wilcox	DSTF Position	
<b>Alternates:</b>		
Justin Miller	VFW	X
Greg Padovani	American Legion	X
Art Dutkovic	MOWW	
Jay Davis	VFW	
Hugh Shown	ROA	X
Geroge Mulvaney	MCL	X
Elizabeth Roxworthy	DMA	X

New Members:

Guests:

Call to Order 10:00am

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

Moment of Silence

Introductions:

IDVA Staff:

Terry Prince, Director

Melissa Black, Chief of Staff

Crystal Womack, Senior Program & Policy Advisor

Kourtney Hopkins, Senior Programs Manager / Women Vet's Coordinator

Maureen Hartigan, Public Information Officer

Jenny Franklin – Director's Assistant

Connie Watson – Grants

Gwen Diehl – Homes Projects

Sara Augustinas – Legislative Liaison

Mark Patterson – Field Services Manager

Danielle Luevano – Operations & Programs Manager

Anthony Vaughn – Assistant Director

Angie Simmons – Homes Administrator

Approval of December 14th, 2022, minutes

Motion to approve the Minutes by Al Reynolds

Vince Long seconded the motion

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

I would just like make a couple of remarks. First off, let me introduce myself, my name's Keith Wetherell, I'm the newly elected Chairman for the IVAC. I was elected in December.

First I want to thank Mr. Peck for everything and his leadership for the past two years, it's greatly appreciated. Thank you very much Mr. Peck.

Next I just wanted to, I briefly sent an email to everyone that just kinda said that we're going to do a couple of little changes. After talking to the Director and the Vice Chairman, Colonel Tyler, we are thinking this would be a good opportunity to kind of change things. In the past, IVAC kind of became a comprehensive report from the IDVA and associated state agencies, and I think that we need to get back to making it

more of a working group atmosphere and studying veterans and issues more than the reporting from a state agencies and IDVA. The IVAC statute and bylaws state this: Advise the IDVA concerning the fulfillment of its statutory duties; review and study the Veterans issues; Receive a report from the IDVA Director at each meeting; Report annually to the governor, and then we have to do an annual report regarding the re-entry process as well. I think that the second point, review and study the Veterans issues is something that I would like to focus more on, so moving forward after this meeting we'll start to kind of develop a way that we can kind of get back to that instead of just having reporting from all the state agencies. Those will still be done, but more in a concise way. I think this way moving forward we can maybe be more effective with helping with veterans issues and programs and stuff like that. So, does anybody have any questions regarding that for now? As we go you know it will morph into things, but I just thought I'd take this opportunity to discuss that real quick and introduce myself and say, thank you very much for your help with this and I look forward to the next two years. So that being said, I would like to go into some brief introductions of all the IVAC members. If everybody could introduce themselves and then a brief description of their organization they represent or what they're here for. Crystal do you mind just going through the roll call, we can do it that way. Would that be the easiest way?

**Crystal Womack:**

That would be perfect. We'll move on chairman if you are complete with your introduction.

**Bob Tyler, Vice Chairman:**

I am Bob Tyler. I'm a retired marine. My time was, well I started a long time ago and in Vietnam I flew helicopters. I retired after over thirty years and got involved when we moved back to Illinois with the military officers association, that's how I ended up here. For the last six years I've been the president of the Council of the Chapters for Illinois for the MOAA and we have about six thousand MOAA members in Illinois and about three hundred and fifty thousand across the U. S. For the most part, MOAA is concerned about Veterans issues dealing with personnel and we take those issues to the legislatures as possible and work through the existing agencies to see that our veterans are not forgotten about.

**Colonel Mike Peck:**

I am holding a seat that was vacated by the late Myron Kirby. I have been with the IVAC since it's inception. I am honored to represent the American Legion.

**Representative Lance Yednock:**

Thank you Crystal, I'm honored to be on this advisory council. I am the representative for the seventy- six district, which includes the LaSalle, Ottawa and Peru area where we have a veteran's home. I'm also on the Veterans Committee and I put on as the Chair of the Veterans Committee in Springfield. I'm learning alot from all of you over the last four years. I continue to be an ear for the advisory council to make sure that any legislation that may come through my committee or come to the floor of the house. So I appreciate all of your service and what you're doing here for veterans. Thank you.

**Megan Everett:**

I am the director of the Veterans Portfolio at the McCormick Foundation here in Chicago. I'm a Navy veteran. I've been on the IVAC for several years now and also serve on the advisory council for veteran Affairs for the city. I oversee our Veterans portfolio, grant making portfolios, so we grant out about three to three and a half million dollars a year to nonprofits working with Veterans across the state with a lot of focus in Chicago, but we do try to work across the state to help support veteran organizations. Thanks.

**Vince Long:**

Hi, I'm Vince Long. I can't remember how many years I've been on this committee, but it's been several. I am a Vietnam Veteran and I represented VFW for many years, and then we decided it was time for a younger guy, so we brought a younger guy in and I was happy to tell Director Prince that I would serve as one of his appointments. I've been involved in veterans just anything about veterans since 1969 when I joined the VFW. It's an honor to serve on this, and I've met a lot of great people and I think we've accomplished a lot over the years. Thank you.

**Frank Gutierrez:**

My name is Frank Gutierrez, I am also on the advisory council for City of Chicago and Veteran Assistance Commission of Cook County, and a board member of Chicago Veterans. I love to utilize my network to help address veterans issues throughout the area and I am blessed to be part of this group. Thank you.

**Kevin Wathen:**

Morning, my name is Kevin Wathen and I am the Director of Military and Veteran Services at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. I am an Army veteran and married to an Air Force veteran. Mission wise, we have a mission to eliminate blocks to the veteran on education for veterans and their dependents. So obviously my focus is typically education based, so we're talking about G. I, Bill and MIA-POW- Scholarship, IVG and Illinois National Guard Grant and the other things that go into the education process. Thank you.

**Command Sgt. Maj. Dena Ballowe:**

Hello, I'm Sgt. Major Blue, I'm the senior enlisted leader for the Illinois National Guard, currently serving. I have 32 years of service, I am married to Air Force National Guard member. He also has 32 years of service. We have 10,500 soldiers across 54 armories in the state and three thousand airmen. Thank you.

**Shannon Yount:**

Hi, my name is Shannon. I am the program specialist in the military and veteran rights bureau in the Attorney General's office. Last year I was appointed as the representative for the Illinois Attorney General's office. If you don't know what we do, I will gladly conduct a presentation at your location. Overall what we do is we ensure that veterans and service members receive the benefits that they are entitled to and if they have concerns about the rights that they can file a concern with us. If you have any questions about that please let me know. Thank you.

**Dutch DeGroot:**

I am a Dutch DeGroot and I am an Army, Vietnam Veteran and an Air Force OIF veteran. I represent the Veterans of Foreign Wars and I thank Conrad Long for vacating his spot so I could step up here. I don't know how much younger I am to him, but it's a pleasure to serve for the Illinois Veterans and I thank you all.

**Eric Bermudez:**

Good morning everyone. I represent the Illinois Department of Employment Securities. I am the assistant State Veterans Program manager and I also have the privilege of overseeing the Illinois Veterans Transition Pathway, which is our re- entry program for our veterans who are currently incarcerated and also oversee the vocational rehabilitation program with the VA for IDES. Thank you.

**Al Reynolds:**

Good morning. I'm Al Reynolds, I am the adjutant treasurer for Department of Illinois Disable American Veterans, serving our disabled veterans and their families. I served on this committee several years. I'm a past chairman of this committee. I've enjoyed it and I look forward to doing many more. Thank you.

**Stanley Olenjack:**

Good morning everyone. My name is Stanely Olejack and I am a veteran of the United States Marine Corps serving during Vietnam. Past IVAC chairman from 2017 to 2019. I'm also involved with he Veterans Assistance Commission and our main goal is to assit veterans. On May 20th we're going to have an all veterans golf outing in our community. Thank you.

**Eliseo Lopez:**

Good morning everyone. My name is Eliseo Lopez and I am a retired Warren officer, United States Army. I spent twenty years in the military. Started out my career in Vietnam and progressed through and ended up retiring out of Germany and Europe. I represent the Military Order of the World Wars. It is a leadership community outreach programs mostly in the ROTC/JROTC and the Boy Scouts field. The Chicago chapter is comprised of about a 145 members. Some in Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, upper Indiana and, Iowa. I have been asked to help out and support the IDVA from Colonel Peck. I took over from him and I'm here to help in any which way I can to support the Veterans Advisory Council.

**Peggy Arick:**

Good morning I represent the Blue Star Mothers of America, specifically the chapter in central Illinois. We are volunteer moms that support our soldiers and airmen and veterans in our area. I have two children, two sons, one who's in the Air Guard has been for twelve years and another one who's in the Army Guard and has been in for twelve years. Thank you.

**Joe Schaler:**

Joe Schaler, I represent the Military Order of the Purple Heart as the department commander for Illinois. A member of a number of organizations, but I'm just very blessed to be a part of this organization with so many great people trying to do good things for veterans.

**Ray Dieter:**

Ray Dieter here. I've trained at Hines VA hospital where we started our Open Heart program, then went into the United States Public Health Service and served in Alaska. Then came back here and a fellow by name and Mike Pack said I should become involved. Instead of being a member, I became president of the Reserve Organization of America and it's an honor to serve here on this committee. So our main interest right now is some of the legislative issues that are going on in Washington and in Illinois. So thank you very much.

**Roy Dolgos:**

I was a Vietnam veteran in sixty- six, served as a military policeman. When I got out I didn't do anything with veterans until 1985 when I kinda came out of the veterans closet and got involved in several different organizations. One being the advisory board for the City of Chicago, I was on it for 14 years and chairman for 4 years. President of my local CVA organization for about ten years. And have been a member of this organization ever since its existence, and I'm looking forward to working with everybody here for the veterans. That's what we're here for is to work for the veteran who cannot can't help themselves and we're here to help them. Thank you.

**Bruce Blackmer:**

Good morning, my name is Bruce Blackmer. I am the new representative of the Marine Corps League Department of Illinois. The Marine Corps League was chartered by an act of congress back in 1937. The department of Illinois focuses on serving Veterans and that is our main goal.

**Hugh Shown:**

Hello, this is my first meeting. I was commissioned through the ROTC at the University of Illinois several years ago. I was active duty with the Army and got into the Army Reserves here locally, 303<sup>rd</sup> ordinance group in Springfield, then the supply and service battallion in Decatur and eventually the US AR school up in the Peoria area. I'm here with the (ROA) Reserve Organization of America with Ray Dieter. It is an honor for me to be here. I got into organizations like ROA and MOAA and others such as the American Legion, but Mike Peck encouraged me. I got into the first organization when Colonel John Wilson, some of you may remember him from years ago, he said here sign this form so you can be in the ROA and and Lou Myers worked with him for many many years with ROA. I am honored to be here and I do have some information on ROA if you would like to have some of that. We are celebrating our 100th anniversary of the organization. We are starting a year 101. And thank you very much for the honor of being here. Thank you.

**Justin Miller:**

My name's Justin Miller, a twp time army combat veteran. I exited service in 2011, I've been in veteran nonprofit initiatives ever since. I sit on the board with Frank for Chicago Veterans. I run Roll Call Chicago Land, which was our professional networking group here in Chicago. I'm a founding member of the the Quad Cities Vet Met. We have an awesome professional networking out there for veterans as well. My day job is a non-traditional education program for service connected veterans that are looking to be aspiring entrepreneurs, and I'm also the Executive Director for Student Veterans of Illinois. I wear a lot of different hats but I do a lot of resource navigation and I'm very

connected to my local veterans here in Chicago. So anything I can do to help, please send my way. I'm also a life member of the VFW. I think that's my appointed role here, but many different hats. Let me know I can help. Thank you.

**Dr. Jerry Fields:**

Hello, I am with the Jewish War Veterans, and I always follow what Mr. Peck wants us to do, so I am reporting this morning.

**Greg Padovani:**

Hello everyone, my name's Greg Padovani. I'm the new kid on the block. I'm one of the delegates from the American Legion. Thank you, Mike Peck for nominating me. I'm from Arlington Heights, where I chair the Veterans Memorial Committee and I've worked with Dutch and Mike for very, very long time and Veterans Affairs. I used my email lists of 6500 veterans and supporters to get the word out about all kinds of things that help veterans. Just communicating about events issues or anything of veteran interest and it's an amazing experience to see how many people respond to those emails that are. We try to make them very compelling. I also have a 35 year career in marketing and public relations that helps me get the messages out. Thank you.

**Elizabeth Roxworthy:**

Hi, good morning I'm Beth Roxworthy, I am the new legislative liaison for Illinois Department of Military Affairs, recently hired in February. I'm also currently serving in the Illinois National Guard. I'm the alternate in the event that Sgt. Maj. Ballowe cannot call in. I have 30 years of service, still serving and just recently returned from our deployment to Africa. I am excited to be part of the team.

**George Mulvaney:**

Hello, I am George Mulvaney, I am a Marine Corps veteran with Marine Corps League and I am the associate associate member under Bruce Blackmer. This is my first meeting and I am glad to be here. I know many of you from the past like Roy when he was in Chicago years ago. Thank you very much and we'll just listen up today. Thank you.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Well, thank you very much for the introductions. Those are outstanding as you can see there's a ton of knowledge and resources associated with the IVAC, and I mean, to me, the possibilities are endless, especially when it comes to helping veterans. I think we have all the resources we need right here. If not the capabilities of finding them. I look forward to working with everyone again. I thank you for the brief introductions and we'll move on director do you mind giving your report?

**Director Prince:**

Thank you and I'll try to keep it brief. I've got a bunch of notes here. I want to start that Colonel Peck was mentioned at least seven times, so he's the big winner, the name drop lottery winner this week, congratulations on that. I want to thank all of you certainly former director Dolgos for being in the room, it's always great to see you sir. The former chairs of the IVAC and vice chairs Mike and Jerry, that was referenced already for their service to this organization as you can see continued. None of us really know how to retire apparently, so we just keep doing what we do. And then Keith and Bob, really

enjoy having lunch with you and kind of going over some of those things and ideas. I've gotten feedback from a number of board members about getting some action going and having conversations and working group that will really impact. What's awesome about this team is that we're all in the same zoom together, so there isn't a problem that can't get solved knowing who we know, and so that's very exciting to me, especially because it impacts veterans and I'm a little selfish because I'm a veteran myself. I wasn't a Marine, but I was the Navy Corpsman with the Marines for 31 years, and so the veteran experience is a big part of why I'm so excited about the direction that we're moving. My report is really quick because I've got a number of our teammates that want to talk about things, but again, they're all going to keep it brief.

The big ticket item that we have going on obviously the budget. IDVA has asked for a significant increase in budget to provide the services that veterans families and their survivors deserve. Quite frankly ladies and gentlemen this agency has not filled or have had the number of people that it should have had in many of the positions. We're blessed to have outstanding performers both civilian and military veterans who are used to doing many many, many things and oftentimes we'll do the work and the demand signal wasn't there. Our Chief of Staff will speak later and has done a fantastic job working with our Assistant Director and our Human Resources team to grow the organization so that we can continue to provide and really increase the amount of services that we provide the veterans.

The next big item is on our website and we'll make sure that you get a copy of it if you haven't already done so. This is the new IDVA mission, vision, and guiding principles. I'm not going to read the whole document to you today. It's a six page overview of where the agency wants to go moving into the next four years. We started our journey together, April 2021 with the IDVA 6 point plan for the future of our agency. As I've reported previously, we're proud to let you know that we've achieved all six of those points. Not wanting to rest on our morals, we've moved into a new direction that really focuses on our people, the veteran experience and operational excellence. Under those we've also called ourselves TEAM IDVA, that's for Teamwork, Excellence, Accountability and Motivation. Team IDVA is really how we're moving forward in the future.

So we're very excited about that and how the IVAC is going to help us achieve some of those goals together because ultimately when we're successful, we're all successful.

I'm going to close with just saying that today's International Women's Day and I'd be remiss if I didn't think that 50,000 women veterans in Illinois and that doesn't even include those women that are serving on active duty gardens, the 50,000 people, many of them on this call in this room, and in our state. Every day at my house is International Women's Day. That's how I managed to get through my marriage. Thank all of you again for your service to Illinois veterans. I'm so excited that none of you know how to retire because without your tireless efforts we wouldn't be able to move in the direction that we've been going and we are one of the, if not the finest state in the country and I've shared that with my colleagues at the NASDVA conference. Wherever you look on ratings and so on and so forth. It's really an eye of the beholder. I believe that Illinois is the definition of choice for veterans and it's a direct reflection of your work both on the

IVAC and in your organization. So with that being said, Mr. Chair, I'll turn it over back to you to go through our different reports. Thanks.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you very much Director. Next we have the veterans home report, Gwen, are you available? Mark Patterson for the field report?

**Mark Patterson:**

Thank you and good morning to everybody. First thing I'll talk about is the field staff vacancies. We're working with our HR, posts have been completed with the job descriptions. That's a new process that is going which will allow us to offer those to the public. That's how we get them posted. VSO vacancies will be filled in the future hopefully prior to the next IVAC meeting by mass posting and consolidated and compressed training. The training will be the exact same material and standard, the only difference will be a concentrated training that will start and finish within one training cycle, one segment, one succession. Southern Region Supervisor position will be posted here within the next week or two.

Field offices, a little bit of status. Aurora is about to reopen, we were in a vet center. \*unable to hear\* Edwardsville will be moving from a difficult accessibility location at the Lewis and Clark College campus to the DHS building in East Alton. This is the exact same location and office we previously occupied probably ten years ago, it is right up front and very accessible. Woodstock office will be moving out of the Armory building, again this is for accessibility issues for our physically disabled veteran community to get in and out of that building so we're going to make it more convenient for them. The Carlinville office, which is in a DHS building will be co-locating with the Macoupin County Veterans Assistance Commission as another part of our partnership with VAC's that we really enjoy doing. The Lawrenceville office has moved to Robinson in the neighboring County of Crawford. Lawrenceville location will remain open as in itinerate office location. We also have some new offices on the horizon. We have a space request out for Ogle county which will be Oregon Winnebago County, where we'll have somebody actually in Rockford. We have folks in Machesney Park right now. In Livingston County in Pontiac.

We have our annual training that is scheduled for May 22nd through the 25<sup>th</sup>. Right now that's out for bid so I don't have a location to be able to provide you. By the end of next week we should have that information and can open those bids. As we did last year, we have invited the veterans assistance commissions to our training and we do a exchange training with them throughout the year for our individual training sessions.

Field services a short term plan, we will be adding additional administrative support to our regions. The positions will be concentrated in distinct and new job duties. First will be the office coordinator, this position will be the administrative support for the regional supervisor. They will track statistics information and ensure all reporting is complete and timely. They will also follow up on activities within the regional office. Second one that's very important is the outreach coordinator. Their tasks will be focused on event development and resourcing for other events through direction of the Regional Supervisor. They will be our educators and programs benefit services people, so that the Veterans Service officers are able to maintain their hours in the office filing claims.

This will be a very proactive position. They will develop messaging and contact various to identifying veterans that are eligible for services, but just don't know what to expect or when they are going to get around to taking the steps to pursue their benefits. We will dispel worries and work with them remotely if necessary to bring processes to them. This will be an aggressive campaign to reach the unserved and underserved veteran communities in Illinois. That is my report.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you Mr. Patterson

**Roy Dolgos:**

I know Southern Illinois has a lot of veterans but very few offices and one of the complaints that we get or I hear of is that it's takes a hour or two hours for a veteran to go to the office. My thinking was, why can't we get a mobile unit such as the Vets Center has? I think we've all seen those white vans and have them travel around southern Illinois where they can go, you know, two hours here or three hours here. You know, drive an hour and they're at another location and now you're not paying for the office space. You're just paying for, you know, a driver to be down in southern Illinois for two or three days or whatever it is. That's just a suggestion that I have. I don't know if it would work or not but I think it would be something to really look into, okay.

**Mark Patterson:**

Thank you, that is something that the director and I have also discussed that's more of a medium- term plan that we have. So if IVAC would support that and put it in writing, we'd be more than happy to have that as a pursuit item that we can use. We've talked about actually having one up north and one in the southern area. So I'm more than happy to receive any type of form regarding that.

**Roy Dolgos:**

I had a meeting with the Governor and I brought that up and he really liked the idea. So I'm sure if you're bringing it up again.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Excellent idea Mr. Dolgos. Thank you for bringing that up. Moving on, we'll do the public information report with a Maureen Hartigan.

**Maureen Hartigan:**

Good morning everyone. Thank you for allowing me to participate this morning. I did put it in the chat, I believe all of you had received it previously, but I did put in the chat the link to the mission, vision, and guiding principles document that the director referred to.

In terms of sharing relevant information to veterans across the state, we continue to do our monthly newsletter. It is sent to an email list of approximately twenty thousand veterans. We post on our social media platforms and send it out to our partners and distribute it internally. Our website is updated monthly. In the past three months we're averaging about 27,000 visitors. The top three visits are to the field offices, benefits and communications. On social media we recognize remembrance days, promote events, updates and benefits and news from our partners. So I'm always very, very happy to receive information from all of you. We also are continuously updating any collateral

that is distributed to veterans so that it is updated, relevant and gives them access to all of the resources that they might need. That's my report for today.

**Vice Chair Bob Tyler:**

I really appreciate your newsletter. I was surprised, the last one I looked at that had a flyer for the MOAA Disaster grants program from National that got circulated. As the Chairman and I have talked about, that's one of the things that this council can help do is crosstalk our information back and forth across, and I was surprised to see the flyer from national in your newsletter before I got it from national. So you did good work on that. Thank you very much.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you very much for your report. I'm moving on Veterans Cash and a lottery report by Miss Shymansky.

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

Shannon is doing a lot of the work for us on the Vets cash program and I'm not sure if the committee is aware, but Connie Watson, who'd been with us for very long time and had been our grants Administrator has moved on to a different state agency. We are working very hard to make sure that we're continuing our commitment to the Vets cash program and doing the quarterly meetings. So I'll be providing that, so Shannon is still with us and does a lot of the work as well, she just had a commitment. We went ahead and held the Vets Cash Committee review on February 15<sup>th</sup> which was included in the notes. There were six grants total, five of which received awards, one grant which is a unique company or an entity called Erase PTSD Now, the committee decided they needed some additional information on and so that was held held without prejudice. It's not about the merits of the grant they wanted some additional information. The materials that you have in your packet, I'll go ahead and just read them off the total funds available this quarter one million three hundred and thirty- one thousand nine hundred and eighteen dollars for the five grantees that were awarded. I'll just read those off briefly. They are Veterans new Beginnings, Code Platoon, the VFW of Illinois Springfield, Brave Heart and Goodwill of Central Illinois. Those vary from one hundred thousand dollars, which is the maximum for our grant programs to twenty six thousand eight hundred dollars which is the lowest and there's a couple in between.

The remaining balance for FY23 is nine hundred and forty- six thousand, six hundred and forty- two dollars and fifty cents. We are working on processing the grants from quarter one. This was the first quarterly meeting that was held and these were for applicants that were received from October first through December thirty- first of two thousand and twenty- two. The next date for the committee members is May 17<sup>th</sup> and we are actively accepting applications and reviewing those to get ready for the next quarterly meeting. All the votes on those five awarded grants were unanimous.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you very much. Any questions for Mrs. Black?

**Roy Dolgos:**

I don't know if it's in the bylaws or not, but I noticed that all the grants for organizations that we're going towards. Are we working with individual veterans and if any individual veterans apply. If they apply for a grant, such as, let's say I had a, veteran come to me and he said I need my house fixed, so I checked it out. The government has no loan locally or federally or anything like that where a veteran can get his house fixed. So I'm wondering if we could or if it's possible that veterans can use this and say hey I need a new roof or I need gutters or something like that. I don't know if it's like I said, if it's under bylaws that we can, or we cant.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

I believe it says there's no personal grants. Am I correct?

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

I believe so. I don't have it in front of me chapter and verse. It looks like we typically do award not for profit entities.

**Roy Dolgos:**

We have four Veterans homes. Why can't the Veterans home itself apply for a grant to use for things like new beds or we need a passenger van. Is that possible?

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

So we actually have a proposal that I'm going to share at the chairs permission when we're ready to turn it over. Alicia Utterback on our team as well as I'll fill in and Director Prince can share his excitement as well. We actually have a proposal that we've been working on and want to present to the IVAC here today that is not exactly what you're describing sir. We have five Veterans homes, actually our Chicago one is up and running. So in the enabling statue we can make requests kind of for IDVA by IDVA, if you will, and that's something that we're about to present to you in just a moment. We have the dollars if we needed to add new beds. We would be able to do those kinds of dollars. We have the home funds coming in. We have the GRF support from members of the General Assembly. We as a matter of fact, just want to make sure that these dollars aren't coming out into the community, not that we're opposed to that, and that actually is a question that Vets Cash members have asked us. Why isn't Quincy making a grant for something and we have member benefit funds for the enjoyment and pleasure of the veterans to do outings and have a beautiful aquarium or things along those lines. So I think that the members at the homes are taken care of in this case and we want to, if there are no additional questions or when it's appropriate go to Alicia for an overview of a very exciting project that we are working on.

**Mike Peck:**

I just want to make sure that he refers that veterans to the County Veterans Assistance Commission. That's what the Veterans emergency fund is for. Now with the passage of the clarification of the military veterans assistance act, there dollars are there.

**Stanley Olenjack:**

Hi, my name is Stanley Olenjack. We had a problem down here in Kankakee, when the determined lottery ticket comes out around Veteran's day and I go into a store the second week of December and I want to purchase some of these lottery tickets there,

and they're all gone. I said, What do you mean? They're all gone and they said, well, we have a new board and if the tickets not on the board, they take all what's left and what are they, what did I do with them? I mean, how do you sell a ticket if it's not in your store.

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

So my understanding with the lottery program is that they have a run of lottery tickets and we get kind of one run, it's a one time a year. It doesn't necessarily say veterans, it's not, you know, identified as this is the Veterans Cash program. Now through Maureen and a lot of her efforts, we try to advertise that so that people can know that they're purchasing, especially around Veterans Day or for holiday gifts. My understanding is that if you could not find it in your local area, then it is sold out. You may be able to still get it in other areas.

**Stanley Olenjack:**

Negative, they came in and they took what was left, they did not sell them out because I said, this is not on the new board. They said if it is not on the new board that comes out in December then the pull what is left of the ticket.

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

Well, I'll have to get clarification on that because that's not what I understand to be the case. My understanding is, there's a run that is one ticket a year that it has whether it's after a certain date, but it certainly should have been available in December, so we have active communications with the folks over at the Illinois Department of Lottery and I can get some clarification on that and be ready for you. In our next conversation because that's not my understanding of how this ticket works.

Thank you for bringing that to our attention sir. We'll find out what the case is, and we'll be ready for an answer in the next time that we have a go around. We do regularly get an update from the Lottery Department on how much is coming in on a quarterly basis and we have regular communications with the folks over there as well.

**Stanley Olenjack:**

Thank you.

Roy Dolgos:

Since we only do one run, why can't we promote that more? Like on the radio or TV? Saying hey we are coming out next week with the Veterans lottery ticket, it only lasts 2 weeks. Please come out and purchase your ticket. They sell fast.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

I believe there is quite a bit of a pr- associated with it. I know us as the Veterans organizations ourself we also promote it amongst our members as well. I know that the IDVA notifies us when it's going to come out with the dates.

**Maureen Hartigan:**

I can speak to that. We collaborate together, IDVA and the Lottery. In terms of putting out a press release and notifying the public on our platforms. So there is an effort, we could consider a PSA and I don't recall if the Lottery did a PSA this year, but I will look into that.

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

The other thing I would add that we understand from the Illinois Department of Lottery and again if we want to have a more detailed conversation, potentially not in this forum but with a smaller group. My understanding is that typical lottery users, high purchasing lottery users have a tendency to not purchase specialty tickets when they think its for a special cause or whatever the case is because they feel like the odds aren't as good. That is part of the strategy by masking it so people who need to know in this case, our communities that we want to share this with go and get this one. It looks like this, right? That's the kind of materials that we put out, but if your average Joe person just going in and picking, I think in this year, it was called Winter Winnings and it should have been able to drag I believe into January. I don't personally play the lottery, but I think there's a lot of folks who work who are strategic about it, and then that's part of the reason why it is masked if you will for high lottery users because it's not going to be as popular by everyday lottery users, and then we won't have the dollars coming in if it's not as popular. I don't entirely understand the psychology of lottery, but that's how it's been explained to me.

**George Mulvaney:**

I just wanted to find out if the, I have no problem with supplementing the the Veterans homes at all here in the state of Illinois with the cash lottery for the veterans, but with Shannon Yount with the Attorney General's office, I wasn't sure is there a conflict of interest state is subsidizing their own programs and I'm just throwing this out there so maybe she can look into it because I know we created and I'm talking about way back in years and many of you remember Illinois joining forces when it was just the volunteer system and then a director actually put it in as a fundraising mechanism for the veterans. So anyway, I just wanted to put that out as a question, we looked into it.

**Shannon Yount:**

I would love to have a further conversation as to the background on the question, and then what I'll do is I will go back and talk to members of the office and see if there's something that we are familiar with or something that we can provide guidance on.

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

If I may, Mr. Mulvaney I appreciate that and we're very conscientious of that question in itself. We would not use any of these funds and we can't statutorily don't have the authority to use any of these funds to supplant the types of things that we should be providing for the veterans in their homes, employee salaries, those kinds of things are not acceptable. We do have a general counsel, our deputy general counsel who is assigned to the Vets Cash Board and he reviews all of the applications. All of the materials and provides a legal analysis to all of the folks. Also has weighed in, on the appropriateness under the statute of what it is that we're about to share with you, which is also not supplier services, salaries, kinds of things. This is a forward thinking research page research- based project, which is absolutely identified. We do have an inactive

state statute that was written many years ago. I think in the 2006 ISH timeframe that tells us what we can and can't do with these dollars and we are very cognizant to follow that statutory authority.

**Alicia Utterback:**

My name is Alicia and I am the assistant to the Chief of Staff here at IDVA and I wanted to take this time today to tell you about this forward thinking project that they've already led into. What's happening at this point is that IDVA is entering into a partnership with the Institute for Health Care Delivery Design at the University of Illinois, Chicago. This will be a multifaceted research project that will move through two phases. It's ready to kick off here in the next two to three weeks. The first phase is looking at kind of the context of the services that we deliver now to veterans in Illinois, it's going to compare us to five similar states look at the experience for the customers that we have now and really give us a good idea of what's happening where some short falls and pain points might be, and how we can address those in the future and phase two is going to be looking at our engagement with current and potential customers, especially underserved groups of veterans and what they will be needing in the future as they age as they need more care and how we can become the destination for folks looking for their services and getting those within Illinois. So we are really really excited to kind of have this modernized roadmap for how we provide and deliver services and make our customer service number one make us the destination for veterans looking for services and support going forward and it's really how we can tailor our needs strategically to our veterans, ever changing needs within Illinois.

**Chief of Staff Melissa Black:**

Just to add to that there will be literature review we're looking at all of the data. There's a lot of siloed data about veterans in the area that we're really seeking to understand the characteristics desires, engagement preferences of different customers being able to optimize delivery to those customers. The intent for us is to help us understand. What it is that IDVA can do, but also we understand that all of you here at IVAC are also serving veterans in your ways and if we can set the table with some of this data and make this data also available to you all so that you can optimize how you're serving veterans in your communities. Understanding gaps needs really, it's thinking about what we're doing best practices and other states. So we're just, we're very excited about having the weight and the caliber of the University of Illinois in Chicago to do a lot of this work for us and to be able to, you know, things that are appropriate to share with you all that aren't necessarily just geared to us in particular, but the economic impact of veterans in Illinois. Understanding, you know, how we, how you all serve them is advocacy group and how we serve them is obviously groups. So this is something that to come, we'll be sharing the information with you all as folks also serving veterans.

**Chariman Keith Wetherell:**

Excellent, I look forward to this. This is a great info and thank you very much for sharing. Any other questions or anything before we move on?

Moving on, the IDVA Legislative report...Sarah Augustinas.

**Sara Augustinas:**

Alright, my legislative update today is attached to the calendar invite and it will be brief. The general assembly is currently in the eighth week of the Spring Legislative session. There's about sixteen to seventeen weeks, so we are roughly halfway through. The house filed four thousand and twelve bill, the Senate filed two thousand five hundred and thirty- four bills. Some are agency budget bills that will later be consolidated. Some are essentially placeholder bills and some bills are refiled from previous general assemblies and even with that, it's still a very busy spring session with a lot of legislation affecting veterans. Currently I am tracking about one hundred and ten bill for the agency. I do expect that number to increase and this does not include pending amendments or anything forthcoming and some of those placeholder bills I mentioned will become substantive bills possibly about veterans. I'm tracking roughly thirty- nine bills that have veteran or military in the short title. Counts from different organizations might be higher. I'm specifically tracking bills that are currently moving through the legislative process. I am tracking less bills that have kind of remain stuck in the rule for assignments committee. I'm also tracking seventy one bills that would affect agency operations. These are bills that affect the Nursing Home Care Act procurement agencies with twenty- four seven facilities and things of that nature. Our budget hearings are coming up at the end of March. The house hearing was scheduled for March 23rd but will be rescheduled. So that date is pending. We're hopeful that it will be the same week, but this is a very recent change and then our Senate hearing will be on the 20<sup>th</sup>, so we'll have those wrapped up by the end of March. There will be a two week spring break for the general assembly in April. At the end of April, into May is just the tail end of session. So a lot of different things going on. Something I did want to mention about our FY24 budget hearings is that in the house, we have always gone before the house and human services Appropriations Committee. We go up and testify with other agencies like the DHS and Aging. That's the committee they go for, as well, previously in the Senate, there used to be a subcommittee for Veterans Affairs for approps. However, now we're going before the Health Committee for Appropriations in the Senate that didn't just affect us, education and a lot of other entities used to have their own specific subject matter hearings and they've recently consolidated in the Senate and have gone back to putting all agencies before, four budget committees or appropriations committees. So that's a change that went across the board. It was not specific to us. I think it's helpful with the homes being such a large part of our budget. It is important to have individuals who understand veterans issues on the committee. It always is, but it is also important for individuals who have worked on nursing home care and healthcare for years to also have a glimpse into our budget to make sure that we're getting the funding and the same attention as other agencies do. That is my update pending any questions from this group.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you very much. Any questions?

We will go to Attorney General's Office Shannon Yount.

## **Shannon Yount:**

Hello everyone. I know we did a brief introduction earlier and I forgot to mention, I'm not an attorney I'm the program specialists. So anything that I say cannot be construed as legal advice. Please don't do that. I know it's not often that when you meet someone from the Attorney General's office that they're not an attorney. So that's why I feel like I need to say that. Over the past year, we have been busy. I know that I had talked about some of our accomplishments in the September and December meeting. So I'm just going to briefly go over what we have been doing. I think as a program specialist, I'm trying to get the information out there. So I'm utilizing the IVAC email distro list and seeing where you guys are with the veteran service organization and I'm utilizing that to share information. You have been seeing some emails over the past couple of months with stuff that we do. For example when we published our legal rights for Illinois service members guide on our website, you guys got an email about it. When the Attorney General published a press release in regards to the Military Veterans Assistance Act and information pertaining to the changes, and if you have any questions, how to contact us there was a press release you guys should had received it. If not please let me know. I would like to update our distro list. Along with that, besides the legal rights for Illinois Service members guide, we have been mailing out our benefits for Illinois Veterans Guide, which I know a lot of members of this particular group has been asking for. I think we had mailed out quite a few, so if you have not received it or would like additional copies, let me know. I will provide my email. I will also provide our general email which is a lot shorter than mine and just so it's easier to remember.

In the near future we will be conducting presentations. A main project that I'm working on is called a Zoom Webinar Series where we are going to conduct presentations for Illinois Veterans Service members and just the general population. Those presentations will cover through 3 areas. So right now it's a project that we're working on and there'll be covering three topics which we cover either enforcement or we provide assistance in those areas. We will be conducting presentations on the consumer.

We have been given the opportunity in the past or in the state convention for veteran service organizations to give a five to fifteen minute rundown on vet consumer scams and the new legislation that we were able to work with IDVA in two thousand and twenty- one call to 2yyy which is the veteran consumer protection deceptive Practices Act also, I. Just call it the consumer app because I can't remember every single word in it, and then the third presentation, which we're going to be adding is pertaining to the Military Veterans Assistance Act and we will be opening this presentation upon requests from the VAC County Boards and officials. We'll be having pre- scheduled ones where anybody can listen in, on the Zoom webinar. Then as always we have a helpline called the Military Veteran's right helpline, so if any veterans or service members have any questions concerns, they can call the help line. We also have an interactive form on our Illinois Attorney General's webpage for military and veteran rights, where if you follow directions, it will allow you to just complete it on the website and it sends it automatically to our email account. This was one of the projects that I worked on last year so that you don't have to save it on your computer or print it out and it's all in the internet. I also understand that many people don't like that process and we can, you can call us on our help line and we will mail it to you and that in that process a lot of people like that as well. I keep mentioning our helpline and our email account in our email address. So the email address is mbrb@ilag.gov and everybody in the Bureau has access to it.

I know that some members of this particular group with the IVAC have reached out to us either by that email or to me as an individual. So you could still do that. That's the email address that we utilize. That's everything right now. We are currently working on updating some of our brochures. We have nine brochures on our website that provides information to veterans and service members. They cover PTSD and then there's a pension point, so it varies, and it's just like a buffet, take whatever you want. You can download on your computer or will mail it to you. So I think that's a simple rundown, anybody have any questions.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Any questions?

**Mike Peck:**

I know I prepared you for this question. Under the military Veterans Assistance Act, section 8 very last line it states that the annual reports will be available online. In preparation for our department conventions because I'm running resolutions and these reports are goldmine of information. I mean I've got seven resolutions already prepared for the department conventions, what enforcement mechanisms do we have to have the VAC's put these Annual reports online?

**Shannon Yount:**

It is in section eight, which I know you are very familiar with this particular act and you probably already know the answer is that if individuals have concerns about something not being followed, they can file a complaint with the Illinois Attorney General's office. We can conduct informal mediation with that entity. With that being said, we understand that during the legislation process last year, some VAC's voiced concerns pertaining to online capabilities because they don't have a website, so it just depends on the VAC and if they have the opportunity and the availability to put it online, but if there are some that maybe they don't know that they have to add this as a requirement to put it online and we would just do education. Similar to other pieces of legislation that we provide information or enforcement on is the key thing is providing education and informal mediation, and then after that that's where the other stuff going. When an individual files complaint, we always explain the process with the Illinois Attorney General's office. Thank you.

**Mike Peck:**

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to at this time, make a motion, not make a motion, but I'd like to urge the director. Let's give the veterans of Illinois one stop shopping. If we can have a page on our IDVA website where we have all these annual reports available. These reports are a gold mine of information. I've gotten eight good resolutions out of it pertaining from incarcerated veterans in the county jail, the veteran treatment courts, and so on, that would be the best way to communicate our services to our veterans of Illinois. If we could utilize that IDVA website and give the veterans one stop shopping.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you Colonel.

Director?

**Director Prince:**

Yeah, we'll take it for action and we'll discuss it with the team Mr. Chair and we'll come back to you with our update certainly before the next meeting. I have it noted, I have a preview thanks to my colleague Dutch over here. Mike, now he's up to twelve references.

***Chairman Keith Wetherell:***

Thank you Colonel Peck. Any other questions for Miss Yount?

Representative Yednock, do you have anything you would like to report out?

**Representative Yednock:**

We had our first Veterans Affairs meeting yesterday and there was two bills that had passed a committee that goes to the floor. Both were former chair Kifowit's house bill 3103, which deals with the orders of protection for some of our members of the military. We won't get into the details of it because it's lengthy and legal. Then also HB 2805, which is designating June 27<sup>th</sup> as Post- Traumatic Stress Day. So these are things that we passed on to the committee yesterday and we'll be debating on the floor in the coming days. As chairman of the Veterans Committee, I'm going to lean on all of you a lot to help us figure out what is good legislation and what makes things for the Department of Veterans Affairs more difficult, so it's really all I have to add at this time, and thank you again, everyone.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you, Sir. I'm sure there's plenty of people to be happy to help you with that Legislation in this committee. Thank you.

Is there any other legislators that I might have missed or anything that we'd like to say anything? No, okay.

**Sara Augustinas:**

I did forget this in my update. Leader Morrison, the chair of the Senate Vets Affairs Committee wanted to be here today. She was on the agenda. She was unavailable. She was looking for contact information for Veterans advocate organizations and she would like to have the email addresses of members of this group. I said, I would take that to today's meeting. So if you're comfortable sharing your email address, so she can have it to send out newsletters blurbs from her office. I can get that over to them if anyone is uncomfortable, please let me know. I can make sure. My name is Sarah Augustinas, my email is on the invite, but I don't want to share anyone's email address without permission. So that's all I have.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Sure. That's excellent point. We don't need to vote on anything like that. I would think that if you're comfortable sharing it, please email Sarah, if you're not then just disregard. Better yet only email Sarah if you would like to opt out of receiving the emails.

Mrs. Diehl, are you available?

**Gwen Diehl:**

**IDVA has 20 Funded Capital Projects underway at the Veterans' Homes totaling \$ 450,061,557.** (Including IVH- Chicago and IVH- Quincy)

**Illinois Veterans' Home at Anna (One Projects)**

- **General Building Repairs and Improvements**
  - 53% design
  - Anticipated construction completion 1-15-2025 \$ 2,666,700

**Illinois Veterans' Home at Chicago (Substantially Complete)**

- **Construct 200 Bed Veterans' Home**
  - 100% Complete
  - Pending USDVA Recognition Survey for Per Diem \$ 110,629,018.95

**Illinois Veterans' Home at LaSalle (Three Projects)**

- **Replace Resident Room Doors** (27 each) in NW Isolation Wing
  - 85% Construction with few Supply Chain Delays.
  - Anticipated Final Completion 6/01/2023 \$ 300,000
- **Renovate Veterans Home**
  - Project design continues (46%). May be some Supply Chain impact
  - Anticipated Final Completion 12/3/2025 \$ 5,194,400
- **Replace Roofing System**
  - A/E Selected
  - To be presented to CDB Board 3/14/2023 \$ 2,500,000

**\$ 7,994,400**

**Illinois Veterans' Home at Manteno (Eleven Projects)**

- **EMERGENCY Automatic Flush Valves, Mixing Valves & Water Filtration**  
Construction is 97% complete
  - Still pending operating permits from IL EPA for the Filtration Plant constructed in the south wing of Prince Building \$ 9,934,118
- **Replace Air Handling Units in residential buildings** (R3 & R4)
  - Design is still at 40% complete
  - Anticipated Substantial Completion 7/29/2025 (no change) \$ 5,669,100
- **Replace Water Mains on campus** (Separating Domestic Water and Fire Mains)
  - Project design 29% completed (no change)
  - Anticipated Substantial Completion 9/09/2024 \$ 4,314,000
- **Central Kitchen Renovation** Project will renovate the Kitchen floor and Dish Machine Room)
  - Project Halted.
  - May need personnel changes due to Scope refinement
  - Still at 18% design
  - Anticipated Completion 9/01/2023 unlikely - will have to be extended. \$ 950,700

- **Renovate Restrooms** (No change)  
(Still in design and cost estimating. Project will renovate and update 120 Resident Restrooms plus Nurse Station and public rest rooms. Undergoing Code Analysis and design development. Due to ADA requirements, additional architectural changes may be needed, requiring additional funding.)
    - Still in design – now at 12% due to the scope change
    - Anticipated Construction Completion 7/31/2025 \$ 5,300,000
  - **Replace Shingle Roofing Systems**
    - Work began September 2022 and Construction 73% complete
    - Anticipated Completion 2/07/2024 \$ 3,651,200
  - **Upgrade HVAC/Replace Air Handling Units (R1 R2 S1 S2)**  
(Project is to provide additional ventilation R3 R4 S1 S2)
    - Still in design – 67 %
    - Anticipated Completion 9/30/2023 \$ 5,215,000
  - **(Additional) Renovation for Isolation Rooms**  
(Project is to make final adjustments to the ventilation systems for isolation rooms in R1 & R2)
    - Substantially Complete - Punchlist items being completed \$ 552,404
  - **Upgrade HVAC/Replace Air Handling Units (Interconnects, A1 A2)**  
(Project is to provide additional ventilation)
    - Still in design – 32 %
    - Anticipated Completion 5/31/2024 \$ 4,313,900
  - **EMERGENCY Assessment & Stabilization of Building**  
(Vehicle crashed into at the center corridor of interconnect at R3/R4 intersection on September 20. Emergency Project was requested)
    - Repair Project Complete \$ 200,000
- \$ 40,099,522

### Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy – (Eight projects)

- **Construct Domestic Water Loop**
  - Demolition of Water Tower is complete.
  - Coordinating closely with the New Nursing Home Project
  - Anticipate substantial completion of the whole project 05/15/2025 \$ 14,561,110
- **Construct New Nursing Home and Domiciliary**
  - Construction is 49% complete
  - Anticipate substantial completion of the whole project 7/08/2026 \$ 270,835,506
- **Emergency Repairs to Storm Sewer Line** (under Railroad bed)  
(Project still in design coordination with BNSF Engineers, IL EPA and IL DNR.) \$ 988,000
- **Upgrade Electrical at HQs Bldg & Generator at Water Treatment Facility**
  - Architect/Engineer Firm selection approved - Design development – 41%
  - Estimated completion 10/25/2025 \$ 980,800
- **Install Fire Suppression System**
  - Complete installation of fire sprinklers in IT Room in the old Stone Building, Smith Hall and Reig Admin Building
  - Architect/Engineer Firm selection approved – Design is 14% Complete
  - Estimated completion 12/25/2025 \$ 1,156,500
- **Improve Ventilation in Kitchen at Hammond Hall**

- Temporary Chiller installed
  - Design is complete and contractor on board - Supply Chain Issues
  - Estimated completion extended to 08/31/2023
- \$ 350,000  
 \$ 288,871,916

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**20 Capital Projects underway at the Illinois Veterans' Homes**

Anna (1)	2,666,700
Chicago (0)	110,629,019
LaSalle (3)	7,994,400
Manteno (10)	40,099,522
Quincy (6)	<u>288,871,916</u>
	\$ 340,114,187

VETERANS' HOME WEEKLY STATUS SUMMARY

Date: March 6, 2023

*(Due to a change in reporting requirements, the previous information is no longer available.)*

Home	Skilled Census	Budgeted Skilled Census	Skilled Vacancies
<b>Anna</b>	49	49	0
<b>Chicago</b>	25	200	175
<b>La Salle</b>	88	190	102
<b>Manteno</b>	185	294	109
<b>Quincy</b>	293	386	93
<b>Prince</b>	9	15	6

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you Gwen, any questions?

Is there any other reports that I've missed or forgotten anyone?

Okay, I guess that concludes our report phase. Next, we'll go on to old business. Mr. Peck, do you have something concerning the Persian Gulf Memorial?

**Colonel Mike Peck:**

As many know BG Lou Myers four or five years was giving a quarterly report on the Persian Gulf Memorial. There's memorial legislation was passed August 16, 2002,

which gave us the last section of land at Oakridge Cemetery. It is adjacent to Lincoln's Tomb there. So in remembrance of Lou, who passed away last year, I want to make his final report. Events from the Beriut Bombing in eighty four been repeated. I've seen the repeated use American forces and role peacekeepers. Our servicemembers have right freedom for people of Kuwait, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. Our servicemembers have died in Niger, Yemen and terrorist bombings throughout Europe and even Central America. Today as members of NATO, our servicemembers run the borders of Ukraine and are providing assistance for refugees fleeing their homeland. When Lou advised that the memorial design has been completed and that he had retitled the memorial to The Hands of Freedom. it was if Lou had seen into the future in bring hope and freedom to our allies. Lou would want me to publicly thank his cohort in the design to the memorial. Mr. PJ Staab of Springfield. Mr. Staab will continue to serve and oversee the construction of the memorial to ensure that is completed as Lou had envisioned. Mr Chairman, I move that we accept Lou's last report and our thank you for our mission accomplished.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you Colonel Peck.

We got a motion on the floor. Is there a second?

Motion 2<sup>nd</sup> by Ray Dieter

Motion passed unanimously

Thank you again Colonel Peck, that was a very nice report.

Any other old business?

Moving on to new business. Any new business?

**Stanley Olenjack:**

I just want to reference the directors strategic plan that was sent out to us. On page number five, we have the priority number two, which is a veteran experience and down and the second paragraph, there's some bullet points and one bullet point that is very interesting is: Streamline the Veterans Home admission process. This is outstanding they are looking into making it easier for our veterans to get into the homes. But our problem right now is that we don't have any veterans to put into homes. The season of COVID- scared, a lot of, I don't know if it was the veterans or if it was the family members, but scared them away from going into our veterans home.

Prior to the Veterans home or actually prior to Covid, like at Manteno, we had two hundred and ninety- seven beds filled. With the waiting list of about thirty- five to forty veterans. Now you have one hundred beds open out there and the lines two hundred and fifteen. Why are the veterans not going into our homes? I think they were scared off by Covid, they were scared off by Legionnaires disease and their care keepers or children or whatever, are not wanting to put them into homes rather sending them to private nursing homes versus the Veterans home. I think Chairman, we're saying that next meeting we have to come up and work together in ways to find out how to help our veterans and we have to somehow or another, like I said, find ways to influence our

veterans that hey, this is the best place to come and retire in. The care is better, the atmosphere is better, but that's all I wanted to say is that, you know, what this council needs and between the IDVA to come up with some kind of a program to go after and get those veterans and have them back in our homes again. You know, between Quincy, LaSalle, Manteno there's over three hundred beds open. It is unheard of before in Illinois. So I just wanted to say that we should figure out ways to get our veterans back. Get our veterans back into our Veterans homes where they belong where they've got good service in order to enjoy themselves.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you.

Any other new business?

**Roy Dolgos:**

For our next meeting, I would like, since we're going to be concentrating on Veterans, I'd like to see the city of Springfield come to our meeting and let us know what they're doing for the Veterans in Springfield and also how we can help them with different projects or whatever they may need. Now, when I was director at Manteno, we were the first agency to work with HUD and the Illinois Housing Authority now, maybe Springfield can work with them and they could set up a unit or fifteen beds or something like that for veterans. It's just a suggestion that I had thank you, but I'd like to see us meet with them and then also in Chicago, they can meet with the people up there.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Sure, I'm sure we can look into that.

**Crystal Womack:**

I actually have a quarterly meeting with the deputy mayor of Springfield, so we'll discuss offline.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you Crystal.

My next piece under new business is the future meetings and kind of the direction of this council. So the next meeting is going to be in June. I think what we're going to do is we're still kind of working on the agenda format and so on and so forth, but what I would like to do is have all the members be prepared to briefly present a program or an issue that they may see that's prevalent in their areas and bring it to this council to see if we can, one share that information, if it's successful so someone else may be able to use it or if it's an issue, maybe utilize our resources to help them repair that issue. That's kind of the vision that we have with this and what we'll do is we will not have like, all these reports and stuff. What we'll do is we'll have a brief report from the Director of course, and then after that, we'll kind of go into the programs and issues, meat and potatoes if you will of these things and then have a kind of a working group atmosphere type thing where maybe we can work that through this. That's just kind of the vision that we have. Like I said, I've talked with the director about it and the vice chairman and we're just trying to, you know, kind of kind of get back to getting away from a concept of comprehensive reporting system that we have going now. If everybody's okay with that,

I think that we would like to proceed that way. We'll see how it goes and then we can always adjust from there. Does anybody have any questions about that or anything else?

**Mike Peck:**

Based on what Mr. Dolgos said earlier and by Mr. Patterson's comment, I'd like to make a motion that we either recommend the to the director, a mobile Vet unit. He would have our support.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Motion on the floor by Mike Peck  
2<sup>nd</sup> by Dutch DeGroot

Motion passed unanimously

Director, we will talk offline and discuss the specifics if you will.

**Roy Dolgos:**

I'm sure we could probably purchase one of those vans from the Vet Center. I'm sure that they have a couple that they are not using.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

I know that there are a lot of variables when it comes to a state agency purchasing something. I'm sure the Director will have more insight on it. I think it is a great idea. I would like to see that come to fruition.

**Director Prince:**

There are several options for us to consider. Some that will not require a vehicle such as with the pop up events and the Secretary of State with the drivers license. We could always set up there. I do not want to tie us to a truck persay. More over mobility is to get with organizations and get the word out. I can look at the master calendar and say what events are going on in the state. Then we can call each other to confirm attendance on those events.

Mr. Chair, I do think that is a great thing for IVAC to come up with a way to help us spread ourselves across the state to ensure that there is representation across the board at all of these different events up to and including the mobile units that were just discussed. I will leave it at that for now. I look forward to working with you over the next several months.

**Dutch DeGroot:**

I'm in Chicago by my beautiful accent here. So on behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, I want to just thank our legislators, especially for the last session for the amazing bills that got put through, especially the VAC Act. It's been major, it's still doing things, I just wanted to make sure that I thank the AG office. I've been in contact with Randall, Shannon and Ron, you have been phenomenal answering all our questions. What we would like to see, especially with all the VAC's being there all entities, trying to get them in one group. We think the Associate County VAC's needs to have our oversight as Veterans organizations to really try to get everybody in compliance. A lot of the VAC's

are doing different things. So I hope that they will work with the AG's office more about having everybody on the same page. That's something we would like to do. We talked about having all the annual reports put on the one website so everybody can be in compliance with the law. And then a continued support for the VAC of Cook county. They are in a growing stage right now, we've come a long ways and we plan to talk to the commissioners and educate them. The other thing we were trying to do is also educate our veterans, what legislation is about and what the VAC's do. So I certainly appreciate being part of this program and thank you all for your service.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you Mr. DeGroot.

Is ther any other questions or concerns? No..  
Any Good of Welfare?

**Frank Guiterrez:**

I do know that the Chicago Transit Authority Metra and CTA signed an agreement that all employees could ride the systems for free. Chicago land already had the military service pass, it does not include Metro. I reached out to the policy makers over at Metra. To see if they were even thinking about maybe possibly in the future because I know a lot of veterans that would be able to benefit from being able to utilize Metra, especially the disabled veterans to utilize their systems to visit the VAC's and VA Hospitals abd so on. I'm just wondering if I can get any support within the council for pushing this further along.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

I would say no problem with that. Would you like a, formal endorsement? Is that what you're looking for or anything like that or just a letter or something? Is there anything specific that you had in mind?

**Frank Guiterrez:**

Possibly a letter. I'm already kind of in discussions with the chair of transportation for State of Illinois and having an endorsement from the Veterans Committee would be very helpful.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

I'm sure we can facilitate that.

Any other questions or concerns?

**Mike Peck:**

Can we make that a motion?

Vice Chairman Bob Tyler:

I think we need to stay in the realm of the Advisory Committee. We can make a motion outside of this committee, however we are here to advise the Director.

**Director Prince:**

We certainly would take that information and then discuss it with our bosses and then we will take the appropriate action thereafter. So with all that being said, we can put that on our new business.

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

Thank you Director.

The next meeting will be in June. We will schedule the date shortly. Just a reminder to complete your Ethics training.

Motion to adjourn by Vice Chairman Bob Tyler  
2<sup>nd</sup> by Vince Long

Motion approved