



AVVA - At Large Newsletter

Volume 26

March 2024

Happy Spring! Here are my notes from the March 16, 2024 quarterly Wisconsin State Council meeting in Waupaca and the AVVA meeting that followed immediately.

AVVA Meeting

Pat discussed several items with the group.

- Pat reported the Board of Directors met over Zoom on 1/24/24. VVA President Jack McManus and AVVA President Sharon Hobbs are meeting regularly to discuss AVVA being VVA's legacy. VVA has designated \$1 million for a legacy committee; AVVA will need the funding if/when they take over a legacy committee.
- Pat has been encouraged to attend the Leadership Conference but will attend ONLY if there will be a roundtable on the legacy committee. Pat's limited resources and her attendance at numerous Conferences in the past mean there would most likely be little new information for her at the upcoming one.
- If you can assist the Appleton Chapter at the May 10-11, 2024 Toxic Exposure Expo they are holding at the Convention Center in downtown Appleton, please let them know. You don't have to be there the whole time or even on both days.

State Council Notes

President's Report – Mike Demske

- Richard Lindbeck, John Margowski Mike Demske, Jim Mullarkey (Chair) and Pat Furno (Advisor) are members of the Wisconsin State Council (WSC) Constitution Committee and will work on procedures needed after the dissolution of National.
- What do Chapters want to see happen when National is dissolved? Do they want WSC to continue after the dissolution? Do Chapters want to continue after the dissolution?
 1. John Willman (#479) requested information on the national dissolution be added to vvawi.org. John Margowski shared that National's attorneys are still working with the State of New York so no information will be available until those discussions are completed.
 2. Jim Mullarkey recommended Chapters wait until the National dissolution process is completed before they begin any dissolution process. The WSC can then work with Madison on state/chapter level processes/procedures. Secretary Mullarkey requested a show of hands on how many Chapters want to remain an organization (most Chapters want to remain an organization, however, 2 Chapters are currently struggling to maintain their Chapter charter due to lack of members).
- Mike thanked the Appleton Chapter (#351) for presenting their mobile education locker prior to this meeting. The locker is part of what they use in presentations made in schools and elsewhere.
- Since he has been a member for 37 years, Mike asked John Margowski to read the letter from VVA President Jack McManus celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Wisconsin State Council.

Vice President's Report – Dan Sciuti

- The only item Dan had is that he will not be running for re-election as Vice President.

Treasurer's Report – Pat Craney

- Pat reported the State Council had more income than expenses during the last quarter.

Secretary's Report – Jim Mullarkey

- Jim thanked Chapters who have submitted their financial reports and ask them to submit/resubmit their election reports (especially page 3 which only goes to the State). It is critical to include the names and contact information for officers, delegates and alternate delegates to ensure information gets to the appropriate Chapter members. The Chapter President and Secretary should already be receiving information but if they aren't, or you want additional Chapter members to receive it, send Jim the names and e-mail addresses you want added to his list.
- The calculation of the number of delegates each Chapter is allotted is currently included in the by-laws; this will need to be changed since it is a duplication of what is in the State Constitution.

Region 6 Director – John Margowski

- The Veterans Benefits Committee has completed the approval of submitted grant applications. The Department of Veterans Affairs needs to make sure the Caregivers Grant applications are processed properly; currently 90% of Vietnam veterans applications are denied while almost all post-911 applications are approved. It is important to determine why this discrepancy is occurring.
- Although there are over 35,470 homeless veterans, the VA is closing many homeless programs.
- The National Constitution indicates an elections committee is optional but Chapters must select a presiding officer to run elections even if that person is running for election or re-election.
- Chapters are encouraged to review their membership rosters and submit a list of all deceased members (including their membership number) and send it to Nicole Kennedy at the National Membership Department.

National At Large Director Report – Richard Lindbeck

- Bergman and Moore are the veterans benefits attorneys who will be handling claims appeals; they expect to have the appeals (currently about 600) resolved by 7/31/24. All 8 attorneys who were previously handling the appeals were fired. They weren't meeting the standards established in their contracts and were only processing 1 claim per month; this could save VVA approximately \$1 million.
- 2024 is the last year that Chapters will receive a membership "rebate" from National. Since National will be paying an outside organization to remove deceased members from their rosters, it will save money if Chapters submit the deceased membership form; you can use a single form to list all deceased members rather than a separate form for each person. A surviving spouse can continue to receive "The Veteran"; but National will need to be notified the spouse still wants a copy.
- There are 7,000 claims in Puerto Rico that haven't been processed (some for over 15 years) but are expected to be completed within a few months. VVA President McManus will be going to Puerto Rico to ensure these long overdue claims are taken care of.
- Over 1 million Agent Orange samples (stored in freezers) are still at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The Air Force will move the samples, but it is unknown who will pay for it.
- The Leadership Conference this year will have many of the same topic/speakers as in the past and may be the last one due to the prohibitive cost of holding it.
- The 2025 National Convention in New Orleans may also be the last one due to decreasing attendance and increased cost. The Convention will be held since the contract has already been signed and it could cost as much as \$2 million to cancel the Convention.
- VVA currently has 91,053 members who served in the military from 1955 – 1975.
- Do NOT use the attorneys who advertise on TV to file a Camp Lejeune claim; they can charge 50% of the settlement vs 25% charged by VVA approved attorneys. Although some of the TV attorneys have been told to "cease and desist", they continue to handle claims. Talk to your CVSO for a list of "approved attorneys".
- G. Pauline (of Iowa) is the new Assistant At Large Director.

AVVA Report – Pat Furno

- There will be an AVVA meeting immediately following the State Council meeting.
- It was reported at the January 2024 AVVA Board of Directors meeting that AVVA President Sharon Hobbs and VVA President Jack McManus are working together on AVVA becoming VVA's legacy, beginning with incarcerated veterans. Some AVVA members are also working on taking over some VVA committee duties.
- Some veterans have become caregivers for their spouse's but they are not being compensated as a caregiver.

Committee Reports:

Legislative – Dan Sciuti

Dan highlighted several items from his report (his full report will be at vwawi.org)

- VVA President Jack McManus testified before the Joint House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee encouraging Congress to: pass the Donut Dollies Congressional Gold Medal Act (H.R. 3592); hold an oversight committee hearing on the Toxic Exposure Research Act; call for research on pre-Gulf War burn pit use, including all veterans who were exposed to any toxicants and are still waiting for answers as to their long-term effects; maintain close oversight of the implementation of the PACT Act; pass the Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282/S. 344); enact legislation reinstating the 48-hour VSO-review period for disability claims; enact legislation prohibiting the reduction of VA disability compensation for incarcerated veterans; and, act to ensure that a reciprocity agreement with South Korea is entered into immediately.
- Medal of Honor Day is celebrated on March 25 of each year. Wording for the Medal of Honor Day proclamation reads, in part, "Whereas the Medal of Honor is the highest distinction that can be awarded by the president, in the name of the congress, to members of the armed forces who have distinguished themselves conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their lives above and beyond the call of duty ... Whereas public awareness of the importance of the Medal of Honor has declined in recent years; and Whereas the designation of National Medal of Honor Day will focus the efforts of national, State, and local organizations striving to foster public appreciation and recognition of Medal of Honor recipients." Wisconsin currently has 3 living Medal of Honor recipients.
- Specific Philips CPAP machines provided by the VA have been recalled. Since it involves very specific models, for the latest VA information on this recall, go to Philips CAPA and BiLevel PAP Recall. The cutoff date for the recall is August 9th. One of the meeting attendees shared that INSPIRE devices may be an option. Although the VA may cover the cost under certain circumstances, Medicare and/or a Medicare supplement may also pay for it. Keep in mind getting a CPAP machine involves a process so will take time.
- Mike Demske also shared that Senator Jon Tester (Montana) has introduced S. 3958 to require the Interagency Working Group on Toxic Exposure to conduct research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving as members of the Armed Forces, and for other purposes; Marco Rubio (Florida) is a co-sponsor.

Veterans Affairs Committee/Council on Veterans Programs – Vern Larson

Vern reported on the status of various bills.

- The following bills were passed and signed into law: Act 70 added 3 representatives from student organizations to the Council on Veterans Programs (COVP) Board (UW system representative, technical college representative and independent/private collage representative); Act 69 designated and marked the entire route of State Highway 80 as the Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial Highway; and Act 102, Amendment 1 which removed the authority of Veterans Affairs to approve construction on the grounds of Camp Randall Memorial Park (including the 12-15 acres of the Veterans Memorial Park) for purposes of the new athletic training facility (the University Board of Regents and the Athletics Department quickly made the decision with the entire process taking about 2 weeks).
- The following bills were passed and are waiting to be sent to the Governor: SB 546 allows admission of spouses to Wisconsin veterans homes if the veteran is not already admitted (current state law requires the veteran to be a resident before the spouse can be admitted); SB 633 designates and marks I-90 from the Minnesota/Wisconsin state line in LaCrosse County to the intersection of I-90 and I-94 in Monroe County as the Ho Chunk World War II Code Talkers Memorial Highway; and SB 383 which allows Hmong soldiers who fought in Laos in support of U.S. forces to indicate his/her veterans status on a Wisconsin operators license or identification card.
- The following bill passed only one house of the Legislature: AB102/SB102 reduces the eligibility threshold to claim veterans and surviving spouse's property tax credit from 100% to 70%. Authors of the bill are looking at amendments that would limit this bill to certain income groups in order to lessen the impact to local governments. The bill was passed by the Assembly (96-0), approved by a Senate committee (6-2) but did not get put on the agenda before the Senate adjourned. Attached amendments included maximum income of \$75,000 for singles or \$150,000 for married couples and a maximum home value of around \$300,000. The bill will be brought back again next year.

Old Business:

- No old business.

New Business:

- John Margowski (#425) shared there is a new Agent Orange locations exposure list which includes 7 states in the United States. You can search Google for the 2/9/24 press release or use the following link: <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-presumes-exposure-agent-orange-herbicides/>.

- John Margowski (#425) made a motion to change the WSC by-laws for the WSC to meet only 2 times per year, in March and September. In an election year, WSC would also meet in June to conduct elections, swear in officers and adjourn for a social gathering. The changes would take effect in 2025; the WSC attendance requirement by-laws must also be amended. The motion will be discussed again at the June meeting with the final vote to be taken at the September meeting. Second by Frank Mueller (#448); passed without objection.
- John Margowski (#425) asked President Demske appoint an Awards Committee, with duties to include setting up a rewards nomination form. Volunteers were requested to Chair and serve on the Committee. Vern Larson (# 635) volunteered to be the Chair, Greg Bloch (#635), Ray (#) and Pat Furno (AVVA) volunteered to serve on the Committee.
- John Margowski (#425) asked for volunteers to join him on the elections committee; Richard Lindbeck (#448) and Greg Foye (At Large) volunteered. If you are interested in running for office, please let John know by e-mail or U.S. Postal Service. A description of the officer descriptions can be found on the National VVA website (vva.org).
- Jim Mullarkey asked if there was any interest in including a Zoom option for future meetings; the consensus was it could be tried at the September meeting. A question was asked if members can vote over Zoom; the answer is yes. The link for any Zoom meetings would be included on vvawi.org

Upcoming Events:

June 22, 2024

Wisconsin State Council quarterly meeting; upper shelter at South Park (921 S. Main Street), Waupaca

August 20-24, 2023

AVVA Leadership Conference, Reno Nevada

September 21, 2024

Wisconsin State Council quarterly meeting; Par 4 Comfort Suites, Waupaca

December 6-7, 2024

Wisconsin State Council holiday party (location TBD) and quarterly meeting; Par 4 Comfort Suites, Waupaca

May I send you this newsletter by e-mail? If so, please contact me at jlfoye@frontier.com with a subject line of "AVVA At-Large Newsletter" or by phone at 715-842-9197 (please leave your phone number so I can return your call). Any suggestions on what (or how much) information to include in this newsletter is always appreciated. Thank you!



Joy L. Foye

Wisconsin AVVA At-Large Representative