

Member Organizations:

24th Infantry Regiment
Buffalo Soldiers
Chicago Chapter

555th Parachute
 Infantry Association
"Triple Nickle"
Chicago Chapter

American Legion
Dorie Miller Post 915

American Legion
Harold Washington
Post 1987

Blind Veterans
 Association
Chicago Chapter

Disabled American
 Veterans
Chicago Chapter 6

Montford Point Marine
 Association
Chicago Chapter

Muslim American
 Veterans Association
Chicago Chapter

National Women
 Veterans United

Veterans of
 Foreign Wars
Major Harris Post 2024

Veterans for Peace
Chicago Chapter

Veterans for Unification

Veterans Strike Force

Vietnam Veterans
 of America
Chapter 311

VetNet

Coalition of Veterans Organizations



CVO TOWN HALL MEETING - Sept. 20, 2014

by Larry Nazimek

As a Coalition of Veterans Organizations, we speak with one voice in communicating our needs to our elected officials, instead of having numerous groups acting on their own. If we are going to complain about problems with the VA, it only makes sense to complain to those who can do something about them. We had planned on having separate meetings with our Senators and Congressmen, but it became readily apparent that making such meetings come to fruition was a lot easier said than done. Our elected officials have many requests for meetings, so we decided to have a Town Hall meeting and invite them, or their representatives.

This meeting took place on Sept. 20, 2014, at the Montford Point Marine Assn. We wanted to have the meeting at the JBVAMC, but when their administration learned of our plans of inviting Senators and Congressmen, they denied our request.

We invited (through letters that were hand-delivered to their offices by our members) Sens. Mark Kirk and Dick Durbin, and Congressmen Bobby Rush, Danny Davis, Tammy Duckworth, Luis Gutierrez, Robin Kelly, and Mike Quigley. Realizing that these officials have numerous events to attend, we stated that if they were unable to attend, that they should send a staff representative. Sen. Kirk was in Washington, DC, and his staffer who would have attended,

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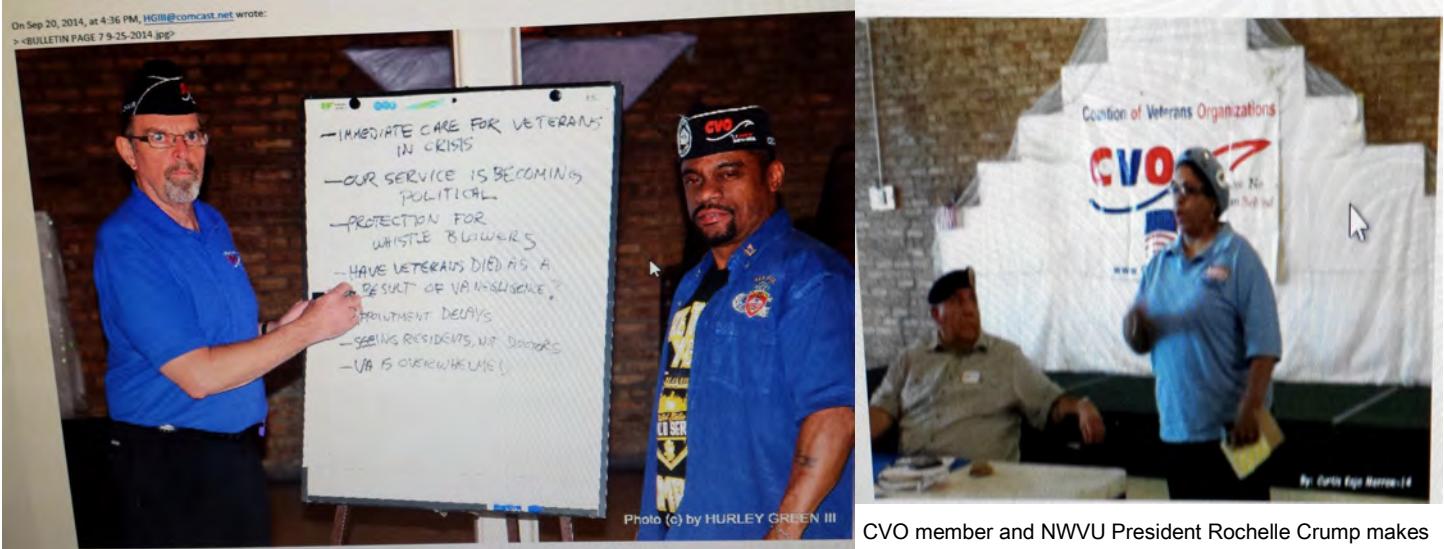
CVO Recording Secretary and NWVU Vice President makes a report on the VA Crisis to the Town Hall meeting. CVO Chair Bruce Parry, Rep. Danny Davis Staff Member Nicole Harvey,



Chaplain Claude Hilliard of the Montford Point Marine Association during the Town Hall Meeting, Saturday, September 20th.

Continue:

events to attend, we stated that if they were unable to attend, that they should send a staff representative. Sen. Kirk was in Washington, DC, and his staffer who would have attended, was in St. Louis, although a separate meeting with us has been scheduled. In spite of repeated calls to Sen. Durbin's office, his office did not respond, and we understand that he was at a basketball game at St. Sabina. State Sen. Jim Oberweis, Durbin's opponent in the upcoming election, arrived late, because he had other events to attend, and was stuck in heavy traffic on his way over. Cong. Duckworth was represented by staffer Sarah Keep, and Cong. Davis was represented by staffer Nikki Harvey (whose Jaguar had two of its wheel caps stolen while parked in the lot). Cong. Rush's office sent their regrets after our meeting. Congressmen Gutierrez, Kelly, and Quigley did not respond. CVO Chairman Bruce Parry conducted the meeting. As issues were raised, he wrote them on an easel, and as the pages were filled, they were posted on a side wall. Our issues were broken into several categories, with designated members reporting on the problems, followed by a period of questions/comments/discussion from the members. It was evident that many members had lengthy personal "horror stories" to tell, but in order to keep the meeting moving along, the discussion periods had to be limited, and those speaking had to limit their comments to 3 minutes. Parry began by going through the points in the CVO Veterans Program, such as full mandatory funding of the VA, an end to priorities for care, an end to Means Testing and copays, presumptive benefits, etc. The VA has been saying that it spends more money per registered veteran than ever, but this is due to a decrease in the number of covered eligible veterans. Many vets who would like to utilize the VA Healthcare system have been deemed ineligible for various reasons. An example of this are recently discharged vets who do not have a service connected disability (that they are currently aware of), who can only access VA healthcare for 5 years. CVO Recording Secy., Dr. Connie Edwards, reported on the VA Crisis Report that has been getting a great deal of media attention. CVO Executive Committee member David Rogers reported on homelessness among veterans, mental health issues, and the need for discharge upgrades. Those with bad discharges are usually denied their VA benefits as well as employment, where they could earn money to pay their expenses, thus leading to a downward spiral of homelessness and hopelessness. NWVU President Rochelle Crump reported on the VA's Crisis Hot Line. Those on the verge of suicide need immediate attention from a live person. Requiring the called to leave a message or dial another number are unacceptable. Some members were indignant over those officials who did not attend, and some felt it unacceptable the Cong. Duckworth and Davis had sent representatives, although our invitations specifically stated that it would be acceptable for representatives to attend if the officials were unable to attend. Many comments expressed anger at the officials, but if we put ourselves in the shoes of these officials/staffers, how would we feel if people hollered at us and accused us of not doing our jobs? It's far better to simply raise issues and request action. After concluding remarks by the congressional staff members and Bruce Parry, the meeting was adjourned. We certainly intend to follow up on these issues and expect Congress to take action on them. Naturally, we intend to vote in the upcoming November election.



Bruce Parry, CVO Chair, with Darryl Howard, CVO Treasurer, taking notes at the Town

CVO member and NWVU President Rochelle Crump makes a report on the dysfunction with the Crisis Hot Line as CVO Co-Chair and VAC Superintendent Abundio Zaragoza looks



CVO was present for both of the Town Hall meetings

held at JBVA on Wednesday, September 24th. Besides myself, Darryl Howard, David Rogers, Virgil Mathis, Darryl Lockhart, Frank Thompson, John Newsom, Abundio Zaragoza, Taalibdin Shabazz and Larry Nazimek were there from CVO. We were well represented. The morning meeting was for the Benefits side of the VA (the Veterans Benefit Administration or VBA) and was run by the Interim Director of the Regional Office, Suzanne Galley. I talked to her before the meeting and gave her the 3-page report on the results of the CVO Town Hall meeting. I emphasized the need for Presumptive Benefits and she pointed out the VA (and Congress) has moved in that direction, but isn't there yet. A number of topics came up during the Q&A. The questions were taken directly from the floor and did not have to be written out before hand for this Town Hall. Some topics covered (this is not all of them) included dependents benefits issues, Voc Rehab, that wartime periods for VA benefits are determined by Congress, the need to publicize non-service connected pensions, Camp Lejeune presumptive conditions, the role of service organizations and service officers, and the eBenefits program. I personally commented on how you have to pick out good service officers; some are poor. I got the names of some good service officers in attendance. The afternoon session was for the hospital (the VHA or Veterans Health Administration) and was run by the Hospital Director, Ann Brown. Again, I met with her before the meeting began and gave her the results of our Town Hall meeting. Questions for this Town Hall had to be written down. Darryl and I submitted questions and comments on Full Funding of VA health care, ending homelessness (including the undercounting of homeless veterans), equal treatment for women and men veterans, the need to define what a veteran is for eligibility criteria, whether the VA is overwhelmed and whether pay at the VA is sufficient, and the fact that vets see residents, PA's and nurses and often don't get to see the attending physicians. Many questions were answered well, but some (eligibility and seeing attending physicians) were shined on. Many other questions were raised by other participants. Virtually everyone's questions were addressed. Overall, I think both Town Hall meetings were good. The need to have Town Hall meetings at times working people can attend was raised. By directive of the new VA Secretary, they are going to be holding these every quarter, so we should be able to dig into the issues more deeply. I learned a lot and look forward to future meetings. hope others in attendance will add their comments to mine. Bruce

Oct. 1, 2014, MEETING AT SEN. MARK KIRK'S OFFICE

By Larry Nazimek

On Oct. 1, 2014, a delegation representing CVO (Bruce Parry, Daryl Howard, Larry Nazimek) met with Sen. Mark Kirk's staffer Brian Colgan, a Marine vet., at the Senator's Chicago Office. We covered the CVO issues that had been presented at our Town Hall Meeting on Sept. 20. He told us what Sen. Kirk was already doing on some of our issues, such as the lengthy delays in getting VA appeals adjudicated. We discussed several possible alternatives in handling the backlog. While Colgan was interested in our issues, he was particularly well-versed on the issues of homelessness, since that was his area of specialization when he previously worked for Congressman (retired) Judy Biggert. Regarding the Crisis Hot Line, he recalled the successful National Runaway Safeline (800-RUNAWAY), saying that he would look into that program for ideas in addressing the Crisis Hot Line issues that we had uncovered. Colgan stated that Sen. Kirk, realizing that it is impossible to solve all of the VA problems immediately, had come up with a "Top 10" list, and as those issues are addressed, he would develop another Top 10 List of VA issues. He took notes during our meeting and will be getting back with us in the future. Accordingly, we look forward to working with Sen. Kirk and Mr. Colgan.



NATIONAL WOMEN VETERANS UNITED
PRE-VETERAN'S DAY
STAND DOWN 2014
FOR ALL WOMEN VETERANS



- Continental Breakfast & Lunch
- New & Gently Used Clothing & More...
- Resources & Health Vendors
- Free Raffles: Winner Must Be Present to Win All Raffles
- Special Raffle Drawing:
(1) Kindle Tablet Fire



Jesse Brown VAMC
820 S. Damen Ave. 2nd
FL Chicago, IL

9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Saturday, October 25, 2014

**Come and see what every
Woman Veteran needs to**

**It is not about
One of us!
ITS' ALL OF US!**

RSVP Required

(312) 458 – 9130



Catch the Spirit of NWVU in 2014

Educating, Advocating & Motivating Women Veterans

The National Women Veterans United (NWVU) will host their Annual Stand Down For Women Veterans on Saturday, October 25, 2014 at Jesse Brown VAMC from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm. Everyone will be provided a continental breakfast, lunch, facials, manicures, and free raffles to include a Kindle Tablet Fire and a flat screen TV.

NWVU will assess the needs of all women veterans and provide whatever immediate assistance is required. We also help those have not been engaged with VA services or community resources to keep them informed about ongoing support. Workshops are planned for entrepreneurship, maintaining healthy lives, and navigation through VA systems.

Service providers include VA Health Care Services, Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF), VA Grant Funding, HUD-VASH program, Domestic Violence, Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services Division of Child Support, Veterans Assistance Commission (VAC), Inner Voice Employment Assistance, and many other outstanding organizations.



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