

## Jewish War Veterans

Post #54

Meeting Minutes  
January 13, 2019

Command Bruce Mayor called the meeting to order at 10:08 AM. The November Minutes were approved as written.

Attendance: Bruce Mayor, Howard Goldstein, Leslie Turner, John Wilkerson, Steve Braverman, Howard Goldstein, Larry Malis.

### Commander's Report:

- Department Meeting:  
Nothing to report
- Oakridge Cemetery Monument update (below under old business).
- Is Comedy Dead? Update (below under old business).
- Dupage County VAC will not do a stand down this year since the percentage of homeless Veterans was low. There will be a Veterans Resource Fair on July 10. Quincy Veterans Home restoration is on schedule. The Chicago Veterans Home will open 2020.
- JWV National pushing to contact Legislators to support the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (Navy Veterans get presumptive service connection due to Agent Orange. Caring for our Veterans Act, and Deborah Sampson Act.

### Reports

- Quartermaster's Report – Leslie Turner: \$2,555.20 in the account. One deposit and 2 expenditures. Report accepted.
- Senior Vice Commander – John Wilkerson: Little change to the membership roster (two phone numbers and one address).
- Junior Vice Commander – (Vacant): No report

### Old Business

- Cemetery Monument: Will contact Mosaic Construction in April, assisted by JUF, to potentially donate restoration services. Nothing new to report this month.
- The Is Comedy Dead? Dinner and Show was a failure on several levels. Poor coordination with ticket names, buffet amount and arrangement of tables. Four couples from our Post were rejected at the door and went to dinner elsewhere.

- Four Chaplains Ceremony at Hines VA Hospital February 4<sup>th</sup> @ 1PM. JWV hosted last year. Marine Corps League hosts this year.
- A Christmas Carol at Goodman Theater event went well with 19 Veterans from Hines. We intend to continue the event next year with a promise from Goodman to provide tickets.
- JWV Annual Banquet is July 7<sup>th</sup> @ 11:30 AM at Dover Straits in Mundelein (\$25 per person), and Department Convention Meeting is July 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Howard presented info on the Million Veteran Program to do health and genetic testing for research. Up to 700K Vets have signed up.
- Howard presented info on Veterans Courts from a newsletter making the rounds.
- JWV Department ages show <100 members across the state under 70.

#### New Business

- Election of Officers prior to Convention meeting.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Grade classroom discussion January 20<sup>th</sup>. Topic is what did we learn in the Military and how did that affect our post-military lives – not necessarily from a Jewish perspective. Class is 9:15 to 11:00. Call Bruce if interested.
- Steve referred to an article in last week's NYT addressing challenges of the traditional VSOs and their competition for membership and influence with newer more agile VSOs. He suggested using the article to discuss reorganization and more issue specific plans and activities. See article after these minutes.

Good of the Order/Comrades in Distress: Stan Nathanson's (Department parliamentarian) wife passed away. Robert Nussbaum's significant other passed away. Dane Smith, a CPD Officer and Jeff Sach's stepson, passed away due to completed suicide.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:02 AM.

Next meeting scheduled for February 10, 2019 at Congregation Etz Chaim, 10:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Braverman  
Adjutant

**1.1 - The New York Times: [Veterans' Groups Compete With Each Other, and Struggle With the V.A.](#)** (4 January, Jennifer Steinhauer, 48.7M uvm; New York, NY)

WASHINGTON — For generations, Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion posts have been as integral to American political culture as pancake breakfasts, town squares and state fairs. In advocating for veterans — among the country’s most revered and coveted voters — the groups have wielded unquestioned power on Capitol Hill and inside the White House.

Now, nearly a generation after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the oldest and largest veterans’ service organizations — known colloquially as “the Big Six” — are seeing their influence diluted, as newer, smaller organizations focused on post-9/11 veterans compete for money, political influence and relevance.

The newer organizations reflect cultural shifts in a smaller community of younger and increasingly diverse veterans who are replacing the older, predominantly male veterans — many of them having served because of a draft for now long-ago wars.

The scores of upstarts include Student Veterans of America, which advocates on education and job issues; Team Red, White and Blue, which promotes service and “camaraderie” events; and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, which focuses on the specific health and employment challenges those who served in those two wars face.

Leaner and more financially efficient than their predecessors, these newer veterans’ organizations focus on issues such as education and job training rather than on brick-and-mortar meeting spaces for veterans to gather or on resources spent lobbying in Washington.

In addition, many officials of the newer organizations say, their goals are to integrate veterans back into civilian communities where they feel misunderstood and have lost ties, while helping civilians who have had little contact with veterans — active-duty troops make up less than 1 percent of the United States population — understand their experiences.

As older veterans die, so, too, do the V.F.W. halls, scores of which have shuttered in recent years. While accurate membership numbers are hard to ascertain because many veterans pay dues to several organizations, a shrinking veteran population over all has caused memberships to fall and some groups to restructure.

“The young vets are saying we need to do things differently with a different emphasis,” said Chuck Hagel, a former defense secretary and Vietnam veteran who is associated with a small organization, HillVets, that helps veterans find staff jobs on Capitol Hill. “The Vietnam vet is a different kind of vet than Afghan or Iraq war vets; they were draft vets and they wanted in and out. Most veterans today are married with families, and that means new demands, new interests and new pressures.”

At times, the politically progressive leaders of some of the organizations — many from the Vietnam era — take positions that appear out of step with more socially conservative members from previous wars. This has irritated Robert L. Wilkie, the Veterans Affairs secretary, who views these as unwelcome partisan positions, said several agency and veterans’ group officials.

Last April, Mr. Wilkie hosted a breakfast for veterans’ service organizations that included representatives not just of the traditional Big Six, but also the Independence Fund and Concerned Veterans for America, which is financed by Charles G. and David H. Koch, who have backed conservative causes.

The Koch-supported group was instrumental in ousting the last head of the department. It has also been pushing for more health care to take place outside the V.A. system, with the first step beginning soon under a sweeping new law. Their voices were welcomed by House Republicans as they passed the measure this year.

At a hearing last month on Capitol Hill, some Democrats suggested that Mr. Wilkie was ignoring the opinions of traditional organizations on this law. "A lot of V.S.O.s have talked to me about the communication within the V.A.," said Senator Jon Tester of Montana, the ranking Democrat on the Senate veteran committee. "It's not where it needs to be."

Mr. Wilkie made his position clear. "Half of our veterans are now under the age of 65," he said, "which means they have different cares, they have different interests. What I have done in my short time is actually open the aperture to the table at the Department of Veterans Affairs to bring in veterans who are not traditionally part of the system."

The shifts, while perhaps inevitable, leave some worrying that the hard work of pressing for the complicated and expensive health care needs, and other issues, will lack a generation of new leaders.

"These smaller groups don't do policy advocacy while the Big Six have been carrying all the water," said Kristofer Goldsmith, an assistant director for policy and government affairs at the Vietnam Veterans of America. "The average vet has no idea what these groups are doing on their behalf. They have a free T-shirt from Red, White and Blue but don't realize my 72-year-old boss with emphysema walks around Capitol Hill advocating for them on the G.I. Bill."

The first large veterans' service organizations, the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans, arose after the Civil War, with new ones forming after each conflict to serve veterans lacking services.

While there are thousands of nonprofit veterans' organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service, the majority of power has been consolidated among the Big Six: Disabled American Veterans; Veterans of Foreign Wars; American Legion; Paralyzed Veterans of America; Amvets; and Vietnam Veterans of America, which was developed after Vietnam veterans were turned away from other organizations.

According to a study this year by the Center for a New American Security, a nonpartisan policy research center in Washington, nonprofits that serve veterans generate about \$3.6 billion in annual revenue.

While the older organizations control roughly 68 percent of total income in this market, the recent growth has been dominated by large post-9/11 organizations, which have grown in excess of 15 percent per year, compared with the 2 percent income growth of the Big Six. The study also found that post-9/11 organizations save their money at a rate almost 2.5 times greater than pre-9/11 organizations.

A relatively new entry, the Wounded Warrior Project, has set a new model for advocacy organizations, raising money from outside the veterans' community and funding research and services rather than infrastructure. The group is widely viewed as having finally recovered from a major spending scandal in 2016.

“They figured out how to raise money from outside the vets’ community better than anyone else,” said Emma Moore, one of the authors of the Center for a New American Security report. “The Big Six are struggling with overhead. As the veteran population shrinks, how they end up dealing with the overhead of maintaining buildings and their structures is yet to be determined.”

Through grants, the Wounded Warriors Project also marries legacy Big Six organizations with newcomers to build coalitions around issues like toxic exposure, which brings post-9/11 veterans into advocacy, and legacy groups into the future.

“Congress still listens to them,” said Phillip Carter, a senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation who specializes in military and veterans’ issues, describing the continuing clout of the Big Six. “Members and staff understand the political throw weight of veterans’ groups based on their large membership and the degree to which they command public respect.”

But when it comes to forming laws, some groups are clearly on the rise, like Student Veterans of America, which played a significant role in drafting a new G.I. Bill. These groups, lacking the large governance structures of the old veterans’ service organizations, tend to be faster on their advocacy feet.

Outside Washington, the contrasts between the groups is stark. Many of the old V.F.W. halls remain outposts of fellowship over beer, while younger veterans prefer community centers with healthier and more practical assets, like Wi-Fi, child care and yoga classes. In many cases, social media has replaced physical spaces as a place where veterans congregate.

Many of the new groups steer away from lobbying on Capitol Hill, and have turned instead to community services, running races and other activities meant not to connect veterans to one another as much as to the rest of the communities they have rejoined.

“The epidemic of alienation and loneliness in society writ large is magnified in the vets’ community,” said Bana Miller, a spokeswoman for Team Red, White and Blue, which engages veterans in community service and physical activities.

“Many post-9/11 vets served five, 10, 15 years, and they are looking for connection and community and support,” she said. “We are key to getting people out into their communities and taking what they learned from their service, doing things together shoulder to shoulder to build deep bonds with other people.

“Our organization is not necessarily in the advocacy space,” she added. “We work toward mental health solutions via physical and social activity.”

Traditional veterans’ organizations say this new focus does not replace theirs.

“We get bills passed,” said Kayda Keleher, the associate director of national legislative service for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. “We provide financial assistance to cover bills for veterans who were attending a college that shut down. We provide scholarships and fellowship opportunities, our National Home for Children, and so much more. Those are our strengths and our legacy that will keep us around.”

The greatest demonstration of the power across the spectrum from old and new groups, as well as the Koch-backed organization that has the Trump administration’s collective ear, will be on

display next year as Congress carefully examines major changes to health care services for veterans stemming from a large bill passed last year.

“Veteran organizations can be like Sears, using the same business model with diminishing returns,” Mr. Carter said. “Or, they can reinvent themselves and their business models to remain viable, and focus on issues that appeal to all generations to remain relevant.”