

# **2011 ANNUAL REPORT** **of the Veterans Affairs Commission,** **City and County of San Francisco**

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\* With Attached Document: ATTENDANCE RECORD – VAC Monthly Meetings, 2011

Respectfully Submitted, By and For the Veterans Affairs Commission, City and County of San Francisco  
this 15<sup>th</sup> Day of January, 2012....

**(Original Document Signed by.....)**\_\_\_\_\_

**Raymond Wong, Retiring 2011 President**

### **Sec. 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

By any measure, 2011 was a year of **transition and growth** for the VAC. The **six new Commissioners** appointed during the year represent a **40% Turnover of the Commission Roster**; thereby bringing the VAC to its **full 17-member strength for the very first time**. More important however, the new Commission members represent the diversity that both the Mayor's Office, and the Board of Supervisors have been advocating in the past several years.

A review of the Commission Personnel Changes section (below) confirms that we have achieved the mandate to add significant representation for our most recent veterans; those of the 'Post 9/11 Conflicts'. We have also achieved the mandate to insure inclusion of the female veterans of our community.

As documented in additional sections of this REPORT, the Commission "turnover" also shows that we have made significant progress in our start-of-the-year goal to engage in **issues and activities that are relevant to the interests and lives of the**

**veterans of San Francisco**, from the youngest to the oldest; from the Career Builders, to the Wounded Warriors, and yes, to the unemployed and to the homeless.

In continuing and expanding that commitment, we are grateful for the 'hands-on' cooperation that has been extended to us by both the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors. We look forward to a bright and productive partnership in our mutual goal – to serve the interests and needs of the Veteran Community of the City of San Francisco.

## **Sec. 2: Commission LEADERSHIP and PERSONNEL CHANGES of 2011**

As per VAC By laws, we started with our annual **Election of Officers** process, which eventually included an election **resulting in the installation of Commissioner ROBERT VARNI as President; Comm. Raymond WONG, Vice President, and Comm. Stephen NOETZEL as Secretary.**

### **Note for future consideration:**

***In a first-time-ever circumstance, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 2011, commission appointments for NINE (of the 15 seated) COMMISSIONERS EXPIRED. Most Commissioners continued active service on the Commission (See Attendance Grid) in 'Hold-over' status, until re-appointment however it is suggested that the Mayor and Board of Supervisors confer to adjust future appointment terms to return to the traditional form of 'staggered appointments'.***

In February, **Commissioner (and newly-President) Robert VARNI resigned from the Commission** stating that he had business and organizational commitments that required his full attention and that he could not devote the required time and commitment to the VAC. He resigned as President, and **did not seek re-appointment his seat (BOS #1) to the Commission.** Vice President **Raymond WONG was elevated to ACTING PRESIDENT** until a new Officers Election, (at the June 6, 2011 meeting) when **Comm. WONG was ELECTED as President for the remainder of the 2011 Term.** The position of Vice President remained unfilled.

Also in February, long-term **Commissioner Renie CHAMPAGNE retired** from the Commission due to deteriorating health.

***NOTE IN MEMORIAM: In the spring of 2011, we were all saddened to learn that Commissioner Champagne as well as his dear wife Margaret passed away within the same 3-month period. They will both be long remembered and revered for their 5+ decades of service to the Veterans Community of San Francisco.***

**On March 29, 2011, Mr. Eduardo RAMIREZ, was appointed to fill Board of Supervisors Seat #1 on the Commission (replacing Comm. VARNI).** Also on that date (3/29/11), the **BOS Re-Appointed Commissioners Regaldo BALDONADO, John Caldera, Stephen NOETZEL, and Edwin WILKERSON (all to terms ending 1/31/15).**

**On May 23, 2011, Ms. Alexandra CRICHLAW, was appointed by Mayor Lee to fill the Mayoral Commission seat formerly held by Comm. R. Champagne who retired in February (see above).** Also on that date, (5/23/11), **Ms. Amber ROSE, was appointed by Mayor Lee to fill the Mayoral Commission seat formerly held by Comm. Veronika Cauley who was not re-appointed.** Also on that date, (5/23/11), **Commissioners Chris GRUWELL, and Raymond WONG, were both Re-appointed by Mayor Lee, to a new 4-year appointments in the Mayoral appointed seats they currently occupy.**

**On September 27, 2011, Ms. Deborah DACUMOS was appointed to fill BOS Seat #5 on the Commission (filling long-vacant seat of Comm. Jill Buck).**

**On November 15, 2011, Ms. Dottie GUY, was appointed to fill BOS Seat #12 (new appointment).** Also on that date (11/15/11), **Mr. Jordan TOWERS, was appointed to fill BOS Seat #10 on the Commission (replacing Comm. James GUGLIELMON who had resigned due to continuing medical issues).**

**In summary, the 'transition of 2011' included appointment of six (6) new Commissioners; and by the end of 2011, for the first time in its existence, the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission stood at its full 17-member complement. The attached ATTENDANCE RECORD provides a full view of Commissioners participation during the calendar year.**

## **Sec. 3: Significant ACTIONS taken by the VAC in 2011**

### **Commission GOALS AND PLANS for the leadership year.**

In the **January meeting**, the Commission discussed and identified its **PRIMARY GOAL for the new leadership year**; that being a multi-part initiative to research, develop, and advise the City Administration on the **best ways to increase employment opportunities for the veterans of San Francisco, and to mitigate the inordinately high unemployment rate in the veterans community.** While achieving some success in this area (i.e. Negotiations with several of the **major Corporate Employers** in the Bay Area, and development of the new **Veterans Resource Center**), this challenge remains as a primary 'carry-over' goal for the leadership year of 2012.

### **RESOLUTIONS, ENDORSEMENTS and ADVICE LETTERS to Mayor and Board of Supervisors (2011)**

In the **January 2011 General Meeting**, the Commission was informed that the approved **Letter to City Administration regarding Request for Investigation of actions of former American Legion leader Michael Gerold**, had been delivered to the office of the **President of the Board of Supervisors**, and to the **Office of the Mayor** (including delivery to the new Mayor, Edwin Lee). ***There has been no response on this matter, from either the Office of the Mayor, or the Board of Supervisors.***

In the **April 2011 General Meeting**, after considerable investigation and discussion, the **VAC approved a RESOLUTION** in support of (proposed Federal Legislation) **HR#210, titled: The Filipino Veterans Fairness Act of 2011**. Subsequently, on 4/25/11 a **Letter of Advice** from VAC President Wong was forwarded to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors, **urging their support for this important Federal Legislation**. ***The Commission was subsequently pleased to see a full supportive response to this letter, specifically in the form of a MIRROR RESOLUTION passed by the BOS and forwarded to appropriate Federal Legislators.***

In the **May 2011 General Meeting** after appropriate discussion, the **VAC approved the Re-Transmittal of its earlier Letter of Advice to Mayor Newsome**, in support of the **Building Use Plan (for the War Memorial Veterans Building)** as developed by the **American Legion War Memorial Commission (ALWMC)**. Subsequently, on 5/5/11/11 a **Letter of Advice** from VAC Secretary Noetzel was forwarded to the Mayor Edwin Lee and Board of Supervisors, **urging their support for this important plan**. ***There has been no response on this matter, from either the Office of the Mayor, or the Board of Supervisors.***

In the **June 2011 General Meeting** during appropriate discussion, the **VAC voiced its endorsement for the establishment of the planned VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER** in room 210 of the War Memorial Veterans Building. The VAC has been in continuous daily operation since its Grand Opening in July of 2011, and has served hundreds of visiting veterans since that time.

In the **August 2011 General Meeting** after considerable investigation and discussion, the **VAC voted its formal ENDORSEMENT for the Final Design Selection** for the planned **VETERANS MEMORIAL PROJECT**. Subsequently, on 9/14/11 a **Letter of Advice** from VAC President Wong was forwarded to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors, **urging their endorsement and support for the project**. ***There has been no response on this matter, from either the Office of the Mayor, or the Board of Supervisors.***

In the **August 2011 General Meeting** during appropriate discussion, the **VAC voiced its endorsement for the establishment of the FREE MEALS FOR NEEDY VETERANS program** recently launched by some of the newly appointed Commissioners, in partnership with a local chapter of the **National Veterans Service organization AMVETS**. This initiative represents the first 'hands on' volunteer program to provide **Direct Services** to address the ongoing struggle of the **Homeless Veterans Community** via utilization of facilities within the **San Francisco War Memorial Veterans Building**. As advertised on the **Veterans Affairs Commission Website**, the program provides: ***"FREE MEALS FOR VETERANS IN NEED - EVERY SUDAY, Between 10am and 3pm. Proof of Veteran Status required."*** Food is donated by a variety of outside agencies, and prepared in 2<sup>nd</sup>-floor kitchens by volunteers.

In the **September 2011 General Meeting** after considerable investigation and discussion, the **VAC approved a RESOLUTION** in support of (proposed California Assembly Bill 201 regarding establishment of additional **VETERAN'S COURTS** in California. Subsequently, on 9/19/11 a **Letter of Advice** from VAC President Wong was forwarded to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors, **urging their support for this important State legislation**. ***There has been no response on this matter, from either the Office of the Mayor, or the Board of Supervisors.***

In the **September 2011 General Meeting** after considerable investigation and discussion, the **VAC voted its formal ENDORSEMENT of proposed California Senate Bill 888** regarding establishment of measures to insure that the **Funeral Services for American Military Personnel** are not marred and disrespected by protest groups of any kind. Subsequently, on 9/26/11 a **Letter of Advice** from VAC President Wong was forwarded to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors, **urging their support for this important State legislation**. ***There has been no response on this matter, from either the Office of the Mayor, or the Board of Supervisors.***

In the **September 2011 General Meeting** after considerable investigation and discussion, the **VAC voted its formal ENDORSEMENT of proposed California Assembly Bill 199** regarding implementation of **Public School Curriculum** to include instruction regarding the significant role of the **Filipino Freedom Fighters in World War Two**. Subsequently, on 9/27/11 a **Letter of Advice** from VAC President Wong was forwarded to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors, **urging their support for this important State legislation**. ***There has been no response on this matter, from either the Office of the Mayor, or the Board of Supervisors.***

In the **September 2011 General Meeting** during appropriate discussion, the **VAC voiced its endorsement for the ongoing series of monthly TOWN HALL MEETING program**, as hosted by **VAC Commissioner Eduardo RAMIREZ** in the Veterans Building. These meetings bring together numerous **Veterans Community Service Providers**, and the veterans who learn about a variety of services designed to benefit the **Veteran Community**.

In the **November 2011 General Meeting** after considerable investigation and discussion, the **VAC approved a RESOLUTION** in support of (proposed Federal Legislation) **HR#2634, titled: The Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2011**. This bill, introduced by congressman Robert Filner of California, provides for a **variety of measures** to mitigate the horrendous **effects of**

**widespread use of defoliant chemicals during the Vietnam War.** Subsequently, on 11/10/11 a **Letter of Advice** from VAC President Wong was forwarded to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors, **urging their support for this important Federal Legislation.** *To date, there has been no response on this matter, from either the Office of the Mayor, or the Board of Supervisors.*

In the **December 2011** General Meeting after considerable investigation and discussion, the VAC voted its **formal ENDORSEMENT** for a major (March 2, 2012) **EVENT** in the Veterans Building, called the Community Covenant **VETERAN & MILITARY RESOURCE FAIR.** This event has the **potential to become the most significant Veterans Community Event in the War Memorial Veterans Building in decades.** The entire Public Space in the ALWM Building will include a be fully utilized to bring together the entire Veterans and Military Community of the Bay Area, with Service Providers and a JOB FAIR to introduce potential Government and Corporate Employers to veteran and Reserve Personnel seeking employment.

#### **Sec. 4: ANCILIARY EVENTS undertaken by the VAC in 2011**

**“Every Spring and Every Fall”.** That’s how the **VAC official WEBSITE** announces the **TWO primary annual events** that (by long-standing tradition, if not specific mandate) are organized and produced, (individually and working in concert), **by members of the VAC.** The reference is to:

- **The annual MEMORIAL DAY ceremonies at the S.F. Presidio, and**
- **The annual VETERANS DAY PARADE, in downtown San Francisco**

**Memorial Day at the Presidio.** Continuing his long tradition as the Prime Mover of this event, **Commissioner Wallace LEVIN** once again presided over a stirring event in commemoration of the many Armed Services men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our nation. A majority of the Commissioners participated in various roles to assure that the parade and ceremonies proceeded exactly as planned. The Mayor and several S.F. Supervisors commended Comm. Levin for another outstanding memorial event at the Presidio.

**Veterans Day Parade.** This year the Parade Event became a **tribute in memory of Commissioner Renie Champagne**, who before his demise, had admirably **organized and presided over this event for an incredible string of fifty consecutive years!** A number of well-seasoned Commissioners and former Commissioners stepped in to take the reigns to insure a well planned and received Parade **which was (for the first time) held on the Veterans Day, namely 11/11/11.**

#### **Other 2011 Events of Significance:**

> **On Sunday, May 1, 2011, American Legion Post 315 hosted a Community Forum event on the sensitive subject(s) of VETERAN’S SUICIDE and SUICIDE PREVENTION** in the Veterans’ community. **Guest speakers Mark Stalnaker** (Ph.D, Staff Psychologist and Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the SF VA Medical Center.) **and author Aaron Gantz** provided alarming new information and statistics on the **growing problem of suicide** in the Veterans’ community; **including the “Hidden Loss” of many additional untimely Veterans deaths due to substance abuse; homelessness and an inordinately high accident rate.** To close the event, host (Commissioner) John Caldera presented **guest speakers Stalnacker and Gantz with CERTIFICATES OF COMMENDATION**, signed and issued by Supervisor **ROSS MIRKARIMI**, for their outstanding work in the area of suicide prevention.

> In July of 2011 a number of VAC Commissioners participated in the **Grand Opening Ceremonies** for the new **VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER now established in Room 205 of the War Memorial Veterans Building.** The facility is equipped with a series of Work Stations (each with a modern computer for research) and staffed with a rotation of salaried “Trainer Vets” and augmented with additional volunteer professionals. **The VRC is funded via numerous personal and corporate donations.** It is opened **every business day from 1-5pm** and visitors are warmly welcomed.

> In September of 2011, the **VAC established a direct connection with members of the S.F. Arts Commission** as **representatives of the S.F. Opera** attended a VAC General Meeting to **invite all bay-area Veterans** to attend a **performance of the new opera: “HEART OF A SOLDIER”**, just prior to its World Premiere **on the eve of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic and historic events of “9/11/01”.** The ‘Veterans Community Only’ gratis performance occurred on the evening of September 9<sup>th</sup>, as the Opera House was filled to capacity, including a number of VAC Commissioners.

#### **Sec. 5: General Meetings – Attendance and Guests**

##### **MEETING GUESTS and PUBLIC COMMENTARY.**

The monthly General Meetings of the VAC, traditionally held on the first Monday of every month, **were attended by a wide variety of guests at every meeting.** In each instance, they came to **initiate and strengthen connection** between a variety of public and private organizations (and the Commission) **to provide enhanced services to the Veterans Community of San Francisco.** Some of the most frequent meeting guests were bay area Veterans who were already active in Veterans issues. **Several such guests were later appointed to seats on the VAC.** Another frequent guest, **Commissioner Roger Dong of the American Legion War Memorial Commission** attended frequently to **act as liaison between the ALWMC and the VAC** on important issues pertaining to **Retrofit Plans and Post-Retrofit Building Use Plans.** Other guests represented **liaison between organizations such as Swords to Plowshares, Veterans hiring and careers programs, Veterans Campus Clubs, Veterans Housing Programs, the WholeVets Program, the S.F. Arts Commission, and the S.F. Elks Lodge.** We look forward to follow-up and further development of these ‘mutual interest liaison contacts in the new Leadership Year.

### **Commissioners ATTENDANCE at General Meetings.**

ATTACHED as part of this REPORT, is the official ATTENDANCE RECORD for the VAC Monthly Meetings of 2011.

This document serves to meet our annual Attendance & Participation requirement. We are pleased to report the following Summary Statistics from that Report:

- FOUR Commissioners recorded **Perfect Attendance for ALL 2011 VAC meetings.**
- THREE additional Commissioners recorded *Perfect Attendance for all meetings after appointment.*
- The Remaining currently seated Commissioners compiled an **aggregate 75% attendance record.**
- There were **only five (5) instances** of Unexcused absence during the year.

## **Sec. 6: Heading into 2012 – the New Leadership Year**

The Commission will begin the New Year (2011) with completion of the traditional **Nominations and Public Elections process** as per its by-laws mandate. **Once the new Leadership Team is elected, we will work productively to address new issues and continue to make progress on important new issues of concern to the Veterans Community of San Francisco.**

Of the many issues, the “Elephant in the Room” remains the **PRIMARY ISSUE** regarding *Future use of the War Memorial Veterans Building*; specifically the **Question: How Much of the War Memorial Veterans Building Can Be/Should Be Preserved for Use By and For Veterans?**

***We enter the New Year confident that the City of San Francisco Administration (both Mayor’s Office and Board of Supervisors) will join with us in a productive and inclusive process to insure a fair and equitable solution to this all-important 2012 issue.***

**REPORT authored by VAC Secretary Stephen S. Noetzel. Submitted for correction/edit at VAC General Meeting of 1/9/12, and RATIFIED by unanimous Commission vote on 1/9/12.**

***Note: Official VAC 2011 ATTENDANCE RECORD (as referenced above), follows.....***

### **ATTENDANCE RECORD – VAC Monthly Meetings, 2011**

**(Official ATTACHMENT to the 2011 ANNUAL REPORT of the VAC)**

NAME_____	Meeting of:											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1. Alfidi	P	P	P	A1	P	A4	X	P	P	P	P	P
2. Baldonado	P	P	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P 100% (A)
3. Caldera	P	P	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P 100% (A)
4. Crichlow	.....(Mayoral appointee 5/23/11)					P	X	P	P	P	P	P 100% (B)

5. Dacumos	(BOS Seat #5 appointee 9/28/11)								P	A2	P		
6. Gibbs	P	P	P	P	A1	P	X	P	A2	A2	A2	A2	
7. Gruwell	P	A4	A4	A4	A4	P	X	P	P	P	A1	P	
8. Guy	(BOS Seat #12 appointee 11/15/11)											P	100% (B)
9. Levin	P	P	P	A1	P	P	X	A3	P	P	A1	P	
10. Noetzel	P	P	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	100% (A)
11. Ramirez (BOS Seat#1 appoint 3/29/11)	P				P	A1	X	P	P	P	P	P	
12. Rose	(Mayoral appointee 5/23/11)						P	X	P	P	A1	P	P
13. Thompson	P	P	P	A1	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	
14. Towers	(BOS Seat #10 appointee 11/15/11)											P	100% (B)
15. Wilkerson	P	P	P	P	P	P	X	P	P	P	P	P	100% (A)
16. D. Wong	P	P	A1	P	P	P	X	P	A1	P	P	P	
17. R. Wong	P	P	A1	P	P	P	X	P	A1	P	P	P	