

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 11, 2024– 10:00am

Illinois Department of Affairs

WebEx

Attendance:

NAME	APPOINTED BY	PRESENT
Bruce Blackmer	Marine Corps League	X
Al Reynolds	Disabled American Veterans	X
Senator Mike Porfirio	President of Senate	X
Senator Craig Wilcox	Minority Leader of Senate	X
Rep. Lance Yednock	Speaker of the House	X
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
	IDVA Director	
Kevin Little	National Guard	
Elizabeth Roxworthy	Department of Military Affairs	X
Shannon Yount	Attorney General	X
Adam Broshous	IL Secretary of State	
Jorge Bermudez/Rich Wuthrich	IL Department of Securities	X
Michael Peck	The American Legion	X
Joseph Bartley	AMVETS	X
Peggy Arick	Blue Star Mothers of America	
Tim Kennedy	Catholic War Veterans	X
Dr. Jerry Field	Jewish War Veterans	
	Military Order of the Purple Heart	
Lee Lopez	Military Order of the World Wars	X
Ray Dieter	Reserve Officers' Association	X
Christa Hammers	IACVAC	
John "Dutch" DeGroot	Veterans of Foreign Wars	X
Roy Dolgos	Vietnam Veterans of America	
Bob Tyler	MOAA	

New Members:

**Alternates / Guests:** Art Dutkovic, Hugh Shown, George Mulvaney, Dean Farr

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

Crystal Womack, Senior Programs Manager

Maureen Hartigan, Public Information Officer

Jenny Franklin – Director's Executive Assistant

Shannon Shymansky – Grants

Sara Augustinas – Legislative Liaison

Danielle Luevano – Operations & Programs Manager

Approval of September 14th, 2022, minutes

Motion to approve the Minutes by Al Reynolds

Vince Long seconded the motion

**Chairman Keith Wetherell:**

I just wanted to start today's meeting to say that this is my last meeting as chairman. I've been on this council for 18 years. The last two as chairman. It's been an honor and a privilege to chair such an esteemed group. The dedication this group has for veterans is 2<sup>nd</sup> to none and it's been nothing but an honor. I wanted to say "Thank You" to everyone for the opportunity and also "Thank You" to those coming up for their future work and I'll still be around to help.

I had planned to do a piece today on veterans in agriculture, however our speaker had a conflict. I wanted to take the time to point out the importance of veterans in agriculture in the state of Illinois as well as some of the different services that are available for veterans that are in that space.

Some of the things that I found is that veterans are very adaptable to being in agriculture because they have a good skill set that transitions them into that industry. So there's a lot of veterans that get into that, especially in Illinois, it's an important piece.

They're a big part of the solution for workforce and different things to where there's rural areas that don't have as many people that they could have to come work. Veterans can

fill those in and offer some job placement and things like that because they can walk into those jobs and they have the skill set already.

There's also a lot of programs available for veterans. One of which is The Farmers Veterans Coalition of Illinois, which is a great group. It's free to join. I would advise anybody that's a part of agriculture and a veterans to join. They disseminate a lot of information on policy and changes on laws and environmental things. It's a worthy cause. That's who I was gonna have come in and speak, but they couldn't make it due to conflict.

There are also some other Illinois specific grants and programs that are available for veterans. The University of Illinois has an extension program. They do agriculture workshops and educational seminars and different things like that. So if you know of anybody that's a veteran that's interested in getting into that space, that would be a good place to start by using either one of those services.

Finally, there's some mental health things that are beneficial for veterans. It's therapeutic to be working on your own I guess you could say and in that space offers a lot of privacy. So there's some positives there and I could see where, there's a lot of benefits for veterans to be in that type of industry.

I apologize that I don't have more information on this stuff. I planned on having a whole piece on this but again, last minute changes. With that, I would open it up to anybody that would want to have any input on this. I know there's several in this group that are involved with agriculture and I would open it up to see if anybody wanted to add anything or to provide additional resources or information.

No. Okay.

Well, thank you very much. Again, you know, it's a big industry in Illinois and I think veterans are involved with every industry and this is just another one that they do their piece in and it benefits everyone involved. I think it's important for veterans in in agriculture, so that being said, I would turn it over to director for his comments.

**Director Prince:**

Thank you Mr. Chair and we'll come back to your service to IVAC here at the end if that's ok. We're gonna provide a general activities of the department report. I'm gonna start with Danielle, kind of give us an overview on headquarters and some of the initiatives she's working on if you're not familiar, Danielle Luevano, United States Marine, is our headquarters director.

Danielle, take it away.

**Danielle Leuvano:**

Good morning, everyone. I don't have a whole lot to share this morning, but, we had a few meetings ago mentioned how we wanted to be more proactive in reaching the veterans of the state of Illinois, and those military members who are returning to the state of Illinois. We have partnered with the Department of Defense, and the Transition Assistance Program. All the military members are required to take TAPS before exiting the service. During that program the DOD collects their information and asks them where they want to settle after they leave the service. So we partnered with them in getting some data from the DOD to get information on which veterans are going to are planning to return to Illinois. So, just kind of being proactive and sending

IDVA introduction letters to those individuals via email as well as snail mail. Upon their return they have an overview or idea of what benefits that they're entitled to. If they're sitting on the edge kind of debating if they want to come back to Illinois or not, hopefully that packet will highlight some of the benefits that they can have when they return to Illinois. Also it just kind of gives them the resources to reach out to the Department of Veterans Affairs when they do return to reach out to the Veteran Service Officer to assist them in their transition.

That's my overview pending any questions.

**Director Prince:**

Thanks Danielle. This is a really great partnership with DOD to start to capture who's coming back to Illinois like she said. Over a thousand letters were sent out recently and we check on that on a routine basis. Service members now have to opt out of checking the box, historically they didn't have to say where they were going. Now they have to opt out and say where they're going so the state is immediately notified. That's just the first part of a longer range plan to keep track of who's in the military from Illinois which is the long term goal of this administration and certainly our state.

Danielle and her department, that's just one facet of what they do, for the rest of the group they also handle record requests. Hundreds and hundreds, including one for me for DD-214's and things of that nature. It's one of the things that a lot of people don't know about of IDVA, and of course many of those come from funeral home directors and other folks that are looking for DD-214's. So, just getting that word out there that IDVA has one of the most comprehensive records collection of anybody, and before veterans call the St. Louis Record Center, they might want to reach out to IDVA first to see if we have what they're looking for.

Danielle, thank you as always, appreciate it. I'm gonna jump around a little bit Mr. Chair. I've invited Shannon Shymansky to come in and just give us a quick overview on the Veterans Cash Grant Program. Shannon, why don't you tell the group how we're doing in there and who's getting some of the lottery.

**Shannon Shymansky:**

Right now we have, just the third quarter, and we've had forty applicants this year. We normally have per year fifteen to twenty and even during Covid and before that I think we had average of seventeen applications of nonprofit organizations that received money from us. Now it's building and it's building and we have Amplifund which is a new Grants Administration database, and it's been very challenging, but we're still working with it. I have a lot, just this quarter I had eighteen applicants. So we had a lot to go over in our board meeting which is usually an hour, this past meeting was two and a half hours. Currently I'm waiting for the scoring back from the board. We are allocated two million dollars per year, and we have the bingo game now. It's the tripler and somebody won the tripler on November 15th, so they are already circulating the Bingo Seven Times game. There's nine other organizations within lottery that share that profit, so we get ten percent of that. That new ticket is already out. The money is being distributed right now and we're moving fast and trying to get some more help in Vets Cash, right now I'm the only one there. So, it's very exciting and a lot of new nonprofits are coming up.

**Director Prince:**

So as we get out of the about we tell people, as it's not a well known program and as you heard, over forty to fifty applicants for the veterans cash. That's not a guarantee,

that money comes from profits based on the sales of the tickets. Those organizations that are getting grants or those that are serving veterans in historically underserved homeless veterans and things of that nature, those women veterans and the list goes on and on. We've directed them to kind of focus their efforts on that PTSD and suicide prevention being the rounding out the top five. I just wanted Shannon to speak so you know who she was and how important that Grants program is being a big part of IDVA, again, not as well known as some of the things that we're gonna get into here in a second.

If I may, and this is gonna catch them off guard, I would like to introduce our new chief of staff, Jassen Strokosch. He's not necessarily new he's been here for eight weeks, give or take. But I would like you to give them an impression on what you're seeing at our veterans homes. I think you've got the freshest perspective and been to nearly every veterans home. Before I go into any kind of official report, just kind of give them the state of the union as it comes to veterans home.

**Chief of Staff Jassen Strokosch:**

Sure, thank you Director and I have been absolutely honored to go out and spend considerable time in our homes. I think there's a couple top line impressions. I think one of the things that's just been most unbelievable is the passion and commitment of the staff that's there, who are one hundred percent dedicated to the residents of those homes. They have really powerful relationships with many of the veterans that are there and their family members that come to visit and really see that as an extension of their own families. The care they're delivering reflects that. So that's just an unbelievable impression.

I think the other piece that's been really powerful is seeing the connection that our staff have really made with families, not just the residents that are there, but the families that come in. They know them by name, they know the way that they report back out the care that's being given and changes within the residents that they have. This is a real bond that have. I think one of the things that I've heard repeatedly that I'm really proud of is, so many of the families that I've met with, the family members they've brought into our home have been in some other non veteran home before they came to us and the stark contrasting care quality from where they were before to when they entered one of our homes is almost always the first thing that someone mentions about their experience. I don't know what we could be more proud of, right? They they've had this wide experience and then a complete transformation when they've come here. So that that's been unbelievable. I've had the privilege of obviously being here during Thanksgiving and Christmas time. So it's been a rare opportunity to get to see in my number of visits, a lot of family members present and so I get to witness those experiences.

I will just convey one brief story at Manteno. I got to meet two brothers that have their rooms next to each other and their years are just enough apart that they never actually lived under the same roof until they came to us at Manteno to be at that home. It was actually a nice little story in the Kankakee Journal about the two brothers and they're on the cover and the two of them sitting there. But I got to spend some time talking with them. There were four generations of their family visiting at Christmas time. So I had this great photo of them surrounded by all the way down to little five month old and then everything in between that was there and they just went on and on about just how special it's been to have them both there. They of course bicker and fought with each other the entire time we sat there and talked, which was part of their charm, but that experience has just been unbelievable.

Then lastly I would say for folks that probably don't get to get out there as much as I do getting to see the Chicago home and then the new facility at Quincy that's about to come online. The state of the art, beautiful, high quality, you know this doesn't look anything like your normal institutional sort of setting. It's just unbelievably beautiful architecture and investment in building that just really raises the standard. I've never been in any hospital or any other nursing settings, congregate care setting of any kind that looks as nice and as high quality as that setting. I'm incredibly proud to know that we're serving veterans in that facility moving forward. So I just encourage folks when that facility's open, if you get a chance to swing by Quincy, it is absolutely worth the visit to see those new facilities and just really, really super proud of what's there.

The last thing I'll say is there's a ton of really exciting things going on in the kitchen. We're improving chow, which is if there's a challenge, it is the first thing I hear about it's usually food. I keep a little running list everywhere I go of things they want added to the menu. Asking what would make their lives better. You know AD has done a lot of work on this in Manteno but it's spreading across the state and doing things like allowing them to wake up on their own schedule, a more flexible continental breakfast type setting, things like that that seems small, but completely changed the way they feel about their environment and it's like a home like setting.

So probably didn't want me to go into all that much detail and talk for that long, but it's been an unbelievable opportunity on that front. My family has been teasing me that I'm spending more time on the weekends at the home playing Uno in Chicago than I am with my own family, so gotta look at that, but it's really been an unbelievable experience and I'm just incredibly, incredibly proud of this sort of hidden gem of an experience of how we're serving veterans across Illinois.

**Director Prince:**

I think that's awesome. I wanted them to hear that because a lot of times when we talk about veterans homes, it's what you hear about Covid or census or things like that and knowing that staff are so committed to what they do, all of us as a leadership team spend a large amount of our time at the veterans homes. I went on Thanksgiving to LaSalle and talked to the food service people there as well. You know, there's always more people, more money. And so we are working on some staffing challenges and opportunities I would say.

The Assistant Director is currently currently serving as the HR Director. Our HR director took on another job at another state agency. It happens a lot in state government, people move around a lot. We appreciate Md. Gonzalez service to IDVA and Assistant Director Vaughn has a very nice overview. He's been kind of doing cover on this for as long as I've known him. So, and if you recall, he was the acting administrator at the LaSalle veterans home for a while after the COVID crisis subsided.

We're working hard to improve and increase census, doing it responsibly to make sure that we have the staff and the resources and the personnel. In Chicago I think we're at 58 residents. We're getting close to halfway there. But like anything, there's a lot of hiring and other actions that have to occur. So the Chief of Staff, the Senior Home Administrator who wanted to be on this call, she's actually on her way to Chicago as we speak, asked me to give that and let you know that she's working hard on looking at how we get our census to ninety percent over the next eighteen months in a responsible manner that allows for us to hire but also provide the care and that what you just heard about.

So we're super excited about the construction at the Quincy home and also at LaSalle where we have 58 beds that can't be filled because we're rebuilding that side of the building and then we're moving over. And you've heard me give the statistics I'll give it a one last time for you, Mr. Chair. The state of Illinois, the federal government invested over five hundred million dollars in veterans homes alone in our state in the last several years. That's pretty amazing and it has made us the envy of other state directors. I can tell you that. So the Quincy stories going national.

**Chairman:**

Incredible work. Thank you.

**Director Prince:**

So if there's any other questions about the veterans homes, this would be a great time to ask.

**Representative Swanson:**

I'll wait. My comment was in regards to the lottery ticket if someone has comments on the homes, I'll follow up after that if that's ok.

**Chairman:**

Any questions regarding the homes?

**Director Prince:**

We will swing right over to the question and I'll close out with the VSO's.

**Representative Swanson:**

Thank you, and this is just mainly information for all. I serve on the Lottery Ticket task force. That task force was assembled because of Senate Bill 1508. Bill 1508 directs all the separate lottery tickets to be put into one bucket. So there are now ten organizations who are going to be reaping the benefits of the special lottery ticket. Those groups are the veterans, ticket for the cure, quality of life, multiple sclerosis, special Olympics, state police, Alzheimer's awareness, the United National College Fund and Dream. Dream is a scholarship fund that provides financial assistance to undocumented residents of Illinois who are interested attending college in any state. So where before the veterans we had our own ticket or rate, we received the benefit from the ticket sold around the Veterans Day and through this time of year. Now the funds from the one specialty ticket that everyone will share will be divided amongst ten different groups.

I've expressed my concern. I think we are going to see a reduction in our veterans money and I express my concerns that of all the lottery tickets, the veterans ticket has been the most beneficial serving Illinois veterans. Many of these other organizations, the money leaves the state where our veterans ticket benefited Illinois Veterans directly. So I'll continue to fight that we do get our fair share, but now it's gonna be the number raised every year divided by those ten organizations. In the past years, the veterans ticket has been the most profitable of all tickets. It's been at the 1.35 where the closest competitor was at 1.29 million dollars. So, I just wanted to share that with everyone. Thank you Mr. Chair.

**Chairman:**

Thank you Rep. Swanson.

**Joe Bartley:**

Another question, and this is the lottery as well, and Dan I appreciate your comments, but you know the veteran service organizations that are out there that have the accredited VSO's working here in the state helping to take care of veterans, you know, we're seeing applications go up more and more and more, but the pot isn't necessarily what it is in the future it isn't gonna be where it's at today. You know we're dependent a lot on that grant to help with funding those VSO's. And so, what we're seeing is that, you know, we may not be eligible for the full hundred thousand because of the fact that there's 40 applicants or 18 applicants in a quarter and there's only so much money to go around. So if there was some way to prioritize within the grant program, I know you set priorities as to where the priorities are, but the veterans service organizations that have accredited VSO's out there should be, I would think some of the upper priority as far as whose potentially to get that grant money. So I'm just throwing that out there on the table as consideration for, you know, the grant and taking care of the the veteran service organizations that are out there and a lot of what they're doing is supplementing what the IDVA is doing and what so much else is going on. So using those VSO's.

**Chairman:**

Anything else?

**Shannon Shymansky:**

We also have a veterans assistant fund and if people donate money and want to donate money, that goes into our vets cash fund as well. But I do understand your concerns and that was a concern of mine as well. This ticket that we do have that is combined with nine other organizations, it is sold year round. So right now, like I talked to the Director earlier, let's give it some time to see how much it's going to be sold. And I know that the bingo game, people like it, some people do some people don't, but it's already selling very well, and so now with the tripler being won more people are buying the Seven Times Bingo which is the new ticket.

I'm seeing more money and revenue come in. I haven't received anything this month yet. It will be interesting to see, especially during the holidays, Thanksgiving in December and in January cause taken sales do go up, but I want to see and compare my numbers from last year and the year before. I know we're allocated two million dollars to spend in Vets Cash for veterans and behavioral health issues and homelessness and the VSO work. We do have a lot of organizations and I understand what Joe Bartley is saying, but our board members, I wish Greg and and Bob were on the call because they understand and see all of these applications coming through and they really do and Betsy who is our chairperson, does go through each application with a fine tooth comb as well as our Director.

So for the organizations, you know, we look at startup companies or startup new non-profits. We want to know how long they've been in business as a nonprofit and we want to know who they serve. We get a lot of people that want to try to serve somebody in Indiana or somewhere where else, no all our money stays within Illinois and we support Illinois veterans. I want to see what our numbers are gonna be after especially this Christmas holiday and see how much money we do bring in annually. My concern was a split as well with nine other organizations. So I know in the past we have received 2 million dollars in sales from the lottery. That's the only time and I think it was like fifteen years ago, they hit 2 million dollars in sales. It's normally 1.7 million. It's been 1.5 million. It's been 798,000 thousand dollars and this has been on going on since 2006. So, I am looking at those numbers and the statistics so thank you for bringing that up Representative Swanson.



**Chairman:**

To add on, I've been on that committee. I was on it for two years, long, long time ago. It, it's difficult. It's difficult to make those decisions because honestly, a lot of those applicants are deserving, but there's only a set amount of funds that are gonna go to it. So you have to make some tough choices. I don't envy those on that committee because it's tough and you wanna give it to everyone, but you can't, but you want to ensure that maybe not this time you get them next time, but then you have to take somebody off. It's a juggling act when you're dealing with those grants and such. So it is difficult and those are some good points from Representative Swanson and Joe, and thank you for sharing those.

**Mike Peck:**

Yes, did we resolve the problem on the issuance of the checks to the grantees?

**Chairman:**

I'm not sure. Do you know is anyone familiar with the issue? We'll look into that and let you know, Col.

**Mike Peck:**

Okay, but this is brought up on the board members, there was a problem getting the checks to the the grantees. I didn't know if that problem was resolved or not.

**Shannon Shymansky:**

The reimbursement checks, yes. I'm working with Amplifund on that.

**Chairman:**

Yeah, but she's working on that.

**Mike Peck:**

Thank you.

**Director Prince:**

So moving ahead then back to the VSO's, so Mark Patterdson isn't here today. I don't know if he's on the call, but if he isn't I'll give the update, which is our VSO's continue to deploy all over the state of Illinois. You see it in our newsletter. They're a myriad of interim the state taking advantage of the opportunities that the VA national has given us through the Pact Act and other things to get veterans enrolled in healthcare to get them their compensation and pension, and then also the the dizzying array of Illinois benefits, including the biggest one we signed this past season, which was the property tax amendment, which has been just a wonderful thing. Other state directors are kind of an envy of how did you roll that off, it's just another one of those great benefits for Illinois, and I won't go through all the rules of it, but it is a very positive. So the VSO's continue to do that and Mark is working with our chief results officer to see where it best to deploy them. Working in concert with our VAC partners around the state and where they are to provide coverage to make sure that we're getting to every veteran that's out there in Illinois.

I'll close with with this, we're in the middle of budget season. We had a successful meeting today with GOMB, which is the governor's office of budget. IDVA is asking for approximately 239 million dollars, which is the small increase from last year. There's a lot of things in the paper, right? About the federal government, the VA and all that. And we've been blessed by the efforts of the VAC, IVAC, the VAC's themselves, our

organization that IDVA continues to receive the funding that we need to do the great things that you hear about every day. So just want to say thank you for your support as a group on that continuing to fight the battle for Illinois veterans and their families. And that's it for the general activities of the department.

**Chairman:**

Thank you very much, director. That was very good.

Mr. Farr, you had your hand up?

Okay, we're gonna move on to some old business. Mr. Guterrez are you on the line? He had some things that he would like to discuss, but we can go back to him.

**Mike Peck:**

We have some Senator's and Representatives on the call here too. You might wanna introduce them and see if they have any comments.

**Chairman:**

Sure. Representative Swanson, did you have any other comments that you would like to add or anything else you would like to speak on?

**Representative Swanson:**

No, I'll just wait and see how we go here. Thank you.

**Senator Porfirio:**

Nope. Nothing to add.

**Representative Yednock:**

I have one little thing I want to say. It's been a pleasure being on this commission with all of you. This is probably my last one as I'm not coming back to Springfield for the next session, but I can tell you all that I really appreciate all that you do for veterans in this state and it's been my honor to be part of this group. So thank. Thank you very much to all of you.

**Chairman:**

Thank you for being involved Representative. You've been involved and you've come to the meetings and everything. We really appreciate your input every time. So, thank you.

**Representative Swanson:**

Representative Yednock has served as the chair for our veterans committee and has been a great honor of serving as a minority spokesperson, the veterans committee. Rep Yednock's heart's always in the right place when it comes to talking about veterans and providing veterans services, so Rep. Yednock certainly appreciate your time as the chair of the veterans committee and wish you the best as you move forward.

**Representative Yednock:**

Thank you, Dan.

**Shannon Yount:**

I just had a quick comment and it goes off into a question. So, one of the attendees in the Springfield office had brought up how IDVA, the committee that's overseeing the disbursement of cash, how they're reviewing the applications or the grant proposals. I

think one of the things maybe Shannon could touch on is there a vetting process to determine if they are in compliance with state laws and if their veteran organizations. During the vetting process are you guys check to see if the individual or the organization is registered with secretary State, are they registered with charitable trust with Illinois Attorney General's office? If they have accredited claims agents or attorneys that help veterans, are they accredited VSO's? So those are the things that where questions kind of stem from is understanding the process of reviewing these grant proposals.

**Frank Guitierrez:**

One of the organizations that's currently applying was asking if there's a specific format required for the veteran veterans cash grant proposal. And so Shannon, would it be possible just to give like a quick rundown of the grant proposal process.

**Shannon Shymansky:**

Sure, all non for profit organizations have to be registered in GATA. They have to be registered in SAMS, they have to be registered in Secretary of State corporation, and they have to be non profit, they have to show their W-9's and they have to provide letters that they are a non for profit and tax exempt organization. So all of that is vetted and we do go through, even if I require their website to be posted and or submitted in their application, and then that way we can look and see what they actually do, what they have on their website. They have to have accreditation as a VSO and we do look at that, if people are acting as a psychiatrist or psychologist they have to submit their license from IDFPR. I go on and look at the website to see if they're active and have an active license if they've been disciplined and all that information is provided to the board. So yes, they're vetted. I have to approve and go through their information in GATA as well. It has to be a pre approved before they can get a grant.

**Chairman:**

I'll add, I was an awardee of the veterans lottery grant when I was with AMVETS a couple different times and the application process is extremely thorough, and not only that after you get it, the reporting's quarterly and it's extremely thorough, and then not on top of that, they do site visits because I was visited. They come and you know verify that you're doing what you're doing. As far as vetting, in my experience I haven't seen anything else that's better vetting, as far as like grant awarding. So, that's just my personal opinion. I've been through it on both sides. I was on the committee and then I was also a grantee. And to clarify I wasn't on the committee when I was a grantee. So, but at the same time the process in GATA, if you're not familiar with GATA, it's a very, very thorough situation and Sam's too, really. I personally can't stand both of them, but if there's sort of it's good for good reasons. So, but at the same time. My experience is, is very vetted

Any other questions regarding that? Okay.

Frank, did you wanna, talk about the CTA stuff, please?

**Frank Gutierrez:**

So I apologize, I wasn't able to attend our last meeting. I was tied up, but I did go over the minutes and I saw you guys were talking about hiring veterans within government entities. One of the things that CTA did was, well, we created a veteran employee resource group because we wanted to build the culture from within to actually attract the veterans outside of the organization. It was very difficult at first, back in 2021, our numbers were probably pretty sad. Hiring 13 veterans a year 13, 14, you know, the year after, I want to say 17 after that. I mean, we're at the point where the veteran employee

resource group, you have about 535 veterans just advocating for the hiring of additional service members veterans transitioning. This year we actually hired 113. Which is pretty good, which is a lot better than we have been doing in the years past, and I think a lot has to do with one, the veteran employees that are advocating internally and two, executive leaders that are supporting us. I had this thought about having a state and local government veteran employee resource group on like an Illinois level and it branches off to various other government entities underneath. Might be a good way to one, not only attract veterans to apply for government positions but actually provide current employees resources to excel. At no cost.

**Chairman:**

Yeah, that's incredible, those are some incredible numbers Frank. Thank you for sharing that.

Does anybody have any questions or thoughts regarding that? No, ok.

Thank you for sharing that Mr. Gutierrez, we really appreciate all the hard work you're doing and I look forward to hearing how those those numbers continue to trend upwards.

Next is the nominations. So that's what I have on my agenda. So unless anybody has anything else they'd like to add, do you have anything Mr. Vaughn? No, ok. I don't see any hands up. I guess we'll go into the nominations and elections.

**Crystal Womack:**

I did receive two formal nominations, one for the chair position for Bob Tyler and for vice chair from Shannon Yount.

**Chairman:**

I know Mr. Tyler is not in attendance, but he has expressed to me that he does accept the nomination.

**Dutch DeGroot:**

I'd like to open up the nominations if I may and do nominate both of those great veterans advocates for the chair and vice chair.

**Chairman:**

Thank you. Ms. Yount, do you accept the nomination?

**Shannon Yount:**

Yes.

**Representative Swanson:**

I will second the nominations made.

Motion for nominations carried.

**Chairman:**

Okay, thank you.

So Crystal was gonna do a roll call vote. So when you hear your name, please express your preference and that'll be for your position. Yes this is for both chair and vice chair.

Mike Peck	Yes
Senator Porfirio	Yes
Representative Yednock	Yes
Representative Swanson	Yes
Bill Wolffe	Yes
Bob Norman	Yes
Vince Long	Yes
Frank Gutierrez	Yes
Kevin Wathen	Yes
Shannon Yount	Abstain
Dutch DeGroot	Yes
Eric Bermudez	Yes
Al Reynolds	Yes
Lee Lopez	Yes
Ray Dieter	Yes
George Mulvaney	Yes

**Crystal Womack:**

Chairman, voting is complete for all delegates.

**Chairman:**

Unanimous.

Congratulations Col. Tyler and Ms. Yount. I have full confidence that you'll be a great fit for the IVAC and continue the credible legacy that has had, not mine, but the rest of it.

That being said, I would like to say a couple words about the IDVA. In my opinion, I think the IDVA is at the highest level of professionalism and services and resources that I've ever noticed in the 22 years that I've been involved with. So I want to point that out. I think that's directly a result of the workers. Director has done a great job and all his staff. They do incredible work. They're constantly finding new ideas. They constantly are putting veterans ahead of everything else, and for that, I just wanna say thank you very much for making my job easier and thank you for allowing me to be a part of that process. So that it's been an incredible experience and again, I thank you. For those who are unaware, I'm no longer with AMVETS, so I'm out of the veterans industry as an employee. I'll always be a volunteer with veterans. I am in a different industry but they'll always be a part of my heart and I will continue helping anywhere I can. That being said, it's been my honor and privilege to be the chairman of this esteemed council. So thank you again.

Is there any questions or concerns on anything?

**Director Prince:**

Mr. Chair before we close, I'd like to present you with one of our challenge coins as a token small token of our appreciation.

**Chairman:**

Thank you very much. Again, it's it's been great. Not all great, but most of it's been great. So, just like everything else, there's trials and tribulations, but, I really think the direction of IVAC and the IDVA has it exceeded my expectations on our situation. So again, thank you and thank you for everything you folks have done for me. So, any other good and welfare questions, concerns you have?

**Vince Long:**

I want to brag a little bit on our county. I was saying here is that we established our VAC out there. And we were only getting a portion that I forget the formula of the tax money that comes into us. However the county board will remodel the office that we're in now and the county board stepped up and paid for that. Then we've got an assessment come in to help Dan out. We went back to the county board and asked for the full amount. This went through, so it's gonna add a little over another hundred thousand to our county.

**Chairman:**

Thank you for sharing Mr. Long.

**Hugh Shown:**

Yes some comments, general comments.

This last weekend December the seventh, Pearl Harbor eighty three years ago for Pearl Harbor, and for those here, there is some literature over here from the program that we took place at Pearl Harbor. There were two Pearl Harbor survivors that were at that program.

This coming Saturday Wreaths Across America. Many veterans organizations are taking part in that. So that is a wonderful program that and I know at Camp Butler, they're doing that.

The other mention, this Saturday is the Army, Navy football game. A comment here, The only game where everyone playing is willing to die for everyone watching. And so those cadets bless their hearts they are doing that.

The other thing I wanted to mention is the Army Reserve Minute Man scholarship. If anybody or if veterans know of future veterans there is a college scholarship, the Army Reserve Minute Man scholarship is available. So if you know of a senior in high school or somebody in the reserve or guard that is wanting to go to maybe the University of Illinois. They can get thousands of dollars paid for tuition room and board books and things like that. So let me say it again, US Army Reserve Minute Man scholarship. Now is the time to be applying for this next year. It is that for graduate students and undergrad. If somebody is in graduate school, there is scholarship available, there is a commitment as a result of that. And I think it's either six or eight years to to serve either active duty or reserve or guard. So there is that commitment, but for people. It'll pack your way through college and your graduate program as well. So thank you.

**Chairman:**

Thank you Mr. Shown.

Dutch DeGroot? Did you have your hand up?

**Dutch DeGroot:**

Good morning, Mr. Chair, just two items that I think are of importance. The veterans assistant commissions, as you know, they've been on steroids since we had the MBAA modified and one of the problems that I pointed out to Attorney General's office is that we are not getting the annual reports in one area, and they're not being submitted, and we're leaving a lot of vital information behind. So hopefully we'll be working on that with helping Attorney General's office to be able to see all those reports in one place where we can download them and see what these different VAC's are doing. The other thing I would like to address is especially since we have some of our esteemed legislators on here, which I know. To try revisit, we have an act where all public high schools must

allow recruiters to get in to at least talk to these children and make sure that they know the opportunities that the military provides for them. Right now there are a lot of school districts that don't allow them in. It's a disservice to these people. And it's a disservice through our military that really need recruits. Thank you.

**Chairman:**

Thank you Mr. DeGroot.

Chicago office?

**Frank Gutierrez:**

Yes, I just want to remind everybody that the VACCC membership meeting is set for December 17th and it'll be held at the Linestoneship 6404 Joliet Road Countryside Illinois. The meeting will start at seven. Thank you so much.

**Robert "Bob" Norman:**

Yes, good morning, Mr. Chairman and the rest of the board. I just have one announcement to make and this kind of falls in line with what the IDVA is all about for veterans. We are in O'Fallon Illinois sponsoring an Our Community Salutes event on May first, they also one in Chicago in the tri County area on April 24th. I think that would be a good opportunity when we recognize those young High School graduates who are enlisting in our armed forces to be able to see some of the work that IDVA does for veterans so that they're more prepared to return to the community after their service. So, I invite anybody from the IDVA to come and set up a table at our event on May first to provide information to the family of the recruits.

**Chairman:**

Thank you Mr. Norman.

**Representative Swanson:**

I will be real quick, on the 8th of November, we were fortunate up in this area in Western Illinois as a new Lane Evans Seaboc was open. We were formerly in a smaller building, but now the VA bought or is leasing space from the old Bergners store, which was a part of Gillsburg Mall. They've increased their capacity tremendously now having more opportunities for physical therapy for our veterans, audiology, more optometry, and it's just grown tremendously. So we're very well benefited. As we talked earlier about some of the VA dollars coming to Illinois, that maybe some VA dollars we don't always necessarily recognize as coming here to Illinois, but it's been a tremendous year and a half long project and then finally the doors opened on the 8th of November. So, if you're in the neighborhood, stop by. It's a beautiful site. Couple hundred people at the grand opening and some even going back clear to when they opened up the Lane Evans facility. Many years ago here in Galesburg, so I just want to bring that to your attention that the veterans here in Westman Illinois have received a great new facility for medical care. Thank you.

**Chairman:**

Thank you Representative Swanson.

Okay, well thank you very much again and the next meeting will be in March. Information will be emailed out accordingly, so look for that. I would entertain a motion to adjourn. Al Reynolds makes that motion. Vince Long seconds the motion to adjourn. All those approved signified by saying I, The I's have it. Thank you very much. We are adjourned. Have a great day, Merry Christmas to everyone, Happy New Year.

Motion to adjourn made by Al Reynolds

2<sup>nd</sup> by Vince Long

Next meeting date: Tuesday, March 11, 2025