



## MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: 7 MAY 2013

Location: NG Aviation Facility, Concord

In Attendance:

Members:

Peter Burdett, Chairman, MOAA  
Bobby Bronske, Vice Chairman, CVMA  
Steph Riley, Secretary, NGANH  
Sen. Sharon Carson  
Sen. Sam Cataldo  
Rep. Al Baldasaro  
Rep. Robert Theberge  
Ken Maynard, AMLEGION  
Benjamin Saxon, DAV  
Ron Reilly, DAV  
Kenith Chase, MOPH  
Al Grant, VVA  
Mike Horne, ROA  
Joe DiChiaro, MOAA  
Kevin Grady, AFA  
Ed Josephson, AFA  
Marsha Bailey, Rolling Thunder  
John Domenicis, Rolling Thunder  
Diane Domenicis, Rolling Thunder  
Joe Shea, MCL  
Ray Hayes, AFSA  
Mike Rice, NH Army Retiree Council  
Raymond Schwendeman, CVMA  
Advisors: (non-voting)  
Peggy LaBrecque, NH Veterans Home  
Brig Gen Carolyn Protzmann, Deputy Adj. Gen  
Maj Gen William Reddel, TAG  
Amy Kennedy, Policy Advisor for Gov Hassan

Guests:

Peter Clark for Senator Shaheen  
Steve Monier for Senator Ayotte  
Joshua Denton for Rep Shea-Porter  
Michael Ollen for Rep McLane-Kuster  
Lisa Aldridge, NH Transition Assistance Advisor  
Rep. Frank Emiro  
Howie Howe, HOTH  
Henry Pratte, Veterans Museum of NH  
CSM John Nanof, State CSM NHARNG  
Ken Lull, NH ESGR  
Judy Crockett, Manchester VAMC  
Dan Marcek, VetFlix  
Robert Garand, Catholic War Veterans  
Russell Bilodeau, Catholic War Veterans  
Leigh Ann Shriver  
LtCol Todd Swass, NGANH  
Ian Clark, NHNGEA  
William Bates, NHNGEA  
Mark Sullivan, Veterans Count, Seacoast Chapter  
Rick Courtemanche, Veterans Count, Seacoast Chapter  
CSM Steve Houten, State CSM NHARNG  
Betty Ouellette, Veterans Count, Legacy Corps  
Daisy Wojewoda, Easter Seals  
Cynthia Sweeney, Daughters of American Revolution  
Bill Hopkins- NH Peace Action

**1. Open Meeting/ Call to order:** Chairman, Pete Burdett convened the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

**a. Pledge of Allegiance:** P Burdett      **Invocation:** J DiChiaro

**b. Welcome/Remarks:** Thanked everyone for taking time to be here. The TAG, MajGen Reddel, would like to announce that the State CSM John Nanof will be retiring and CSM Steve Houten will be taking over the position to oversee the enlisted force on the Army side. (Introduced both men at the meeting.)

## Approved

Pete said that Autofair emailed him to say that the response in offering jobs to veterans was light, wanted veterans with any interest in the Autofair jobs to email him.

The Dental for Vets event last Saturday by a dental group, Dovetail Dental Associates, in Moultonborough gave around \$15,000 in free dental care to vets. Please thank them if you have any interaction with them.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Combined Enlisted and Officer NGANH State Conference was held on 13 APR and Pete received the Wentworth Achievement Award. He accepted it on behalf of the SVAC.

### **c. Introduction of New Members/Guests/Visitors:**

John and Diane Domenicis, Rolling Thunder alternates

Peter Clark, standing in for Sarah Holmes

MSG Ian Clark, NHNGEA

MSgt William Bates, NHNGEA

Mark Sullivan, Veterans Count, Seacoast Chapter

Rick Courtemanche, Veterans Count, Seacoast Chapter

CSM Steve Houten, State CSM NHARNG

Betty Ouellette, Veterans Count, Legacy Corps

Daisy Wojewoda, Easter Seals

Cynthia Sweeney, Daughters of American Revolution

Bill Hopkins- NH Peace Action (anti-war, anti Pentagon spending, non-profit)

**d. Secretary's Report:** S Riley reported the presence of a quorum, making it an official meeting. The minutes from the APR 2013 meeting were approved with a motion by A Baldasaro, and a 2nd by B Saxon, unanimous vote to accept minutes.

### **e. Speakers:**

Daisy Wojewoda and Betty Ouellette for BG Harry Miller, Vets Respite Program- wanting to do other programs for vets, recently got involved with a program called Legacy Corps. Betty Ouellette is the program manager for Legacy Corps, which is a respite program for people who are caring for disabled or elderly veterans. It is for vets of any era or age and for their family members. Have volunteers that can do 10-12 hours per week at no cost, mostly in the Manchester, Seacoast, Lakes Region areas. It is related to the Americorps Program and the main grant is through Maryland. Volunteers get a monthly stipend, get rigorous screening and training. The respite is a break for the caregiver of a disabled vet, for a single vet that is disabled and needs a break, for a spouse that might need babysitting, etc. The program is starting in Manchester and will continue through the next fiscal year. Can recruit volunteers up North if there is a need. There is a DCSP care coordinator in that area, Sue Watson, that could help coordinate that if there is a need.

[Burdett]- should hook her up with Jay Sprinkle, Director of the Berlin Vet Center, to get referrals for this program.

Lisa Aldridge, Vet Center Open House- Press Event, Open House and BBQ at the Berlin Vet Center on 17 MAY 2013. At noon there is the press event with speakers to include Ray Burton, Dave Canter, Jo Moncher, Rob Norris, Jay Sprinkle and John Pagan. From 1230-1400 there is the tour of the Vet Center and a BBQ provided by the Common Man. Will also be handing out copies of the new North Country Homeless Resource Guide. POC's Lisa Aldridge and Jay Sprinkle.

## **2. Old Business:**

**a. Legislative Committee- Ed Josephson:** has sent out the LSR spreadsheet to everyone. There are 2 hearings this week on HB 220 and HB 524, only scheduled for 15 minutes each so it doesn't appear that they anticipate much opposition to the bills.

**HB 220-** NH Medal of Honor- submitted to clean up the language regarding the qualifications for it.

**HB 524-** relative to National Guard facilities, the national guard scholarship fund and the state active duty death benefit. To allow us to do federal contracts on state land. Also had some scholarship language in this bill

**HB 233-** Care of the War Memorial in Franconia Notch. Has been special ordered to the next session which means that it has been postponed to the next meeting.

**SB 47-** relative to a surviving spouse's right to retain the Purple Heart plate. It had a hearing on 23 APR in the Transportation Committee. There were 2 speakers in support and 5 or 6 in opposition. Not sure how it will turn out, the executive session has not been scheduled for it.

**SB 88-** the Honor and Remember Flag. Has a hearing scheduled for 16 MAY.

**SB 90-** establishing a committee to study developing a policy for vet preference for government hiring.

[Carson]-Jo Moncher approached her to ask if the Senate Commission on TBI and PTSD could be extended for another year. Amendment was added to the bill to do that. In the fall, am planning on introducing a bill to make it permanent. They will be submitting a report to the Governor by the end of the year on their accomplishments.

**HB 399-** NH Liberty Act. It passed the House 337 to 15.

[Carson]-The Senate Judiciary committee killed the bill today. Had a meeting with Gen Protzmann and the JAG last week to speak about the problems with the bill prior to the committee meeting.

[Protzmann]- The TAG doesn't usually take a stand on a bill unless our department sponsors it. With regard to the Liberty Act, the problem with it from a National Guard perspective is that we become criminally liable if we are federalized. The act itself prohibits material support and participation from the state of NH in connection with some aspects of the NDAA relative to detention and other support with regards to terrorist activities. As federal employees we are covered by the Torte Act but if we are mobilized by the state and perform duties related to this activity, we are not covered according to this legislation. It would make us criminally liable. Our military lawyers took a look at this and decided to bring our concerns to Sen. Carson to make her aware of the implications of the act.

**HCR 1 and HCR 2** handouts were passed around.

[Theberge]- there is a group out of San Francisco called the Free Speech for People Alliance and their main objective is to push and pass HCR 2. In order to get that done, they want to use Rep Baldasaro's resolution HCR 1 as a vehicle to promote their agenda. They want to have veterans come to a press conference and show support for HCR 2. They want to use veterans for their political gain and have all 6 New England states adopt similar resolutions.

[Baldasaro]- As the sponsor of HCR 1, am willing to take the loss. Would like a letter from SVAC to make position clear that we don't want to use vets for political gain.

[Carson]- Background on HCR 2, Citizens United Decision. A few years ago the US Supreme Court allowed corporations to do a lot of activities within the political realm. The state of Montana has already sued the federal government over this ruling, they have lost the case. They decided that it was a freedom of speech issue so that is why the ruling stood. The resolution requests Congress to begin the process for a constitutional amendment establishing that human beings, not corporations, are entitled to constitutional rights. The NH Senate President made a decision not to play the political game with resolutions.

[Theberge]- regarding HCR 1, hoping to come up with a medical veteran's card that can be used at civilian providers. Will create an ad hoc committee to look at setting up a pilot program for this.

[Denton]- On Jan 15, Congress introduced HR 257 Veteran Health Equity Act. It requires the 48 contiguous states to have a full service VA. If they do not have that, it requires that they issue a veterans' card. The bill is currently in the House Veteran Affairs Sub-committee

[Monier]- Sen. Shaheen and Sen. Ayotte have sponsored legislation to get a full service VA in Manchester or have veterans sent to community resources

[Burdett]- Sen. Ayotte also wants to fit in a mental health pilot program

[Howe]-VA regulations state that NH is in full compliance with veteran health care because we are within 3 hours of a full service VA: Togus, Boston or WRJ. The federal regulations need to change in order to get the Manchester VA full service.

**HB 34-** Sen. Carson will work on crafting legislation to show how military occupations can translate to licenses and certifications. Will have it added to the bill as an amendment.

**b. State Budget- (Baldasaro)** a budget was passed on the House side that takes out \$750,000 out of the Veterans Home. The residents of the Veterans Home are getting letters that say they need to start paying for the purchase of the Depends diapers that they might need to wear. If the budget goes through, the Veterans Home will have to try and request more funds or may have to shut down parts of the facility.

[Labrecque]- appreciate the support. The \$750,000 is 5% of the general funds. Needed to look at every single line item in order to balance budget and the charging for depends was one way to make ends meet.

**c.** Frank Emiro was recognized for his contributions to SVAC. Will be moving to Arizona soon.

### **3. New Business:**

#### **a. National Legislative Staff Remarks:**

##### **Peter Clark (Senator Shaheen):**

SHAHEEN STATEMENT ON SECRETARY HAGEL'S DECISION TO SEEK CHANGES TO MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM

(Washington, D.C.) - U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) this afternoon applauded Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel's decision to seek changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) which will help ensure justice for sexual assault victims. The news comes a month after Shaheen and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) called on Hagel to review the military justice system in light of the unilateral dismissal of the sexual assault conviction of Lieutenant Colonel James Wilkerson after he was initially convicted by a jury of his peers. Shaheen and Boxer specifically called

on Hagel to "to take immediate steps to restrict Convening Authorities from unilaterally dismissing military court decisions."

**SHAHEEN WELCOMES NAVY DECISION TO NAME NEW COMBAT SHIP AFTER THE CITY OF MANCHESTER** (Washington, DC) - U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) welcomed news today that the United States Navy will be naming a new Littoral Combat Ship USS Manchester in recognition of Manchester, New Hampshire. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus personally called Shaheen this morning to give the news and inform her that the ship's expected completion date would be August 2016.

**SHAHEEN, COLLINS, AYOTTE, KING WELCOME SUPPORT FOR SHIPYARD AND VIRGINIA CLASS SUBMARINE IN FY14 BUDGET** (Washington, DC) - U.S. Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Susan Collins (R-ME), Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), and Angus King (I-ME) released this statement following (applauded) the release of the White House's Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 budget request, which calls for \$11.5 million in funding for new military construction at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard as well as two Virginia-class submarines:

"We're pleased that the Administration's budget request recognizes the importance of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard to our country's national security. The budget request would accelerate the investment of \$11 million in much-needed military construction at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, even as the Department has postponed or cancelled more than \$4 billion in other military construction projects around the country during the next five years. These resources, as well as the planned procurement of two Virginia class submarines, are steps in the right direction to modernize our nation's four public shipyards so they can continue to safely and efficiently maintain the ships and submarines that protect our shores. As the budget process moves forward, we remain committed to working together to support the yard and its dedicated workforce."

The funding called for in the White House budget will go towards the consolidation of structural shops, which will improve the efficiency of operations at the Shipyard. The budget also requests two Virginia class submarines in FY 2014.

**SHAHEEN PRESSES FOR COST SAVINGS, EFFICIENCY, OVERSIGHT IN FY 2014 DEFENSE SPENDING** As Chair of Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, Shaheen also reiterates opposition to Pentagon's BRAC closure recommendation (Washington, DC) - U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Chair of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, led a subcommittee hearing today to consider the FY 2014 Defense Authorization bill and budget priorities for the Department of Defense's installation projects and environmental programs. Shaheen looked to the witnesses testifying - which included representatives from each of the military services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense - to identify savings in defense spending and military construction while maintaining critical national defense operations and pursuing environmental protection measures.

**SHAHEEN, AYOTTE CALL ON WHITE HOUSE TO TAKE ACTION ON VETERANS DISABILITY BACKLOG** (WASHINGTON, D.C.) - U.S. Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) today joined a broad, bipartisan coalition of senators in calling upon the White House to take direct and urgent action to end the current Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims backlog. In the letter sent this morning to President Obama, the senators pointed to the unacceptable delays veterans are facing across the country, which in some cases reach more than 1000 days.

**SHAHEEN CONDEMNS LATEST MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTS** Shaheen to be briefed on Sexual Assault Prevention Office's annual report this afternoon (Washington, DC) - U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) this morning condemned the latest allegations of sexual misconduct in the military after it was reported yesterday that an Air Force sexual assault prevention officer was charged with sexual battery over the weekend. A second report also indicated that another Air Force general granted "clemency to a convicted sex offender without any public explanation." This marks the second time this year that an Air Force official overturned a jury's guilty verdict on a sexual assault case. Shaheen, who chairs the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, has been a leader on addressing sexual assault in the military. Later today, Shaheen will be briefed by Major General Gary Patton, the Director of the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), on the SAPRO annual report before it is released later today.

**Steve Monier (Senator Ayotte):**

**April 8, 2013**

Senator Ayotte sent a letter to Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki, along with Senator Shaheen (D-NH) and Representatives Ann Kuster (D-NH-2) and Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH-1), urging him to consider opening a combined access clinic and telehealth center in Colebrook that would help address the difficulty that North Country veterans currently face in accessing medical care.

**April 9, 2013**

Senator Ayotte introduced the Never Contract with the Enemy Act (S. 675). This legislation enhances and expands authorities that Senator Ayotte successfully included in the fiscal year (FY) 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA; Public Law 112-81) that currently allow the commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) in Afghanistan to expeditiously terminate contracts in the event that U.S. tax dollars are found to be either directly or indirectly benefitting enemies of the U.S. and expands them to all federal agencies.

**Also on April 9**, Senator Ayotte introduced S. 680, a bill to rescind amounts appropriated for FY 2013 for the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS). Despite Congress having passed an amendment in the FY 2013 NDAA (Public Law 112-239) ending funding for MEADS, a failed program that the Department of Defense (DoD) has said it will never procure, the continuing resolution under which the federal government is currently operating appropriated an additional \$380 million in circumvention of this law. Senator Ayotte has been a leading voice in Congress on defunding MEADS, which she has denounced as the "missile to nowhere."

**Also on April 9**, Senator Ayotte along with Senators Shaheen, Susan Collins (R-ME), and Angus King (I-ME) introduced Senate Resolution (S. Res.) 94, a resolution recognizing the 50th anniversary of the sinking of the U.S.S. Thresher (SSN 593).

#### **April 10, 2013**

Senator Ayotte joined Senator Shaheen in opposing a new Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round following the release of the president's FY 2014 budget proposal, which calls for a new BRAC round in 2015. "The last BRAC round did not achieve the intended savings," the Senators said. "Now is not the time to spend billions of dollars on another BRAC round, especially as the Department of Defense grounds combat aircraft, cancels ship deployments, and furloughs workers due to sequestration." Senators Ayotte and Shaheen are ranking member and chair, respectively, of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support.

#### **April 11, 2013**

Senator Ayotte issued a joint statement with Senators Shaheen, Collins, and King welcoming the administration's commitment to improving shipyard infrastructure and calling for continued modernization efforts.

#### **April 15, 2013**

Senator Ayotte applauded Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's announcement that DoD plans to reverse its decision to award a Distinguished Warfare Medal (DWM) to cyber personnel and drone pilots. DWM would have ranked above the Bronze Star and Purple Heart in order of precedence. In March, Senator Ayotte joined a bipartisan group of senator in sending a letter to Secretary Hagel urging him to reconsider his decision. She also cosponsored related legislation.

#### **April 16, 2013**

Senator Ayotte received the endorsement of General Joseph Dunford Jr., Commander of the International Security Assistance Force and Commander, U.S. Forces, Afghanistan for her Never Contract with the Enemy legislation (S. 675) during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing regarding Afghanistan. General Dunford stated that the authorities provided in the Ayotte amendment to the FY 2012 NDAA have "saved taxpayer dollars" and "more importantly... been able to prevent those dollars from being in the hand of the enemy who would do us harm."

**Also on April 16**, Senator Ayotte attended a breakfast meeting at the Pentagon with Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley and Air Force Vice Chief of Staff General Larry O. Spencer, along with Senators Shaheen, Manchin (D-WV), and Wicker (R-MS) as part of the Pentagon's Congressional outreach effort. Secretary Donley is a key decision maker in the selection of the first Air National Guard base to receive the KC-46A refueling tanker.

**Also on April 16**, Senator Ayotte met with Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), Stuart Bowen, to discuss his last trip to Iraq and the findings in SIGIR's recently issued final report to Congress. Senator Ayotte received SIGIR's endorsement for her Never Contract with the Enemy legislation. He said, "In Iraq, SIGIR documented many contracting problems that reportedly involved our tax dollars falling into the hands of the enemy. Much progress has been made on improving contingency contracting, but we must take action to enhance existing legislation and reduce these vulnerabilities. The Ayotte-Blumenthal 'Never Contract with the Enemy Act' (S. 675) sensibly embodies such action. The Congress should enact this legislation, which would help all federal agencies serve as better financial stewards and improve the protection of our national security interests."

#### **April 17, 2013**

Senator Ayotte stated her support for allowing the Navy the discretion to forgo furloughing civilian employees during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

**Also on April 17**, Senator Ayotte, along with Senator Shaheen, sent a letter to Secretary Hagel urging him to provide maximum flexibility to the service branches in an effort to avoid furloughing civilian employees.

**Also on April 17**, Senator Ayotte met with New Hampshire Military Officer Association of America member to discuss issues facing service members.

**April 18, 2013**

Senator Ayotte questioned Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper and Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lieutenant General Michael Flynn about the September 11, 2012 terrorist attack on the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on worldwide threats. She inquired as to who in the intelligence community (IC) had briefed the president and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on the situation during the attack, whether the IC had sufficient information about the deteriorating security situation in Libya prior to the attack, the accuracy of the talking points provided to UN Ambassador Susan Rice, and the lessons that the IC has taken from the tragedy.

**April 23, 2013**

Senator Ayotte questioned Army Secretary John McHugh and Army Chief of Staff General Raymond T. Odierno during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Army posture.

**Also on April 23**, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution introduced by Senator Ayotte and Senator Murray (D-WA) recognizing the month of April 2013 as the National Month of the Military Child.

During a Senate Budget Committee hearing today, U.S. Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) pressed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki and other senior VA officials to provide better care to North Country veterans. Citing the difficulty that North Country veterans currently face in accessing care, Senator Ayotte called for the VA to establish a contract for inpatient services at the Androscoggin Valley Hospital in Berlin, as well as a part-time access clinic in Colebrook, co-located with a telehealth site. Senator Ayotte also highlighted the need for a full service VA medical center in Manchester. While New Hampshire veterans continue to wait for a full service VA medical center, Senator Ayotte asked VA officials to consider expanded contract services with local hospitals. "Many of our veterans are traveling long distances to get the care that they deserve and across state lines and it is very difficult for many of them...Our veterans in our North Country deserve the same kinds of access [as] other more populated areas of the state," she said. In response to a question from Senator Ayotte, Secretary Shinseki said, "It shouldn't matter whether it's a veteran living in a rural area or a veteran living in an urban environment...we have to create the opportunities to meet those requirements, whether it's a full-service hospital or some combination of working with quality hospitals that are currently available to us, we arrange our relationships to provide what veterans deserve." Last year, Senator Ayotte and Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) urged Secretary Shinseki to consider establishing a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Colebrook to serve North Country veterans. Last month, Senator Ayotte and fellow delegation members sent another letter to Secretary Shinseki to request that the VA locate a part-time access clinic with a proposed telehealth site in Colebrook, and reiterated the North Country's need for a CBOC.

**April 24, 2013**

During a Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, Senator Ayotte questioned Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Installations and Environment, John Conger, regarding BRAC decisions and the required environmental impact study for an east coast missile defense site which she successfully included in the FY 2013 NDAA. She also asked Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Installations, Environment, and Logistics, Kathleen Ferguson, for an update on the decision-making process for the basing of the KC-46A.

**Also on April 24**, Senator Ayotte attended a classified all members briefing on Syria and North Korea. The briefing was conducted by Secretary of State John Kerry, DNI James Clapper, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Dr. James N. Miller, and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Sandy Winnefeld, Jr.

**Also on April 24**, Senator Ayotte sent a letter along with Senator John McCain (R-AZ) to Senator Tom Carper (D-DE), chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, of which both are members, requesting a hearing to investigate whether intelligence officials had information that could have prevented the Boston Marathon terrorist attack.

**April 26, 2013**

Senator Ayotte sent a letter along with Senator Reed (D-RI) to Senators Durbin (D-IL) and Cochran (R-MS), chair and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Appropriations Committee, urging them to support grants to community partners that engage in research, treatment, education, and outreach activities for traumatic brain injury, mental health, and substance abuse disorders among members of the National Guard and Reserves.

**Also on April 26**, Senator Ayotte sent a letter to Senators Johnson (D-SD) and Kirk (R-IL), chair and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, urging them to support the American Battle Monuments Commission's effort to maintain the Clark Veterans Cemetery.

**On Tuesday, May 7, 2013**, Senator Ayotte and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) introduced a Bill to Combat Military Sexual Assault. Of the estimated 19,000 cases of military sexual assault in 2011, 3,192 were reported. That number rose to 26,000 cases in 2012, with 3,374 reported. Bill would provide greater victim resources while improving current DoD prevention programs

(Washington, D.C.) - Today, as the Pentagon's annual report on sexual assault showed an alarming increase in cases, U.S. Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) introduced the Combating Military Sexual Assault (MSA) Act of 2013. In an effort to reduce sexual assaults within the military and help the victims of this crime, the Combating MSA Act would address a number of gaps within current law and policy and build upon the positive steps the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has taken in recent years. According to DoD estimates, there were about 19,000 cases of military sexual assault in 2011 alone. Of these, 3,192 were reported, leaving thousands of victims to face the aftermath alone as their assailants escape justice. That number rose to 26,000 cases in 2012 with less than 3,400 of those cases being reported.

**Josh Denton (Congresswoman Shea-Porter):**

The Congresswoman recently:

- . Spoke at the USS Thresher memorial event on April 6th;
- . Spoke at the National Guard Association event on April 13th;
- . Read a bedtime story to the families of the 169th AVN on April 13th; and
- . Spoke at the deployment ceremony of the 238th AVN on April 29. Newly cosponsoring

**H.R. 588** The Vietnam Veterans Donor Acknowledgement Act, which the Congresswoman was an original cosponsor of, passed on Monday;

The Congresswoman has recently cosponsored:

- . H.R. 1209 To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the World War II members of the "Doolittle Tokyo Raiders", for outstanding heroism, valor, skill, and service to the United States in conducting the bombings of Tokyo;
- . H.R. 1494 Blue Water Navy Ship Accountability Act to direct the Secretary of Defense to review the operation of certain ships during the Vietnam era; and
- . H.R. 1598, the Veteran's I.D. Card Act.

The Congresswoman has also written a letter to Shinseki at VA: Pressing for Answers on Health Effects of Burn Pits, requesting that exposure to burn pits be considered a presumptive condition by the VA, granting veterans expanded access to medical care

**Michael Ollen (Congresswoman McLane-Kuster):**

**April 18, 2013**, Rep. Kuster helped introduce, **H.R. 1623, the VA Claims Efficiency Through Information Act of 2013**. Introduced by Rep. Gloria Negrete McLeod (D-CA), this legislation will provide Congress and the public with highly detailed information regarding the VA's performance and further break down information into medical claims. I.E. VA would have to provide how long it takes to adjudicate a PTSD claim This level of information would positively serve the VA and Congress with a better understanding of the problems and ways to address them.

**April 25, 2013**, Rep. Kuster helped introduce, **Pay Veterans as you Go Act**. This bill would require the VA to pay veterans as individual medical conditions as soon as they are adjudicated thereby paying veterans at a faster rate.

**April 25, 2013**, Rep. Kuster helped introduce, the **Troop Talent Act**. Introduced by Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), this bill would improve the alignment of specialty skills acquired in the military with civilian certifications or licenses required for post-service employment, expands existing efforts to meet current workforce demands, and implements quality assurance measures to ensure credentials translate into the private sector.

**April 25, 2013**, Rep. Kuster helped introduce, **H.R. 1759 the Require Detailed Reporting VA Information Requests to Federal Agencies**. Introduced by Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA), this legislation would require VA to provide quarterly updates to Congress in regards to the timeliness of other agencies in fulfilling their information requests. Veteran's claims are often untimely because VA is waiting for other agencies to provide information. By having more definitive data, VA and Congress can work to reduce these bottlenecks.

**April 26, 2013**, Rep. Kuster helped introduce, the **VA Faster Filing Bill**. This bill expedite claims processing by educating veterans on the quickest route to receive their decision and provides veterans with information regarding VA's timeliness for adjudicating claims in different formats such as paper application or online utilizing the Fully Developed Claims program.

**April 26, 2013**, Rep. Kuster helped introduce, the **Adjudication Centers of Excellence Act**. Introduced by Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Mike Michaud (D-ME), this legislation will create a pilot that will utilize the highest performing offices to adjudicate the most difficult medical conditions such as PTSD and TBI, with the belief that office's specializing in specific medical conditions will create timely efficiencies and increase the accuracy of those ratings.

**April 26, 2013**, Rep. Kuster helped introduce the **VA Regional Office Accountability Act**. Introduced by Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY), this legislation would require VA Regional Offices (VARO) that fails to meet the administrative goal of processing claims within 125 days at a 98% accuracy to provide a report to Congress as to why this happened and what they need to meet their goal. It would also ask VA leadership to explain how the VARO leadership missing their goal was reflected in their performance evaluation. This will better assist Congress in understanding the on the ground challenges and how they can better assist.

#### **Kuster Unveils Legislative Package to Address VA Claims Backlog**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – As part of her commitment to serving our nation's veterans, Congresswoman Annie Kuster (NH-02) and a group of lawmakers on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee are announcing a coordinated legislative package to help the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) in its efforts to address the growing claims backlog. The package of ten bills seeks to help the VA meet its goal of eliminating the backlog in full by 2015, and includes legislation introduced by Congresswoman Kuster that would encourage the VA to make greater use of automation in the processing of veterans claims, increasing efficiency within the Department and freeing up resources to provide more timely services for veterans.

"As a nation, we have no higher responsibility than to serve our courageous veterans as well as they have served us," Kuster said. "Meeting that responsibility demands that both parties come together to help address the growing claims backlog so that we can more efficiently deliver veterans the benefits they have earned. That's exactly with our legislative package will help do, and I'm proud to join so many of my colleagues in taking this important step forward." "As a new member of Congress, Rep. Kuster has repeatedly proven her commitment to supporting our nation's veterans," said Rep. Mike Michaud (ME-02), ranking member on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. "Her bill to improve the automation of claims processing will help advance our effort to eliminate the VA claims backlog, and I am grateful for her commitment to this critical issue."

"I am thrilled that our Congresswoman is being so proactive on this issue that has plagued veterans for years," added New Hampshire State Rep. Steve Shurtleff of Penacook, a Vietnam veteran. "Taking these steps in the right direction is essential to ensuring that our veterans have access to the medical care they need and deserve."

The legislative package seeks to bolster VA's current efforts to modernize and foster further innovation in order to get veterans' claims and compensation settled faster. Some bills would have an immediate impact, some over the next two years, and others are designed to be long-term approaches to prevent future backlogs. Goals of the legislative package include:

- Ensuring VA has the needed information to accurately process claims by requiring better interagency collaboration between VA and entities such as DoD;
- Encouraging VA to look at better ways to process claims in an electronic system; and
- Strengthening accountability by requiring VA to track information in a more efficient and effective way that is provided to the public.

The 10 bills introduced and soon to be introduced include:

**Encouraging the automation of certain VA claims (Rep. Kuster)** – requires VA to provide an annual report to list those medical conditions that are processed in an electronic automated fashion, the feasibility/consideration for adding additional medical conditions, and any barriers barring VA from adding those medical conditions that are not automated.

**IMPACT:** The reporting would require VA to consider how and if any of the medical conditions that they adjudicate could be automated or simplified. Any work that can be automated or simplified will allow VA to focus limited resources on the more challenging workload.

**VA Claims, Operations and Records Efficiency Act (Rep. Kirkpatrick)** – requires DoD to provide certified, complete, and electronic records to VA within 21 days.

**IMPACT:** Would substantially reduce the amount of time spent waiting for DoD to provide information in a timely manner.



**Claims adjudication Centers of Excellence (Rep. Michaud)** – requires VBA to establish a pilot for Conditions Adjudication Centers of Excellence that would focus on the 10 most complex and time consuming medical conditions.

**IMPACT:** The pilot would utilize the highest performing offices to adjudicate the most difficult medical conditions, such as PTSD and TBI, encouraging the VA to specialize claims processing by condition, reduce the time it takes to adjudicate these conditions, and decrease the error rates on difficult claims.

**Pay veterans as medical conditions are adjudicated (Rep. Titus)** – requires VA to pay for medical conditions as they are adjudicated in an electronic system.

**IMPACT:** Currently, veterans receive payment when all medical conditions within a claim are fully adjudicated. This legislation will require VA to pay veterans as individual medical conditions are adjudicated, which will pay veterans at a faster rate.

**Expedite claims processing by educating veterans on the quickest route to receive their decision (Rep. O'Rourke)** – provides veterans with information regarding VA's timeliness for adjudicating claims in different formats such as paper application or online utilizing the Fully Developed Claims program.

**IMPACT:** Would encourage and educate veterans to utilize methods that may increase the timeliness of their claims.

**H.R. 1521 (Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney)** – extends VA's authority to contract for medical disability examinations by five years.

**IMPACT:** VA's ability to have contractors provide medical exams increases the availability and timeliness of those exams. VA needs the support of the contract exams to reach the goal of processing all claims within 125 days by 2015. Without this reauthorization, VA medical examinations would overwhelm the VA health-care system.

**H.R. 1623 (Rep. Negrete-McLeod)** – requires VA to provide numerous data points in an online setting that would better detail the backlog, the timeliness and accuracy of VA regional offices, and timeliness and accuracy of adjudicating specific medical conditions.

**IMPACT:** The reporting would provide both the VA, the public, and policy-makers with better clarity on the backlog and the specific claims that are proving to be a challenge. This additional level of detail was not available in the legacy paper system. VA indicates that this level of clarity should be available in VBMS. This would insure that VBA builds in the capability of understanding the workload at this level of granularity and ultimately may lead to gains in efficiency by better understanding the backlog and ways to address it.

**Require VA to maximize the use of private medical evidence (Rep. Walz)** – amends title 38, United States Code, section 5103A(d)(1) to provide that, when a claimant submits private medical evidence, including a private medical opinion, that is competent, credible, probative, and otherwise adequate for rating purposes, the Secretary shall not request a VA medical examination.

**IMPACT:** Would conserve resources and enable quicker, more accurate rating decisions for veterans.

**Require annual reports on VA regional offices that fail to meet backlog reduction goals (Rep. Meng)** – requires annual reports on VA regional offices that are not meeting their administrative goal of no claim taking longer than 125 days with 98% accuracy. Details would be required explaining why the office did not meet the goal, what they need to meet it, and how failure to meet the goal was considered in regards to the VARO Director's performance appraisal.

**IMPACT:** The reporting requirement would serve as a motivator for leadership to meet their administrative goal. It would also provide additional information in regards to the backlog at the individual VARO level and the information could assist policy-makers in considering additional solutions to reduce the backlog and provide better services to veterans.

**Require Detailed Reporting on VA Information Requests to Federal Agencies (Rep. Ruiz)** – requires VA to track all information requests to other federal entities.

**IMPACT:** Would require VA to provide quarterly updates to Congress in regards to the timeliness of other agencies in fulfilling their information requests. Veteran's claims are often untimely because VA is waiting for other agencies to provide information. By having more definitive data, VA and Congress can work to reduce these bottlenecks.

**b. Bring Bowe Home-(Howe)** Holding an event at Veteran's Park in Manchester that will serve as a fundraiser to help defray his parents' costs of flying to DC monthly to pressure them to bring his son home. On June 22 there is an event being held in Idaho, where Bowe is from, and want to hold a concurrent event in Manchester. Need to have more support from veterans to help get this event scheduled by the city.

**c. Bi-Annual Report-** the report was sent out to everyone and a few minor changes were recommended. Motion made by M Horne, seconded by K Grady to accept the report, passed with a unanimous vote. The report will be sent out to various organizations.

**d. By-laws** offer up the cycle for SVAC elections. The Chair and the Secretary are elected in the even years and the Vice Chair is elected in the odd years. Will open up the nominations for the Vice Chair for one month and will be

## Approved

voting on it at the June meeting. A nomination for Bobby Bronske to serve was made by A Baldasaro, seconded by B Saxon.

#### **4. Misc. / Announcements / Calendar Items:**

11 MAY- Friends of Vets at WRJ-Homeless Vets Fundraiser/ motorcycle ride  
15 MAY Killarney's Pub, Nashua 1800-2000- Science Café NH on PTSD and TBI  
17 May at 1200- Stand Up for Vets Press Event and Open House at Berlin Vet Center  
18 MAY Veterans Count SOS event, Pack and Boots race and dinner, [www.vetscount.org](http://www.vetscount.org)  
23 MAY- House Veterans Affairs meeting 0900 Room 203 LOB- Rep Robert Theberge  
24 MAY- Manchester Vet Center grand opening  
26 MAY at 1730 Vesting in Veterans BBQ at The Greenhouse at the Italian Farmhouse in Plymouth, NH  
27 MAY at 1100- Memorial Day ceremony at the NH Veterans Home  
30 MAY at 1100- NH State Veterans Cemetery ceremony  
13 JUN at 1700- Northeast POW demo motorcycle ride during bike week in Gilford  
15-17 JUN- Rotary Rock'n Ribfest (Veterans Count) Merrimack  
3 AUG- Northern NE Military Retiree Day- NH Aviation Facility- 0800-1300, opening ceremony at 0900

**5. Motion to adjourn** 1st A Baldasaro, 2nd A Grant and the meeting ended at 1850.

**Next meeting date: 4 JUN 2013 (Regularly the 1st Tue at 1700) Location: NG Aviation Facility - Concord, NH**

Respectfully submitted,

Steph Riley  
Secretary