



Together Always

**AVVA - AT LARGE NEWSLETTER  
VOLUME 13  
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I hope you and your loved ones had a safe and healthy holiday season. The Wisconsin State Council held “informational meetings” for the Toxic Exposure Committee and the general Council Meeting via Zoom on December 6, 2020. There were 12-15 attendees for the general meeting.

**AVVA Report**

Pat shared the following with us:

- AVVA is redesigning their Agent Orange/Toxic Exposure website.
- The Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PFAFC) was expanded to include Vietnam Veterans effective October 1, 2020. Approved caregivers will be eligible to receive up to \$2,800 a month for aiding veterans with the basics needed for independent living at home or in the community including help with bathing, dressing, feeding and getting in/out of bed.
- Fran Davis has resigned as Region 6 Director due to health issues and Rick Talford, who was the Assistant Director, has replaced her. Rick has recently had several major health issues, including COVID, so Pat requested we all keep him in our thoughts and prayers. We all wish him a full recovery.

**Toxic Exposure Committee**

- Three new conditions are now considered presumptive: hyperthyroidism, bladder cancer and Parkinsonism and are included in the National Defense Authorization Act. President Trump has threatened to veto the bill but Congress is expected to override any veto.
- VVA President John Rowan met with President-elect Biden and his team and discussed Toxic Exposure.
- John Margowski and Jim Mullarkey reported on the status of Toxic Exposure town halls. They have had Zoom meetings to work on setting up virtual town halls with a format similar to the in-person meetings. Previous TE information has been scanned and is being updated for virtual use. Virtual town halls would allow the group to expand panel members and/or allow members of the administration to hear the stories. Town Hall concerns have shifted from the effect on veterans to their children/grandchildren.
- Research is being done on Gulf War Syndrome from the first Gulf War (1990-1991). Veterans from that engagement are trying to change the term “Gulf War Syndrome” to “Gulf War Illness” but it would require legislative action versus only discussions in town halls. The next step would be to include burn pits; the VA’s position is there is no evidence of an issue. John M. pointed out that ensuring implementation of what is already on the books is critical; this would require veterans organizations working together to ensure laws/regulations are implemented right away rather than allowing 6 months for them to begin.

**State Council**

President's Report (Richard Lindbeck)

- Richard's e-mail has been spoofed. Fake e-mails were sent requesting gift cards. In the future, you can confirm an e-mail is legitimate by double-checking that it's his e-mail address.
- The National Convention is scheduled for July(?) in Greensboro, NC (UPDATE: It is August 10-14).
- The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs has been holding virtual meetings using Zoom.
- A new veterans cemetery was opened near Tomahawk in July, 2020.

COVID-19 Virus and Vaccine Update (Dr. Jeffrey Whittle)

- Doctor Whittle spoke to us about the COVID-19 status in Milwaukee. His duties changed from working with out-patients to treating patients of physicians who are now assigned to treat COVID patients.

- Dr. Whittle is hopeful that new cases have peaked. He's seeing more people wearing masks and taking COVID seriously. A broader knowledge of the disease and better treatments are reducing mortality rates.
- Dr. Whittle answered numerous questions based on his current knowledge of COVID:
  - Drug interactions that may occur with the vaccine are currently unknown.
  - It isn't clear yet if the worst is over. Hospitalizations are increasing, however, the increase in testing provides a more accurate infection rate. (REMINDER: The meeting was held potentially before effects from holiday gatherings were known). Many people will continue to be infected; following CDC guidelines regarding masks, social distancing and isolating (as needed) are very important.
  - So far very few instances of reinfections have been reported.
  - Good follow-up is needed vs waiting to see what happens regarding long term side effects, etc.
  - If you are immune-system compromised, discuss your concerns with your doctor when the vaccine is offered to you.
  - With several COVID strains and differences in individual bodies react, COVID symptoms can vary widely. You may not exhibit the more "traditional" symptoms but still have the virus.

#### Secretary's Report (Jim Mullarkey)

- The VVAWI.org website was hacked but is still working. Security software has been purchased to help prevent future attacks. Jim will rewrite the website once again; the new website will be accessible from **any** device (it should be completed in about a month). Please let Jim know about any change you have or would like to see.

#### National Director's Report (John Margowski)

- John missed the last National Board/Committee Chairs virtual meetings; a videotape of the meetings can be found on the vva.org website. The April Board of Directors meeting is tentatively scheduled as in-person rather than virtually.
- Since the Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers is complicated, John suggests you contact your County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) or another service officer to assist you in applying for it.
- VVA National President John Rowan met with President-elect Biden's team and focused on what needs to be reintroduced with the new Congress.
- John receives a copy of the COVID reports President Lindbeck sends to National.
- The vva.org website has information on proposed changes to the by-laws, etc. that will be discussed at the National Convention (it is currently scheduled for in-person attendance).

#### Council on Veterans Affairs (Vern Larson)

- The Board meetings held on Zoom have worked really well. As a result, Vern's Chapter is considering it for their meetings as well.
- Wisconsin's veterans homes have all been impacted by COVID although cases didn't start appearing until around July. Vern praised the state Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Mary Kolar, on how consistent and persistent they have been in taking precautions in all the facilities.
- Vern and his family have had COVID. They are recovering but there have been residual side effects including a loss of sense of taste and smell, lack of energy and shortness of breath. Please be careful and follow the guidance set forth by the CDC.

#### General Information

- Highground Liaison (Greg Foye): The Highground has started a capital campaign, "The Highground Rising". The campaign includes construction of a 12,000 square foot Welcome and Visitor Center with a larger space for events, programs, Veterans meetings, student education and mental health services. He also advised the group a new liaison will be needed since he is no longer a Highground Board member.

#### Upcoming Events:

March 13, 2021 (tentatively in person or by Zoom)

Wisconsin State Council quarterly meeting; Ramada Inn, Waupaca

June 19, 2021 (tentatively in person)

Wisconsin State Council quarterly meeting and annual picnic; Camp Victory, 9839 Sterling Avenue, Willard, WI

August 10-14, 2021 (tentatively in person)

National Convention, Greensboro, NC (details to follow as they become available)

September 18, 2021 (tentatively in person)

Wisconsin State Council quarterly meeting; Ramada Inn, Waupaca

December 3-4, 2021 (tentatively in person)

Wisconsin State Council holiday gathering and quarterly meeting; Ramada Inn, Waupaca

May I send you this newsletter by e-mail? If so, please contact me at [jlfoye@frontier.com](mailto:jlfoye@frontier.com) with a subject line of "AVVA At-Large Newsletter" or by phone at 715-842-9197 (we don't have caller ID so you'll need to leave your phone number in order for me to return your call). Any suggestions on what (or how much) information to include in the newsletter is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Take care and be safe.

*Joy*

Joy L. Foye  
Wisconsin AVVA At-Large Representative