

MINUTES**ARKANSAS VETERANS' HOME TASK FORCE****Tuesday, May 7, 2013****10:00 a.m.****Room 149, State Capitol****Little Rock, Arkansas**

The Arkansas Veterans' Home Task Force met Tuesday, May 7, 2013 in Room 149 of the State Capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas. The following members attended: Senators, Jane English, Jim Hendren, and Bobby Pierce; Mr. Paulino Acosta, Jr., Mr. Ronnie Anderson, Ms. AnnaMarie Atwood, Ms. Jane Benton, Mr. Miles Brown, Mr. Joseph Didden, Mr. Steve Gray, Mr. Mike Hampton, Ms. Anne Laidlaw, Mr. Bob Moody, Ms. Alicia "Cissy" Rucker, Mr. Bob Schoenborn, and Mr. Tom Thomas.

Other legislators attending: Representatives John Edwards, Kim Hammer, Douglas House, Fredrick Love, and Mark Perry.

Senator English called the meeting to order and recognized the Task Force members for introductions.

Senator English stated that the Task Force will have an open and public process. She announced the Task Force will meet every month until its final report is submitted to the Legislative Council, the Senate Committee on State Agencies and the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs by October 31, 2013. The schedule of Task Force meetings are as follows: **June 6, July 9, August 5, September 12, and October 10 at 10:00 a.m., in Room 149 of the State Capitol.** Senator English noted that one of these meetings may possibly be held at the Fayetteville Nursing Home in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Senator English stated that Act 38 of 2013 requires the Task Force to determine who the veterans are in Arkansas and their needs, as it investigates the criteria for a new veterans' home. After the criteria are developed for the veterans' home/new building proposals will be accepted. Senator English also noted that the Department of Veterans' Affairs has completed several site visits to veterans' homes in other states and within the state.

Ms. Alicia "Cissy" Rucker, Director, Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs, was recognized. Ms. Rucker stated that she and other individuals have visited homes to look at the different layouts and configurations but no decision have been made. Senator English stressed the importance of investigating what it would cost to maintain and operate a veterans' home and how to pay for it.

Election of Chairperson

Representative Edwards was recognized. **He nominated Senator English as chair of the Veterans' Home Task Force. Senator Bobby Pierce seconded the motion. Without objection, the motion was approved and Senator English was elected chair.**

Representative House was recognized. He reported that the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs published funding documents and requirements that are critical to the Task Force assignments. He asked whether or not the Task Force had a copy of the terms and conditions of the grant. Ms. Rucker replied that the document is available online. She will get copies to staff for distribution to the Task Force this afternoon.

Senator English said the Task Force will have to submit its assurance that it will have $\frac{1}{3}$ of the funds for a new veterans' home. These funds are expected to be available after July 15th.

Ms. Rucker reported that the grant application requires the schematics for what the building will look like. There is a consensus for a "greenhouse concept" (individual cottages) type veterans home instead of the old institutionalized type building. Ms. Rucker noted that the Task Force can consider two smaller homes or one large home.

Senator Pierce asked does the Task Force have a voice as to the new location of the veterans' home. Senator English replied, "yes".

Mr. Steve Gray, U.S. Senator John Boozman's Office, was recognized. He stated that as he sees it the Task Force is in a position to consider five major areas as relates to the veterans home:

- choosing a director
- choosing a location
- determining the design and physical size of building
- deciding the payment options (Medicaid, per diem (federal), private pay or a combination)
- determining the extent of care (long-term care, day drop, additional ancillary area, etc.)

Senator English encouraged the Task Force members to bring their thoughts and ideas to the meetings in order to develop a good proposal that will be the best for the veterans in Arkansas.

Mr. Tom Thomas, Chairman, Arkansas Veterans' Commission, was recognized. He stated that the newer veterans' homes facilities are beautiful. He expressed that he does not want Arkansas' new veterans' home facility to be considered a place where veterans will go to die but a wonderful place where they can continue living. Senator English concurred with Mr. Thomas and expressed that this should be the Task Force's top goal.

Mr. Mike Hampton, Arkansas Veterans' Coalition, was recognized. He stated that according to Act 38, the Task Force is responsible for identifying the number of current and future veterans, noting that there is a report that establishes where Arkansas veterans are by counties. This information will be provided to staff for distribution to Task Force members.

Ms. Rucker suggested that the Task Force should first investigate the veterans' levels of care. According to Ms. Rucker, approximately 60% of the residents at the Fayetteville Nursing Home have some sort of dementia or cognitive impairment. Ms. Rucker noted that no state money goes to the Fayetteville Nursing Home.

Mr. Gray gave a brief overview of the federal grant process. He explained that the state will determine the veterans' needs. In this case, Arkansas is undeserving veterans by standards. After the state submits its package and has secured the funding, the federal government will review the package and decide whether or not it is eligible for federal funding. Once the facility is built the state is responsible for managing it. The federal government will provide a subsidized per diem, per patient to the facility to offset some of the expenses. Mr. Gray stated that normally there are private pay options as well as Medicaid reimbursements. Mr. Thomas added that sometimes the startup expenses can add up to as much as \$1 or \$2 million dollars.

Senator English asked does Fort Roots have a nursing home. **Mr. Miles Brown, Public Affairs Officer, Central Arkansas Veterans' Healthcare System**, replied that Fort Roots is a community living center that provides assisted living and dementia wards. He noted that there are a total of 123 beds with strict eligibility requirements for acceptance into the facilities.

Senator English stated that the Task Force will need to know how many Veterans Administration nursing home contractors there are around the state. Mr. Brown agreed to provide this information to the Task Force.

Senator English stated that Varnaria Vickers-Smith, Legislative Analyst, will disseminate all pertinent information to the Task Force members. She asked that each member provide updated contact information to Mrs. Vickers-Smith. Mr. Gray stated that the National Association of State Veterans Homes has availed itself to the Task Force for any questions it may have.

Senator English concluded by stating that the Task Force may have its timelines, goals and objectives before the next meeting date.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:43 a.m.