

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Saturday October 17, 2020

The Department of Illinois Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission met at Legion headquarters in Bloomington, Illinois on October 17, 2020. The meeting was called to order at 10:00, and the pledge of allegiance was recited. The following members were present:

Rodger Bennett (4th Div.) Chairman
Tom Nebgen (3rd Div.) Vice Chairman
Raymond Toczek (1st Div.)
Stephen Wylie (5th Div.)

Ashley "Dave" Davis (2nd Div.) absent

Bennett will continue as chair, Nebgen as vice-chair. Secretary has been changed to Toczek. Due to COVID there has been no meeting since the fall 2019, no minutes to approve.

Tom Nebgen announced that he will be stepping down from his National appointment on the VA&R Health Administration Committee. Stephen Wylie, our new member, was welcomed aboard.

Toczek gave an update on the Chicago VA&R office. The VA closed the Regional Office in mid-March and all the Veterans Service Organizations had to close also. They are co-located in that building. All Service Officers have been working from home. Calls and e-mails are retrieved and responded to as appropriate. There have been no face-to-face interviews. Regardless, due to modern technology, they can and have still been submitting claims electronically, and have the systems which allow them to sign forms online. Latest estimate is that the Regional Office will not reopen until spring.

Biggest problems with the lock down are C&P exams. At first none were being performed, which caused a large back up. Also, certain facilities, like the National Personnel Records Center, are not open, so old Service Treatment Records can't be accessed at this time. Finally, personal and video hearings were stopped. As of now, C&P exams and zoom hearings are being scheduled, but it will take months to catch up on the backlog.

COVID also took its toll on the staff. Both the Dept. Service Officer, Carolina Contreras, and our new hire, Johnny Gonzalez, resigned. That leaves one full-time Service Officer, Bill Slider (@ Marion VHA), and two part-timers, Ray Toczek and Wayne Macejak, to handle the work load. It

will be a real challenge. Replacements can't be hired until next year and will take a minimum of 4-6 months to train.

Co-payment bills at the hospitals and clinics (for those veterans who must make a co-payment), are not being mailed since April. However, fees are still being accrued! Veterans who wish to pay, can check with their medical center billing and find out their current balance.

The new Veterans Home in Chicago has been landscaped and the staff hired. We are just waiting for the first residents to be accepted. Flu shots are again available at the VA and with COVID, it would be wise to get one.

The Dept. Commander, Roy Weber Sr. Vice Commander Wayne Fischer, buttonholed us later. They thanked us for coming down to the meeting. Roy reminded us to get the word out about our free life insurance for active members. An accidental death will result in a \$1,000 payment and if the veteran was on Legion business, it increases to \$5,000. As long as dues are current, the coverage remains in force. CAUTION, if dues lapse, even for a few days, the veteran must reactivate the policy.

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:45. The next meeting will be held April 10th, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond P. Toczek
Secretary, VA&R Commission