

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE

Of the

Suffolk County Legislature

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on **May 12, 2005**.

Members Present:

Legislator John Kennedy • Chairperson

Legislator Daniel Losquadro • Vice•Chair

Legislator Elie Mystal

Members Not Present:

Legislator Cameron Alden

Legislator Jon Cooper

Also In Attendance:

Legislator Viloría•Fisher • District #5

Legislator David Bishop • District #14

Alexandra Sullivan • Chief Deputy Clerk/SC Legislature

Fran Siems • Aide to Presiding Officer Caracappa

James Teese • Aide to Legislator Kennedy

Kevin LaValle • Aide to Legislator Losquadro

Amy Duryea • Aide to Legislator Schneiderman

Ben Zwirn • Assistant County Executive

Bob Smith • Director/SC Department of Human Services

Brian Gordon • Director of Public Relations/Long Island State

Veterans Home at Stony Brook University

All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Alison Mahoney • Court Stenographer

(*The meeting was called to order at 2:39 P.M.*)

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay. I'm going to call the Veterans & Seniors Committee to order, please. I'm going to ask that we have the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Losquadro.

Salutation

Thank you very much, Legislator Losquadro. I'm going to move right to the agenda. Actually, we do not have any resolutions on the agenda today but we do have a speaker who is here for us. I'm going to ask that the representative that we have from the Long Island Veterans and Nursing Home, that would be Mr. Brian Gordon; Mr. Gordon, if you would please step up and address the body for us. And you're here today to speak to us about funding cuts associated with the Long Island Veterans Nursing Home located over in Stony Brook?

MR. GORDON:

Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Thank you for being here today, sir,

MR. GORDON:

Just to frame it in for you, the Long Island State Veterans Home is a 350 bed nursing home for veterans located on the Stony Brook University Campus, we've operated now for just shy of 14 years. We are one of the five State veterans homes located throughout New York State and we are one of 119 State veterans homes that are located throughout 47 states and Puerto Rico.

I'm coming before you today to inform you about cuts that President Bush has proposed for his Fiscal Year 2006 Budget. Right now in State veterans homes every honorably discharged

veteran who served in the United States Military is eligible to reside in a State veterans home when he or she needs to do so and he or she is also eligible for a \$59 per day per diem payment through the VA; it's the per diem payment of \$59 per day that is actually in jeopardy as part of this. The VA has begun to try and shift its funding. We're not a hundred percent why but they've decided to shift some funding and they are trying to shift it away from long-term care. What they are looking to do is they are looking only to allow veterans who fit in priority groups one, two and three and those veterans who are listed or are designated by VA as catastrophically disabled to receive this per diem.

From a funding perspective, what this means for our home, only about 20% of the veterans currently residing at the Long Island State veterans home fit into priority groups I, II and III or could be classified as catastrophically disabled. Our facility receives approximately \$6.6 million in funding through the VA Per Diem Program, that would be reduced to about \$1.3 million per year.

Essentially the way it's been put is the university is opposed to utilizing student funds, and rightfully so, to subsidize the State veterans home. So as a result, the facility, to be honest with you, would not be able to sustain the \$5 million cut that's actually before us. So if the President's proposals do pass, the veterans home would actually close to be perfectly honest with you, and there's no way that we could sustain a \$5 million cut.

The Director of the home, Fred Scangel, would have been here today, but at 10:30 this morning he was testifying in front of a Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee in Washington, D.C. on this very issue and he was sitting alongside the President of the National Association of Veterans Homes who does represent those 119 homes. So in the end, if the cuts go through we're going to be in a lot of trouble.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Well, I appreciate you coming here to speak to us. If you can, just inform us a little bit more. I think I know that the members on the committee have a good understanding, you presented the issue and the problem well. How many residents do you have in the nursing home now?

MR. GORDON:

Right now the Long Island State Veterans Home, it's a 350 bed facility, we have 349 veterans in there today and our facility operates at a 99.6% capacity rate and has done so for the last nine years. We also have a waiting list of about 25.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

And I imagine that you serve veterans from all spans, all wars, all conflicts?

MR. GORDON:

Yes. We have no World War I Veterans now but we serve World War II up through Vietnam and even we do have a Gulf War Veteran now. We serve veterans also from not only Suffolk County, although the majority of our residents do come from Suffolk, but we serve people who have come from Nassau County or even Westchester in some respects.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Thank you. Legislator Mystal.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Good afternoon. Usually when somebody comes in front of us they want or need something; what would you like for us to do as a body?

MR. GORDON:

I think that we would ask that you would just go on record as supporting •• or not supporting the cuts as proposed by President Bush. We're not looking for any supplemental funding, you know, from Suffolk County, we're just looking for the support in general of Suffolk County.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Mr. Chair, could we put a resolution together?

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Absolutely. Thank you for following up on that, Legislator Mystal.

As a matter of fact, we do have a Sense Resolution that's been cosponsored by Legislator Lindsay and myself which is being laid on the table on Tuesday and perhaps we will be able to go ahead and take some additional action to go ahead and move the Sense through as quickly

as possible. But certainly this body •• or we understand and we certainly are very much in support of our veterans and want to do whatever we can to lend support to restoration of funding.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Do you know how our local Congressman would have fit into that bill, Congressman Bishop, Israel, King and our two Senators?

MR. GORDON:

Yes, I actually did not bring the document with me today, we have had conversations with all five Long Island Congressional representatives as well as meetings with Senator Hilary Clinton on this issue. Two weeks ago the five leaders in Congress all did a delegation letter in support of this and this letter was sent to Congressman James Walsh who is on the Appropriations Committee and is in Syracuse, New York. So all five of the local Congressional leaders do support it and Senator Clinton does support it as well.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay. If there's no other questions.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Mr. Chair, I'm not a member of this committee, I'm here for the next committee, we're a little delayed today. But having the veterans home in my district, I do want to comment ••

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Certainly.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

•• that they do an exemplary job. It's a very good facility and they certainly deserve the support of our Federal government and certainly all of the veterans who are returning from war need that kind of support. So I want to thank you for being here, you always do a great job there.

MR. GORDON:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Thank you, Legislator Viloría•Fisher. And I guess at this point what I would suggest, unless we have any other questions ••

LEG. MYSTAL:

What I would like to know is that if the members of the committee could go on as cosponsor on the Sense Resolution with you.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

I was going to request that.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Absolutely, certainly.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Okay.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

We would be happy to go ahead and add all the members of the committee as sponsors of the Sense.

All right. Well, thank you. If there's no other questions for the speaker then, I appreciate you coming down to speak to us today to inform us on this, and certainly we're going to move in that direction.

MR. GORDON:

Thank you, Legislator Kennedy.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

If there's anybody else to come before the committee? Hearing none, we're adjourned. Thank you.

(*The meeting was adjourned at 2:48 P.M.*)

**Legislator John Kennedy, Chairman
Veterans & Seniors Committee**

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