

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS  
COMMITTEE

joint with the

SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS  
COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING

STATE CAPITOL  
HARRISBURG, PA

NORTH OFFICE BUILDING  
HEARING ROOM #1

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2018  
9:01 A.M.

PRESENTATION ON VETERANS ISSUES

HOUSE COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

HONORABLE STEPHEN BARRAR, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN  
HONORABLE LYNDY SCHLEGEL CULVER  
HONORABLE MARK M. GILLEN  
HONORABLE BARRY J. JOZWIAK  
HONORABLE JIM MARSHALL  
HONORABLE KATHY L. RAPP  
HONORABLE FRANCIS XAVIER RYAN  
HONORABLE WILL TALLMAN  
HONORABLE CHRIS SAINATO, MINORITY CHAIRMAN  
HONORABLE BRYAN BARBIN  
HONORABLE ANITA ASTORINO KULIK

1 SENATE COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

2 HONORABLE RANDY VULAKOVICH, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN  
3 HONORABLE RYAN AUMENT  
4 HONORABLE ELISABETH BAKER  
5 HONORABLE MICHELLE BROOKS  
6 HONORABLE SCOTT HUTCHINSON

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*Pennsylvania House of Representatives*  
*Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

1 HOUSE COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:

2 RICK O'LEARY, MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
3 SEAN HARRIS, MAJORITY RESEARCH ANALYST  
4 LU ANN FAHNDRICH, MAJORITY ADMINISTRATIVE  
5 ASSISTANT  
6 AMY BRINTON, MINORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
7 HARRY BUCHER, MINORITY RESEARCH ANALYST  
8 IAN MAHAL, MINORITY RESEARCH ANALYST

9 SENATE COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:

10 NATE SILCOX, MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
11 RON JUMPER, MINORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

\* \* \*

(See submitted written testimony and handouts online.)

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## 1 P R O C E E D I N G S

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3 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: I'm  
4 Senator Randy Vulakovich, I call this joint hearing of the  
5 Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness  
6 Committees to order.

7 As is our custom, I would ask that everyone  
8 rise. Please join me in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance  
9 to the flag.

10 (Pledge of Allegiance recited.)

11 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: You're  
12 starting to talk like us people from Pittsburgh.

13 Thanks to Chairman Barrar for working with me  
14 to put together this hearing, which we will highlight what  
15 the department is doing for our nearly 820,000 veterans in  
16 Pennsylvania. We will also hear from our veterans  
17 organizations on their legislative goals. We also have some  
18 written remarks for the record.

19 I thank the department and the men and women  
20 that are here today for all they have done for our country  
21 and what they are doing today for their fellow veterans. In  
22 working together, I believe we have accomplished a great  
23 deal in my short time as chairman of this committee.

24 And so far this session, we've passed  
25 Representative Saccone's House Bill 165, which authorizes

1 two new medals for those serving veterans; House Bill 1231  
2 codifies into law the department's Veterans Registry; and we  
3 hope to have the Veterans' Monument and Memorial Trust  
4 legislation done in the near future.

5           Before I turn it over to my fellow chairman  
6 for remarks, I want to note for the record that my co-chair,  
7 Senator Jay Costa, and members of the Democratic Caucus,  
8 they are unable to be with us today due to a caucus meeting  
9 they're having. However, Ron Jumper, their minority  
10 executive director, is here.

11           Be sure to disseminate all information to the  
12 members.

13           You know, we're starting the new year.  
14 Everybody is trying to get their agendas. That's what we're  
15 trying to do. That's what everyone else is trying to do.  
16 And you will see members that will have to leave here,  
17 Senator Barrar (sic), will explain that, because of certain  
18 things they have to do.

19           So with that, I would just like to introduce  
20 Chairman Barrar.

21           HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you,  
22 Mr. Chairman.

23           I'd like to thank General Carrelli, General  
24 Weller for being here today, also the members of the DMVA  
25 and our veterans service organizations for taking time to

1 come and speak to us today to let us know what your top  
2 agenda items are.

3           Unfortunately today, when we set this meeting  
4 up, we had a two-hour hearing planned and the House has been  
5 called into session, will go into session at ten o'clock.  
6 So we will only be here for an hour.

7           I would like to let the testifiers that don't  
8 get a chance for us to hear their testimony, we do have your  
9 written testimony here with us, but if you feel there's  
10 something you need to speak to us about, we are more than  
11 glad to entertain a meeting in our office to discuss your  
12 agenda items with you. They are very, very important to  
13 this committee.

14           So you know, on that, I know we are pressed  
15 for time and so we can get going.

16           But I would let Chairman Sainato...

17           HOUSE MINORITY CHAIRMAN SAINATO: Thank you,  
18 Chairman Barrar.

19           And with the time, I just want to echo what  
20 the chairman said, and we look forward to your testimony.

21           SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

22           Now, if we could have the members introduce  
23 themselves. From my -- well, let's go down there, on my far  
24 left.

25           REPRESENTATIVE GILLEN: I'm Mark Gillen with

1 the Berks Military History Museum, also a state  
2 representative from Berks and Lancaster Counties.

3 REPRESENTATIVE CULVER: Good morning, Lynda  
4 Culver, Northumberland and Snyder Counties.

5 REPRESENTATIVE KULIK: Representative Anita  
6 Kulik, Allegheny County.

7 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: Representative Bryan  
8 Barbin, I represent the Johnstown area.

9 SENATOR AUMENT: Good morning, Senator Ryan  
10 Aument, Lancaster County.

11 MR. SILCOX: Nate Silcox, committee director  
12 for Senator Vulakovich.

13 MR. JUMPER: Ron Jumper, committee director,  
14 Senator Costa's office. Thank you for being (inaudible).

15 REPRESENTATIVE JOZWIAK: State Representative  
16 Barry Jozwiak, fifth district, Berks County.

17 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Good morning and  
18 welcome, Representative Kathy Rapp, Warren, Forest, and  
19 Crawford Counties.

20 REPRESENTATIVE TALLMAN: Will Tallman, Adams  
21 and Cumberland County. Grandson just graduated from Parris  
22 Island last week.

23 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: No  
24 remarks from the Army out there? Okay.

25 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Parris



1 Island, is that a vacation spot?

2 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Now, I  
3 want to thank all of the members for being here. And once  
4 again, don't think it's disinterest when people have to get  
5 up and leave. All your testimony is here. (Indicating.)

6 Our first panel is led by Adjutant General,  
7 Major General Anthony Carrelli.

8 General, you are being accompanied by several  
9 key members of your staff, the commandants of our veterans  
10 home -- including my commandant over in southwestern  
11 Pennsylvania, Commandant Adams -- and the chairman of the  
12 State Veterans Commission.

13 So would you please reintroduce everyone  
14 before you start your testimony?

15 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Of course, sir.

16 So of course, on my right is Major General,  
17 retired, Eric Weller, our deputy for Veterans Affairs, and  
18 to my immediate left, Mr. Ed Burris, the chairman of the  
19 State Veterans Commission. I'd also like the commandants to  
20 all please stand.

21 (Pause.)

22 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: So there's five of  
23 the six commandants of the homes. Actually, Mr. Jim Miller,  
24 the Gino Merli Commandant, had a surprise this morning with  
25 the Department of Health showing up at the home for a

1 no-notice inspection, so he was unable to attend, but the  
2 other commandants are here.

3 Thank you so much for being able to make the  
4 trip here today.

5 And then --

6 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: I want  
7 to thank you for everything that you do in the homes. I've  
8 been to a number of them, and especially the one over in  
9 southwest Pennsylvania. You do a wonderful job.

10 Thank you. God bless you.

11 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: And then I'd also  
12 like the DMVA, the rest of the DMVA staff, to please stand.

13 (Pause.)

14 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: All members of the  
15 team that help us do all of the great things that we do for  
16 veterans.

17 And then, sir, just one last shout-out, if I  
18 can, to our veterans service organizations, who came out in  
19 force today, as well, to help us promote interests in all of  
20 our veterans.

21 Please, all our veterans service guys, please  
22 stand.

23 (Pause.)

24 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Thanks, guys,  
25 appreciate it.

1                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Thank  
2 you, guys.

3                   HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Before you  
4 start, can I say one thing?

5                   If you notice, General Carrelli's uniform  
6 looks a little different than the last time, I think, he  
7 appeared before us. He has an extra star on his uniform.  
8 Congratulation, General, well deserved.

9                   MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Thank you.

10                  SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay,  
11 General.

12                  MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Okay, sir.

13                  In the interest of time, you have our written  
14 remarks. And I know we want to get right to some of the  
15 material. I know there are some follow-on meetings. But  
16 I'd like to just mention a few quick things.

17                  I think we've had a great year this past  
18 year, something that we can build on. Two main areas that I  
19 just want to hit, and again, you have all of the written  
20 testimony. I want to talk about the homes briefly.

21                  I think we've had a banner year in the homes.  
22 You know, we've really been able to keep that level of care  
23 up at the highest points throughout our system. And if you  
24 look, I mean, you all certainly know the issues that we went  
25 through last year with the budget, a great amount of cuts.

1 And as I introduced the commandants behind me, I mean,  
2 they're really the people that made that work.

3           So we did what we could, moving money around,  
4 delaying construction, delaying some replacement of  
5 equipment to make the dollars and cents work. But we  
6 essentially sent this huge problem to each one of those  
7 homes, saying, "This is the best we could do this year, make  
8 it work. But make sure that we're taking care of our  
9 veterans." And the commandants who are sitting behind me  
10 solved that problem last year.

11           We are all fully licensed. We have all done  
12 incredibly well in our inspections. Our satisfaction rates  
13 are as high as they have ever been. And as you all have  
14 known, that go through the homes, we're still doing an  
15 incredible job.

16           And I think with the financial issues that we  
17 had to deal with last year, I think it's an incredible job  
18 by a number of people that work, you know, at the commandant  
19 level, that work in those hallways in those homes, the  
20 supervisors, the nurses, the people making the food, the  
21 people that are doing the custodial work, all chipped in to  
22 get us through this successful year despite all of those  
23 challenges. So I think that's a great success.

24           Again, I don't want to give the impression  
25 that we can do that every year. There were things that we

1 had to put off. There were things that we had to postpone  
2 to make that work. But I'm incredibly proud of what our  
3 staff was able to accomplish this last year. To the veteran  
4 in the home, to those families that come visit, they don't  
5 know the difference. They're getting high quality care.

6 We also had a few things that we had to deal  
7 with, unannounced.

8 You're all well aware of the legionella. We  
9 had some positive legionella bacteria in some of the water  
10 testing that we were doing. We immediately sprung forward.  
11 The staffs of the -- the commandants behind me got behind  
12 it, did the science, did the math, figured it out.

13 We installed three deterrent systems now in  
14 three of the homes. We should have the other three homes  
15 done within a year. Preemptively treating the water to help  
16 deter the legionella bacteria from growing in our water.  
17 We've also had a great response from our maintenance staff  
18 to be able to do high hot water flushing throughout our  
19 systems to be able to make sure that we're keeping our  
20 veterans in these facilities safe.

21 If you look around the country, there were  
22 outbreaks. There were problems -- you know, Flushing, New  
23 York, New York City, Minneapolis, Texas, Disneyland out in  
24 California, all having legionella problems this last year.

25 You know, but we were able to keep, jump

1 right on it aggressively, do the extra testing, put some  
2 systems in. Again, it came at a cost, but I'm very proud of  
3 the quick response of our staff to jump right on that, do  
4 the science, do the dedicated work to get that done.

5           One of the other topic areas that I would  
6 just like to briefly talk about is our outreach, too. Our  
7 outreach is so important. Of all the programs that we do,  
8 we're still only really getting to about a third of our  
9 veterans within the population of the Commonwealth. So  
10 everything we do towards outreach, we need to keep that  
11 flashlight on there. We need to focus on that and continue  
12 to get that outreach out there.

13           And we do outreach in a lot of different  
14 ways. The counties are doing it, our VSOs are doing it,  
15 service organizations are doing it through the Act 66. We  
16 need to support those programs. We need to keep that  
17 outreach out there in front.

18           We're also doing it through a lot of our  
19 public affairs work. And I know we ask you all to do that,  
20 as well.

21           I'm very proud of this past year, as well. I  
22 think our engagements, the number of events, veterans  
23 events, that we've been doing -- the Vietnam commemoration  
24 event, some of our World War II recognition events,  
25 veterans' breakfasts, ceremonies that we did for Memorial

1 Day, Veterans Day weeks -- not just those days, but the  
2 weeks leading up to it. Many of you that are sitting in  
3 front of me had events this year. I thank you so much for  
4 doing that and for allowing us to be part of that.

5 I think we, as a whole, we did a lot more  
6 events this past year than we did the year before. And I  
7 throw that challenge out there that we want to do -- this  
8 upcoming year, we want to increase it again. So I'm going  
9 to be beating the bushes everywhere. I ask for your help,  
10 as well, to get many of your colleagues, as well, to sponsor  
11 events. We would love to go out there.

12 That's all part of outreach, as well, when  
13 you talk about all the events that we did and all the  
14 veterans that we interacted with, the ones that we were able  
15 to sign up into the registry, the ones that we were able to  
16 answer questions directly.

17 And I'll tell you some of the events, some of  
18 the smaller events that I did in some of the poor areas  
19 around the Commonwealth, to me, they were some of the most  
20 important we did, not because of the number of people we had  
21 there, but these were some of our veterans that were most in  
22 need. Some of the questions that we got to answer made a  
23 dramatic impact in their life because we were able to help  
24 them, we were able to sign them up, we were able to get them  
25 services that they drastically needed. And essentially

1 overnight, we were able to change their lives.

2           So that's the kind of stuff that we're very  
3 proud of, the work that we do there. I know, all of us that  
4 are in public service, this is why we're doing what we do.  
5 So I appreciate your chance to further do outreach through  
6 our programs, through the Act 66, through just doing events  
7 around the Commonwealth, shining a light out there, asking  
8 for our veterans to come, and shake their hand, pat them on  
9 the back and then answer questions for them.

10           So with that, I'll stop there and leave time  
11 for questions.

12           SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Any  
13 questions right now or do we want to wait until General  
14 Weller?

15           (No response.)

16           SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: All  
17 right, General.

18           MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Morning. How are you,  
19 sir? Great.

20           In an effort to be friends with everybody in  
21 the room, I just want to say the Eagles are going to the  
22 Super Bowl. And I do follow the Steelers, so that accounts  
23 for about 95 percent of you. The other five percent, if you  
24 would just be gentle, I'd appreciate it.

25           Ditto to everything the Adjutant General



1 said. Can I take any questions? No, I'm just kidding. I  
2 do have a lot more to say.

3 I've been on the job for about 14 months.  
4 And you know, the greatest observation, which General  
5 Carrelli has already made, is we get the opportunity to work  
6 with a lot of great people, whether it's yourselves, people  
7 within the DMVA, the interagency, people from the federal  
8 government, our service organizations, county directors, the  
9 5013Cs. It's just absolutely amazing, especially in  
10 relation to the 5013Cs. That's a great new story out there.  
11 There's a lot of people who are looking to give their time  
12 and their money to worthy causes. And in our case, it would  
13 be for the sustenance of veterans.

14 As you know, our main tenets at DMVA are to  
15 educate, create awareness about benefits, and also create  
16 accessibility. And we take that very seriously.

17 If I could go to the next slide, next slide,  
18 slide, slide.

19 So anyways, when I came on the job, a couple  
20 of things General Carrelli asked me to take a look at was  
21 the manpower that we have at our veterans homes just to make  
22 sure that we were, you know, comparable with the private  
23 facilities. He also asked me to establish a five-year plan  
24 so that we could look out into the future, not only for  
25 budgeting purposes, but just basic planning purposes.

1           And then in an effort to ensure that we're  
2 spending the taxpayer dollar correctly, I was asked to do a  
3 study, or head a study, on cost comparison between us and  
4 private facilities throughout the state.

5           I would say that at this point in time, we  
6 have about 1600 new vets -- next slide -- and about 1305 are  
7 filled. Per our testimony, we actually have authorization  
8 to expand our licensing based on our veterans' footprint up  
9 to about 2300 vets. But anyways, at this point, we have  
10 about 1305 filled. We have approximately six veterans homes  
11 throughout the state, and I believe you know where all of  
12 those are.

13           Next slide.

14           I just want to remind everybody that the  
15 original intent of the veterans homes is for a benevolent  
16 purpose. You know, we're here to provide long-term care for  
17 indigent personnel, disabled soldiers, so on and so forth.  
18 And again, the implied intent is benevolence. People have  
19 to demonstrate a financial need. We don't deny anybody  
20 access based on the ability to pay. And again, that's in  
21 the Pennsylvania Code.

22           Our services are pretty basic. We provide  
23 care for people that have dementia. We have skilled care in  
24 all of our facilities, we have personal care in four of our  
25 facilities, and then also domicile care, which is slightly

1 the lower half of a personal care.

2 Slide.

3 And our mission, again, as I've stated, is to  
4 provide a service to veterans in need of long-term care.

5 Slide.

6 These are the total number of beds that we  
7 have available right now, 1561, gives you the breakdown of  
8 the types of beds. (Indicating.)

9 Slide.

10 And this is our basic demographic.

11 (Indicating.)

12 Generally, people that are 81 years of age on  
13 the average, male veterans, Protestant, widowed. Basic  
14 length of stay is about two years. They usually come to us  
15 with very serious problems, cardiac issues, that type of  
16 thing. And unfortunately, on the average, we're losing  
17 about one, 1.1 veterans per day in our homes. I believe  
18 last year, it was about 389 personnel that we lost.

19 Slide.

20 As General Carrelli mentioned, our commandant  
21 from Gino Merli wasn't able to show up today because of an  
22 inspection that he's going through. But what I wanted to  
23 assure you is that we are provided with a lot of oversight  
24 from the federal and state government. We go through  
25 inspections from the federal VA, from DHS, and DOH. And

1 then for good measure, we throw another inspection in there,  
2 an internal inspection from DMVA headquarters.

3 So what I'd really like to say is these  
4 people at the veterans homes, the commandants, their staffs,  
5 are operating full bore every day of the year.

6 If you're familiar with the military and  
7 getting ready to go through inspections, you're usually  
8 given a period of time to stand down. In the Air Force, we  
9 used to get a year to get ready for an inspection. That's  
10 not the case with those folks. They have to be ready and  
11 running every day of the year.

12 On top of that, people from DOH can walk in  
13 at any particular time they want, even if it's an  
14 unscheduled inspection, to take a look around. So hats off  
15 to our commandants.

16 Slide.

17 Criteria for admission, again, you have to be  
18 a veteran, spouse of a veteran, or qualify with what I call  
19 nonveteran or a veteran without benefits. That would be a  
20 member of the guard or reserve that has not deployed and  
21 owns a DD214. That's a form that says you have been called  
22 to active duty, Title 10 service. We do have some  
23 reservists out there that have not deployed for overseas  
24 operations.

25 Eligibility, again, you have to have served

1 honorably. And you know, we base the residents' fees, you  
2 know, based on their ability to pay.

3 I'll tell you up front, on the average, our  
4 skilled care residents pay about \$42 a day for their,  
5 towards their cost of care. And our personal care folks pay  
6 about \$35 a day. That's roughly what they can afford on the  
7 average. Admission, first come, first served.

8 Slide.

9 So as I said, General Carrelli asked me to  
10 take a look at the manpower that we have in our homes.  
11 We've taken great care over the last year, analyzed each  
12 individual physician, whether it's the commandant, me, the  
13 legal staff, the number of nurses that we have, the number  
14 of custodians that we have, and we've established a  
15 baseline. And the baseline is based on federal/state  
16 regulations, industry standards, physical footprint of the  
17 facility, operational needs. In that regard, we've  
18 established thresholds at the various homes as to, you know,  
19 if the building size is X amount, if it increases at all,  
20 then you need an additional number of custodians or food  
21 service handlers, that type of thing. And then we've got  
22 specific staffing based on requirements from the individual  
23 commandants.

24 Any questions so far?

25 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: (Inaudible.)

1 Oh, I'm not on. Okay.

2 Were you able to hear the question about the  
3 reimbursements from the federal VA? How many of our  
4 veterans that are currently in there -- are all of them  
5 reimbursed by --

6 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: I believe so, but let  
7 me turn around and --

8 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: It would be about  
9 88 percent, because we're allowed to take nonveterans up to  
10 a certain percentage. We're right at 12 percent of  
11 nonveterans, so 88 percent of our veterans are getting the  
12 federal reimbursement.

13 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: The  
14 nonreimbursable ones, they are mostly spouses?

15 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Spouses. Yes, sir,  
16 mostly spouses.

17 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: One last  
18 question. I read in your comments here that you are  
19 establishing a pilot program for an adult day health care  
20 program.

21 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Yes, sir.

22 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Is that a  
23 federally funded program or are we doing that?

24 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: In part, it's  
25 federally fund. Any construction requirements, about

1 75 percent of that are being taken care of by the federal VA  
2 and about 25 to 30 percent are being taken care of by us.

3 And we do get federal reimbursement for --

4 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Great.

5 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: -- residents, day  
6 residents.

7 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: That's a  
8 particular interest to me because I do have a bill that  
9 would create a lottery ticket for veterans and the purpose  
10 of that then would go, directly go to providing adult day  
11 care for our veterans. So we are hoping maybe some time  
12 this year we will see some movement on it.

13 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Yes, sir.

14 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.  
15 That's all I have.

16 But one last thing, we've been joined by  
17 Lynda Culver. She's still here. And also Frank Ryan is  
18 here.

19 Representative Barbin has a question. Can I  
20 get him to jump in there or do you want to wait --

21 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: Thank you.

22 General Carrelli, I know we've had -- you've  
23 done a great job of taking care of the issue when it came  
24 up, the legionella that was found in the testing of the  
25 waters. Do we need to be looking at advancing additional

1 capital dollars to make sure that all of the heating and  
2 ventilation systems in all six of the, you know, homes are  
3 taken care of? Can you do that without additional help?

4 Because it's one of those things that really  
5 kind of takes the wind out of how important it is to the  
6 senior veterans, is that they know they can go to a veterans  
7 home and they're going to be safe and taken care of.

8 I know you managed to do it last year. Do  
9 you need any other funds to do it this year?

10 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir. Well --  
11 and, sir, this year we are asking for additional funds for  
12 the testing, the preemptive systems to treat the water  
13 systems. And again, we've been keeping a close eye.

14 All of those legionella outbreaks that I  
15 talked about are essentially tied to water and water  
16 systems. They're in cooling towers, they're in shower  
17 faucet heads, sinks, anywhere where water is aerated. So  
18 that's where our concentration is now, but we're looking at  
19 other things like ventilation systems and things like that.

20 So we are asking for additional resources  
21 this year to cover the cost of testing. At this point,  
22 we're way ahead of other private homes within the -- we  
23 didn't want to mess with that.

24 I know we talked with Senator Vulakovich when  
25 we were talking about the Pittsburgh home in one of our



1 advisory council meetings. We jumped on this right away and  
2 we're setting the standard even before the Department of  
3 Health said this is required, because it's very important  
4 for us to keep our residents safe. So we've been very  
5 aggressive.

6 We are asking for more resources because it  
7 is a cost that we just can't take out of hide without  
8 cutting something else. But this is a must-pay bill.

9 So, yes, sir, we are going to be asking for  
10 additional resources to make sure that we keep our veterans  
11 safe.

12 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: I have one more  
13 question, and it's kind of in line with the adult daycare  
14 issue.

15 We still have an issue of homeless veterans.  
16 We haven't been able to get to all of them. You know, 1100,  
17 we know, but there could be as much as 6500 or 6700.

18 Should we be looking at having some sort of  
19 temporary space at the veterans homes to address the  
20 homeless problem?

21 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Sir, in some cases  
22 when we talk about our personal care system, that's exactly  
23 what we're doing in some cases. Some of those veterans just  
24 have no other place to go. They don't really have medical  
25 needs, but that's what personal care is.

1           Now, that's being overtaken in a number of  
2 our construction projects. We have been, over the last few  
3 years, trading down personal care beds because there is an  
4 increased need for skilled care. If you look at our  
5 veterans population, you see the average that General Weller  
6 just briefed, 81.

7           Our veterans population is getting older and  
8 older. Over 50 percent of our veterans in Pennsylvania are  
9 over 65. And even though the number of veterans in  
10 Pennsylvania are shrinking, the overall number, the veterans  
11 that we have, their ages are growing. So that number  
12 continues to grow. We are going to have increased health  
13 problems as we continue in the next five years, in the next  
14 ten years. So we're forecasting out a greater need for that  
15 skilled care. So we've been trading out more personal care  
16 beds to fit for that. But that will go against using that  
17 as kind of a homeless.

18           And essentially, we just don't have the room  
19 in the homes right now. I think that's why some of the  
20 other options that we've been looking at, the possibility of  
21 sharing with the county homes -- opening up a wing or a  
22 floor at a county home would be a much more reduced cost  
23 than trying to build additional homes or doing very large  
24 expansions in our existing homes.

25           So these are things that we are looking at,

1 we're doing studies on. And we can give that information to  
2 you guys, kind of a menu saying, "Well, here's this option,  
3 here's that option. This is what this costs, this what that  
4 costs. These are the things that we would recommend," and  
5 then look as we go forward to be able to provide a sensible  
6 solution that works for us into the future.

7 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: Thank you.

8 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir.

9 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: Thank you, Mr.  
10 Chairman.

11 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: I'd  
12 just like to -- I'll have some follow-up questions later on,  
13 but I would like to just identify that Senator Baker and  
14 Senator Brooks have joined us. Senator Hutchinson is in  
15 here now.

16 General, do you want to continue?

17 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Sure. Yes, sir. I'd  
18 love to.

19 So anyways, as I said, we took a look at our  
20 staffing, and I've said that it's comparable with the  
21 private care facilities. Without going into great detail,  
22 especially in relation to hands-on care -- the actual people  
23 that touch residents in skilled care -- it's absolutely  
24 comparable. It's right in line.

25 We're at what's called a 3.8 per patient day

1 hours. And that lines right up with the private care  
2 facilities. And it's 1.0 per patient day, number of hours  
3 on the personal care side, and that, again, lines right up  
4 with them.

5 So the next step was to take a look at, you  
6 know, what are our needs going to be based on the projected  
7 number of beds that we are currently expecting? So we took  
8 a look at the construction projects over the next five  
9 years.

10 Slide.

11 I've got some listed here. These are the  
12 major ones that we've got going. Taking all of these into  
13 consideration -- slide -- we were able to develop a standard  
14 showing the number of beds that would be available per year  
15 and then the staffing that would be required to go along  
16 with those beds.

17 Slide.

18 So the next part of this study was to take a  
19 look at the cost that we're incurring versus private care  
20 facilities. Our costs are out there. It's a matter of  
21 public record. Our budget office looks at them every day.  
22 All of you look at them every day. And so what we were  
23 asked to do is compare the cost to run our facilities versus  
24 the private care facilities. They all have a standard of  
25 reporting also that they provide to the government.

1                   So when we first looked at their cost  
2 numbers, the one thing that jumped out at me, especially,  
3 was that their numbers were not all inclusive. The numbers  
4 were what I would call a wholesale number. The number was  
5 what it costs the facility to buy an item, not what they  
6 charged the resident for that item, if that makes sense to  
7 you.

8                   So we looked down through all of the cost  
9 data and we also determined that it was not all inclusive.  
10 For instance, most private care facilities do not have a  
11 pharmacy, but you know that the residents have to buy  
12 prescription drugs. In our homes we have pharmacies. We  
13 provide the prescription drugs. So you can see the  
14 imbalance. And so our goal was to just try to establish  
15 some sort of parity between the numbers. So that's  
16 basically what we did.

17                   And I can tell you that -- and I don't mean  
18 to get extremely confusing. But when we did a straight up  
19 comparison without taking anything into consideration, we  
20 found that, yes, our costs are more than the private care  
21 facilities, hands down. If we subtract it out, our salary  
22 and benefits of our employees, comparing our costs,  
23 operational costs, with what they were claiming as a cost  
24 were almost equal, if you can believe that.

25                   So if you would, just tuck that thought in

1 your mind.

2                   Okay, so now, again, I admit, my salary and  
3 benefit cost is more than the private care facilities. If I  
4 start adding in the things that they don't include in their  
5 cost data sheet, i.e. prescription drugs, transportation to  
6 and from the hospital, and a number of other things, all of  
7 a sudden, my operational costs are less than theirs by, on  
8 the average, maybe \$5 per day.

9                   So everybody following me on that so far?

10                   (No response.)

11                   MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Okay. Well, then the  
12 next step is, you know, that's fine and dandy, but the  
13 people that we're talking about can't afford to live in a  
14 private facility, in most cases. So what we really have to  
15 take a look at is what the profit margin is in a private  
16 facility.

17                   So when you add that in, now all of a sudden,  
18 on the skilled care side for us, we're about \$12 a day more  
19 expensive. On the personal care side, we're about \$12 a  
20 day -- and again, I'm just using rough numbers, but you get  
21 the point -- \$12 less.

22                   Everybody following me so far?

23                   (No response.)

24                   MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: So one of the things  
25 that we take into consideration when we admit people is we

1 do not go after a person's estate.

2           You know, we realize that there's somebody  
3 living at home, if there is in fact a home, but somebody is  
4 living there. When people go to a private care facility,  
5 that's the first thing that's attached, any assets that a  
6 person has. And that goes against their maintenance fee per  
7 day. That is not the case for us.

8           We wait until the person expires, and then we  
9 step in line with any other agency that might be owed money,  
10 and where things fall is where things fall. The bottom  
11 line, though, is, what I'm telling you is, we're not able to  
12 recover a lot of money from a person's estate. But again,  
13 there's not a lot of money to recover to begin with.

14           So if you look at the money that we don't  
15 recover and add that into my skilled care -- or subtract it  
16 from my skilled care numbers, now all of a sudden, I cost  
17 less than a private facility on both skilled care and  
18 personal care.

19           The other thing we were asked to take a look  
20 at was what if we privatized the entire operation? Again,  
21 I'm not equipped to do a study as comprehensive as that, but  
22 I've been in the federal government long enough to know that  
23 when you contract other agencies to do that type of thing --  
24 again, working with one agency to contract out every  
25 position in our facilities -- what they do is they apply --

1 and I forget what the terminology is -- a burden rate, you  
2 know, to the standard salary and benefit number. They  
3 multiply it by 2.33 and they come up with a number and  
4 that's what you're going to pay. Well, if you do that with  
5 our -- or you do that taking private care facility numbers,  
6 multiply it by the 2.33, now all of a sudden, again, if you  
7 privatized our entire operation, you're looking at something  
8 that's more expensive than what we're paying per day.

9 Do you follow me so far?

10 (No response.)

11 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Okay. So that's  
12 pretty much what we came up with. On all accounts, we think  
13 that we are, you know, utilizing the taxpayers' dollars in a  
14 good way.

15 Again, I'll remind you that the people we're  
16 dealing with on the average for skilled care can only afford  
17 to pay about 40 to \$42 a day, and on the personal care side,  
18 about \$35 a day.

19 Slide.

20 We could go over the slides, you know.  
21 Again, I will tell you, I mean, without boring you, the  
22 numbers are there. The number that you're really interested  
23 in is over in the far right, difference in cost to care.  
24 Again, with the time frame we were using for skilled care,  
25 in the top line, far right, is \$458 a day. Again, straight



1 up comparison with the private corporation's profit margin.  
2 They're at 445 a day. That's a difference of \$13 a day that  
3 we're more expensive. But then if you take into account  
4 that we don't have estates to go after, then you subtract  
5 \$18 a day off of the private care side. Now all of a  
6 sudden, we are less expensive.

7 I know that the graph is a little bit  
8 comprehensive, but...

9 So where does that leave us? Again,  
10 comparatively speaking, in our eyes, we actually cost less  
11 than private care facilities. The only thing I could offer  
12 up that would actually make a difference is if my  
13 commandants would have the ability to set up a pay scale and  
14 do direct hires right from their facility. And that way, we  
15 could drive salary and benefit costs down. I know that's  
16 not going to happen, so it shouldn't even be a  
17 consideration.

18 As we've mentioned before, though, we are  
19 looking at other alternatives. A prior study has shown that  
20 there is a need for an increased footprint as time goes on  
21 for additional veterans homes. So we've decided, you know,  
22 we're not really pursuing putting up a brand new state  
23 facility. We're taking a look at partnerships, as General  
24 Carrelli mentioned, with county homes. And so we've --  
25 again, I'm not equipped to do a detailed comprehensive

1 study, but we've taken a look at a home in Delaware County,  
2 I believe, and what we're finding is that we could drive  
3 costs down if we start partnering with county homes.

4           Again, I don't want everybody to get excited,  
5 but based on the, you know, cost difference, you know, we  
6 find that we would be able to reduce our costs by about  
7 one-third for any future expansion of veterans beds.  
8 Roughly for skilled care, it would take us down to about  
9 1300 -- or \$320 a day roughly versus the 458 that we have,  
10 that we're spending at state facilities. Again, the  
11 difference is salary and benefits of state employees.

12           So actually, I believe we're going to be  
13 meeting with you, sir, Representative Barrar, at some point  
14 and just going over the facts and figures.

15           Our goal, though, is, if that sounds like  
16 it's a viable plan, to start picking out areas that are  
17 geographically amenable to veterans, especially those who  
18 live in rural areas, and start looking at county homes that  
19 we might be able to partner with. So we could open up a  
20 number of different facilities, because again,  
21 transportation is obviously a big issue with our veterans.  
22 So if we can make things geographically friendly, that's  
23 what we'd like to do, without spending a lot of money.

24           Slide and slide.

25           So the bottom line in relation to the things

1 that we've been looking at, you know, our staffing levels  
2 are comparable to the private sector. Our costs can be  
3 validated on the standard cost sheet that's going around. I  
4 don't know that I could claim that the cost sheet for the  
5 private facilities can be validated insofar as comparing  
6 apples to apples.

7                   Again, at the DMVA, we do not control  
8 salaries and benefits. That's, you know, set by other  
9 people. We do not control the ratio when you do an economic  
10 analysis when you're comparing privatization. Again,  
11 that's -- especially when you're looking at benefits. The  
12 union, I believe, establishes the comparative ratio.

13                   Our operational costs, which should mean  
14 something, are definitely less than the private sector. Our  
15 total costs are definitely less than what a private sector  
16 charges per day.

17                   And again, I would just remind you there  
18 that, you know, even if a private facility, when you look on  
19 their website or you go and talk to them, and find out what  
20 it is that your maintenance fee is going to cover, you will  
21 find, again, that there are extraneous costs that you will  
22 pay for over and above what they're charging you for things  
23 like the prescription drugs and, again, transportation to  
24 and from the hospital or to and from appointments. They  
25 don't necessarily take you there on their own, especially

1 for skilled care personnel, or residents. I mean, those  
2 people usually have to call up an ambulance. And if you've  
3 ever paid an ambulance bill, especially in Pennsylvania,  
4 you'll know that it's about, I believe about \$750.

5 And again, I'll just remind you that our  
6 veterans basically can afford to pay \$40 a day towards their  
7 skilled care bill and about 35 a day, 32 a day, towards  
8 their personal care bill.

9 Can I answer any questions on the cost study  
10 or the manpower and/or our construction plan?

11 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Senator  
12 Hutchinson.

13 SENATOR HUTCHINSON: Okay. Just a real quick  
14 (inaudible), do your numbers include (inaudible)?

15 Obviously, when facilities -- some of these,  
16 are built, (inaudible) is that part of your numbers here or  
17 is that off somewhere else? Is that included in your  
18 numbers? That's all (inaudible).

19 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: I believe our current  
20 capital costs -- you're talking like construction, new  
21 construction, that type of thing? Yes.

22 SENATOR HUTCHINSON: Yeah. Is that in your  
23 budget or is that in some other state?

24 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: I believe it's in our  
25 budget. Yeah, I believe our numbers are all inclusive.

1                   SENATOR HUTCHINSON: Thank you.

2                   MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Now, going back to  
3 when the building was originally purchased or whatever, that  
4 I can't answer to.

5                   SENATOR HUTCHINSON: Thank you.

6                   MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: But I do know also in  
7 relation to depreciation rules and all of that, we follow  
8 the state rules. And you know, I don't know if the  
9 depreciation numbers are accredited towards us, so I  
10 couldn't validate that.

11                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Senator  
12 Baker.

13                   SENATOR BAKER: General, we know one in three  
14 (inaudible) die from Alzheimer's (inaudible). I'm  
15 interested, do you have any additional costs or requirements  
16 for the home (inaudible) knowing that is the trend  
17 (inaudible)? We're all concerned about the general  
18 population, but (inaudible) our veterans who are at a higher  
19 risk (inaudible) possibly (inaudible).

20                   MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Right. Yeah,  
21 absolutely. I will tell you that there is a definite cost  
22 difference.

23                   When I was talking earlier about per patient  
24 day formulas, actually, the formula that we use towards  
25 dementia care is 3.8 hours per day, you know, required to

1 take care of a person. Our actual staffing standard, our  
2 budget is actually set at a lower rate. So you know, we try  
3 to offset, but the bottom line is, yes, there is an  
4 additional cost. And based on the number of dementia beds  
5 we have set aside, we've, you know, taken that into account  
6 up to this point.

7 I will say, though, that I believe, you know,  
8 the bottom line staffing standard, I think, that the state  
9 sets is 2.7 hours per patient day. Again, I will refer you  
10 to the private facilities. We're in line with what they  
11 have, which is 3.8, 3.9. But I'll also tell you that I  
12 believe there is a current review going on in the state.  
13 National average, by the way, is 4.1, I believe, and I  
14 believe the state is doing a review currently and their  
15 numbers, their hours per patient day is going to increase  
16 also, which will affect, you know, our budget requirements.

17 SENATOR BAKER: What percentage (inaudible)?

18 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Yeah, I see a  
19 projected increase. And as far as the number of beds, I  
20 don't have a breakdown in front of me -- actually, probably  
21 20 percent of our people have dementia or are in those type  
22 of facilities, slightly less than 20.

23 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

24 Representative Barrar.

25 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Great.

1 Thank you.

2 Representative Ryan for a question.

3 REPRESENTATIVE RYAN: General, thank you very  
4 much and thank you for testifying today.

5 General, on page 16, just a few questions.  
6 Have you looked at the private community nursing homes that  
7 are closer to the facilities indicated on page 5? So I  
8 mean, do we know whether or not -- because each different  
9 facility's cost drivers would be different based on where  
10 they're located. Have you looked at those, as well?

11 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: When we did our cost  
12 comparison?

13 REPRESENTATIVE RYAN: Yes.

14 And if you would -- because I was on a  
15 hospital board for 28 years. And the numbers that you're  
16 showing for the private nursing county homes seem awfully  
17 low. And I'm just curious if you're looking at the same  
18 type of acuity of care that you might have, that you're  
19 showing on page 9 that --

20 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: What are you looking  
21 at, sir?

22 REPRESENTATIVE RYAN: It's on page 9. I'm  
23 looking at the acuity of care.

24 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Okay.

25 REPRESENTATIVE RYAN: Your patient is

1 typically a more difficult patient to take care of than the  
2 numbers that -- because I've got a lot of background  
3 detail -- and I apologize for my voice, by the way -- I've  
4 got a lot of background detail on these cost drivers. And  
5 my experience is that if you compare acuity of care to  
6 acuity of care, in other words, an 81-year-old widow with  
7 multiple diagnoses -- could be diabetes, could be dementia,  
8 any number of things -- that \$251 day per cost is awfully  
9 low. I mean, my normal experience is you're looking between  
10 five to six hundred dollars a day in the Maryland  
11 marketplace and in the Pittsburgh marketplace. I don't know  
12 about in the southeast.

13           But I would really encourage you to look at  
14 that data. And then it ties in with Senator Hutchinson's  
15 case, or question about the capital costs, because it looks  
16 like the capital costs are not included in the numbers on  
17 our side. So I would just encourage you to -- it'll give  
18 you a much better metric of whether or not, how cost  
19 effective we are. That's what I wanted to comment.

20           MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Okay, yeah.

21           I mean, again, the data that we looked at was  
22 actually presented to us, you know what I mean? Our numbers  
23 came right from our budget office. The private facilities  
24 was an average throughout the state, again, with emphasis on  
25 the areas around our homes, as you just mentioned, which



1 confirms what I was trying to say earlier. I don't know  
2 that that cost data sheet is all inclusive.

3 REPRESENTATIVE RYAN: Sir, I can almost  
4 guarantee that it's not. And I think you're looking at a  
5 higher cost for you. Our labor costs are high, but I think  
6 you'll see the equivalent labor costs for a similarly  
7 situated nursing facility or care facility will be  
8 equally -- I don't want to say equally as high, but very,  
9 very high, as well. It will give you a better idea of what  
10 we can do to help control costs.

11 HOUSE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.  
12 Representative Tallman for a question.

13 REPRESENTATIVE TALLMAN: Thank you, Mr.  
14 Chairman.

15 General Weller, one question and one  
16 suggestion. So we -- I like the idea of the county home,  
17 looking at that.

18 And I'm just going to reference Adams County.  
19 They sold their county home. So county homes are  
20 disappearing in other counties. Does that still apply?

21 And by the way, it's almost full, if not  
22 full, so are there county beds available?

23 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Sir, in most  
24 facilities throughout the Commonwealth, there are beds  
25 available at the county facilities. That's not to say all.

1 And we'll have to look at each one individually.

2           The idea here is the geography of where our  
3 homes are currently located. You know, we have a waiting  
4 list, some places more than others, but it's because of the  
5 geography.

6           We have open beds in the system. So we have  
7 a veteran, the family comes to us. They have a great need.  
8 They say, "We need a home right now." And we offer them  
9 that bed space because we have bed space throughout our  
10 system. But let's say, for instance, it's in Philadelphia  
11 and they want to go in to a Del Val home. Well, we don't  
12 have an open bed of that kind, if you're looking for the  
13 dementia bed or the skilled care bed at this point, but  
14 we'll put you on the waiting list.

15           But if you absolutely -- we have to have a  
16 bed today, you know, we may have room at, for instance, in  
17 southeastern Hollidaysburg. We'll put you in that bed  
18 today. Most of the time, the family will defer and say,  
19 "Well, no, we'll just go on the waiting list at this point."

20           So where are those beds and where are they  
21 needed? The geography is a huge thing.

22           When we talk about building another  
23 brick-and-mortar home, it's a great expense. If we do our  
24 studies right, would we be able to fill it? Yes. Will we  
25 be able to service veterans of that area? Yes. But that's

1 a great expense to service one more area, versus doing the  
2 county home option where we can do that in a number of  
3 locations.

4           The other thing that we can take advantage  
5 of, when we talk about cost comparison, using the county  
6 homes, we're on their licenses, you know. So a lot of those  
7 costs are already taken up by the existing county home. But  
8 when we talk about our admission procedures, when we talk  
9 about our budgeting, we're not talking about putting a whole  
10 other additional staff just for that home. Essentially, one  
11 of the commandants behind you will be adopting that county  
12 home that's in their area and their staff will be doing a  
13 lot of the admin support for that county facility. So we  
14 don't have to duplicate that whole staff at each county  
15 location.

16           So if we set that up right and use the mother  
17 ships of the homes that we have now, we'll be able to do  
18 this a lot cheaper. The more times we do it, the lower our  
19 overall costs actually become because we're taking advantage  
20 of a system that we already have built, if that makes sense.

21           REPRESENTATIVE TALLMAN: Thank you.

22           (Inaudible.)

23           REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: I know --

24           Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I'll be brief  
25 because we have to leave.

1           I know we were talking here about long-term  
2 care and skilled nursing. But what about -- you know, so  
3 many people now are having different replacements, knee  
4 replacements, hip replacements, and they're going into  
5 skilled nursing for rehab. And are you seeing -- does the  
6 system take in people for, veterans, for just the rehab and  
7 send them back home or is that another issue that you're  
8 looking at for county homes, picking up that rehab, as well  
9 as long-term care?

10           MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: We've been taking a  
11 look at it. We actually established a test case in one of  
12 our facilities and basically we're trying to get a  
13 relationship going with the federal VA in that regard. You  
14 know, if they would have people in that type of situation  
15 that would need temporary rehab and if we have beds  
16 available where we could bring them in and take care of them  
17 on a temporary basis, we'd really like to do that. Again,  
18 that's just in its absolute infancy at this point in time.

19           REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Thank you, Mr.  
20 Chairman.

21           And I would like to say a big welcome to my  
22 Warren County Veterans Affairs director, Edgar Burriss. And  
23 I'm very sorry that I can't be here to hear your testimony,  
24 but my senator will be here. So welcome and welcome to the  
25 Capitol. And I'll be reading your testimony, but not being

1 able to hear it.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: All  
4 right. We're all pretty much on schedule. And as you know,  
5 the House members have to leave for legislative session. I  
6 would just like to say a few things in the couple of minutes  
7 we have here.

8 I am very grateful to you, General, General,  
9 your staff. We have had a lot of meetings in my office and  
10 different places, and I know you have with Representative  
11 Barrar. But after last year's budget, there were a lot of  
12 concerns about a cut we made in some of the cost areas that  
13 you have.

14 I was disappointed. I thought that we'd pull  
15 off the increase to the VSOs. I have not forgotten it. I'm  
16 going to keep working towards that, as Representative Barrar  
17 will. We realize the need to reach out to our veterans.  
18 Talk is one thing, action is something else. You know that  
19 in the military. You have a can-do attitude. I was  
20 disappointed in the cuts we made last year to the homes. We  
21 talked about that. But we will continue to work on these  
22 things.

23 And I asked you to prepare things for the  
24 budget this year. I think what you presented here to us  
25 today certainly would be part of your presentation at the

1 budget hearings.

2           Many look at things and just say, "Well, we  
3 could cut there, cut there, cut there." I can tell you,  
4 I've looked at that budget. After we pass it, I'm obsessed  
5 with it. I take it and I look at it, thinking, "Maybe we  
6 can cut this item here and save some money." But I don't  
7 know what's all in that line item. So I go and I call the  
8 people who do know what's in those line items. And they  
9 say, "Well, Senator, you can't really cut there because  
10 federal laws, state law. It's something that we need to do.  
11 It's important." And so we all have to learn.

12           But I asked you to tear apart your budget,  
13 microanalyze it down to the penny where you could. I've  
14 looked over what your presentation was last night and then  
15 hearing it today, and you certainly have tried to accomplish  
16 that to the best of your ability, trying to weigh in the  
17 private sector within the public sector of how we take care  
18 of our veterans. You've done that to the best of your  
19 ability, and you've shown the costs.

20           Something I never thought of that you pointed  
21 out to me immediately, General, was that -- we were talking  
22 about some of the things you do in these homes that the  
23 private home, they'll do it, but they'll charge you. And  
24 I'm not knocking them for that. They're in a business and  
25 they're providing a valuable service, but they're also for

1 profit, many of them.

2           For example, the pharmacy, they're going to  
3 bill you for those medicines and we know it's costly. Some  
4 will get paid, some will have to be out of pocket. But you  
5 just do that. And you've got control over it because you  
6 have a pharmacy on hand.

7           I've seen, gone into homes where I've seen  
8 medicine sitting all over the side table, paid for by  
9 taxpayers' dollars. Some paid by people, some people's  
10 means who can afford it, but still a waste. And then  
11 there's other ones who struggle, but can't pay it. And then  
12 they pass way or their condition changes. And there's all  
13 those pills sitting on that table they are just going to be  
14 disregarded.

15           So the transportation, if you need transport  
16 someplace, you call an ambulance and they transport. And  
17 you're going to pay for that.

18           So it's those services that you offer plus  
19 that little extra that you give, which I know we talked  
20 about, the concern. If we go and put our veterans in --  
21 build some type of bond with the county homes, that we still  
22 want to preserve that special little touch that reminds  
23 everyone working there that these are special people and we  
24 need to honor them and return the service back to them that  
25 they gave to us a long time ago, and in some cases, still

1 do, through people like you out there.

2                   And also, you know, just to remind the  
3 veterans themselves that we do care about their service to  
4 the country.

5                   So all these things have to come into play  
6 and I hope when you're in the Appropriations hearings people  
7 see these things when you break them down. And you  
8 certainly have done everything that I've asked you to do.  
9 There may be some other things, analyses, we asked you to go  
10 into and it's all to prove the case that we are providing a  
11 valuable service to our people.

12                   And I don't think we're going overboard, but  
13 I think at the very least, we do need to provide them what  
14 they need. And that need for someone who serves their  
15 country may be a lot more than some other person's needs.  
16 It's just what we do and if we don't do that in this  
17 country, then we don't deserve to call ourselves a nation by  
18 any means.

19                   I've got a question about the estate. And  
20 we've had this discussion, too. We basically honor the fact  
21 that a person who, let's just take male or female and their  
22 ability -- let's take a case of a male person who served as  
23 a veteran in one of our homes, but the spouse is still home.  
24 Spouse may very well have served, too, but at the very  
25 least, she's the spouse of a veteran. We recognize the fact



1 that we're not going after that home while that person is  
2 still in there.

3 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir.

4 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Now, do  
5 we follow the normal procedure, as I understand it, once  
6 that tie is broken through death of both the person in the  
7 home and the person in their residential home, the spouse?  
8 That's the only time that we really go after and seek any  
9 restitution, right?

10 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir.

11 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Right.  
12 And that's just a matter of honor there.

13 The debt, I think Senator Hutchinson brought  
14 up a good point about some debt. If you still have debt on  
15 buildings for some reason, whether you've paid for it as you  
16 go -- I know Commandant Adams over in the southwest veterans  
17 home, over the years, they've replaced a lot of things over  
18 there to bring everything up to code and to really make it a  
19 place that the veterans feel more comfortable to live in,  
20 but also dealing with safety. And I don't know if all those  
21 costs are in a debt situation where, you know, there's money  
22 owed or was it paid as we go?

23 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Paid as we go, sir.

24 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Paid as  
25 you go.

1 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir.

2 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: All  
3 right.

4 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: In fact, actually, we  
5 go through a reimbursement process with the federal VA. The  
6 state basically fronts the money and then once the  
7 construction is done, we make application to the federal VA  
8 and then they reimburse the state. But it's -- there are no  
9 liens taken out, or loans taken out, over a long period of  
10 time for these things.

11 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Well,  
12 also, I think that we were talking about doing a (inaudible)  
13 needs assessment. You were talking about the Delaware  
14 county home, where you might try a pilot program there or  
15 something.

16 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: Yes, sir.

17 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Would  
18 it be a pilot program as such or would it be something  
19 permanent you have to enter into?

20 MAJOR GENERAL WELLER: I guess that would be  
21 up to all of you. We're just looking to present some facts  
22 and if we get the go-ahead -- and obviously, we'd have to  
23 talk with the Governor's Office about it. But again, we're  
24 just looking to provide an option, another path as opposed  
25 to putting up new buildings.

1                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: And  
2 then the southern part of central Pennsylvania, I don't  
3 believe we have -- well, I know we don't have a facility  
4 down there. So would there be some thought to putting,  
5 doing an analysis of that area in south central PA,  
6 something in there along with the county homes?

7                   MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir. We would  
8 essentially look to do an entire map of places that are  
9 underserved. Obviously, you can look at where the homes are  
10 now and pick out fairly large communities that are not  
11 represented at this point.

12                   So we have the demographics of where our  
13 veterans live and the approximate ages and things like that.  
14 So we would want to do a targeted study to go to where the  
15 most need is right now. And then if we're successful, we're  
16 able to duplicate that and then serve other areas.

17                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: The  
18 special account fund that you have for the armories, the  
19 special account, there's dollars in there?

20                   MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: The State Armory  
21 Fund?

22                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Yes.  
23 Could you briefly explain why that account is so important  
24 to the DMVA?

25                   MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir.

1           I mean, all of our armory maintenance comes  
2 out of that fund. So it is a fund -- when we sell  
3 properties, we also raise money through armory. Some of the  
4 soldiers and airmen in their facilities will rent those  
5 facilities out and actually serve -- they'll use the drill  
6 hall for different events and things like that. It's  
7 actually extra work on our soldiers, and they're able to  
8 raise money by doing that. And that money can go into  
9 improvements for their NWR use, for the betterment of the --  
10 but that money all goes into that fund.

11           When we sell other armories -- we've sold a  
12 number of armories over the last couple of years -- that  
13 money comes back to us because it was originally  
14 appropriated for that purpose. So that money goes back into  
15 that fund.

16           So we use that money and then we ask for  
17 appropriated money every year. But if you're able to look  
18 over the past few years, we've asked for a lot less money  
19 because we had a number of sales that have gone through to  
20 put that -- but now all of a sudden, there was great talk  
21 about taking it all away last year. I believe our number is  
22 approximately 300,000, is going to come out of our fund.  
23 But that's, you know -- we've got leaky roofs, we've got  
24 heaters, we've got pipes that froze, that's the money we use  
25 to do that.

1                   So it's been a pretty brutal winter so far,  
2 so we are very concerned about that money. Because you  
3 know, essentially, once we've exhausted it, we'll have to  
4 wait until the next appropriation before we're able to do  
5 any maintenance work.

6                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: I don't  
7 know how anybody could ask you to do any more the right way  
8 when you're putting in special -- you sell something. You  
9 put it into an account to pay for something else that you  
10 need to do, certainly very fiscally responsible, an  
11 efficient way of doing things.

12                   And also, I think there's a match to it, some  
13 of those dollars, from the federal government. If you  
14 haven't already used it to spend on something, there's a  
15 federal match to it also, right?

16                   MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: In some cases,  
17 depending upon what the project might be, there's federal  
18 funds available on certain things.

19                   But you know, the bottom line is, these great  
20 costs, some of the unpredictability of failures, you know,  
21 sometimes we can't wait another whole year to ask for more  
22 money. If the water's leaking on the heads of our  
23 soldiers -- I mean, they have to train. And if they're  
24 going to train in the rain, they're going to train in the  
25 rain because -- you know, that's why it's important for us

1 to carry a balance. Because I just can't predict what's  
2 going to break this year.

3 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.  
4 I just wanted to bring that out so that, you know, we fought  
5 the fight to keep those dollars in there. And I'm going to  
6 continue to do that as I'm sure the other House members  
7 will, too.

8 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Thanks.

9 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: But  
10 it's important to point out that sometimes we look at things  
11 and we want to go after it, but before you go after it, you  
12 should know what you're going after and try to honor the  
13 phrase "do no harm." So those are things we need to think  
14 about.

15 So I thank you for your testimony today.

16 Any questions from any of the members that we  
17 have? If you give them to your respective chairman, we'll  
18 get them to the Generals to do.

19 Okay. Thank you so much today for your  
20 testimony.

21 And next we're going to go to the State  
22 Veterans Commission, Mr. Edgar Burris, chairman of that  
23 commission.

24 Okay, Mr. Burris.

25 MR. BURRIS: Good morning.

1                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Good  
2 morning.

3                   MR. BURRIS: I would like to thank the Senate  
4 and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness  
5 Committees for allowing me to testify today.

6                   The Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission,  
7 as defined in Title 1, is comprised of the Adjutant General,  
8 the Tag Major General, Tony Carrelli; the Deputy Adjutant  
9 General for Veterans Affairs, Major General retired Eric  
10 Weller; along with the State Commander, commandants and  
11 presidents of all the service organizations. And they are  
12 listed in my testimony, so to allow for time, I will not  
13 read all those off.

14                   In addition, there are more members at large  
15 assigned by the Governor, and there are four members allowed  
16 to sit at the table that are nonvoting. They are the state  
17 adjutants for the American Legion, the Disabled American  
18 Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the executive  
19 director of the Am Vets.

20                   Within the SPC, we currently have five  
21 committees active. The first is the grants to the Veteran  
22 Service Organizations Programs, commonly referred to as Act  
23 66 of 2007. They are formed to demonstrate the current use  
24 of those funds and to show why additional funds are needed,  
25 to make sure the veterans of the Commonwealth are assured

1 that they received the care and support they have so  
2 rightfully earned.

3           Pennsylvania has the fourth largest veterans  
4 population in the country. However, we are not fourth in  
5 the country when it comes to dollars awarded through pension  
6 and compensation. We are sixth based on the GDX report from  
7 the VA from fiscal year 2016. However, if you calculate  
8 those dollars in a per capita basis, you would find that we  
9 are much lower than that.

10           Alabama, by that same report, has a veteran  
11 population of 373,761. However, their pension and  
12 compensation is \$2,062,094,000. Pennsylvania with a veteran  
13 population in 2016 of 845,000 has 2,612,747,000. So you see  
14 that we are way off.

15           To change these statistics we need funding  
16 authorized to hire and train additional veteran service  
17 officers that are currently semifunded through Act 66 of  
18 2007. This will allow the service organizations to hire  
19 additional personnel. It was slated to receive funding last  
20 year. The budget was withdrawn. This program needs to be  
21 fully backed to ensure that there are sufficiently trained  
22 VSOs to assist all the veterans and their families.

23           Since its inception in 2007, looking at the  
24 VA's GDX report, there are 1,057,000 veterans in the state  
25 of Pennsylvania. The moneys received was 2,840,523 -- I'm



1 sorry, 840,523,000, with the compensation and pension being  
2 1,167,287,000.

3 Now, looking at the GDX report for FY2016,  
4 the veteran population had decreased to 845,507; however, we  
5 saw a dramatic increase in benefits paid. Total  
6 expenditures were 5,480,864,000. This is an increase of  
7 2,640,341,000, almost doubled. Then looking at the amount  
8 of compensation and pension, it increased to 2,612,747,000,  
9 an increase that more than doubled.

10 Since its inception, there's been  
11 \$21,194,784 -- \$85, excuse me -- put into this program. And  
12 although the veteran population has decreased, the moneys  
13 from the VA increased by \$1.5 billion. That seems like a  
14 good investment to me.

15 The current veteran population today is  
16 approximately 820,000. When adding dependents eligible for  
17 benefits, the numbers of persons eligible to receive funding  
18 increases. When you couple grants to veterans organizations  
19 along with the extensive training now being given to the  
20 county directors of Veterans Affairs through the MDVA, along  
21 with which they invite the service organizations to attend,  
22 we have seen a huge spike. However, it's not big enough  
23 because although we're the fourth largest veteran population  
24 in the world -- or the country, we are not fourth in the  
25 moneys received.

1           In addition, County Code states that every  
2 county is to have a director of Veterans Affairs. Many  
3 counties struggle due to the unfunded mandates forced upon  
4 them. There needs to be additional funding provided to  
5 ensure county veterans offices are also fully staffed. The  
6 amount of funding that the VA currently gives to veterans in  
7 this Commonwealth would most definitely increase. It stands  
8 to reason that if we are fourth in population, we should be  
9 fourth in receiving VA moneys coming in.

10           Our next committee is the Bylaws Committee.  
11 Their function is to set forth a set of bylaws that will be  
12 a guideline for the commission to use going forward.  
13 Currently, we do not have bylaws in which the commission  
14 conducts its business. Having these in place will spur  
15 everything forward as we go forward in our meetings caring  
16 for the veterans of the Commonwealth.

17           The Legislative Committee is tasked with  
18 tracking current bills and reporting to the commission those  
19 that the committee think are the most needed to be tracked  
20 and whether it is a bill that will benefit our veterans and  
21 families or a bill that may be seen as a detriment to their  
22 benefits or their care. We also ask them to look at bills  
23 that should be presented to the legislators for enactment.  
24 We have a pension relief grave marker and state military  
25 cemeteries.

1                   House Bill 304 sponsored by Representative  
2 Goodman, in reference to Section 7701, Subsection B and  
3 Section 7702, Subsection A of Title 51, has been submitted  
4 and referred to the committee of Veterans Affairs and  
5 Emergency Preparedness. These recommend raising the pension  
6 for the blind and paralyzed veterans from 150 to 200. We  
7 would ask that those bills be pushed through and we would  
8 ask that they be pushed through on their own merits with  
9 nothing attached to them.

10                   In addition, County Code authorizes a payment  
11 of \$75 towards a funeral bill of a deceased war era veteran  
12 and the same like amount for the surviving widow upon her  
13 death. County code goes on to state that it can be raised  
14 to \$100. Looking back at the death records in my county in  
15 1914, \$50 was paid. However, the cost of burial, including  
16 plot, casket, and digging of the grave was less than \$100.  
17 The average cost of a burial today is \$10,000, plus the  
18 expense of the plot and the digging of the grave.

19                   The County Code needs to be updated with an  
20 increase, as well as a requirement for the funeral homes to  
21 notify the counties on the death of a veteran. For as  
22 required in County Code Section 1912, every county is  
23 responsible to report to the state the death of every  
24 veteran in the county and where they are buried. Many  
25 funeral homes do not do that because the amount of money

1 they receive for doing the paperwork is not worth their  
2 time.

3 We would also ask that "war era" be removed,  
4 for when a veteran went into service they basically signed  
5 over a check to the country, the state, and the county for a  
6 price up to and including their life. Just because they  
7 were fortunate enough to have served during a time of peace,  
8 their service is no less valuable.

9 As I was told by a colonel many years ago,  
10 all veterans got dressed to go to the dance, not all got  
11 invited to the dance floor.

12 As discussed during the testimony of last  
13 year given by Chairman John Brenner on the area of property  
14 tax exemption, currently to be eligible for this program, a  
15 veteran must be a war era veteran, be rated 100 percent  
16 permanent and total, or be paid at the 100 percent rate due  
17 to IU and meet the income guidelines.

18 As brought to you in last year's testimony,  
19 we would still like to see a constitutional change to  
20 include the surviving spouse of the service member killed  
21 in action, for this family has given 100 percent to the  
22 cause of freedom. And this is a small price to be paid. As  
23 well, remove the "war time era" stipulation so any veteran  
24 rated 100 percent permanent and total or IU would be able to  
25 apply for and be granted the property tax exemption. We

1 would ask that if this bill were submitted, again, that it  
2 would go through on its own merits with no attachments or  
3 riders.

4           Lastly, on real estate tax exemption, make  
5 the ruling that the exemption be granted based on the date  
6 stamp on the application so that they don't have to wait  
7 until the following tax cycle and that way all counties  
8 would be providing this benefit equally. Currently, some  
9 honor the date stamp on the application, others require that  
10 that wait until the following year tax season before that  
11 tax exemption takes effect.

12           Funding for the state veterans homes -- with  
13 Pennsylvania having the fourth largest veteran population in  
14 the country, it is inconceivable why last year's proposed  
15 budget was cut. Even if funding had been kept exactly as it  
16 was the year before, it would still be considered a cut  
17 because the workers have union contracted raises, the cost  
18 of health care increases, and any fund left over to care for  
19 the veterans dwindles.

20           The veterans in this state and this  
21 Commonwealth need to be taken care of. Our veteran  
22 population is getting older and more will be needing care.  
23 Many forget that without their services and sacrifices, many  
24 of you would not be able to do what you are doing here  
25 today.

1 I thank you again for allowing me the time to  
2 testify today on the needs of our veterans.

3 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Thank  
4 you.

5 Any questions by anyone? It can even be  
6 staff.

7 Senator Hutchinson.

8 SENATOR HUTCHINSON: Not a question, just a  
9 comment. Thanks for coming down.

10 A pet peeve of mine over the years, and you  
11 seem to agree with me, is that, you know, that term "war era  
12 veterans." We should be honoring all of our veterans  
13 equally in these kinds of programs. And just generally, I  
14 think that's something, a direction we should move in as a  
15 society, in saying that everyone who stepped forward should  
16 be honored, whether they ended up being in a war era or not.

17 So thank you for talking about that today,  
18 too, and thanks for coming down.

19 MR. BURRIS: Thank you.

20 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH:

21 Anybody? Any staff?

22 (No response.)

23 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

24 For a matter of time, this all ties into a previous  
25 discussion.

1                   The number of veterans, you know, we were  
2 using for a long time -- we have 900,000 veterans. And we  
3 were using that -- in fact, I was using that all last year.  
4 But now, there's about 820,000 veterans?

5                   MR. BURRIS: Yes, sir.

6                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: So all  
7 those veterans have passed away?

8                   MR. BURRIS: Either passed away or moved  
9 because of finding jobs. You know, finding jobs in rural  
10 Pennsylvania is tough. Many of them that get out of the  
11 military go on to other places where they can seek  
12 education.

13                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Some of  
14 them move to warmer weather, too, probably.

15                   Okay. The recommendation for the increase  
16 from 150 to \$200 for the blind veterans pension and the  
17 amputee and paralyzed veterans pension. How many of our  
18 veterans fit into that category? Do you have a number for  
19 that? Anyone?

20                   MR. BURRIS: Roughly 2,000.

21                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Two  
22 thousand? Okay. Thank you.

23                   The funeral homes -- I just had to bury my  
24 brother-in-law, who was 52. He died of a heart attack. He  
25 was a veteran. And you know, I know the funeral home

1 applied for following the County Code that they have to do.  
2 But you're saying some funeral homes will not do it because  
3 why?

4 MR. BURRIS: Some funeral homes refuse to do  
5 it because the \$75 is not worth their time to do the  
6 paperwork.

7 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Yeah,  
8 but that \$75 is to pay that bill, right? The cost of that  
9 funeral that someone has to pay?

10 MR. BURRIS: The application states that the  
11 money can either be sent to the family or it can go back to  
12 the funeral home if the funeral bills are not paid.  
13 However, we -- in my county alone and throughout the  
14 Commonwealth, there are funeral homes that do not do that  
15 paperwork.

16 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Let me  
17 ask you something. Do you know what the paperwork consists  
18 of?

19 MR. BURRIS: Yes, sir, I do.

20 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: How  
21 long does it take you to do that paperwork?

22 MR. BURRIS: It takes about 10 to 15 minutes  
23 if the family has all of the information.

24 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH:

25 Basically, a DD214, a copy of the death



1 certificate, which the funeral home gets for you.

2 MR. BURRIS: Right.

3 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Cost of  
4 the funeral --

5 MR. BURRIS: It's -- but again, the other  
6 part is the \$75. If you compare to 100 years ago, they were  
7 given 50. And the cost of a funeral 100 years ago was \$100.  
8 The cost of a funeral today is 10,000.

9 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Yeah.  
10 Okay. Something for us to look at, too, then.

11 This might be for any of you.

12 Just thinking, as far as our veterans  
13 population, I know that people migrate. They move around.  
14 But with the all-volunteer Army that we have today, compared  
15 to many of our people, World War II and Korea, our numbers  
16 are dwindling because of their age, but how do you see our  
17 numbers going as far as with an all-volunteer as opposed  
18 to -- we had the Korean war, we had World War II, draft,  
19 even Vietnam, part of it was draft and then it changed to  
20 the lottery system. And then eventually not to just -- the  
21 Vietnam era, did it ever go to the volunteer or through the  
22 end was it --

23 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: It was a draft.  
24 Obviously, there were plenty of people who volunteered and  
25 were career service members, but by and large, most members

1 that served in uniform during that time were drafted.

2 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Is  
3 there a possibility that numbers of veterans will -- as our  
4 World War II and Korea's veterans pass on, our Vietnam  
5 veterans are around my age, in their 60s -- do we see a  
6 decrease in the veterans population?

7 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Yes, sir. Our  
8 veterans population will continue to decrease. I mean, a  
9 few years ago, we were advertising we were nearly a million  
10 veterans in Pennsylvania. And then we were in the mid-900s,  
11 high 800s, last year the mid-800s, now we're 820,000.

12 We used to have 320 to 340,000 Vietnam vets  
13 in Pennsylvania. Now, I believe the latest number is about  
14 280,000. So those numbers are going down. But if you look  
15 at World War II, we had over 16 million Americans served in  
16 the military during the World War II time frame,  
17 nine million during the Vietnam time frame. We just aren't  
18 putting up those kinds of numbers now.

19 So as a nation, our veterans numbers are  
20 going down. Every state is seeing that. There are  
21 estimates that 20, 30 years from now, we may be in the 500  
22 to 600,000 range with the number of veterans.

23 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: In how  
24 many years?

25 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: Twenty to thirty

1 years, sir. But those populations are getting older and  
2 older.

3 And again, it depends, if you look at --

4 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Yes.

5 MAJOR GENERAL CARRELLI: -- historically,  
6 over the last decade, our military has gotten much, much  
7 smaller. The Air Force is a fraction of what it used to be.  
8 The Army is a fraction of the size it used to be, the  
9 smallest it's been since World War II.

10 So where are we going there with the new  
11 administration? We're talking about increased money in the  
12 defense budget, starting to increase in size of the  
13 different service components. Will that make up some of the  
14 difference? It's possible. But I still believe we're  
15 looking, particularly over the next decade, at our numbers  
16 continuing to decrease.

17 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

18 All right.

19 Well, we thank you. We can have further  
20 discussion on some of the items that you brought up and also  
21 on some of the questions I have.

22 So thank you. Thank you very much.

23 MR. BURRIS: Thank you. Thank you for  
24 allowing us to testify.

25 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Thank

1 you, Generals. Thank you so much.

2 The next person to testify, PA War Veterans  
3 Council, Keith Beebe, vice-president and chairman,  
4 Legislative Committee.

5 Just make sure that the mic is close to you  
6 and that the green light is on.

7 MR. BEEBE: Looks like it. There we go.

8 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

9 MR. BEEBE: Thank you very much, sir.

10 Good morning, and on behalf of the 14  
11 veterans organizations represented on the Pennsylvania War  
12 Veterans Council, we'd like to thank you for this  
13 opportunity to present the issues to you that we feel are  
14 important to the veterans community throughout the  
15 Commonwealth.

16 One of our main issues continues to be to aim  
17 to increase the current level of funding for the Veteran  
18 Service Officer Grant Program -- that's, of course, known as  
19 Act 66 of 2007 -- and continue to seek additional funding  
20 for the program in upcoming state fiscal year budgets.

21 As many of you are aware, because of our  
22 previous briefings and meetings -- we've been talking about  
23 this for quite a while -- for every dollar of investment in  
24 the Act 66 program, we recover about \$77 into the state and  
25 federal revenue. These dollars are, of course, part of the

1 tax base of the Commonwealth. The Veteran Service Officer  
2 Grant Program provides outreach throughout the Commonwealth  
3 every single day, helping veterans with state and federal  
4 benefits, as well as providing advocacy on many issues  
5 related to military service.

6 We ask the support of your committees to lead  
7 the charge to properly fund this program. You will hear  
8 more information today from a representative of the American  
9 Legion in Pennsylvania, including the accomplishments of the  
10 Veteran Service Officer Program, but quite frankly, also the  
11 significant impact on the current state funding level that  
12 it has on its operations.

13 A professional comprehensive study is needed  
14 in the long range needs of veterans truly in need of state  
15 assistance for long-term care needs, regardless of their  
16 age. We ask that the state conduct a comprehensive study on  
17 how to best achieve long-term care for veterans in need of  
18 state assistance. The study should include looking at a  
19 combination of state veterans homes, private nursing  
20 facilities, aging in place programs, rehabilitative care,  
21 adult day care, and hospice.

22 As has been said here today, we remind you  
23 that Pennsylvania has the fourth oldest veteran population  
24 in the nation. In this ever-changing world of health care  
25 reform, such a study should help determine the best path to

1 determine Pennsylvania veterans receive the respect and care  
2 they deserve.

3           The issue of small dollar AK payday loans has  
4 come up again. The state and national level has done that  
5 every year for the past few years. We steadfastly maintain  
6 the preservation without change or modification of the  
7 Commonwealth's current strong law concerning such loans.

8           We ask that you consider establishing state  
9 legislation which would allow sentenced veterans to apply  
10 for post-conviction review of their sentences if  
11 post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, or traumatic  
12 brain injury, TBI, were incurred while serving their  
13 country. In addition, supplement the Veterans Court  
14 movement by adding the requirement that every county  
15 district court of common pleas take positive steps to  
16 identify veterans appearing before them and perform  
17 professionally approved, professionally assessed  
18 presentencing investigations for PTSD and TBI.

19           We urge the State Veterans Commission, or  
20 general assembly if the commission defers, to call for an  
21 investigation of the real estate tax exemption program to  
22 ensure it is being uniformly, fairly, and equitably applied  
23 by all county taxing authorities. We will subsequently  
24 recommend any needed legislation and regulatory changes  
25 required because of the findings of this investigation.

1           In addition, we seek a state constitutional  
2 amendment to add an eligibility to the real estate tax  
3 exemption program. This eligibility would be for not  
4 remarried surviving spouses of those killed in action.

5           Veterans preference is applied to  
6 Pennsylvania state hiring for both civil service and  
7 noncivil service positions. We understand legislation  
8 should be forthcoming in the next few months, aimed on  
9 improving and standardizing the hiring process, including  
10 the hiring of veterans. This, quite frankly, has been  
11 decentralized.

12           In November, the state's Office of  
13 Administration started gathering the individual procedures  
14 from the agencies and it began working with the Department  
15 of Military and Veterans Affairs to hunt a standard approach  
16 for the veteran hiring process. The Office of  
17 Administration is also working with the MVA and the Civil  
18 Service Commission to clarify the tools and forms used to  
19 determine veteran eligibility.

20           We are concerned over whether veterans  
21 preference is being rigorously applied to noncivil service  
22 hirings as it is to civil service. We'd like to see some  
23 reporting from both systems for comparison. That's to  
24 include the percentage of totals, new hires, and the types  
25 of positions.

1           In addition, we'd like to convince ourselves  
2 that the noncivil service mechanism ensures veterans get the  
3 appropriate preference. Essentially, our concern is whether  
4 the application of the principle for those that risk  
5 themselves for the nation get a fair chance at competing on  
6 an equal level with their nonveteran peers.

7           To conclude, we'd like to ask that increased  
8 funding be considered in support of the Veterans  
9 Transportation Network. The service provides safe and  
10 reliable transportation to veterans who require assistance  
11 traveling to and from VA health care facilities and  
12 authorized non-VA health care appointments. And we'd also  
13 like to ask again that a state bonus be created for those  
14 who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, or of course,  
15 the global War on Terror.

16           Once more, I thank you very much for the  
17 opportunity to testify today. The Pennsylvania War Veterans  
18 Council continues to work with you to improve the lives of  
19 veterans throughout the Commonwealth.

20           Thank you.

21           SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Any  
22 questions?

23           A comment from Senator Hutchinson.

24           SENATOR HUTCHINSON: Thank you.

25           You have some great suggestions here and I



1 look forward to working with you on those.

2 I think the thing that really stood out,  
3 based on what we were hearing earlier today about the  
4 changing population of elderly veterans and the kinds of  
5 services they need and the kinds of services that, you  
6 know -- one of the members talked about, where are we in the  
7 transitional care or short-term care and all those kind of  
8 things? And then your testimony sort of brings that home  
9 and talks about, maybe we need a comprehensive study going  
10 forward instead of just saying, "We're going to address this  
11 problem here, oh, and we're going to do this over here."  
12 But look at the whole ball of wax --

13 MR. BEEBE: The whole picture, yes, sir.

14 SENATOR HUTCHINSON: -- so we can provide  
15 what's needed today in today's environment to serve  
16 veterans, whether it's -- you know, including aging in  
17 place. What can we do to help them stay in their home? You  
18 know, if it takes small dollar amounts or whatever to allow  
19 them to stay at home, which is what I'm sure most would  
20 prefer, if possible. You know, everything from there to  
21 Alzheimer units and everything in between. This -- maybe we  
22 do need a more global look at the whole ball of wax.

23 So thanks for bringing that up today.

24 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Yes, to  
25 follow up on that. You bring up a good point there, and

1 Senator Hutchinson, I think, said what I was going to say.  
2 So I'll leave that go.

3 There's only one thing here.

4 On the veterans preference issue with the  
5 civil service.

6 MR. BEEBE: Yes.

7 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: You  
8 know we've had ongoing negotiations with regards to that  
9 piece of legislation.

10 MR. BEEBE: Yes, sir. I understand the  
11 legislation is upcoming, I believe.

12 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Right.  
13 And you know, once again, we have no intention of affecting  
14 in any negative way our veterans for civil service.

15 One of the issues was with our homes, was  
16 months and months to fill replacements to take care of our  
17 veterans in those homes. So it's twofold. We have veterans  
18 in there who we want to give the best service we can give  
19 to, but yet, we don't have the people to provide that  
20 service to our veterans for various reasons. And so that's  
21 why we're taking this issue on because it's so very  
22 important.

23 But even back at the southwest veterans home,  
24 one of the issues I brought up when I first got on that  
25 counsel -- before I was chairman in the Senate and before,

1 actually, I was in the Senate, I was in the House -- we want  
2 to make every effort to hire veterans to take care of  
3 veterans. So that is our goal and our mission.

4 But still, if we have veterans in homes that  
5 weren't receiving the proper care, to be able to replace  
6 those people to take care of them, that's -- we need to take  
7 care of those people in those homes. And even though the  
8 southwest veterans home used to be, you know, personal,  
9 domicile, dealt with some dementia, dealt with a little  
10 hospice, a little nursing, and because of the demographics  
11 and the need that's out there, that has been converted over  
12 pretty much to a nursing home. And a lot of the veterans in  
13 that home, that I know personally from being over there so  
14 many times, they really require a lot of assistance. So we  
15 want to make sure of that.

16 MR. BEEBE: Thank you, sir.

17 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Yes,  
18 absolutely.

19 MR. O'LEARY: Keith, in regard to the real  
20 estate tax exemption, including the spouse of a KIA --

21 MR. BEEBE: Right.

22 MR. O'LEARY: -- do you, as the war council,  
23 do you share the same view as the Veterans Commission? I  
24 believe they testified --

25 MR. BEEBE: I was reading the --

1 MR. O'LEARY: -- regarding the war clause.

2 MR. BEEBE: Yeah. I was reading their  
3 testimony. It looks to be the same.

4 MR. O'LEARY: Okay.

5 MR. BEEBE: We, of course -- I think the one  
6 major difference was that it is an unmarried or not  
7 remarried --

8 MR. O'LEARY: Yes, right.

9 MR. BEEBE: -- spouse was the only difference  
10 that I noted.

11 MR. O'LEARY: And Chairman Sainato has the  
12 legislation and we kicked it out of committee --

13 MR. BEEBE: Right. Okay.

14 MR. O'LEARY: -- and we'll probably move it  
15 on the floor soon.

16 MR. BEEBE: All right.

17 MR. O'LEARY: But one of the issues out  
18 there, it was mentioned earlier, is the war clause, you  
19 know, the injury had to happen during a period of war. And  
20 the issue of should that clause, the war clause, be taken  
21 out. Did you discuss that at all?

22 MR. BEEBE: I don't have any reference to  
23 that. I mean, I know what you're saying, but I don't have  
24 an answer to that, sir.

25 MR. O'LEARY: Okay.

1                   MR. BEEBE: You mean removing the war clause?  
2 Is that what --

3                   MR. O'LEARY: Yeah, because according to  
4 Article 8, Section 2C of the Constitution, it says 100  
5 percent disabled veteran who, during a period of war,  
6 incurred this injury -- not in the war, but during a period  
7 of war. And that has been on the discussion table of should  
8 the war clause come out.

9                   MR. BEEBE: Okay. Let me check into that for  
10 you, sir.

11                  MR. O'LEARY: Okay. I appreciate it.

12                  MR. BEEBE: Thank you.

13                  MR. O'LEARY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14                  SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: And as  
15 far as the Veterans Transportation Network --

16                  MR. BEEBE: Yes.

17                  SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: -- is  
18 the main issue in the rural areas as opposed to -- you know,  
19 these veterans, most of these veterans, of course, when you  
20 look at the numbers, a lot of them are at the age where they  
21 can get, we call the program ACCESS back home. It's paid  
22 through lottery dollars for transportation to and from  
23 certain things for these veterans.

24                               Is there a number that you have? And also is  
25 it more prevalent in certain areas like the rural areas

1 where these veterans don't have a means of transportation?  
2 I'm not quite sure. If we could get a little bit, if we  
3 could get like a white paper on the Veterans Transportation  
4 Network to explain it a little bit more in depth --

5 MR. BEEBE: I will get that to you, sir.

6 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

7 MR. BEEBE: And thank you. I work with the  
8 department -- the DAV has the most information on that. I  
9 can get that to you.

10 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.  
11 Because there may be something we can do as far as something  
12 with -- especially with the certain age groups of veterans  
13 with regards to those additional services that are offered  
14 through the lottery dollars for transportation.

15 MR. BEEBE: I will do that, sir. Thank you.

16 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: All  
17 right. Thank you.

18 Pleasure as always, Mr. Beebe. Thank you  
19 very much.

20 MR. BEEBE: Thank you, sir.

21 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

22 Next, we will have the PA American Legion, Kit Watson,  
23 Department Adjutant.

24 Is the green light still on, Kit?

25 MR. WATSON: Yes, it is.

1                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.  
2 All right.

3                   MR. WATSON: Well, as your numbers have  
4 dwindled from 17 to 3, I appreciate all three of you  
5 sticking around.

6                   Good morning, distinguished members present.  
7 My name is Kit Watson. I'm the Department Adjutant for the  
8 Pennsylvania American Legion. I requested to speak here  
9 today representing the American Legion's efforts for Act 66  
10 of 2007, the VSO Grant Program.

11                   This program has proven to be the gold  
12 standard for veterans outreach in our state and has become  
13 the most successful veterans support bill ever passed by  
14 your members. This program touches more veterans than any  
15 other veterans support program ever enacted by the state, to  
16 which we have previously testified to to your committees on  
17 several occasions. Today, I want to tell you what this  
18 program means to us at the American Legion.

19                   Since the year 1919, taking care of veterans  
20 has been one of the four pillars of service that our  
21 organization was built upon. The VSO Grant Program has  
22 given us the ability to perform this mission at a much  
23 higher standard. The majority of veterans outreach in our  
24 state is a by-product of the VSO Grant Program. In the  
25 American Legion, we averaged over 78 outreach visits per

1 month last year, mostly to legislative offices, and  
2 requested benefits for over 5,020 veterans, of which more  
3 than half of those veterans were first time original claims.

4 Our veteran service officers assisted  
5 another 2,282 veterans for non-VA military service related  
6 issues and appeals. Without the VSO Grant Program, we would  
7 have returned to the old days of hoping the veterans hear of  
8 their benefits and would wait for them to come to us for  
9 assistance.

10 We have used our legislative outreach program  
11 to be aware of veterans who need us in their local  
12 communities. We have essentially begged this body for  
13 additional resources in the VSO Grant Program over the past  
14 few years. Why? Because we have a proven program that  
15 works.

16 With an aging veterans population in  
17 Pennsylvania, where more than half our veterans are over the  
18 age of 65, we cannot afford to continue to push funding to  
19 this program down the road. Our veterans need assistance  
20 now. Employing fully trained, accredited veteran service  
21 officers is critical to the success of reaching veterans who  
22 are unaware of their benefits that they may be entitled to.

23 We have testified in the past that the  
24 service officer salaries are our biggest obstacle and it  
25 remains our large hurdle today.



1           Last year, just our organization lost nine  
2 fully trained, accredited service officers to higher paying  
3 positions. We've become the training ground for better  
4 paying jobs with veteran support positions. Losing nine  
5 service officers degrades our ability to provide and  
6 maintain the highest standards of assistance we owe our  
7 veterans. We challenge you to prove your support for the  
8 Commonwealth veterans by finding the monetary resources to  
9 improve this valuable program.

10           Our organizations have shown you the road map  
11 of how to reach veterans and their families, but we can't  
12 take those roads without retaining the quality staff we  
13 employ to drive it. We can only do that by adding  
14 additional funding to this program.

15           VA expenditures for compensation to pension  
16 last year to Pennsylvania veterans was \$2.6 billion, proving  
17 there is a strong return on investment.

18           The majority of our outreach efforts are done  
19 in legislative offices. You have the ability to evaluate  
20 our performance on a daily basis.

21           I would like to end our testimony by quoting  
22 some of your fellow members' words.

23           "My district office staff are charged with  
24 helping constituents navigate through the bureaucratic red  
25 tape. By having a service officer visit monthly, we are

1 able to go above and beyond being a referral system to  
2 Veterans Affairs," Representative Peter Schweyer, 22nd  
3 district.

4 "This is an invaluable service, something  
5 that our community relies on and I'm honored to offer my  
6 office as a location to the American Legion," Representative  
7 Stephen Barrar.

8 "The VSO outreach program is an excellent  
9 service and an important resource for veterans to be able to  
10 connect with someone who can help receive the benefits and  
11 services they deserve," Representative Nick Miccarelli.

12 "Please accept this letter as my full support  
13 for continued funding for the VSO outreach program offered  
14 by the American Legion. This excellent service allows  
15 veterans of my district the opportunity to meet face to face  
16 with a skilled and friendly service officer," Representative  
17 Rich Irvin, 81st district.

18 "This program is a priority for veterans  
19 seeking benefits. I fully support the continued efforts  
20 provided by the VSO outreach program," Representative Fred  
21 Keller, 85th district.

22 "It is my belief that the Veterans Service  
23 Officer Program is a much needed program as evidenced by my  
24 own district office. I would appreciate your serious  
25 consideration of continued funding for this program," Lynda

1 Culver, 108th district.

2 "I cannot express how much this service means  
3 to me, my staff, and most of all, my veteran constituents.  
4 I hope that we can continue this relationship for years to  
5 come. Through this program the American Legion is providing  
6 a great service and we feel fortunate that we have the  
7 opportunity to utilize the program and reach out to the  
8 veterans of the 116th Legislative District," Representative  
9 Tara Toohil.

10 "I'm writing today to express my pleasure  
11 with our relationship with the Philadelphia branch of the  
12 American Legion," Representative Justin Simmons, 131st  
13 district.

14 "Veterans are a crucial part of our  
15 community, and their selfless service to our community is  
16 without question. The service that you and your  
17 organization provide to local veterans is critical, ensuring  
18 that they receive appropriate benefits. I have seen  
19 firsthand the extraordinary work you do and provide by  
20 providing outreach services at my Sayre office,"  
21 Representative Tina Pickett, 110th district.

22 "News of this program spread throughout the  
23 district quickly and veterans were extremely appreciative of  
24 the support. Our feedback has been overwhelmingly positive  
25 of veterans telling us that they absolutely feel they

1 receive first-class advice and assistance," Representative  
2 Adam Harris, 82nd district.

3 "I would like to express my full support and  
4 continuation of the VSO Grant Program, in particular the  
5 favorable consideration of the American Legion request for  
6 additional moneys," Representative Chris Dush, 66th  
7 district.

8 "The time VSO officers spent in the  
9 legislative district offices, such as mine, has proven to be  
10 invaluable to many constituents searching for assistance,"  
11 Representative Ryan Mackenzie, 131st district.

12 "I believe this funding will be very  
13 beneficial to the veterans of my district; therefore, I give  
14 strong support and encourage the approval of VSO Grant  
15 Program applications," Representative Martin Causer, 67th  
16 district.

17 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Can I  
18 just interrupt you for a minute?

19 MR. WATSON: Sure.

20 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Because  
21 of time --

22 MR. WATSON: Sure.

23 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: -- I  
24 would like to get the Veterans of Foreign Wars in here.

25 And I get your point. And here is the point.

1 We all say we want to try to get you these dollars. Then  
2 why didn't it happen? All of these people want to make  
3 these statements, but what were they willing to do to give  
4 you those dollars? For some of us, we're willing to do a  
5 lot to get them.

6 So I think you get to each one of these  
7 representatives and get to the other representatives and  
8 senators, okay, and kind of do what you're doing here, same  
9 thing, and get a commitment from them that they'll do this.

10 Now, our budget is not in real good shape.  
11 Still not in good shape, even though it's balanced, so to  
12 speak. But when people make statements that they want  
13 something, they need to go fight for it. That's what they  
14 need to do.

15 MR. WATSON: I won't dispute that, sir.

16 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: I  
17 fought for it. I wasn't able to pull it off. And I'm sorry  
18 about that. I'm even ashamed that I didn't get it done.  
19 When I go after something, I generally get it done.

20 This should be in the budget this year. So  
21 let's just see, let's everybody put their name on the line,  
22 in the House and the Senate, that they want this in the  
23 budget.

24 If we have to go take it from some other  
25 place, that's fine. We may not have the dollars to increase

1 anything in this budget. But there's other places maybe we  
2 can pull it from. So let's make our decision on what we  
3 want to do.

4 So you keep that in mind.

5 And all of you can get to your state reps and  
6 your state senators, and say, "It's our time for this here.  
7 We're asking for it and we want you to fight for it."

8 MR. WATSON: Senator Vulakovich, I totally  
9 agree with you and we plan on doing just that.

10 And one thing that isn't in my written  
11 testimony is my final statement and that is, what makes this  
12 funding request different from other requests that you  
13 receive? This pays back dividends to the Commonwealth and  
14 it's a proven -- we're in 10 years of it now, and it's  
15 proven over that 10 years that it's never fallen short of  
16 returning dividends to the Commonwealth.

17 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: And  
18 take the dollar amount aside, we keep talking about wanting  
19 to serve those who served. The sky is not the limit, but  
20 this isn't out of the question to ask for and to get more  
21 benefits to our veterans who deserve them.

22 So thank you.

23 Do you have anything else to say?

24 MR. WATSON: Thank you.

25 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: And I

1 apologize for that, but we just -- I wanted to get the other  
2 one group up here because we're committed to go to session.

3 MR. WATSON: Yes, I understand, sir.

4 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: We  
5 can't get out of that.

6 MR. WATSON: I appreciate the three of you  
7 sticking around.

8 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Thank  
9 you, Kit. Thank you.

10 PA Veterans of Foreign Wars, Dwight Fuhrman,  
11 Department Commander.

12 MR. FUHRMAN: Good morning to the House,  
13 Senate chairs, and members of the committee. Thank you for  
14 the opportunity to speak to you on two items that concern  
15 our organization.

16 At the VFW state convention in Pittsburgh,  
17 our membership adopted a no smoking ban resolution. Since  
18 then, we have been on the hill a few times to ask  
19 representatives of the House and Senate to support us on  
20 this resolution by bringing the bill out of committee and  
21 onto the floor for a vote.

22 In order to save time, I would like to read  
23 this resolution to you, as I feel it is self-explanatory. I  
24 will welcome any questions during or after this session.

25 "Whereas, the Pennsylvania Veterans of

1 Foreign Wars since its founding has stood for and supported  
2 all veterans health issues; and

3 "Whereas, by any and all medical and  
4 governmental reports, smoking and secondhand smoke have been  
5 proven to be known as carcinogenic; and

6 "Whereas, Pennsylvania Veterans of Foreign  
7 Wars respects the right of our veterans to smoke, we also  
8 must respect the right of the veterans who choose not to  
9 smoke; and

10 "Whereas, Pennsylvania Veterans of Foreign  
11 Wars is always seeking new members to join our ranks, by  
12 encouraging our posts' leadership to maintain a quality  
13 operation conducive to all family members of our membership;  
14 and

15 "Whereas, today a vast majority of eligible  
16 veterans are nonsmokers and do not frequent smoking  
17 establishments; and

18 "Whereas, to prevent further erosion of our  
19 membership and entice new members to join our ranks, we must  
20 address the health factor of all members and families,  
21 children and spouses, of our posts; and

22 "Whereas, legislation to ban smoking in all  
23 PLCB establishments, clubs, bars, and restaurants across our  
24 Commonwealth would provide an even playing field for all  
25 entities: Now, therefore be it



1                   "Resolved that the Pennsylvania Veterans of  
2 Foreign Wars 2017 convention, meeting in regular session,  
3 June 14 to 17, 2017 at the Green Tree Pittsburgh,  
4 Pennsylvania, hereby support legislation to ban smoking in  
5 PLCB establishments throughout our Commonwealth; and be it  
6 further

7                   "Resolved that a copy of this resolution be  
8 forwarded to the Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission and  
9 the Pennsylvania War Councils seeking their support, and  
10 finally be it

11                   "Resolved that a copy of this resolution be  
12 forwarded to the Governor and members of the Pennsylvania  
13 Senate and general assembly for immediate action."

14                   In light of our resolution, we're asking you  
15 to join us in this effort in supporting the smoking ban  
16 legislations.

17                   Last year, we were left out of the budget for  
18 increasing the current level of funding for Act 66 outreach  
19 programs. So again, this year, we are in full support of  
20 the legislative goals of the Pennsylvania Veterans War  
21 Council Organization which includes increased funding for  
22 Act 66.

23                   So in closing, thank you again for this  
24 opportunity to address you. Thank you.

25                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Well,

1 we've addressed the Act 66 part of it.

2 MR. FUHRMAN: Yeah.

3 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH:

4 "Resolved, that the Pennsylvania Veterans of  
5 Foreign Wars 2017 convention, meeting in regular session --  
6 2017 -- Green Tree, Pittsburgh -- hereby support legislation  
7 to ban" all "smoking in PLCB establishments throughout the  
8 Commonwealth..."

9 "A copy of this resolution be forwarded to  
10 the Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission and the  
11 Pennsylvania War Council seeking their support, and be it  
12 finally

13 Resolved that (inaudible) for their immediate  
14 action."

15 Okay. So where are we with the State  
16 Veterans Commission and the PA War Veterans Council on this  
17 issue? Is there an agreement on this?

18 MR. FUHRMAN: On the smoking -- I think we're  
19 all in favor of no smoking. I think there are two bills  
20 laying out there that need to be brought up and addressed to  
21 be voted on to -- we would like to see the whole state of  
22 Pennsylvania go nonsmoking, sir.

23 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Well,  
24 we fought that battle some time ago, and some of us -- well,  
25 a lot of us got kicked around pretty good with that piece of

1 legislation. It went back and forth.

2           Look, we're going to give this some thought.  
3 Me, personally, I never smoked. I don't like it. I  
4 attribute the death of my father to two and a half packs of  
5 Lucky Strike cigarettes every day, mill worker, age 40,  
6 died. I just buried my brother-in-law, 52, smoked heavily,  
7 and I attribute that to that, also.

8           So I'm all for nonsmoking. But this -- we  
9 can't really give you a judgment or answer on this right  
10 now. I guess the idea is that you want to ban it from your  
11 clubs, but you want to make sure it's banned in every other  
12 club, too.

13           MR. FUHRMAN: Yes.

14           SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: It'd be  
15 a hard one to pull off. I'm just going to be honest with  
16 you.

17           MR. FUHRMAN: Yeah.

18           SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: I think  
19 that one of the strong reasons why we didn't go all the way  
20 with the ban was because we heard from organizations, such  
21 as yourselves, saying, "Well, you would really hurt us  
22 because of, you know, the members who come in there." And  
23 smoking was, you know -- back in the years, especially  
24 during battle times -- I guess it's true when you see the  
25 movies, "Boy, do you have a cigarette?"

1                   MR. FUHRMAN: Oh, yeah. They had cigarettes  
2 on cigarettes. Yeah.

3                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: So this  
4 is an issue. Me, personally, I would like to ban smoking  
5 everywhere like that, but I'm just one person and there may  
6 be some controversy over this. So I think if all of you are  
7 on board, you know -- I don't have an answer for you right  
8 now.

9                   MR. FUHRMAN: There are a lot of VFW posts  
10 now that are nonsmoking. My post is one of them. And our  
11 business is booming.

12                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Yeah.

13                   MR. FUHRMAN: And we'd just like to see it  
14 get there.

15                   I almost died from smoking back in 1996. I  
16 was a three-pack-a-day smoker. I ended up in the hospital  
17 for 10 days. So you know, I'm an ex-smoker and I just, I  
18 can't be around it.

19                   MR. O'LEARY: Are the policies currently that  
20 you let each post decide?

21                   MR. FUHRMAN: Yeah. It's up to the post to  
22 decide if they want to smoke or nonsmoke. Yeah. So it's  
23 slowly going to nonsmoking in our VFWs across Pennsylvania.  
24 But there's still smoking posts out there, which I don't go  
25 to.

1                   MR. O'LEARY: Sure. But I think the Veterans  
2 Commission and the War Council, if they officially take a  
3 position and let the committees know, Mr. Chairman, I know  
4 my chairman would be very interested in the voice of this  
5 commission and the council, officially. I know we've heard  
6 it from individual organizations on this. So we look  
7 forward to discussing it.

8                   MR. FUHRMAN: Thank you.

9                   SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: You  
10 know, you have private clubs that, it's private.

11                  MR. FUHRMAN: Right.

12                  SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: You  
13 join, you join. You're a guest. You know it going in.  
14 That was the slippery slope, so to speak, as attorneys like  
15 to use, that we were getting into and -- I don't know.

16                         Things do evolve. Less people are smoking.  
17 And you're right. You know, the restaurants went nuts over  
18 it. And yet, it really didn't affect them at all. So I  
19 don't know that --

20                         I don't know at this stage of the game that  
21 it would really affect, you know, your membership and what  
22 your clubs provide socially to your members. That it  
23 would -- if you would choose to all do that on your own, I  
24 don't know that you'd lose that much. I really don't.  
25 Because it's the camaraderie and the spirit of your

1 organization that I believe really draws your members, and  
2 that socialization. I do know that there are some people  
3 that can't drink without a cigarette, you know. But I think  
4 that's starting to change.

5 So this is an issue that I think you're going  
6 to have to work on yourselves and come to us. And something  
7 we'll have to think about. I do not have an answer for you.  
8 Sorry. But it's a realization about how it really is out  
9 there.

10 But I commend you because I think it's a good  
11 thing. You know, there's people who work in there, who  
12 don't smoke, who really don't like that, but they work in  
13 there. And they provide those services and it's not fair.  
14 But in private clubs, there's certainly decisions you can  
15 each make on your own and just say, "Look, we're not going  
16 to have it anymore." And however you do it, whether it's  
17 got to be a unanimous vote or majority vote or something  
18 like that, but I commend you for that because you've  
19 suffered because of your three packs, my father paid the  
20 price of two and a half, my brother-in-law just passed over  
21 Christmas, 52. It was sad. And people have paid the price  
22 for this.

23 So I thank you very much.

24 MR. FUHRMAN: Thank you.

25 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: Okay.

1 Thank you.

2 MR. FUHRMAN: Thank you, sir.

3 SENATE MAJORITY CHAIRMAN VULAKOVICH: For the  
4 record, Concerned Veterans for America, Alan McCormick is  
5 the coalition's director. He's provided testimony in the  
6 packets that are available.

7 And I want to thank all of you for being here  
8 today. I need to thank you all for the service in the past  
9 as a soldier serving in the military, male, female, all  
10 those who served in any other capacity. And I especially  
11 thank you who have served in the past and are continuing to  
12 serve, for those who are serving now and will become  
13 veterans like yourself.

14 So with that, thank you, God bless you, and  
15 that will conclude this hearing. Thank you.

16 (Hearing concluded at 11:04 a.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I hereby certify that the proceedings are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me on the within proceedings, and that this copy is a correct transcript of the same.

---

Summer A. Miller, Court Reporter  
Notary Public