

Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, May 18, and Friday, May 19, 2006

Location: FDIC/Seidman Training Center
3501 Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22226

Attendees:

Chairman

James Terry Scott, LTG, USA (Ret.)

Members

Nick D. Bacon, 1SG, USA (Ret)
Larry G. Brown, Col., USA (Ret)
Jennifer Sandra Carroll, LCDR, USN (Ret)
Donald M. Cassidy, Col., USAF (Ret)
John Holland Grady
Charles "Butch" Joeckel, USMC (Ret)
Ken Jordan, Col., USMC (Ret)
James Everett Livingston, MG, USMC (Ret)
William M. Matz, Jr., MG, USA (Ret)
Dennis Vincent McGinn, VADM, USN (Ret)
Rick Surratt (former USA)
Joe Wynn (former USAF)

Staff

Ray Wilburn, Executive Director
Ed Andersen
Deborah Anderson
Jacqueline Garrick
Kathleen Greve
Steve Riddle
Paul Stepnowsky
Kurt Von Tish
Jim Wear

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Topic	Key Points	Supporting Materials
	<p>Command and the VA Records Management Center. A town hall meeting was held; 74 people attended and 27 provided comments.</p> <p>The Commission further discussed the lack of attendance by the public at the town hall meetings in spite of the publicity sent to local papers and mailing done to the VSOs. Discussed options to increase publicity.</p>	
<p>Government Accountability Office (GAO) Briefing on Study of Disability Benefits (Federal, State, Local)</p> <p>Ms. Margie Shields Ms. Carol Petersen</p>	<p>The GAO presented on its study that compared disability benefits for military personnel and civilian public safety officers (PSO). GAO was mandated by Congress to do this study to determine the efficacy and efficiency with which Federal benefits are paid and how advances in science and technology were impacting on the ability to work. GAO compared the military to federal law enforcement, firefighters, & state police officers in CA, FL, IN, MT, NJ & TX and city firefighters in Los Angeles, Miami, Indianapolis, Billings, Newark, and Houston. They studied tinnitus, leg amputation, and quadriplegia. GAO looked at continuation of pay, temporary benefits, lump sums, concurrent receipt, and retirement. GAO concluded that neither military or PSOs consistently have more disability benefits available to them.</p>	<p>PSO and Military Comparison</p> <p>GAO-06-4 Disability Benefits: Benefit Amounts for Military Personnel and Civilian Public Safety Officers Vary by Program Provisions and Individual Circumstances (April 2006)</p>
<p>Quality of Life (QOL) Briefing</p> <p>Ms. Jacqueline Garrick, LCSW-C, Senior Policy Analyst, VDBC</p>	<p>Ms. Garrick provided the Commission with a QOL briefing in order to help focus on how it could be measured in veterans for VA purposes. She reviewed data collection techniques; narrative, surveys, proxy reports and clinical exams. She described the CNA QOL literature Review report provided to the Commission and the WHO definition of QOL. She suggested QOL Domains: Physical Health, Psychological Health, Social/Environmental Impacts, Employment, Education, and Military/Veteran and a set of indicators for each. The potential uses of a QOL scale that could be developed based on this model could be used for clinical assessments, treatment planning & intervention, VA's Schedule for Rating Disabilities, strategic planning, program & policy development, research, networking & community outreach, family interaction.</p>	<p>Quality of Life Presentation</p>
<p>Chairman's Close</p>	<p>The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 3:42.m. (The Commission held a closed administrative & personnel meeting.)</p>	

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<p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>Chairman Scott</p>	<p>The meeting opened at 8:10 a.m. with welcoming remarks. The Chairman reported on the outcome of the closed meeting to adopt Standard Operating Procedures and to follow Robert's Rules for a small board or committee when voting.</p>	

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<p>Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) Update</p> <p>Dr. Laurie May Director, Health Care Programs</p>	<p>Dr. May provided an update on the status of the surveys. They are pre-testing the veteran/survivor surveys and still developing the rater/VSO instrument, which should be done by the end of May. They are seeking OMB approval for the VSO part. CNA should be able to report by September on some of their projects. In turning to their literature review, Dr. May focused on disability programs and earnings, disincentives to work or therapy, recruitment and retention impact, QOL, and lump sum. She discussed the comparisons to domestic and foreign disability programs. CNA next step is an IU analysis.</p>	<p>CNA Update</p> <p>CNA Literature Review Draft Literature Review: Selected Topics Related to Veterans' Disability Compensation</p> <p>CNA Quality of Life Literature Review - Appendix</p>
<p>SSDI Data Collection Discussion</p> <p>Dr. Laurie May Director, Health Care Programs</p> <p>Mr. Ray Wilburn Executive Director, Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission</p>	<p>Dr. May discussed the issues surrounding SSDI. She reported on the eligibility criteria and credits, the average monthly payments, and the purpose of a CNA analysis that used Current Population Survey (CPS) data to estimate the number of service-connected veterans who receive VA Comp and SSDI (under age 65). Approximately 15% of service-connected veterans receive SSDI and of this subgroup most likely would be 100% SC vets or those with IU ratings. She presented options for matching the data.</p> <p>In a follow on presentation, Mr. Wilburn summarized a legal opinion by the Commission's legal consultant, and VSO and Congressional letters that the Commission has received regarding the SSDI issue. He discussed the authority of the Commission to obtain data.</p>	<p>SSDI Overview</p>
<p>Ms. Mary Ellen McCarthy</p>	<p>Ms. McCarthy read a letter written by a veteran to Congressman Lane Evans, Ranking Democratic Member of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs regarding VA Compensation and SSDI. She also reminded the Commission of the Congressman's concerns over veteran's privacy and the authority of the Commission to do computer matching of data.</p> <p>Commissioners McGinn and Matz reiterated the commitment of the Commission to disabled veterans and said that anyone or any organization claiming the Commission intends to harm veterans is wrong.</p>	
<p>VSO Panel</p> <p>Mr. Jerry Manar, VFW Mr. Jim Doran, AmVets Mr. Rick Weidman, VVA Mr. Carl Blake, PVA</p>	<p>The panel presented their concerns over the Commission's proposal to collect data on VA compensation and SSDI and that this information could then be used to suggest an offset of benefits by the Commission or by Congress.</p>	

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	<p>the impact of QOL, for expedited reviews, and to understand under-utilization of SSDI by veterans. There would be no consideration of any offset explored during this analysis. Social Security data on the low number of initial claims granted and the 4 year process it can take to be awarded SSDI were presented by Livingston. After some discussion, the motion carried by an 11-2 vote with Commissioners Wynn and Grady opposed.</p>	
Chairman's Close	<p>The Chairman highlighted the agenda for the next meeting. There was a request to bring back senior DOD officials who could update on their efforts with Seamless Transition, personnel and retiree matters.</p> <p>The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 2:02 p.m.</p>	

The minutes of the May 18-19, 2006, meeting were unanimously approved as amended by the Commission members in attendance at the June 21, 2006, meeting in Washington, DC.