

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 June 15, 2009.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Leg. Jack Eddington, Vice Chair
Leg. Kate M. Browning
Leg. Ricardo Montano
Leg. Jay Schneiderman

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Sarah Simpson, Assistant Legislative Counsel
Tom Ronayne, Director of Veterans Service Agency
Holly Rhodes-Teague, Director of Office for the Aging
Benny Pernice, Budget Review Office
Craig Freas, Budget Review Office
Barbara LoMoriello, Deputy Clerk
Paul Perillie, Aide to majority leader
Linda Bay, Aide to minority leader
Steve Tricaraco, County Executive Aide
Dennis Brown, County Attorney's Office
Deborah Harris, Aide to Leg. Stern
Bob Martinez, Aide to Leg. Montano
Catherine Stark, Aide to Leg. Schneiderman
Debra Alloncius, AME Legislative Director
Linda Mitchell, Chamber of Commerce Veterans Committee, Huntington
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Kraus, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 11:36 AM

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Welcome to the Committee on Veterans & Seniors. I ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance lead by Legislator Browning.

SALUTATION

I ask everyone to please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence as we keep all of our brave men and women fighting for our freedom overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Thank you.

PRESENTATIONS

Welcome, Linda.

MS. MITCHELL:

Good morning everyone. I thank you so much for having me here this morning. I'm Linda Mitchell and I'm here from the Huntington Chamber of Commerce.

The Huntington Chamber is dedicated to the needs of its members through government advocacy, networking, economic development, job creation, networking and education. And we're proud to be the largest chamber on Long Island with 650 members.

As Director of Member Services, it's my job to add value to their Chamber membership. We have quite a diverse population from the small business owner to the largest corporations. And when someone comes to me with an idea, it's my job to bring it to fruition. We have 13 committees that I am in charge of at the chamber from education and training, human resources to help those small businesses that don't have the opportunity of having a human resources department. So we do run seminars for them to help with all their needs, from government relations to our small business advisory committee, technology committee, women in business committee, our under 30 for those who have come to me and said chamber members are old, what can you do for us?

And the young professionals Chamber of Commerce giving the high school students an opportunity to interact with businesses. But our newest initiative is the Veterans Committee, which came about after a Chamber breakfast meeting in which Lieutenant Lou Delli-Pizzi and some of his Fighting 69th Battalion had come to the breakfast.

At that time after hearing their concerns, we felt that as a chamber we'd like to step up to the plate and include a Veterans Committee. It had certainly been well received. And at our initial meeting I was privileged to have Legislator Stern come and join us and tell us some of the wonderful things that he's been doing through the Veterans Committee from the legislative point of view.

As I stated at our first meeting, we didn't want to reinvent the wheel or step on anyone's toes, but we wanted to bring forth awareness for those that are being deployed returning home and support for their families. I'm very privileged to have as my chairperson of the committee a gentleman from {BEA} systems who's been working with the initiatives that they're doing there.

I've had an honor and been fortunate enough to meet with Tom Ronayne from the Suffolk County Department, with Julie Petrone. I've spoken to Mr. Sledge from the Northport VA Hospital, a woman from the Office of Mental Health to discuss some of the things that we can put together to make our initial project a resource guide starting with the Town of Huntington.

And what I have done is started to put it together. It's a work in progress. I'm very excited because of all the enthusiasm from our committee, but as I said we'd like to bring awareness to those whether we put through the Town of Huntington the Department of Resources, we have Pedersen-Krag that's local. We've included the Northport Veterans Administration because there are so many services that they do provide, the Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency, the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the regional office.

We feel that the more we get the word out there and make people aware, the better it will be for everyone. As I said, this is a work in progress. I'd love to maybe give you a copy to share, but I want you to know it's just a draft. I'm certainly going to make sure that any agency that I do put in here has given me their permission. I do have the right bullet points and we get the word out there.

I've also spoken to Julie Petrone because I know that you do have a veterans job fair in the fall. We'd like to see it a little closer to our area this year instead of Yaphank. We're looking into something maybe in the Huntington area or at Suffolk Community College. So I'll be honored to work with her on that.

Through the Huntington Chamber we do have our fall festival. It's the Long Island Fall Festival every Columbus Day weekend. And I do feel that with 350,000 people going through our fair each October, if we have our brochure available, which I promise I will have it ready, if we can get it out there, get the word out there and share with those being deployed, those returning home or supporting their families, I know it is going to be very difficult for us because I know that the names aren't given. It's very hard to find out who is out there, who's looking for help, who needs the benefits, who's looking for job referrals that we may be able to help them with. But even those passing through the fall festival if someone knows somebody and they do pick up our information, it will just be one step closer to what we're trying to achieve.

Also through our committee maybe further on down the line we can put together baskets for those returning or while they're deployed for their families whether it be movie tickets with a basket of popcorn and candy for the families or discount coupons to the local area. As I said we'd like to start within the township of Huntington, which as you know is very large, and then spread from there.

So if I may just thank you for your time, I do appreciate it. We're going to see maybe through the Chamber if there's any funding we can do for other projects. If anyone does have any ideas, please be kind enough to share them with me because we're very excited about this project. I've learned a lot. Through all my meetings that I've had so far, I've learned a lot about what's out there, what's going on and some of the several ways in which we can help.

So I do thank you for your time. If I may share this with you. As I said, please keep this in the room. It's a work in progress. I'm -- I just want to be sure before we do make our million copies that all my information is accurate. We've only been doing this for maybe six weeks now. So I do thank you for your time and it's been a pleasure to be here.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Linda, before you go, first of all, thanks so much for being here and for sharing the information with us and letting us know the good work that the Huntington Chamber of Commerce is doing for our

veterans. Couple of points. First of all, thank you for sharing the draft because we'll distribute it to members of the Committee. We'll also make copies and distribute it to all of our colleagues.

MS. MITCHELL:

It's a draft.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Because maybe they in their experience and working on behalf of their constituents have come across other programs.

MS. MITCHELL:

Right.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Maybe other services that should be included in this type of a brochure to be distributed. It is I think particularly important that the Huntington Township Chamber is engaged in this type of a project and hopefully will serve as a model for other chambers to follow throughout Suffolk County; because as you've heard, as we've all heard, particularly from our returning veterans and a great leader like Lou Della-Pizzi, that although access to medical care and social services are very important for our returning veterans and their families, what he will say is that the most important issue that our returning veterans are facing are jobs.

And so here in government we provide very important services to our returning veterans and their families, but it really is, you know, up to the private sector and to the organizations that serve the private sector to play its role in ensuring that our returning veterans have the information that they need and the training that they need as they return to the workforce.

So, you know, as you go forward, anything that we can do to help whether it's job related events that we know of, whether they're in the Town of Huntington or anywhere else in Suffolk County, any role that you can play and particular employers can play in assisting our returning veterans in finding employment, you know, would be most helpful. I'm wondering if during the course of your conversations with members of your committee if that's been an issue that you've discussed and maybe some of the things that you might be working on.

MS. MITCHELL:

We are because through the Chamber, as I said, we do have 650 members. Not all of them are that -- as involved. But I feel that those are my resources. And once we get this project going, we can get this out to our membership and tell them what we're doing and tell them that we are looking for job placement and we want them to consider our veterans first as part of what they're doing. So we'll start with that.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else? Legislator Montano.

LEG. MONTANO:

Good morning. How are you?

MS. MITCHELL:

Good. Thank you.

LEG. MONTANO:

Did you by chance read the article in Newsday about two weeks ago, a Sunday article that talked about the decline in membership in both the VFW and the American Legion? Do you know which article I'm talking about?

MS. MITCHELL:

I think I did skim through it, yes.

LEG. MONTANO:

Okay. I read it. What it essentially said was that there was -- I think in the VFW was approximately 10, 12 percent decline in membership. There's a huge age gap between, you know, our more recent veterans and, you know, those from War World II. There's some posts, and this applies to the American Legion also, there are some posts that, you know, whose members are expiring. And obviously they're not -- there's no one there to fill in and, you know, the younger veterans are concerned about family, job, etcetera, etcetera. Do you recall that? It was about two weeks ago.

MS. MITCHELL:

I have to be honest, I didn't go through the whole article.

LEG. MONTANO:

All right. Well, you probably should Google it. I think it's a good point. The question I had is how does your agency, you know, relate to or work in conjunction with the VFW's and the American Legions that experience this type of problem?

MS. MITCHELL:

Well, right now through my committee, as I said we've only started this in April. I do have a gentleman from the Marine Corps. We have other representation from the Navy so I'm trying to -- one of our committee members is going to be reaching out to the other organizations because certainly we know it's more than the Fighting 69, and there are our veterans groups --

LEG. MONTANO:

Exactly.

MS. MITCHELL:

-- to get the word out. And as I said I know that I have heard through my meetings that many of the young people coming back aren't coming forth as you said. And that's why I feel no matter how we can get the word out or make awareness, then we'll try to incorporate that in some way.

LEG. MONTANO:

And the other point I would make is I don't think the article addressed this, but as the armed forces has changed over the decades, there's been more and more increase in terms of its minority members. And you're seeing more of a veteran pool of minority members, people from minority communities, Blacks, Hispanics and others. And, you know, I'm just wondering if there's an effort to reach out also to those younger, you know, and bringing a more diverse element into the veterans organizations.

MS. MITCHELL:

Absolutely. We'd like to address that to our committee.

LEG. MONTANO:

Right. Thank you. You should read the article.

MS. MITCHELL:

I will.

LEG. MONTANO:

It actually was very good. I was, you know, browsing through it. And I generally don't read that section but I did that day.

MS. MITCHELL:

Okay, again, I thank you for your time.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Linda, thank you. Thanks so much for being with us.

Tom.

LEG. MONTANO:

Did you read it?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

No.

LEG. MONTANO:

You didn't read it either.

LEG. BROWNING:

I did.

LEG. MONTANO:

You should read it, too, Tom.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'll make it my business to look it up when I get back to the office.

LEG MONTANO:

Yeah, it's probably still on line. I think it's about two weeks old.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, the phenomena, if I can begin here, the phenomena if I can begin here --

LEG. MONTANO:

And I apologize for interrupting.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

What you're referring to is absolutely correct. And there are a number of reasons for it. Probably the single largest one is that unfortunately we are losing our older veterans at a very, very rapid pace. The rate that we were losing our World War II veterans has now begun to roll over into our older Korean war veterans. So the fact that -- when the War World II and Korean war veterans came home, the culture was very, very different than it is today. Most families were one income families. We had tremendous GI bill and housing opportunities. And a lot of the concerns that the soldiers returning home face now, they were not facing then.

You know, the other aspect of it is there was a sort of a guys' culture; the soldiers would get together, you'd go down and drink your ten cent beer and tell war stories. That's not where we are anymore. And the younger soldiers returning home, again, are more interested in resuming careers or beginning careers, going back to get their education, spending time with family and getting on with their lives.

Another enormous contributor to this is this is the first -- the two wars that we're fighting now are the first wars in the history of this nation where we've asked our soldiers to go back and fight more than once. World War II, Korea, Vietnam, with very few exceptions our soldiers went to war. When they returned, they were home. And each time a soldier came home in we had minted a new veteran. What we've got now is we've got a war that is being prosecuted largely with National Guard and reserve troops who are being asked to return for three and four and five deployments. So in an instance where I've got a soldier returning home from his fifth deployment, after World War II he would have represented five individual soldiers who would have been eligible to become a

member of one of those organizations.

So even though we're at war and we've got many, many hundreds of thousands of troops engaged in fighting these wars, the numbers of eligible folks coming home is actually quite smaller for that reason. And the organizations are hurting. You know, membership represents membership fees. Without the membership fees these organizations are struggling. So there is an impact. And it'll be interesting to see what direction they go in. I know the -- you know, fundraising is a big part of it but everybody is fundraising for something. And, you know, people are at a point where, you know, you start to -- you have to make decisions about where you're going to put your fundraising dollars or your charitable contributions when there are so many people out there asking for those dollars.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Montano.

LEG. MONTANO:

One of the points that the article addressed was that with a declining member was a decline in political clout of the VFW which then leads to a declining voice for -- an advocacy voice to benefits for the veterans that are returning home. And I know that when I was a kid, I mean, we moved out here to Long Island because my stepfather was a Korean War vet and, you know, he was able to get financing through the GI bill. And a lot of the students that I went to school with were Vietnam era vets and they were able to come back from Vietnam and go to school. So without that political clout, I think it hurts -- this is what the theme -- part of the theme was that, you know, the veterans and the veterans' movement is if you don't have the strong organizations, you don't have that strong political voice.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Unfortunately one of the organizations that is growing -- there are two that we see growing while some of the others are not. And the first one would be Amvets. And I think the reason that they're growing in membership is simply because their eligibility criteria is so liberal. They don't require that you be a combat veteran or a war time veteran or any particular type of veteran; only that you have served honorably. With an honorable discharge you're eligible to become an Amvet. So their doors are open to more -- they're not as selective in their membership criteria, not to say that they're not a wonderful organization but they're embracing everybody who has worn the uniform and been honorably discharged. Most of the other organizations have some finite criteria. Vietnam Veterans of America, the Korean War Veterans of America, Submariners. Everybody's got a very finite criteria. Amvets does not, which I think speaks to their success.

The other organization unfortunately that is seeing an expansion in numbers of eligible veterans is the disabled American veterans because we've got so many veterans coming home with injuries both physical and non-physical, psychological and emotional. And these numbers are quite shocking. And there's an argument to be made that the numbers of injuries that we're seeing are partly the result of the multiple deployments. If you have somebody deployed once, the likelihood of him being injured or wounded is X. If you deploy that same old soldier two, three, four times, you increase by a factor the likelihood or the possibility that he'll be injured or psychologically injured. So the DAV unfortunately is seeing an increase in their eligibility base.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Did you say -- what about the American Legion?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The American Legion is the largest right now veterans service organization. The membership numbers are declining. They are declining. And again there's an age gap there. And that's something that generationally eventually that will bridge itself. The same thing for the Veterans of

Foreign Wars, the number are declining.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

And I understand the VFW because I belong to the Amvets, the Vietnam Veterans of America and the American Legion in my area. And it seems like the American Legion and the Amvets are drawing a lot of people that could qualify for the VFW but aren't because the guys are all like 70 years old. And then the other two, there's 70 year olds, there's also 22 year olds. So more seem to be joining. And I don't understand. I think -- I guess it's just that perception that it's like World War II and Korean Veterans only. I'm afraid the VFW is going to shrink 'til it disappears.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, we certainly hope that they would never disappear. I shouldn't say that. Actually the VFW in their charter hopes that some day they do disappear because of lack of eligibility. As long as there is one eligible combat soldier, they will continue to exist. The prayer would be that some day we will not have any eligible members.

One of the things about the VFW is by its own name, Veterans of Foreign Wars. It's an organization comprised of combat soldiers. And typically that is going to be an older population. The combat soldiers that we're mending today are coming home, and, again, largely for the reasons that I stated earlier. But certainly generationally if you've got a 21 year old soldier coming home from Afghanistan, given the choice, by human nature he's more inclined to want to be surrounded by his peers than people his father or his grandfather's age. So I think the explanation is fairly straight forward.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Browning.

LEG. BROWNING:

I think I was -- I was going to say the same thing. I mean my husband is now considering looking to -- I know the one in south of Lakeland Avenue, it's American Legion or something. They've kind of adopted the 142nd. And so there's a number of them have joined that organization. My husband's considered it, but he's older. You know, my 25 year old, he's done his three trips to Afghanistan. He's expecting he'll go away again. He doesn't have time. You know, and like you said, they want to be with their peers. You know, they go to all these legion halls, they don't see people like them. They want to hang out with their buddies and they don't feel that -- I don't want to say they don't have the camaraderie but it's not the same for them as it is for the older ones.

So I think maybe in years to come maybe 20, 30 years from now, you might see all these ones that are currently serving in Afghanistan and Iraq are going to -- you're going to see maybe those numbers increase by them but I think it's an age thing. They're of a different mentality. And I think exactly what you said. And they are doing numerous deployments. So they're not ready to be the American Legion member or, you know, the VFW member.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

And the other thing that occurs there's a commonality amongst combat veterans. It's a brotherhood. And few things can get in between that. But one of the things that you can understand here is if you have a young fellow coming home from Iraq or Afghanistan going into a VFW hall that is predominantly World War II, even sitting together at a table discussing their own experiences and to some extent there will always be a commonality of experience, but it's difficult for the 22 year old who just came home and fought with the latest in technology and the most current of weapon systems, over the horizon targeting, and things that the World War II veteran had never heard of. Everything was, you know, humping over a hill with a rifle in his hand. The commonality of experience is not as close as it once was. And you want to be amongst your peers where you can share experiences. That's a big part of what those organizations are about, is the support of member to member, soldier to soldier. So hopefully it will reverse itself because at the core of it, the reason -- one of the reasons that that these organizations exist is for the legislative

power. And as the numbers diminish so does that legislative influence.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Legislator Montano.

LEG. MONTANO:

With respect to that issue, how are -- what is your perception of how the government is responding to our current vets? I mean, you know what I'm alluding to when -- I didn't serve but I was during, you know, during the Vietnam era I was in college at the time so by the time they got to me the war was over. But one of the issues was that the returning vets felt that they weren't getting quite the benefits that previous veterans had gotten, you know. Where do we stand today in terms of that perception? You know, you read a lot about, you know, the combat stress and the psychological issue that you mentioned earlier which are -- it's a good point that I didn't pick up on, is that they're returning back to active duty so they're not there just once. They're there, come home and then they go back. So we're seeing more of an emphasis on, you know, the combat stress which wasn't really recognized or at least -- maybe I shouldn't use the word, as appreciated, you know, generations back, but where do we stand in terms of how our government is reacting to the returning vets?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, the short answer is in Suffolk County we're doing a terrific job. Suffolk County truly is a place that if I were a returning veteran, I would hope to come home to a place like this because we have services in place. We do have a Legislature and an administration in place that is genuinely supportive and not there for the sound bytes. We do what is necessary for the veterans and very, very significantly their families. Very often people stop short of realizing that the families are a tremendous part of the big picture here. And we're doing a good job there.

We also are very fortunate to have the North Fork VA Medical Center in our county, an exceptional facility. Anybody who has not visited, I know some members have. There is also always an open invitation. If any of you would ever like to visit and tour the facility, please let me know and I will make those arrangements. I always feel it's important to understand what the resources are that we have available to us. And you're not going to get a better sense of that than walking through it.

Beyond Nassau County, we could always use more. As with anything else, it comes down to the dollars. We as everybody else are a product of the economy that we're in. We could always use more money. There's a question right now as to what the amount of our state funding will be this year. It has not yet been decided. I probably won't know until July. It's not significant but to us it's important. Federally we could certainly use more money. There are programs that we would like to be working in that for funding reasons we're unable to. And it's not something that we can remedy on a local level. The types of dollars that we're talking about would have to be federal dollars. But services to our County residents we're delivering a wonderful product. We're taking good care of our veterans. And, you know, we hope to continue to see veterans coming in in the numbers that we are seeing them and getting them the assistance and the services that we have been thus far.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I would just add that over and above government assistance when you attend, participate in many of the programs that are being offered by Suffolk County such as the most recent event at the community college, to see so many members of our community to come together in a volunteer role to provide that type of outreach and support to our returning veterans and their families, you can see why that Suffolk County as you point out Director Ronayne, if you're a returning veteran, this is the place that you would certainly want to be.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you for mentioning the homeless federal stand down. This would be a perfect time to segue into the -- I had not even put it in my notes, but based on the development of the program for the homeless veterans stand down as well as last year when we held our first annual veterans

employment and job fair, based on the program narratives that we developed to implement these programs in Suffolk County and to actually have conducted the programs and seen the result, our office is the recipient this year of so far two NACO awards, from the National Association of Counties. We're being acknowledged for our -- both the employment fair and for the homeless veterans stand down. So there is acknowledgement of the programs that we're working in Suffolk County. People beyond the county are understanding and acknowledging that what we're doing here is good stuff.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. What else you got?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Just a few things on the calendar. Wounded Warrior Project is coming to Suffolk County again. And there's going to be a great deal of activity. There'll be on Long Island and Nassau as well but we have several components that they're going to do. They're going to be running and doing a bike ride. And they will have one component out in Southampton that will have a leg that will come in from Southampton into Sag Harbor, come over the bridge in Sag Harbor, do a course in Sag Harbor and then go back over the bridge and complete the run. That run will be in honor of Corporal Jordan Haerter, who is a marine from Sag Harbor that we all remember and was recently the recipient of the Navy Cross for the services that took his life.

I'm glad that Linda Mitchell is here today. We were very happy to be invited to join the committee that is going to be working on veterans issues. They have a really ambitious aggressive program in the works. I have attended one meeting. Staff from my office has attended another. And we look forward to continuing to be involved with the Chamber doing great things. In fact I had mentioned to Linda Mitchell on the side after one of the recent meetings that given that they are so out in front of this type of program, this type of a committee, that I've committed that the next veterans employment and job fair will be in the Town of Huntington.

We need to develop a location. I'm hoping we can come up with some sort of a suitable venue along the 110 corridor somewhere using one of the members perhaps of the chamber. If not we may default to the community college in Brentwood, which is not far. But given the work they're doing and the fact that we're partnering with them, I would like very much for the next fair to be in the Town of Huntington as a demonstration of our support for communities coming out and doing whatever they can to work with our veterans. It's so important. The communities are so key. So vital to getting this work done.

Very briefly VA obviously has an acknowledgement for the economy that we are in right now; has probably temporarily but for the time being at least has revised the eligibility for category 8's. They've adjusted the income threshold for category 8's so that you can now earn ten percent more than the previous means limit which would have excluded veterans from participating. Very simply category 8 is for a non-service connected veteran who is willing to use either his private insurance or private pay and to make co pays. So it's really just a method of a veteran getting in to use the VA facilities as he would any other medical center or doctor's office. But it's important to acknowledge that they are at least allowing the Cat 8's in enroll again at this point because since 2006 they've not been enrolling category 8's. This is an important step. That's the good news at the VA.

The bad new VA, for all the talk of improving the wait time and the back log of initial claims being processed, the claims about a year ago were in the 650,000 range. We're being told, I had an e-mail this morning, that suggests that we are creeping up on the one million mark. I checked the math. It seems that we should be going in the other direction. So hopefully that's something that will right itself. Everybody has great confidence in the new secretary and we are hopeful that he'll be able to address this issue and get it going.

I've spoken on this before. One of the issues that addresses -- that affects the processing of the claims obviously a staffing, in other words people working to adjudicate claims, when you higher new people, there's actually a reverse impact because these people -- there's a learning curve.

You've got to learn what you're doing before you become proficient at it. So when you hire new people, you actually can see above a bump in the road where your numbers will fall off before they begin to improve. We're hoping that that is the case here and that sooner than later the numbers of the cases being adjudicated will begin to decline.

We've spoken several times in the past on this situation with suicides in the military. And there are many, many arguments as to why the number of suicides have been increasing. There is some programs in place now. There have been some investigations. There are some different approaches being taken and considered. The army today announced that they may, they haven't committed to it but that they may release the report containing the statistics for the actual numbers. Right now everything out there is anecdotal. We know that there were between nine and fifteen at command X. We know that there between three and eleven which really doesn't do anything for us in terms of assessing what the real situation is. I'm hopeful that they'll allow the transparency and that they have light to shine on this, release the report and let us know what the real numbers are. Let's see where the problem is more serious and take a constructive approach toward getting these soldiers the help that they so desperately deserve. Because for all that they've gone through, at the end of the day taking their own life should not be a consideration; should not be an option.

And finally I'll close with this Saturday morning I would invite anybody who would like to join us, Long Island MacArthur Airport in the southwest terminal we'll be sending off another honor flight; our World War II veterans going down to Washington for the day to spend the day visiting the monuments and the memorials.

The good news is we're getting another flight out. The June 20th flight is going out. The not so good news is we have a list now of veterans that will fill three more flights but they're out of money. So anything that any legislator or citizen, anybody individually that would like to assist they can certainly use the help. We have three plane loads that right now are anxious to go but we can't pay for them.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, what time are they going out on the 20th?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We'd be happy to see anybody who would like to join us at six AM. We get there a little bit early. By six we have the coffee and the cake and so forth set up. So that when the veterans begin arriving -- the flight is about eight AM. Anybody who has an older person in the family or a World War II veteran in the family knows that they tend to be early risers. And they tend to be early for their appointments. So for an 8 AM flight that we would ask them to be there at 6:15 for, generally -- if we asked them to be there 7:15, we generally see the 6:15 to 6:30 arrivals to ensure they have good seats. So we're there for six. We'll be setting up. It's really just a very, very satisfying experience to be there and watch these World War II veterans board the flight and go on their way. And again, I would encourage anybody who has the available time to take the trip. You'll be very happy that you did.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, thanks so much. Good to see you today.

Holly?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the resolution that you have in front of you today. It's for replacement vehicles that were funded in the 2009 capital. We're asking for at least funds for three vehicles. The vehicle are replacements. It's not that we're expanding the fleet. What we do is we purchase the vehicle, the vehicles are then leased out to the contractor in the nutrition programs. And we can't have a nutrition program without vehicles. They either take people to the nutrition

sites, if it's a congregate site, or they're used to deliver meals to the homebound. So I'm hoping that you'll allow this to go through.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, this is replacing three vehicles. How many vehicle are used by the program total?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I think it's 60 or 61. So this is just three this year. We try to replace a few every year. Some years it's been eight or nine. Other years it's as little as three. We go by how much mileage is on it, what they're telling us the condition is. Some vehicles don't have a lot of mileage but they're 10, 12 years old. So we're buying two transit buses, the 15 passenger vehicles -- no, the 14 passenger vehicles that have the center aisle which is much easier for the seniors to get on and off of. And we're also purchasing a small van because that does primarily home delivered meal runs. Okay.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

And then the other thing I'd like to just mention is that our picnic is July 21st. It's over in Southaven Park. And usually we have 1800 hundred seniors, 2500, you know depending on the year, depending on the weather. Last year it rained so it wasn't as big. And the rain date for that is July 22nd so you're all welcome to come. The letters will be going out to the Legislators this week.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Anybody else? Holly, thanks.

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

We'll take some votes. First on the agenda is -- it's moot and should be withdrawn but for today's purposes, **tabled resolution IR1331, authorizing the filing of a grant application on behalf of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) for federal capital assistance for the purchase of vans for its transportation program.**

LEG. BROWNING:

I'll make a motion.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Browning will make a motion.

LEG. BROWNING:

Subject to call.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Subject to call. I'll second the motion. This is because there was a another resolution that has essentially --

LEG. BROWNING:

Yeah. I sponsored a resolution which forgives them the ten percent that they were supposed to pay, so.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Which was all good.

LEG. BROWNING:

All good.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. So on the motion, anybody else? All in favor? Any opposition? Any abstention? Motion carries. **(Vote: 5-0)**

IR 1502, Appropriating funds in connection with the purchase and replacement of nutrition vehicles for the Office for the Aging (CP 1749) (Co. Exec.) I will make a motion to to approve.

LEG. BROWNING:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Legislator Browning. The Director of our Office of the Aging spoke on this matter. This is for three replacement vehicles to continue that important program. All in favor? Any opposition? Any abstention? Motion carries. **(Vote: 5-0)**

Any other business. All right, very good. Thank you.

**THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 12:18 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**