



West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance 2013 Annual Report

Earl Ray Tomblin, Governor
Richard Thompson, Cabinet Secretary



Former Secretary Keith Gwinn



Secretary Richard Thompson

June, 2013 - Governor Tomblin appoints Richard Thompson as Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance. Thompson succeeds retiring Secretary Keith Gwinn.

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Dear Governor Tomblin,

I am proud to present to you the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance 2013 Annual Report.

The report summarizes the efforts of the Department in which they focused on remaining commitment to our veterans and their families. Also, the report gives you a clear picture of where the Department is and where it is heading.

The Department, under the leadership of Secretary Rick Thompson, has made great strides in its services to our veteran community.

I hope the information contained in this report will be helpful to you in assessing the effectiveness and responsibilities of the Department of Veterans Assistance.

On behalf of the Governor's Veterans Council, I would like to thank you for your support. Your support keeps us moving forward and helps make the Department of Veterans Assistance a viable and productive organization for our veterans.

Sincerely,

Randall L. Bare
Chairman

THE SECRETARY'S FORWARD

In my first few months as Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance (WVDVA), I've been fortunate to work with countless individuals and organizations from throughout the state that are committed to improving the lives of West Virginia veterans. Governor Tomblin, the West Virginia Veterans Council, the West Virginia Legislature, the West Virginia Veterans Coalition, members of our Congressional Delegation, other state agencies and numerous veterans service organizations are but some of the leaders and entities my office has had the opportunity to collaborate with. Together, we've accomplished a great deal for veterans and their families.

When I first joined the department, my goal was to hear the concerns and ideas of West Virginia's entire veteran community so that I would have a better understanding of how to serve them. To accomplish this, I conducted a listening tour that included round-table style discussions at five different locations throughout the state.

I also wanted to ensure that efforts to assist veterans were not being duplicated and that my employees, who encounter veterans every day, were aware of benefits and opportunities offered by other state agencies. My department has since been working with the Higher Education Policy Commission, Community and Technical Colleges, Workforce West Virginia, the Auditor's Office and others to share information and cross-train employees.

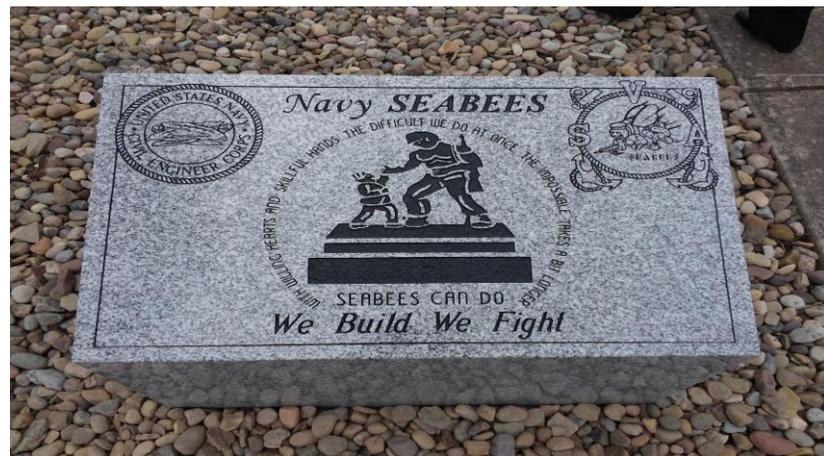
Still another, and perhaps the most important, part of my vision includes improving the efficiency of existing programs, facilities and offices so our department can serve as many West Virginia veterans as possible while maintaining quality services. Our field and claims offices have consistently helped secure annually more than \$200 million worth of federal VA benefits for West Virginia veterans and their dependents. Additionally, the Donel C. Kinnard Memorial State Veterans Cemetery saw its first full year of operations in fiscal year 2013, during which time 115 veterans and dependents were interred at the cemetery. At the West Virginia Veterans Nursing Facility, occupancy rates continue to steadily increase and at the West Virginia Veterans Home, the possibility of adding a transitional unit for veterans in need of immediate housing assistance is being considered.

As always, there is more that can be done to improve our services to veterans and I remain fully committed to exploring ways my department can do just that. I'm grateful for the strong foundation laid in the WVDVA by former Secretary Keith Gwinn and I look forward to continuing to serve the brave veterans of West Virginia.

Rick Thompson
Cabinet Secretary

MISSION

The mission of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance (WVDVA) is to aid and advise honorably discharged West Virginia veterans and their qualifying dependents and to ensure they are provided the care, assistance and recognition they deserve. Numerous programs, sixteen field and claims offices, and three facilities fall under the purview of the WVDVA, enabling the department to meet this goal.



WEST VIRGINIA VETERANS COUNCIL

In accordance with Chapter 9A, Article 1, as amended, The West Virginia Code provides that there shall be a Veterans Council consisting of nine members who must be citizens and residents of this state and who have served in and been honorably discharged or separated under honorable conditions from the Armed Forces of the United States and whose service was within a time of war as defined by the laws of the United States.

Where feasible, two members of the council shall be veterans of either WWII or the Korean Conflict, at least two members of the council shall be veterans of the Vietnam era, at least one member shall be a veteran of the first Gulf War and at least one member shall be a veteran of the Afghanistan or Iraqi Conflicts. The members of the veterans' council shall be selected with special reference to their ability and fitness to effectuate the purposes of this article. If an eligible veteran is not available or cannot be selected, a veteran who is a citizen and resident of this state, who served in and was honorably discharged or separated under honorable conditions from the Armed Forces of the United States and who served during any time of war or peace may be selected. The secretary and such officers, assistants and employees as the secretary considers advisable, shall administer the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance.

It is the duty and function of the Veterans' Council to advise the secretary on the general administrative policies of the department, to select, at their first meeting in each fiscal year commencing on July 1, a chairperson to serve one year, to advise the secretary on rules as may be necessary, to advise the Governor and the Legislature with respect to legislation affecting the interests of veterans, their widows, widowers, dependents and orphans and to make annual reports to the Governor respecting the service of the department. The secretary has the same eligibility and qualifications prescribed for members of the Veterans' Council. The secretary ex officio shall maintain all records of the Veterans' Council.

2013 COUNCIL MEMBERS

Miles Epling, Chairman – Point Pleasant – Mason County - Vietnam

Randall Bare – Sandyville – Jackson County – Vietnam

Patrick Farrell – Bridgeport – Harrison County – Iraq

James DeCarlo – St. Albans – Kanawha County – Korean

Cedric Greene – Charleston - Kanawha County - Gulf

Bill Harris – Glen Easton – Marshall County – WW II

Woody Williams – Ona – Cabell County – WW II

Debra K. Tompkins – Mt. Nebo – Nicholas County – Desert Storm

Robert Vass, Sr. – Huntington – Cabell County – WW II

WEST VIRGINIA VETERANS COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

The West Virginia Veterans Council is required by West Virginia state code to meet “not more than once every two months.” Typically, the Council holds four quarterly meetings each fiscal year. These meetings are open to the public and take place at various locations throughout the state.

FIRST QUARTERLY MEETING: July 27, 2012

The first meeting of fiscal year 2013 was held on July 27, 2012, at the Flatwoods Conference Center in Sutton, WV. Following are the minutes from that meeting:

- Meeting called to order by Chairman Epling.
- Seven members were present-enough members in attendance for a quorum.
- Those present were: Mr. Miles Epling, Mr. William “Bill” Harris, Mr. Randall Bare, Mr. Woody Williams, Mr. James DeCarlo, Cedric Greene, and Debra Tompkins.
- Motion made to dispense of reading of the minutes from last meeting. Motion seconded and carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Veterans Home Residence Council Rules:

- Secretary Gwinn presented Veteran’s Home Resident Council By-Law recommendations to the council for approval.
- Motion was moved and seconded to accept the Resident Council By-Laws as they were presented.
- Motion passed.

SECRETARY’S REPORT

West Virginia Dept. of Veteran’s Assistance Van Driver’s Budget

- Secretary Gwinn reported shortfalls in van driver budget. Department is working with Senator Wells and Delegate Iaquina to seek a resolution to either increase our budget or possibly reduce the per diem from \$75 to \$50 per day. If issue is not resolved, we will be short \$120,000 again next year.
- Eight new vans have been ordered and there is \$150,000 more in our budget, so eight more will be ordered in January.

WW I Veteran in Mason County

- A WWI Medal of Honor Recipient is buried in Mason County in a dilapidated cemetery. The department is working with Culture and History and Mason County officials to determine if he has any remaining relatives and possibly relocate the remains to the DCKMSVC.

Mental Health and Veterans Court

- Department is working to establish Mental Health and Veterans Courts in various counties throughout the state.

Social Workers and DHHR (report by Deputy Secretary Bailey)

- Department is in the beginning stages of establishing a program to cross train social workers employed by DHHR with those employed by WVDVA.

Veteran Friendly Community Program

- WVDVA is working with the Governor's Office and Department of Highways to iron out details of Veteran Friendly Communities Program. Ideas include announcing two or three winners per year and providing them with road signage and a plaque.

Cemetery Plaque Honoring Council Members

- A plaque recognizing the work of the Council was ordered for placement at the cemetery and should be here soon.

Cemetery Issues

- Flags provided by the Post Office were soiled. They will now be inspected upon arrival and extras will be kept at the cemetery, so there is never a shortage of usable flags.
- Some issues with rifle blanks misfiring have been resolved. It was caused by user error. Some complaints were made about the color of the rifle adapter, which has since been painted black.
- Heavy equipment is just now arriving because orders were delayed until property was officially put in our name. Rental equipment has been in use until now.

Highway Signs (report by Deputy Secretary Bailey)

- Department is working with Transportation to get all veteran related highway signs pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order while complying with Federal Regulations. Kentucky didn't and it cost them 10% of their Federal money.
- Also working to make all veteran related road signs uniform in terms of what information they include about the veteran (branch of service, conflict, rank, etc).

War Orphans Program- (Request for change in maximum age limit)

- Woody Williams moves that the Council endorse the change. Motion seconded by Bill Harris.
- Motion carried.

Veterans Nursing Facility in Beckley

- Secretary Gwinn discussed possible nursing facility in Beckley with Governor. He supports it, but has no money for it. Secretary Gwinn requests permission of the Council to investigate possibility of establishing a smaller facility or taking over an empty wing at another facility.
- Motion to approve made by James DeCarlo, seconded by Debra Tompkins. Motion carried.

CEMETERY REPORT (by Larissa Wines, Administrator)

- Cemetery has been fully operational since Memorial Day, 2012.
- Since opening, 18 have been interred.
- Honor Guard now has approximately 30 volunteers.
- Deracho clean-up was difficult, but everything has been repaired now.
- Two more memorials have been approved: The Blue Star Memorial from the local garden club and the Underage Veterans Memorial.

VETERANS HOME REPORT (by Stacy Brown, Administrator)

- Current census is approximately 95.
- Slight flooding due to Deracho, but they have a generator, so they are up and running. No major issues.
- Administrator addressed gaps in communication between resident council members and other residents..

CLARKSBURG NURSING FACILITY (by Dr. Kevin Crickard, Administrator)

- Census is approximately 110 with 4 open rooms.
- Three policies implemented in Deracho response: Emergency Power Outage Policy, Heat Wave Policy, Emergency Staffing policy. Our power out emergency lasted about thirty-six (36) hours and we spent around \$20,000 We will be turning in a claim for that.
- Currently, the average veteran pays \$1200 (Twelve Hundred Dollars) a month to stay at the Veterans Home. At a typical facility, you would pay between \$5,000 and \$8,000 a month. The State Government pays a third of the cost for the veteran, the Federal Government pays a third of the cost, and the veteran pays a third of the cost.
- Waiting list: First come, first served. The average length of stay is 3.6 years. The average wait on our waiting list is 1.2 years. We currently have three available beds and between 130 and 140 veterans now on our waiting list.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS:

- No motions made as result of visitor comments.
- Motion made to adjourn meeting and seconded....meeting adjourned.

A full transcript of the meeting is available at www.veterans.wv.gov.

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SECOND QUARTERLY MEETING: October 26, 2012

The second meeting of fiscal year 2013 was held on October 26, 2012, at the West Virginia Veterans Home in Barboursville, WV. Following are the minutes from that meeting:

- Meeting called to order by Chairman Bare.
- Six members were present-enough members in attendance for a quorum.
- Those present were: Chairman Bare, Mr. Miles Epling, Mr. William “Bill” Harris, Mr. James DeCarlo, Cedric Greene, and Patrick Farrell.
- Motion made to dispense of reading of the minutes. Motion seconded and carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Highway Signs:

- Nursing facility signs in Clarksburg updated and cemetery signs installed. All required signs are in place and up to date.

Social Worker in Huntington:

- Social worker hired to cover Huntington area. All four social worker positions now filled.

SECRETARY’S REPORT

West Virginia Dept. of Veteran’s Assistance Budget

- The department is required to cut 7.5% of the budget. Our recommendations were to cut \$100,000 out of our Van Budget which is \$150,000 per year. We still have over 55 vans in service right now at the four VAMCs so that will not affect us. The other part of the budget cut was \$20,000 supporting the Grafton Veteran’s Day Parade. The other \$100,000 was to be cut from the Re-Education Fund. We’ve seen a reduction in the uses of the re-education fund. We will not be closing any offices or laying off any personnel.

Veteran’s Status on WV Driver’s License

- Veterans can now have their status as a veteran designated on their driver’s licenses.

Report to the Interim Committee Concerning a New Nursing Facility in Beckley

- I was asked by the Interim Committee for Veteran’s Affairs to explore the cost of a new nursing facility for veterans. It costs us about \$12 Million Dollars to operate the Clarksburg Facility. We

take in close to \$6 Million of that from residents and VA Per Diem Fees, but the cost reported to them for 120 beds would be about \$34 Million. A 60 bed facility would be \$20 Million. This does not include site preparations, site construction This cost is simply for just the building and the inside materials.

VETERANS HOME REPORT (report by Stacy Brown, Administrator)

- The Veterans Home currently has 91 residents. We are looking at finishing our roofing construction which we hope to get completed before the hard weather sets in. We also have been looking into grants and some other ways of utilizing the property behind the maintenance building. We would like to add a small “assisted living” section and are looking into that.

CLARKSBURG NURSING FACILITY REPORT (report by Kevin Crickard, Administrator)

- We’re running over 90% full. We’ve been averaging 110. I have 114 available beds right now. There are about 130 veterans on our waiting list. 100 are waiting to get on our regular unit, 30 are waiting to get on our Alzheimer’s Unit. Our Alzheimer’s unit currently has 19 out of 20 beds filled. We have 162 employees. We’re actually in our final push for 189.5 full time equivalent positions, so we’re 90% full, 90% staffed. We are in the process of phasing out one agency which we still use and replacing it with our very last final nurses.
- We just went through our annual survey from the Federal VA. We were found to have 10 deficiencies and one in life safety. We did a plan of correction and implemented a training cycle and some audits. They accepted our credible evidence and we are certified for another year.

DONEL C. KINNARD MEMORIAL STATE VETERANS CEMETERY (DCKMSVC) REPORT

(report by Secretary Gwinn)

- Since opening, 48 individuals have been interred. On average, three people are buried per week.
- Federal regulations state that members of the National Guard are only eligible for burial at the DCKMSVC if they served on active duty. Those who never received orders are ineligible. Because this is a federal regulation, we must comply because we cannot afford to lose federal funding.
- Chairman Bare suggested returning to this issue later so we can seek help from Congressional Delegation.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Bare made Council Committee Assignments:

- Council members assigned to DCKMSVC: Cedric Greene, Miles Epling, Randall Bare.
- Council members assigned to the WVVNF: Bill Harris, Debra Tompkins, Miles Epling, Randall Bare.

- Council members assigned to Legislative Committee: Woody Williams, James DeCarlo, Miles Epling, Randall Bare.
- Council members assigned to Veterans Home: Patrick Farrell, Miles Epling, Randall Bare.

Chairman Bare, Upcoming Legislation

- Three pieces of legislation the Council is interested in: SR15, construction of a State Veterans Nursing, TBI Home.
- A bill to amend and re-enact 11 21 12 of Code WV 1931 related to exempting all military retirement income from State income tax be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia.
- A bill to make hunting and fishing licenses free to all veterans.
- Members of the legislative committee were directed to study the three bills and decide which one(s) they recommend the council support.

Bob Henry Baber, Glenville Veterans Legacy Project Update.

- Project began two years ago. It includes 36 piece photography exhibit, book and documentary film.
- It is available to travel the state for free when requested.

Stephen Dailey (Workforce WV):

- Shared information regarding Workforce West Virginia's veteran representatives and programs. Encouraged department to network with their offices.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS.

- No motions made as result of visitor comments.
- Chairman Bare motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded, passed.

A full transcript of the meeting is available at www.veterans.wv.gov.

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THIRD QUARTERLY MEETING: February 15, 2013

The third meeting of fiscal year 2013 was held on February 15, 2013, at the West Virginia State Capitol.

Following are the minutes from that meeting:

- Governor Tomblin delivered brief remarks, stating that he was present to hear any concerns the council and other attendees wanted to share with him.

Nursing Facility in Beckley:

- Chairman Bare told the Governor the most pressing issue was establishing a new nursing facility in the southern region of the state.

Cuts to Van Driver Per Diem Payments:

- Volunteer drivers were concerned that per diem payments were going to be cut from \$75 to \$50 per day and many drivers would quit as a result.

Veteran Lottery Tickets:

- The Governor encouraged attendees to purchase veteran scratch-off lottery tickets and to raise awareness that proceeds benefit veteran programs. Comments were made that these tickets are not available at all retailers.

Military Training Credits in Higher Ed:

- Concerns were expressed about the lack of transferrable credits associated with military training at universities and community colleges. Higher education institutions often do not recognize the classes that veterans received during service, so they are forced to take unnecessary classes when they enroll.

Chairman Bare officially called meeting to order:

- Council members present: Randall Bare, James DeCarlo, Miles Epling, Patrick Farrell, Harrison Gilliam, Cedric Greene, Bill Harris, Debra Tompkins. Woody Williams was unable to attend this meeting.
- Welcomed Harrison Gilliam (newly appointed Council Member): Secretary Gwinn: Minutes from the last meeting.
- Bill Harris moved that we dispense with the reading of the minutes. Seconded. Motion passed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

None

SECRETARY'S REPORT

- Please remember Ralph Stump, former Council member who recently passed away.
- Department developed a social services questionnaire for distribution at our field offices and other facilities so veterans in need of assistance can be contacted by our social workers.
- We requested Senator Manchin and Senator Rockefeller to assist in our efforts to establish a new nursing facility in southern West Virginia.
- Telehealth clinic in Princeton should be operational by June.
- The Department of Administration is currently seeking bids for repairs to the Veterans Memorial on the capitol grounds. Recommendations from the engineers are expected to be made by May. Renovations are expected to take about one year.
- Veterans Nursing Facility is seeking a rate of change for their residents. This will increase their monthly contributions from a maximum of \$2,400 to \$3,000. This increase will take three years to reach the \$3,000 cap.
- Gold Star Families Memorial for the cemetery has been proposed. Woody Williams is working on that project.
- A bill requesting changes to federal regulations regarding eligibility at the cemetery and other federally funded facilities has been submitted to Senator Manchin. It should be presented to Congress this week. Bill seeks to allow all National Guard members and reservists access to veteran benefits.

VETERANS HOME REPORT (report made by Stacy Brown, Administrator)

- There are 88 residents at this time and the population is aging.
- We've had issues with delayed admissions because VA medical centers outside of West Virginia are slow getting them to us. We are working on improving that relationship to expedite admissions.
- We are working with local community organizations to increase awareness about our facility and who we can admit due to decrease in resident population.

Hunting And Fishing License Update by Deputy Secretary Bailey:

- DNR is concerned about financial loss associated with providing free hunting and fishing licenses to veterans, but we are trying to compromise and develop a discounted rate.

DHHR Partnership Update by Deputy Secretary Bailey:

- We are still working with DHHR to cross-train social workers so veterans with mental health issues and who are in need of social services have better access to the information they need.

CLARKSBURG NURSING FACILITY REPORT (delivered by Kevin Crickard, Administrator)

- Introduction of Sherri Reed, new Assistant Administrator.
- Recently hired a new Director of Nursing to focus on quality assurance.
- Gaps in security were identified, so new cameras and swipe card system was installed.

DONEL C. KINNARD MEMORIAL STATE VETERANS CEMETERY REPORT (delivered by Larissa Wines, Administrator)

- Since the opening, 82 individuals have been interred.

- Approximately 410 informational packets have been sent to funeral homes, hospices and other organizations within the state.
- It would cost approximately \$1,500 annually to support the DCKMSVC honor guard.
- Recent vandalism cost the cemetery approximately \$25,000.
- Flags are being taken down and examined weekly to ensure they are appropriate for use.

Veterans Legacy Project Update by Bob Henry Baber:

- Project has been underway for about a year and a half, conducted by Glenville State College.
- Approximately 220 veterans have been interviewed.

Transition Assistance From The WV National Guard

- Our office provides information to troops recently returned from overseas. Information addresses benefits, mental health treatment, etc. This is for all returning veterans, not just National Guard members.

Department Of Transportation (report by Cindy Cramer)

- Cindy attended the meeting to answer questions regarding road signage for WVDVA facilities and veteran memorial road signs.
- Governor Tomblin issued an executive order to add a veteran's branch and rank to memorial road signs. These updates are currently underway.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS:

- No motions made as result of visitor comments.
- Motion made to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed.

A full transcript of the meeting is available at www.veterans.wv.gov.

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FOURTH QUARTERLY MEETING: June 28, 2013

The fourth meeting of fiscal year 2013 was held on June 28, 2013, at American Legion Post 23 in Mason County, WV. Following are the minutes from that meeting:

- Meeting called to order by Chairman Bare.
- Seven members were present-enough members in attendance for a quorum.
- Those present were: Chairman Randall Bare, James SeCarlo, Miles Epling, Harrison Gilliam, Cedric Greene, Bill Harris and Woody Williams.
- Motion made to dispense of reading of the minutes. Motion seconded and carried.
- Welcome to Rick Thompson, newly appointed Cabinet Secretary of the Department of Veterans Assistance.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Monument Honoring Underage Veterans.

- Move made to install the monument at the DCKMSVC. Move seconded.
- Discussion ensued. Concerns regarding the verbiage on the monument were expressed.
- Move to table the issue until next council meeting was made, seconded and passed.

New Nursing Facility Update

- A Steering Committee has been established and meetings exploring the possibility of creating a new veterans nursing facility in Southern West Virginia are underway.

Van Driver Program

- Discussion ensued regarding the veterans van driver program and the possibility of creating a Memorandum of Understanding between the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), who operate the program, in an effort to keep the program within budget.

NEW BUSINESS:

Vacancy on Veterans Council

- Nominees now being accepted for position on Council due to resignation of Patrick Farrell. His resignation became effective May 10, 2013.

Veterans Homeless Summit

- Scheduled for July 19th at the Charleston Civic Center. Social Workers who attend can receive continuing education credits.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

- Secretary Thompson introduced himself and recognized former Secretary Keith Gwinn who was in the audience.
- Secretary Thompson informed Council and those present of his plans for the Department and of his goal to improve media coverage and communication to veterans about opportunities provided them by the state of West Virginia and the US government.

CLARKSBURG NURSING FACILITY REPORT (delivered by Kevin Crickard, Administrator)

- Most recent state inspection of the facility, we were deemed deficiency free.
- Right now, an average of 95 beds are filled.
- There are approximately 166 veterans on the waiting list with an average wait time of 1.2 years.

DONEL C. KINNARD MEMORIAL STATE VETERANS CEMETERY (DCKMSVC) REPORT
(delivered by Larissa Wines, Administrator)

- 100 Veterans have now been interred at the DCKMSVC.
- 15 dependents have been interred.
- 40% are cremations.
- Current average is 9 interments per month.
- Current rate for dependents is \$722. For veterans, we receive this amount from the federal VA, so our services are free to them.

VETERANS HOME REPORT (delivered by Mike Lyons, WVDVA Operations Manager)

- There are currently 85 residents.
- Many residents are leaving because they are finding jobs and no longer need to reside at the Home.

FIELD OFFICE REPORT (delivered by Mike Lyons, WVDVA Operations Manager)

- It is estimated that approximately \$231 Million in federal benefits have been awarded to West Virginia veterans this fiscal year.
- Last fiscal year, that number was approximately \$161 Million.
- Vietnam era veterans may now claim and receive benefits for a condition known as “herbal aid.”
- Claims offices serve an average of 20 walk-in veterans per day and 100 veterans via phone call per day.

REPORTS FROM GUESTS:

Update from Skip Gebhart, WV Higher Education Policy Commission, Director of Veterans Education and Training.

- Currently there are 16,300 Veterans and dependents utilizing GI Benefits
- Post 911 GI Bill - almost 13,000 are using the new GI Bill
- Cooperative Efforts with WVDVA and a Memorandum of Understanding has been established to ensure all employees are well versed on education benefits for veterans and dependents.

Update from Marsha Hopkins, VP of Excalibur Services, LLC

- This organization provides educational opportunities for veterans.
- They are considering holding a Veterans Expo somewhere in West Virginia. It would provide community resources, educational and training information, employment information, resume development, medical screenings, and a career fair.

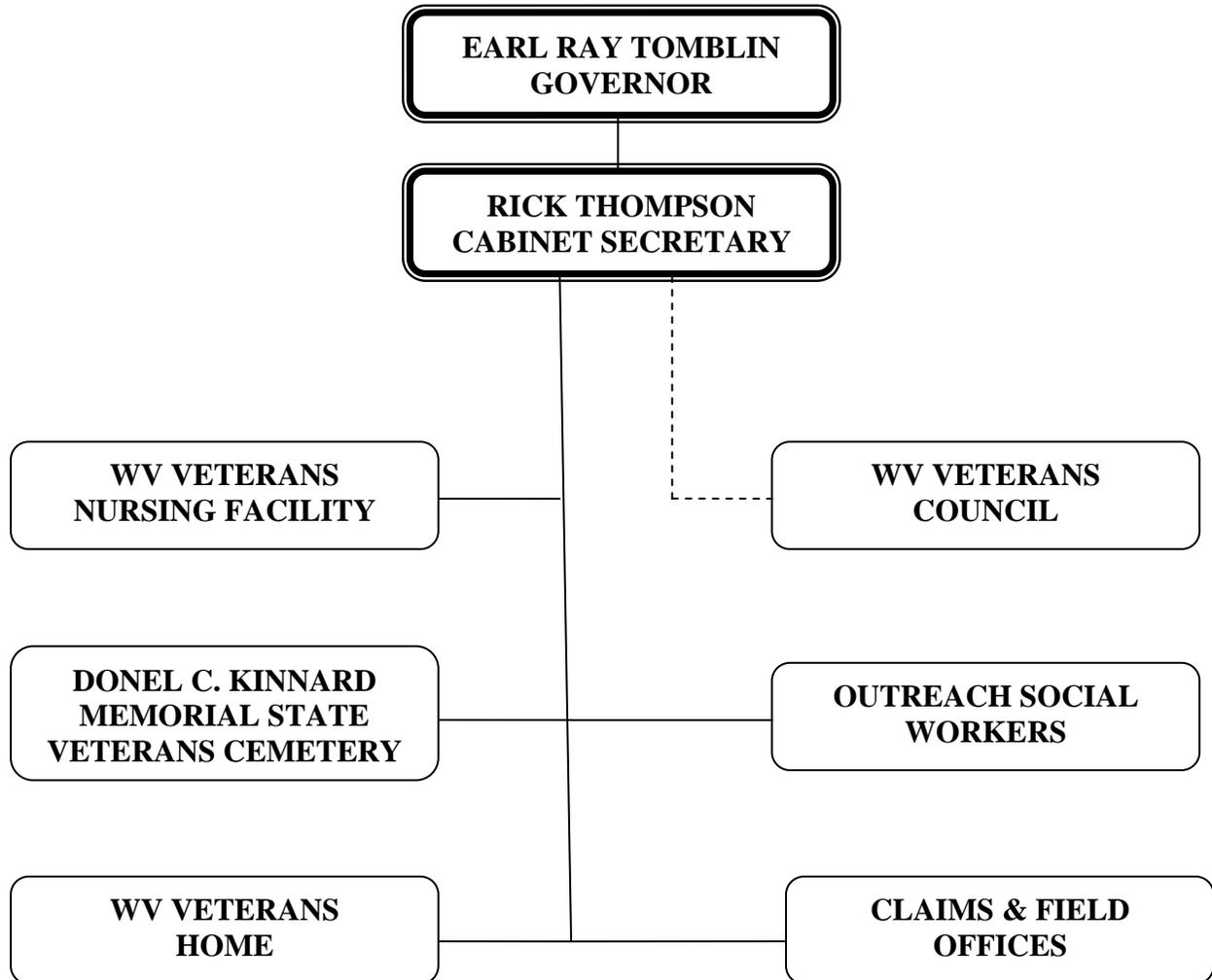
INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS:

- Woody Williams noted that National PTSD Awareness Day set for June 27th.
- Discussion of requesting the WV legislature to proclaim PTSD Awareness Day in West Virginia ensued.
- Discussion about possibility of designating West Virginia a Gold Star Mothers State ensued.
- Former Secretary Keith Gwinn thanked attendees and everyone he has worked with over the years.
- No motions made as result of visitor comments.
- Chairman Bare motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded, passed.

A full transcript of the meeting is available at www.veterans.wv.gov.

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**WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS ASSISTANCE
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**



STATEWIDE MAP OF OFFICES



○ CLAIMS & FIELD OFFICES:

Beckley
Charleston
Clarksburg
Elkins
Huntington
Lewisburg
Logan
Martinsburg
Morgantown
Moorefield
Parkersburg
Pittsburgh
Princeton
Spencer
Summersville
Welch
Wheeling

● FACILITIES:

Barbourville
(WVH)
Clarksburg
(WVNF)
Dunbar
(DCKMSVC)

● CABINET SECRETARY'S OFFICE

Charleston

CABINET SECRETARY TRANSITION



In May, 2013, Governor Tomblin announced the appointment of Rick Thompson as Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance. Thompson's role as Secretary became effective following the June, 2013, retirement of the Department's first ever Cabinet Secretary, Keith Gwinn.

Gwinn stepped down after more than a decade of service with the department because of health concerns saying, "The pleasure I experienced from serving my state and nation in the U.S. Navy has only been matched by the pleasure of serving my fellow veterans as Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance. It has been an honor to work alongside some of our state's most patriotic individuals and a blessing to touch the lives of so many military heroes."

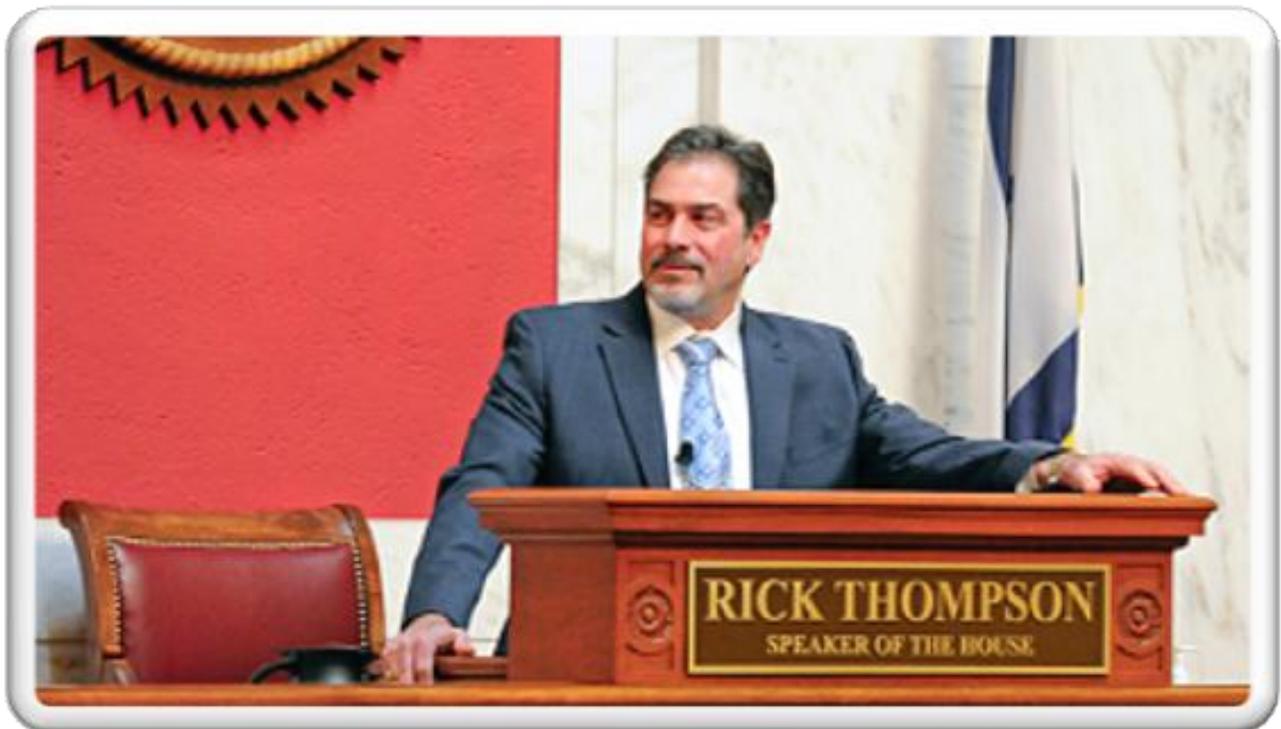
At the time of the appointment, Thompson was amidst his seventh consecutive year as Speaker of the West Virginia House of Delegates, having been a member of the state legislature since 2001. Thompson said he has "enjoyed serving our state as a legislator and as Speaker of the House," and that he

looks forward “to working with the staff at our state’s veteran’s facilities, collaborating with our many veterans organizations, and ensuring we continue to provide support to the men and women who have served our state and nation.”

In the short time that Thompson has served as Cabinet Secretary, the Department of Veterans Assistance has accomplished a great deal. In August, Thompson signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Higher Education Policy Commission and the Community and Technical College System agreeing to cross-train employees so that veterans seeking to further their education will have access to the information and assistance they need. In September, Thompson hosted a statewide listening tour so that he could gain a deeper understanding of the issues facing West Virginia veterans. And, in October, the department, in conjunction with the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, unveiled the first ever Gold Star Families Memorial Monument at the Donel C. Kinnard Memorial State Veterans Cemetery to honor families who have lost a loved one in combat.

Looking back on the past few months Thompson says, “Serving as Secretary of this department has truly been a humbling and gratifying experience thus far and I look forward to continuing to serve my fellow veterans in this capacity.”

Thompson’s career in public service began as a member of the U.S. Army in 1972.



2013 LISTENING TOUR



In August, 2013, Secretary Rick Thompson announced the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance would host meetings across the state throughout the month of September in an effort to learn more about the thoughts, ideas and concerns of West Virginia's veteran community. This month-long listening tour of informal meetings involved visits by Secretary Thompson and other staff members to five different regions of the state including Beckley, Barboursville, Clarksburg, Martinsburg, and Moundsville. At each location veterans' organizations, individuals and military families were invited to participate, as well as learn more about services offered by the department. The overarching goals of the listening tour were to raise awareness of the department, establish an open forum for communication between veterans and the department, and to gain greater insight into the needs of West Virginia's veterans and their families so that we can better serve them.

The listening tour was attended by a total of approximately 125 people including state leaders, members of various veterans service organizations and, of course, West Virginia veterans with a variety of suggestions and needs. The tour received state-wide, and even national, media coverage and shed light on those issues which seem to be of the highest concern to the state's veteran community. A comprehensive summary of the tour identifying these issues was compiled by department employees and released to the public in November, 2013. Actions taken or currently underway, as well as plans to be implemented by the department, in response to these issues are also identified in the comprehensive summary.

West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance

Listening Tour Comprehensive Summary

Introduction:

West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance Cabinet Secretary Rick Thompson, along with other department staff, hosted listening tour events at five locations throughout the state during the month of September. These events provided veterans an opportunity to ask questions and comment on various veteran related issues. The summary highlights the issues most frequently discussed at these events and which the Department perceived to be the most important to West Virginia's veterans. Actions currently underway or plans to be implemented by the Department in response to these issues are also identified in the following report.

Number of attendees:

Beckley	46
Barboursville	47
Clarksburg	31
Martinsburg	17
<u>Moundsville</u>	<u>10</u>
Total	125

General Overview of Findings:

1. Veterans seem to be pleased, overall, with the services, facilities and programs overseen by our department. There is one service in particular they suggest we expand - itinerant visits.
 - a. *Details/Background/Response:* Currently, some of our veterans service officers and social workers host regularly scheduled visits (usually once or twice a month) to various locations throughout the counties assigned to their specific region (i.e. senior centers, VFW posts, VA Medical Centers, etc.). By sending staff to these locations, outside their normal offices, our services are accessible to veterans who live in rural areas and/or have transportation, health, financial or other issues.
 - b. There appears to be a need for more of these regularly scheduled visits throughout the state. We plan to increase this service to the extent possible.
2. There is a general lack of awareness of services available to veterans – including those provided by state and federal governments (as well as private entities).
 - a. *Details/Background/Response:* We intend to publish a small, concise veterans' resource guidebook that contains contact information for veteran related services, categorized according to specific areas of need (i.e. employment, education, financial assistance, counseling, etc.). Members of our staff are currently in the process of conducting research and collecting the necessary information for the development of such a resource.
3. There is a need for increased coordination and communication between state government and federal government entities that deal with veterans' issues. Specifically, this includes the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance, the West Virginia Legislature, the US Department of Veterans Affairs and members of our Congressional Delegation.

- a. *Details/Background/Response:* The first step in the process of improving coordination between agencies was taken during the listening tour, as representatives of every office referenced above attended at least one event (and many attended all five). Relationships have been initiated and all parties have expressed their commitment to working together.

Other Recurring Veteran Concerns (state level):

1. Veterans would like the state to establish another Veterans Nursing Facility (similar to the one in Clarksburg) in the southern region of the State.
 - a. *Details/Background/Response:* The possibility of creating a new Veterans Nursing Facility is already being explored. A steering committee was created in the summer of 2013 that is currently investigating location options in Beckley and Huntington.
2. There were a variety of questions about the Veterans Transportation Program (funded by us, but operated by the Disabled American Veterans). There is a general lack of awareness about the availability of this program as well as how it is operated.
 - a. *Details/Background/Response:* Some questions were in regards to the process involved for veterans wishing to utilize transportation services. Those questions were answered on the spot and veterans were provided the appropriate contact information.
 - b. Other questions related to the delayed payments of this program's volunteer drivers. A general response was provided explaining the program's budget. We recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the DAV and are currently working with them to improve operations and awareness of the program.
3. Concern was expressed over how few veterans actually utilize the education benefits available to them.
 - a. *Details/Background/Response:* Though most education benefits are provided by the federal government through the GI Bill, our department signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Higher Education Policy Commission and Community and Technical Colleges in August, 2013, agreeing to cross train employees so that more West Virginia veterans can be made aware of these benefits and can receive guidance with obtaining them.

Other Recurring Veteran Concerns (federal level):

1. The majority of veteran's concerns related to federal issues were in regards to the VA Medical Centers (there are four in West Virginia: Beckley, Huntington, Clarksburg and Martinsburg). Some positive experiences were conveyed, but many complaints also emerged including language barriers between doctors and patients, extended waiting room times, and limited physician attention.
 - a. *Details/Background/Response:* This does not fall within our purview, so many questions were fielded by representatives of the federal VA and/or congressional delegation staff members.
 - b. It seems that individuals who have reached out to the WVDVA or elected West Virginia officials, who then communicate with federal representatives, have had issues related to VA Medical Centers resolved much more quickly than others. This is a testament to the importance of continued cooperation among government bodies.
2. Veterans are unhappy with the wait time involved with the claims process, generated by a major backlog in the federal VA.

- a. *Details/Background/Response:* This does not fall within our purview and there is very little that our department can do to improve this problem; however, there are two ways we can slightly effect wait time for veterans' claims.
- b. Our veterans service officers are available to assist veterans in applying for and appealing claims. Their guidance helps ensure applications are submitted correctly the first time and veterans who are appealing a case are sufficiently prepared, therefore, eliminating extra interruptions in the claims process. This means, we must remain focused on increasing awareness of this service through various outreach efforts.
- c. Our field and claims offices are in the process of transitioning from a paper based processing system to an electronic-based system. This will decrease the amount of time it takes for a claim to get from our field offices to our claims offices and on to the federal VA. Thus, processing time should be slightly improved.

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DONEL C. KINNARD MEMORIAL STATE VETERANS CEMETERY (DCKMSVC)

130 Academy Drive
Dunbar, WV 25064
Phone: 304-746-0026
Administrator: Larissa Wines

The mission of the Donel C. Kinnard Memorial State Veterans Cemetery is to provide West Virginia's qualifying military veterans and their dependents a final resting place that commemorates their service and sacrifice to our state and nation.

QUICK FACTS:

Total number of interments during fiscal year 2013: 115

Total acreage of cemetery site: 349

Total acreage currently developed: 45

Total number of currently available gravesites: 5,744

Total operating expenses: \$370,265

Memorial Walkway currently includes the following:

- Veterans of Foreign Wars Memorial
- Order of the Purple Heart Memorial
- Global War on Terrorism Memorial
- Blue Star Memorial Marker



Photo Above: DCKMSVC Bell Tower, provided by Ileen Ingersol

Photos Right: Flag Retirement Ceremony, Memorial Weekend, 2013, provided by WV Metronews



WEST VIRGINIA VETERANS HOME

512 Water Street
Barboursville, WV 25504
Phone: 304-736-1027
Administrator: Stacy Brown

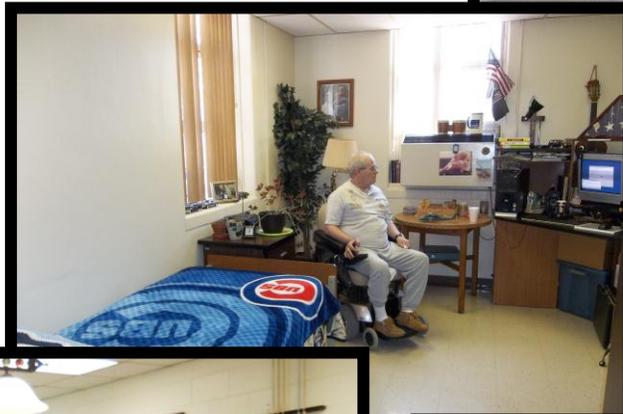
The mission of the West Virginia Veterans Home is to provide a safe, comfortable residence for qualifying veterans who are in need of a place to live.

QUICK FACTS:

Total number of beds: 150

Total number of residents at the end of fiscal year 2013: 85

- Began initiative in FY 2013 to attend VA Medical Center appointments with residents
- Residents & staff volunteered for and participated in Honor Flight Program in FY 2013



WEST VIRGINIA VETERANS NURSING FACILITY (WVVNF)

One Freedoms Way
Clarksburg, WV 26301
Phone: 304-626-1600
Administrator: Dr. Kevin Crickard

The mission of the West Virginia Veterans Nursing Facility is to provide qualifying West Virginia veterans the level of end of life care they deserve by maintaining a well trained staff, a clean and honorable environment, and the highest levels of compassion for residents and their loved ones.

QUICK FACTS:

Total number of beds: 120 (100 regular & 20 Alzheimer/Dementia Unit)
Average total occupancy rate: 93% full
Average Alzheimer/Dementia Unit occupancy rate: 93% full
Number of staff positions filled: 95%



*Photo Above: Musical guest George Daugherty entertains residents and visitors
Photos Right: Therapy dog visits with residents*



CLAIMS AND FIELD SERVICE OFFICES

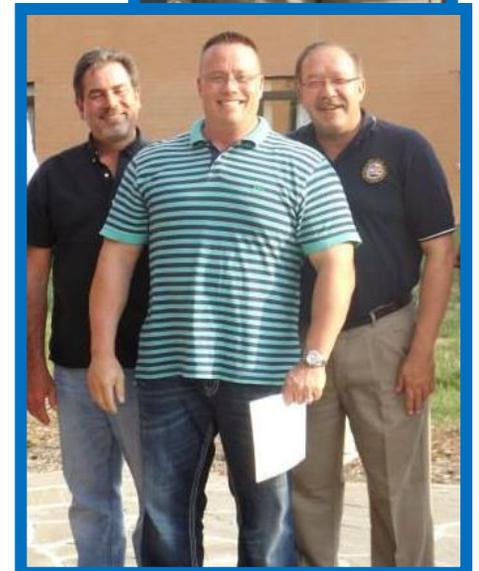
The mission of West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance Field and Claims Offices is to assist qualifying veterans and their dependents in their efforts to obtain state and federal benefits related to their military service. There are 16 of these offices located throughout the state.

QUICK FACTS:

Total amount of federal monetary benefits recovered in fiscal year 2013: approximately \$201 million.

Total number of claims awarded in fiscal year 2013: 12,566.

Total number of consultations (walk-ins & phone calls): approximately 110,000



OUTREACH SOCIAL WORKERS

The mission of West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance Outreach Social Workers is to connect qualifying veterans and their dependents in need of social services to a variety of resources that may assist them.

QUICK FACTS:

Total number of consultations and referrals during fiscal year 2013: approximately 3,600

The outreach social worker program divides the state of West Virginia into 4 regions:

- Region A serves the counties of: Jackson, Roane, Mason, Putnam, Kanawha, Cabell, Lincoln, Boone, Logan, Mingo & Wayne.
- Region B serves the counties of: Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Marshall, Wetzel, Monongalia, Marion, Preston, Taylor, Upshur, Barbour, Harrison, Lewis, Braxton, Gilmer, Doddridge, Ritchie, Tyler, Pleasants, Wood, Wirt & Calhoun.
- Region C serves the counties of: Pendleton, Grant, Hardy, Mineral, Hampshire, Morgan, Berkley, Jefferson, Tucker & Randolph.
- Region D serves the counties of: Clay, Nicholas, Webster, Pocahontas, Fayette, Greenbrier, Raleigh, Summers, Monroe, Wyoming, McDowell & Mercer.

A Message from our Social Workers

The West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance Outreach Social Workers stand ready to guide you to valuable resources from throughout your local community as well as other parts of the state and nation.

There are numerous organizations, volunteer programs, and public and private agencies that are committed to helping veterans and their families through the various hardships they may encounter, and no one knows more about these services than us.

We recognize that every individual and family comes from a unique situation, and with that, specific needs vary tremendously. Developing a plan that is suited to your circumstances and that will alleviate immediate concerns while achieving long-term goals for you and your family is our top priority.

If you are a veteran, or if you know of one, who is struggling right now – with issues large or small – we encourage you to contact us. Help is available and no veteran should be left behind.

PROGRAMS

The West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance operates the following programs:

War Orphans Education Program: Provides for a waiver of tuition and registration fees in a state supported college or university for children between the ages of sixteen and not more than twenty-five, whose veteran parent served in World War I, World War II, Korean Conflict, Vietnam Era or any time of conflict as declared by Congress. Parent must have died in such wartime period, or, if subsequent to discharge, death must have been the result of disability incurred in such wartime service.

Operation Recognition-Diploma: Provides for the awarding of high school diplomas, either from the county in which the veteran resides or the county in which the veteran would have received his or her diploma. Program serves qualifying veterans of World War I, World War II, Korean Conflict, and Vietnam Conflict.

License-Automobile: Provides special vehicle license plates without fee to qualifying veterans in receipt of a VA auto grant or who is permanently and totally disabled due to service-connected causes. Plates include a former POW Tag as certified by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, Purple Heart Tags for those wounded in action, and Pearl Harbor Survivor Tags for West Virginia veterans who were at Pearl Harbor during the attack on December 7, 1941.

Free Hunting and Fishing Privileges: Provided to veterans with a 100% permanent and total service-connected disability and to veterans in receipt of a VA auto grant.

Veteran's Bonus: The state of West Virginia has provided a bonus to all service members who are on active duty during war-time for conflicts dating back as far as World War I. The current bonus is available for those serving on active duty during Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo, and includes a one-time payment of \$400 with an additional \$200 for those deployed to the combat zone. Please note that even individuals who deploy multiple times or to multiple locations may still receive the extra \$200 payment only once under this bonus program, for a total of no more than \$600. The deadlines to apply for bonuses of all other conflicts have expired.

Veteran's Re-Education Act Fund: The West Virginia Legislature provides tuition assistance to those veterans who need a new vocation due to dislocation or unemployment. Veteran must have exhausted the G. I. Bill in order to qualify.

Jack Bennett Fund: Although the US Department of Veterans Affairs provides grave-markers for qualifying deceased veterans, they do not provide funding for the installation of those markers. West Virginia established the Jack Bennett Fund to cover the cost of installation.



DEPARTMENT DIRECTORY

CABINET SECRETARY'S OFFICE

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(866) WV4-VETS
Fax: (304) 558-3662
Website: www.veterans.wv.gov

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Deputy Secretary: Billy Wayne Bailey

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Operations Manager: Mike Lyons mike.c.lyons@wv.gov
Public Affairs Coordinator: Heather Miles heather.d.miles@wv.gov
Chief Financial Officer: Angela Meadows angela.s.meadows@wv.gov
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Administrative Services Assistant: Cheryl Austin Cheryl.d.austin@wv.gov

CLAIMS OFFICES

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Phone: (304) 399-9395
Fax: (304) 528-5738
Email: JamesA.Lewis@va.gov
Charles.Bellomy@va.gov
Thomas.Lyons3@va.gov

PITTSBURGH

Federal Building
1000 Liberty Avenue, Room 1615
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
Phone: 304-395-6262
Email: Michael.k.craig@wv.gov
Charles.phillipi@wv.gov

FIELD OFFICES

BECKLEY

407 Neville St. Suite 113
Beckley, WV 25801
Phone: 304-256-6955
Email: Darrell.s.cunningham@wv.gov
Cheryl.l.farrell@wv.gov

CHARLESTON

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Charleston, WV 25301
Phone: 304-558-3540
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CLARKSBURG

200 Rt. 98 West, Suite 304
Nutter Fort, WV 26301
Phone: 304-566-7251
Email: sue.c.vogt@wv.gov

ELKINS

Elkins-Randolph Co. Airport
Rt. 4, Box 271
Elkins, WV 26241
Phone: 304-637-0235
Email: Pamela.f.rosencrance@wv.gov

LEWISBURG

Greenbrier County Courthouse
200 N. Court Street
Lewisburg, WV 24901
Phone: 304-647-7500
Email: ruth.p.white@wv.gov
Dana.i.gowings@wv.gov

LOGAN

P.O. Box 356
21 Veterans Ave.
Henlawson, WV 25624
Phone: 304-792-7055
Email: barry.c.dingess@wv.gov
Margaret.a.dingess@wv.gov

MARTINSBURG

115 Aikens Center, Suite 17
Martinsburg, WV 25404
Phone: 304-267-0040
Email: david.l.robinson@wv.gov
Lisa.m.smith2@wv.gov

MORGANTOWN

1705 Mile Ground Rd., Suite 1
Morgantown, WV 26505
Phone: 304-285-3480
Email: Rebecca.a.summers@wv.gov

MOOREFIELD

225 North Main Street
Moorefield, WV 26836
Phone: 304-538-2839
Email: carol.r.hefner@wv.gov
Michelle.l.cook@wv.gov

PARKERSBURG

Wood County Courthouse
1 Court Square, Room 402
Parkersburg, WV 26101
Phone: 304-424-1952
Email: Sharon.e.lewis@wv.gov

PRINCETON

Memorial Building
1500 W. Main Street
Princeton, WV 24740
Phone: 304-425-5194
Email: danny.l.honaker@wv.gov
Laura.a.bolin@wv.gov

SPENCER

811 Madison Avenue, Suite 29
Spencer, WV 25276
Phone: 304-927-0980
Email: amy.c.carder@wv.gov

SUMMERSVILLE

715 Main Street, Suite 102
Summersville, WV 26651
Phone: 304-872-0829
Email: darek.igo@wv.gov
Gail.e.thomas@wv.gov

WELCH

McDowell Public Library

P.O. Box 1085

Welch, WV 24801

Phone: 304-436-3804

Kimberly.a.wright@wv.gov

Kesha.r.nealen@wv.gov

WHEELING

51 Eleventh Street, Room 300

Wheeling, WV 26003

Phone: 304-238-1085

Michael.k.craig@wv.gov

Deborah.a.mcgraw@wv.gov

OUTREACH SOCIAL WORKERS

Kasey Voloski

Memorial Building

1500 Main Street

Princeton, WV 25740

Phone: 304-767-0062

Kasey.D.Voloski@wv.gov

Currently serving: Clay, Nicholas, Webster, Pocahontas, Fayette, Greenbrier, Raleigh, Summers, Monroe, Wyoming, McDowell and Mercer

Malissa Teter

225 North Main Street

Moorefield, WV 26836

Phone: 304-538-2839

Malissa.D.Teter@wv.gov

Currently serving: Pendleton, Grant, Hardy, Mineral, Hampshire, Morgan, Berkeley, Jefferson, Tucker, and Randolph.

Rodney Browning

21 Veterans Ave.

Henlawson, WV 25624

Phone: (304) 380-1962

Rodney.Browning@wv.gov

Currently serving: Jackson, Roane, Mason, Putnam, Kanawha, Cabell, Lincoln, Boone, Logan, Mingo and Wayne

THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF WEST VIRGINIA INC.

P.O. BOX 3191
CHARLESTON, WV 25332

MILES S. EPLING
DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT

PHONE: (304) 343-7591
TOLL FREE: 1-888-534-4667
FAX: (304) 343-7592

EMAIL: wvlegion@suddenlinkmail.com

WEBSITE: www.wvlegion.org

February 11, 2014

Richard Thompson, Cabinet Secretary
WV Department of Veterans Assistance
1514-B Kanawha Blvd. East
Charleston, WV 25311

Dear Cabinet Secretary Thompson:

On behalf of The American Legion, Department of West Virginia, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you and your staff for the outstanding service provided to this state's veterans and their families.

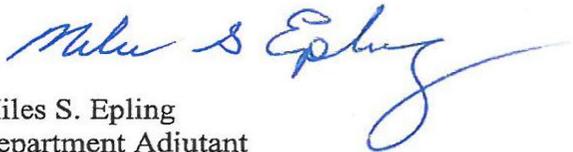
I appreciate our close working relationship, and it gives me great satisfaction to know that we are striving for the same goal – to help each veteran reap the benefits to, which he or she is entitled.

The field offices are most helpful in assisting veterans in their own communities. This allows an individual the luxury of getting help without having to travel a long distance to receive it.

I commend you for your hard work and dedication to the veterans of this great state.

If I can ever be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Miles S. Epling
Department Adjutant



“For God and Country”