

Minutes

July 11, 2017

Veterans Policy Advisory Committee

A meeting of the Veterans Policy Advisory Committee (VPAC) convened at 11:00 AM in the 3rd floor conference room of the BB&T Building, Columbia, SC.

A notice of the meeting was posted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

The following members were present:

William L. Bethea, Jr. (Chairman), Col (Ret) Dan Beatty, Major General (Ret) George Goldsmith, Lt General (Ret) Jack Klimp, Col (Ret) Barringer F. Wingard, Jr., Major General Van McCarty (for Major General Robert E. Livingston, Jr., SC Adjutant General), Stan Foreman (for Howard Metcalf, Director, SC Veterans Affairs), Sara Goldsby (Interim Director, Dept of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services), John Magill (Director, SC Dept of Mental Health), Dr. Beverly A. H. Buscemi (Director, SC Dept of Disabilities and Special Needs), Todd Humphries (President, SC Association of County Veterans Affairs Officers).

Guests attending were Haidee Stith (OnPoint Services, LLC), Phillip Gaillard (Veterans and Community Outreach Coordinator for Congressman Tom Rice), James C. Brown (Chairman, SC Veterans Advocacy Council), Dr. Ronald Rhames (President, Midlands Technical College) Leanne Weldin (Regional Director, Veterans Benefit Administration), Charlie Farrell (Executive Coordinator, SCMBTF) and Sandy Claypoole (Program Manager, SCMBTF).

Chairman Bethea called the meeting to order and welcomed VPAC members and guests. No members of the press attended.

Veterans Policy Advisory Committee (VPAC)

Chairman Bethea sought feedback from the first meeting. George Goldsmith said he was encouraged by the good things that were happening. Jack Klimp talked about the unknown veteran count. He said there are probably close to 1 million instead of the 400,000 we know. It would be helpful to have an inventory of state agencies that serve veterans. We should also have an inventory of state 501(c)3 organizations that serve veterans.

Chairman Bethea led a discussion of VSO organizations that don't register with the Secretary of State and why. If VSO is not soliciting funds, such as working on a federal grant, they are not required to register as a charity if doing business in SC. Although they do have to register to do business, they don't have to register under second criteria of soliciting funds if in fact they are

not soliciting. He urged that members continue to keep us informed of VSOs in their community for two reasons: (1) We want to know who they are and what they are doing.

(2) It helps us determine how many veterans are in the state. General discussion ensued about how to find veterans.

Stanley Foreman, SC Veterans Affairs (SCVA)

Looking at WWII forward – War Roster – the digital compilation of veterans in SC.

Objective is to have a DD214 for all veterans in SC. DoD sends DD214s once a month to SC. The challenge is to get a handle on DD214s so the Dept of Veterans Affairs will be the go-to place for information. SCVA needs to do a better job with outreach. DD214 is sent to home of record, so SC does not have the information on someone moving into the state. The War Roster elevates the visibility of the Veteran's Office and helps us locate the veterans who are in SC. The optimal objective would be to be able to expand the War Roster to eventually catalog all veterans in SC.

James Brown, Chairman of the South Carolina Veterans Advocacy Council (SCVAC)

The SC Veterans Advocacy Council was born out of the Division of Veterans Affairs. There was a need to have a means by which the different veterans organizations could better communicate. The common denominator that made it work was the veterans. We all serve veterans. Each organization sent two people to the meetings. There was an emphasis on collaboration and coordination. The focus is now to engage those who have the power to make changes, such as the legislature or congress. There is an emphasis on families, not just veterans. SCVAC promote rallies and events that recognize veterans. There should be a clearing house of VSOs to find out who is doing what.

Dr. Ron Rhames, President of Midlands Technical College (MTC)

SC Technical Colleges are among the largest providers of VA benefits to military personnel and their families in South Carolina.

For example, Midlands Technical College (MTC) provides education and training to more than 1,100 veterans and their dependents annually.

MTC and the SC Technical System is an attractive educational option for military families because of our quality programs, accessibility, affordability, and flexibility of class offerings.

As you know, many veterans face a difficult transition to civilian life, which may affect their success in college and life after the military.

Studies show that special services designed for veterans helps them complete their educational programs and successfully transition to the workforce. MTC resources designed to promote veterans' employment include:

- Maintaining a close partnerships with Fort Jackson, Reserve units, the National Guard and local military organizations.
- Recently, Midlands Technical College hosted a recognition ceremony to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Fort Jackson with the opening of a new Veterans' Center on the college's Beltline Campus. The Commanding General at Fort Jackson, the Military Liaison for the Chamber of Commerce and a leader in the Army Reserve were on hand to celebrate with the MTC board of trustees, faculty, staff and students.
- This Center provides veterans an opportunity to network and connect with other veterans and to receive a wide array of workshops and services designed specifically for veterans and their dependents.
- MTC regularly reviews workforce data and surveys employers regarding workforce needs and satisfaction with graduates. In addition, MTC has program advisory committees that give input on curriculum, course content, technology and worker competencies. This type of close alignment with workforce needs is reflected in 90+% student pass rates on licensure exams and 90% placement rates of graduates
- Community outreach activities inform veterans and their families about workforce opportunities, career trends, and educational options.
- Specialized orientation programs prepare veterans for college.
- On-base presence by technical colleges is critical. For example, MTC has operated an Education Office on Fort Jackson for more than 30 years.
- MTC adheres to the Department of Defense Principles of Excellence and we are a DOD Service Member's Opportunity College. As such, MTC awards credit for military training and experiences when possible. We evaluate Joint Service Transcripts to determine advanced placement credit, so veterans can complete their programs of study and enter the workforce more quickly.
- MTC conducts faculty and staff specialized training so they can better support veterans.
- MTC also provide specialized career planning and counseling, in collaboration with local VA services, Vocational Rehabilitation and veterans' organizations through the VetSuccess on Campus Program.
- The VetSuccess program is offered in collaboration with the VA.
- MTC is the only higher education institution in South Carolina to be approved for a VetSuccess on Campus program. This program provides a trained counselor who works for the VA (on the MTC campus) to help veterans transition into college and later to transition into the workforce. Services provided by the program include:
 - Information on VA benefits such as Vocational Rehabilitation, employment, education benefits, home loan guaranty, life insurance
 - Guidance and support while using VA educational benefits
 - Electing healthcare benefits
 - Information on submitting a claim for disability compensation
 - Information on community resources

- All MTC academic credit programs and more than 20 Corporate and Continuing Education (CCE) programs are eligible for VA benefits.
- MTC was the first college in SC authorized to award VA benefits for approved Continuing Education programs. This is important due to the increasing importance of career credentials in today's society.
- The Midlands Technical College Foundation has established scholarships to help veterans successfully complete college and enter the workforce more quickly.
- In addition, the Foundation offers QuickJobs scholarships to assist veterans with specific Corporate and Continuing Education training that can quickly prepare them for high demand, well-paying jobs.
- MTC also offers college-based work experiences such as internships, cooperative education experiences and apprenticeships that allow veterans to combine classroom training and work experience to increase job readiness and increase career qualifications.
- Recently, MTC established a Life Skills Center and is now integrating life skills training recommended by employers throughout the educational experience to enhance workforce preparedness.
- MTC has established a local advisory committee of community leaders and veterans to provide guidance on resources and services that can help veterans succeed.
- MTC has recently established an Office of Entrepreneurism. This office helps students, including veterans, who want to start a business.
- The MTC Human Resources Office engages in proactive veterans hiring practices and attends Veterans and Military Employment Fairs.

In summary, MTC and all SC technical colleges demonstrate a strong commitment to veterans.

The initiatives that I outlined provide a supportive, quality college experience that prepares veterans to successfully transition to their chosen career fields and assume leadership positions.

Leanne Weldin, Regional Director, Veterans Benefit Administration

Leanne is an Iraq veteran who started with VA in 1994. There is frequently some confusion between State VA and Federal VA. Leanne's office administers benefits. There are 2.8 million veteran VA homeowners. GI benefits have been used by 1.7 million vets since 2009, valued at 75 billion dollars. VA pays GI benefits to colleges in 7 days. It administers SGLI and VGLI life insurance. One hundred twenty-eight thousand vets nationwide and 3,000 vets in SC are enrolled in vocational rehabilitation. VA is paying benefits to service members stationed at Camp LeJune who were affected by the contaminated drinking water. VA is paying benefits for Agent Orange exposure to Vietnam Vets. Service by VA is improving dramatically. There are 56 regional offices that process claims. There are 700 employees in Columbia. There were 1.4 billion dollars in economic impact of disability benefits in SC in 2016, with 74 billion dollars

nationwide. Disability income is tax free. There are VA pension programs for low income vets who cannot work anymore. Nine thousand vets in SC have a pending claim, nationwide 358,000. Fourteen thousand vets in SC have an appeal pending, 458,000 nationwide. The appeals process takes three to eight years. New claims are processed in 115 days. One-third of all appeals will be granted. Appeals legislation to speed the process has passed the House in D.C., but has not passed the Senate. VA has gone paperless. Claims can be worked in any state.

VA pushes to give all veterans assistance even if they have a bad discharge. The big aim is to reduce suicides. The high bar on discharges will continue to be a problem. VA can give all vets initial diagnosis, but cannot give lifetime care to those with a bad discharge. The state can go to bat to help change this.

It is estimated that 30% of Vietnam vets have PTSD. Fifteen to twenty percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are estimated to have PTSD. Veterans with PTSD are often not violent. Just the opposite, they tend to withdraw.

Attorney General Wilson is standing up pro bono legal service for lower ranking service members.

Mr. Bethea announced that August 15th is the date of the next meeting. Our state director committee members will be asked to give an overview of their areas at the next meeting. At the September meeting, we would like to have the National Guard and Department of Commerce present on their activities related to veterans.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 PM and lunch was served.