

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Advisory Committee on Outlying Areas and Freely Associated States

Meeting Minutes

February 11, 2025, 6:00-7:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time

Attending Committee Members:

Other VA Leadership and Staff:

- Ferdinand Torres-Leon, Alternate Designated Federal Officer

Also Present:

- Roger Keen
- Jaime Matthews
- Andre Glaude
- Fermin [last name unknown]
- Barrie [last name unknown]
- Harley Eriich
- Brad Ruzala
- Maria Posada Velasco
- Jesse Stole

Agenda and Discussion:

- Opening Remarks and Roll Call
- Review and Adoption of December 2024 Meeting Minutes
- Final Draft Report Review & Adoption
- Open Discussion
- Public Comments
- Adjournment

Opening Remarks:

- Mr. Kaneko opened the meeting by reviewing the agenda. He welcomed everyone and expressed his appreciation for their attendance. Mr. Kaneko reflected on the success of the recent annual meeting in Guam, highlighting the positive outcomes and valuable discussions.
- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude conducted the roll call of committee members and confirmed that a quorum was present. She thanked everyone for their dedication and hard work in preparing the draft report.
- Mr. Torres-Leon addressed the committee. He announced that the travel vouchers from the annual meeting have been processed. He told committee members to contact him directly with any questions or concerns. Mr. Torres-Leon mentioned that the Advisory Committee charter review has begun; this is required every two years per the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) guidelines. He also reminded committee members of their appointment term, which is two years. Committee member solicitation will begin soon. Mr. Torres-Leon stated that VA is prepared to receive the committee's draft recommendation report and start the routing process through VA Leadership for review, comments, and concurrence.
- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude inquired about the location and specific dates for the 2025 annual meeting, asking whether it would be in Washington, D.C. Mr. Torres-Leon responded that

Washington, D.C., has been identified as a potential location, but other locations, including Hawaii, will also be considered. A decision matrix will be created to help guide the selection process. The meeting is tentatively planned for July or August 2025. However, the dates will depend on several factors, including leadership schedules, committee approval, and authorization from the Secretary of VA and other key leaders. He noted that various considerations, such as the budget, travel logistics, costs, and leadership approval, will be crucial in the planning process.

- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude followed up, emphasizing the importance and significance of having this committee be able to travel to Washington DC, the nation's capital, for the annual meeting to see firsthand and be present with the leaders to express the needs of Veterans in our areas and territories.
- Mr. Kaneko acknowledged that committee member Mr. Borja joined the meeting.
- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude stated that Mr. Tua'au-Glaude is in attendance as a public member.

Minutes of Last Meeting:

- Mr. Kaneko stated that the minutes from the annual meeting are complete and have been sent out to the committee members for review.
- Ms. Buyum stated she did not receive a copy of the annual meeting minutes.
- Mr. Benjamin stated he did not receive the annual meeting minutes and is uncomfortable approving them without having an opportunity to review them.
- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude motioned to approve the annual meeting minutes.
- Mr. Torres-Leon stated he would send the annual meeting minutes to the entire committee for review.
- Ms. Muna-Barnes requested that the motion be changed to approve, subject to any corrections.
- Mr. Kaneko summarized and restated the proposed motion to approve the minutes subject to any necessary corrections. All attending committee members agreed to the motion, except Ms. Buyum, who requested to review the minutes before voting to approve them.
- Mr. Martinez proposed a subsidiary motion not to approve the minutes until every committee member can review them. All attending committee members agreed to this subsidiary motion.
- Mr. Torres-Leon provided clarification and stated that according to the FACA guidelines, it is up to the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and the Alternate Designated Federal Officer (ADFO) to finalize the minutes. The committee members can review it for accuracy; however, any edits or updates that may be needed are completed by the DFO or ADFO.

Final Draft Report Review & Adoption:

- Mr. Kaneko asked the committee members if they had any comments or feedback regarding this agenda item.
- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude thanked Ms. Buyum and Mr. Ortiz for their commitment and hard work in compiling and drafting the report. She recognized their valuable contributions and thanked them for the time and effort they devoted to ensuring the report's progress and quality.
- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude motioned for the committee to vote on approving and submitting the final draft report to the DFO and ADFO. Mr. Benjamin seconded the motion.

- Mr. Kaneko conducted the vote, and all attending committee members voted in favor.

Open Discussion:

- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude thanked Mr. Torres-Leon for organizing, planning, and managing the travel arrangements and vouchers for the annual meeting in Guam.
- Mr. Benjamin acknowledged that committee member Mr. Yano joined the meeting.
- Mr. Yano provided written remarks after the meeting due to technical issues. Mr. Yano said he recognized and appreciated Mr. Ortiz's dedication to the report. Mr. Yano reminded the committee that the Palau issues and recommendations are no different from the Federated States of Micronesia or the Republic of Marshall Islands. He added that the recommendation to pay for Palau Veterans to travel to the Philippines or Guam to receive medical care is much cheaper than building infrastructure or scheduling regular medical flights throughout the Outlying Areas and FAS. Mr. Yano emphasized the need for the VA to visit Palau and the FAS to see all the resources and enable the local doctors to step in and help Veterans, reducing their out-of-pocket expenses. Mr. Yano thanked the committee members and the VA Advisory team.
- Ms. Tua'au-Glaude emphasized the significance of the recommendations outlined in the draft report, expressing hope that leadership and other stakeholders will recognize these critical needs and enhance access and resources for Veterans across our regions and territories.
- Mr. Martinez inquired about the next steps following the submission of the report. He sought clarification on the process moving forward, whether the committee will prioritize identifying and addressing new issues and challenges affecting Veterans in our regions or if the focus will be on refining and expanding upon the issues already identified. Additionally, he asked what actions or strategies are recommended as the next steps to ensure that the committee's efforts continue to drive meaningful progress and improvements for Veterans.
- Mr. Torres-Leon stated that the committee will continue to work on these and other recommendations. He emphasized that another report will be submitted in two years, indicating ongoing work. As initiatives are implemented, the committee can track progress, make revisions, add new items, and maintain momentum in addressing key issues. This work is far from over, and the committee will remain committed to driving continuous improvement, working toward enhancing the lives of Veterans and ensuring they have the support and resources they deserve.

Public Comments:

- Mr. Torres-Leon opened the meeting for public comments and encouraged participants to share their thoughts in the chat or via email. He also provided the email address for submitting comments.
- Mr. Brad Ruzsala is a VFW Post 3457 and Project Buddy Check 670 member. He thanked the committee for their important work and expressed appreciation for the efforts made on behalf of his region and others. He also expressed a strong interest in learning more about the ongoing initiatives, including reviewing past meeting minutes and staying updated on the committee's progress. He concluded by saying that, on behalf of the regions, it is encouraging to know that people are working diligently to support those who have served the country.
- Mr. Torres-Leon provided a link to the Advisory Committee's webpage with resources and information about the work being done.
- Mr. Torres-Leon concluded the public comments.
- Mr. Kaneko provided closing remarks. He thanked the members for their time,

commitment, and invaluable contributions. He emphasized that the work accomplished so far is critical for advancing our shared goal of enhancing the lives of Veterans. However, the work doesn't stop here, and I'm grateful for your continued dedication to supporting our Veterans and ensuring they receive the resources and care they deserve. Once again, thank you all for your contributions.

Meeting Adjourned

/s/Kalani Kaneko
Committee Chair

/s/Bernard Johnson
Designated Federal Officer