

**Veterans Disability Benefits Commission
Meeting Minutes**

Date: Thursday, November 17, and Friday, November 18, 2005

**Location: Room 334 Cannon House Office Building, U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, D.C. 20515**

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. Cassiday, Col., USAF (Ret)
- John Holland Grady
- 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)

Topic	Key Points	Supporting Materials
November 17, 2005		
<p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>Chairman Scott</p>	<p>The meeting opened at 9:00 a.m. with welcoming remarks and a reiteration of the Commission's objectives.</p> <p>The Chairman restated the general approach the Commission will use to fulfill its charter and continue to evaluate and monitor the research of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA).</p> <p>Chairman Scott provided a brief summary of a meeting he had with Chairman Buyer of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs; Chairman Miller, House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs; and congressional staff on November 16, 2005. The purpose of the meeting was to provide the Committee with a brief update of Commission activities to date and request an extension of the Commission's charter through September 2007. Additional conversations took place with staff of the Senate Committee on Veterans'</p>	

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	<p>evaluation requirements;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IOM will compare PTSD with other chronic conditions; • IOM will analyze and assess remission and recurrence of symptoms; incentives, barriers and strategies for recovery. • VHA will fund these studies and IOM will issue reports in April and July of 2006. • The scope of VHA's study will be broader than the focus of the Commission's task number 2 related to PTSD. <p>Chairman Scott reported that the Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Jonathan Perlin, assured him that the Commission will have a seat at the table, participating fully with VHA and IOM in their process. The PTSD study results will also be available sooner than the lengthier study IOM is conducting for the Commission.</p> <p>Following discussion, a motion was made and carried to strike the PTSD task from the Commission's IOM SOW and accept the VHA proposal to include the Commission in its IOM study of PTSD.</p> <p>Draft CNA Statement of Work (SOW)</p> <p>The draft CNA SOW incorporates the comments submitted by the Commissioners since the October meeting, (comments are annotated in the margins of the draft). The CNA SOW contains four general objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey of disabled veterans and survivors; 2. Analysis of disability and survivor benefits; 3. Analyze readily available information, research and data on disability; 4. Integrate findings (both CNA and IOM). <p>The Process Overview (slides 6-17) includes details of the tasks and approach CNA will take to fulfill the requirements of its SOW. A series of options for conducting the surveys, with varying approaches, confidence levels and estimated costs were also discussed.</p> <p>After considerable discussion about the presentation of CNA's research to the Commission in the form of recommendations, suggestions, findings or options, a motion was made and carried to require CNA to provide options appropriate to the research questions based on the facts and its findings, but not recommendations.</p>	<p>Draft CNA Statement of Work</p> <p>Process Overview</p>

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	<p>The Commission voted in favor of accepting the draft SOW and forwarding it to CNA for the next step in the contracting process, i.e., the preparation of its initial proposal.</p> <p>Additional votes by the Commission accepted Option 4 (slide 14 of the Process Overview) for the survey of veterans at a 95 percent confidence level (slide 16 of the Process Overview), and a 95 percent confidence level for a 30-minute survey of survivors.</p>	
Public Comment	<p>Ms. Rose Lee, Gold Star Wives, asked the Commission to clarify and reword a point made regarding the Survey of Disabled Veterans and Survivors to: “. . . the receipt of full DIC and a partial or full offset from SBP.”</p> <p>Mr. John Vogel advocated the full participation and involvement of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in VHA’s study of PTSD with IOM.</p>	
November 18, 2005		
<p>Commission Business</p> <p>Chairman Scott</p>	<p>Chairman Scott asked the Commission for the limited authority to negotiate minor changes to the wording in the contract documentation between the Commission and CNA and/or IOM until the next meeting. Further, he assured the Commissioners that any changes of substance would result in a “time-out” until vetted by the full Commission.</p> <p>The Commission unanimously voted to carry the motion to allow the Chairman this limited authority.</p> <p>January through June 2006, the Commission will conduct its public meetings on the third Thursday and Friday of each month.</p>	
<p>Discussion of Survey of Rating Specialists</p> <p>Keith Hancock Commission Staff</p>	<p>This discussion focused on a proposal to conduct two separate surveys. One survey would involve VBA rating officials (Rating Veterans Service Representatives and Decision Review Officers) and the other survey would include the Veteran Service Organization (VSO) accredited claims representatives co-located at VA Regional Offices.</p> <p>The purpose of these surveys would be to seek input from those individuals who work on the “front lines,” with firsthand experience in administering disability compensation benefits; assist the Commission in the study of the compensation program; and offer an additional set of data to support the Commission findings.</p>	<p>Survey of Raters Presentation</p>

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	<p>Three options regarding who could potentially conduct the surveys were presented, along with the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The Commission unanimously voted for CNA to conduct these two surveys electronically. An additional task will be added to the CNA Statement of Work.</p>	
<p>Discussion of a Field Site Visit Plan</p> <p>Jim Wear Commission Staff</p>	<p>To follow-up on previous discussions at public meetings, the Commission intends to conduct field visits in fulfillment of its charter. The consensus among the Commission has been that this venue would offer a very valuable opportunity to receive input from veterans and people who work with veterans outside the Beltway (metro-DC).</p> <p>The following criteria were used to select potential locations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas with large veteran and service member populations; • Well represented presence of VA and DoD, to include Regional Office, military installations (including Discharge Sites), VA medical facilities, Vet Centers; • A cross-section of the country. <p>Eleven sites were selected and the Commissioners polled for their preferences. The following eight sites were the preferred choices of the Commissioners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seattle • San Diego • Chicago • St. Louis • San Antonio • Boston • Atlanta • Tampa/St. Petersburg <p>A team of three to four Commissioners, along with one staff member, will conduct visits to the different sites. A standardized protocol will be followed at each site, and a report will be made to the full Commission at subsequent monthly meetings.</p> <p>Chairman Scott reiterated that the selection of these eight sites in no way precludes visits to other locations by individual Commissioners who may feel such visits are beneficial or necessary.</p>	<p>Site Visit Presentation</p>
<p>Public Comment Period</p>	<p>Mr. Jim Doran provided suggestions on approaches to conducting the survey of Veterans Service Representatives and potential locations for site visits.</p>	

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	Ms. Carol Scott encouraged the Commission to consider the under-served needs of Native American veterans and the challenges service personnel face when proving service in combat zones while having been assigned to highly classified Special Operation units.	
Chairman's Close	There will be no meeting of the Commission during the month of December 2005. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 19, and Friday, January 20, 2006, in Washington, DC.	
Adjourned at 11:50 a.m.		

The minutes of the November 17-18, 2005, meeting of the Commission were unanimously approved by Commission members in attendance at the January 19, 2006, meeting in Washington, DC.