



**VETERANS CAUCUS
CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

STATE OF THE CAUCUS

REPORTED MARCH 1, 2014

LAWSON STUART
CHAIR

JOHNATHAN ERVIN
1st VICE CHAIR

ZOE DUNNING
2nd VICE CHAIR

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TREASURER

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SECRETARY

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

KATE MACKAY ORGANIZATIONAL DEV.	SHAWN TERRIS POLITICAL	REID MILBURN COMMUNICATIONS
KRISTEN KAVANAUGH WOMEN VETERANS	EVELYN THOMAS LGBT VETERANS	MARK HENDERSON MINORITY VETERANS

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Veterans and Members,

It is truly a privilege to present to you this report on the state of our Caucus. It is very hard to believe that it has almost been a year since we were privileged to become the ones entrusted with the caretaking of this great endeavor.

There has been a lot of amazing work carried out in these several months that have resulted in a complete re-boot of the Caucus to the entity we are all now a part of. Each and every person in this Caucus has participated as an important element of getting here and we have an amazing team in place.

I cannot express enough, the gratitude I have for the opportunity to be trusted to lead as your Chair. I am truly experiencing one of the greatest privileges I have ever been given.

Our Veterans are a group of people who have taken everything they had, and at some point in time, placed it all on the line as something they would willingly sacrifice for those who come after them.

For those who come together to serve those who have served us, we become a part of the care-taking of the greatest people this country will have the privilege of calling its residents. This Caucus has not only fully stepped up to this calling, but has found an element yet unfulfilled and carved for itself a niche where it can enable those already working on great things for Veterans while working on its own things. In doing so, we have become an entity that can cover a lot of ground.

The state of the Caucus is strong. Perhaps it is even stronger than it ever has been. But this is not the greatest we can be. This is only the beginning. We will need all of you to make it to our greatest possibilities. We are a team. We are a family. We are the proud, Veteran Blue of California.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Stuart". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "L" and a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

LAWSON STUART, CHAIR

RE-ORGANIZATION & RE-PURPOSING

Just prior to being elected to our positions, the Caucus officers settled on the general outline of a plan to completely re-organize the Caucus and allow it to become re-purposed into a fully functional, organizational element of the California Democratic Party (CDP).

The re-organization had many different elements to it. The primary goal was to get the Caucus to a state of functionality consistent with the other elements of the CDP. The plan for this included getting the Caucus to a point where it did not simply conduct business the three times a year that it met, but would instead meet three times a year to discuss the things that had been accomplished and the things ahead.

Re-organization was initiated via the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Bylaws to consider language for a complete revision of the Bylaws of the Caucus. Shawn Terris was appointed to Chair this Ad Hoc Committee. She appointed Karen Marie Otter (Emeritus Officer and former 2nd Vice Chair of the Caucus) as her Committee Vice Chair. Roger Hart (Former Caucus Treasurer), Bob Handy (Emeritus Officer and Former Caucus Chair), and Scott Dick joined the committee at the appointment of Ms. Terris.

Complimenting the work that was going on with the Bylaws for structure, the process to re-certify the Caucus was initiated, as required by the CDP. Signatures from the members of the Caucus who are delegates to the State Central Committee were collected, and all of the required documents were submitted to the CDP Rules Committee for final review.

The Executive Board made the decision to met monthly via Teleconferences, where all members of the Caucus were invited to attend and listen in, in order to ensure that meetings were transparent. For those who could not attend, minutes of these meetings began being consistently posted to the Caucus Website.

As re-organization of the Caucus was well underway, the over-all purpose of the Caucus was considered very carefully. All Caucuses of the CDP are tasked with ensuring that they bring about the participation in the politics of the party of those who would not normally do so. In other words- engage the un-engaged. Each Caucus is tasked with reaching out to those interested in its mission. In our case, this has meant outreach to Veterans and Veterans' supporters.

As we reviewed Veterans Affairs as a whole, it began to become very clear that the Veterans Caucus had a unique angle on things that was not previously being taken advantage of. Unlike the many Veterans non-profits, and agencies at multiple levels of government, the Caucus did not have limitations on its advocacy efforts. Once this was noticed, we then looked for the best methods by which we could fully take advantage of this and utilize it to move Veterans issues forward.

Today, the Veterans Caucus considers its job, in regard to Veterans Affairs, to be that of the political strong arm, available to all Veterans' issues under consideration in the State of California. We have formed ourselves as a third tier, complimenting the work of the government agencies and non-profits with either political reinforcement or our own ideas and projects.

In other words, we have fully embraced that where the government agency may recommend doing something for Veterans; where the Veterans non-profit organization may request action for Veterans; and where the individual Veteran may even be forced to beg for action- the Veterans Caucus is in a position to demand it. And if needed, ensure that there are consequences when those who fulfill a public service position ignore their Veterans' needs.

The Caucus met in Costa Mesa for the July Executive Board meeting of the CDP. At this meeting, the leadership was able to present the new, intended tone for the Caucus. The meeting was healthy with debate, multiple discussions of ideas, and a preview of the things to come.

In November of 2013, at the Executive Board meeting of the CDP, we were everywhere. Shawn Terris, in her new role as the Chair of the Political Committee, presented to the Platform Committee of the CDP the most aggressive language ever submitted for the Veterans Plank. Veterans were recognized at the beginning of General Session and lead the rest of the CDP in the Pledge of Allegiance. Our meeting featured the passing of the Bylaws produced by the Ad Hoc Committee and the full implementation of our new structure. Reports were heard from the six new committees and their leaders. And the room was filled with candidates, members, speakers and Veterans.

With the adoption of polices for the Caucus at the January Executive Board teleconference; the full re-organization of the Caucus marked its completion.

COMMITTEES

A large part of the re-organization of the Caucus was ensuring that our members were empowered to become more involved in our actions. One of the many ways this was to occur was through committees where they could find specific interests and serve them.

Additionally, in keeping with promises made during the campaign for the slate, focus of the Caucus was re-directed to thoroughly include Women, LGBT and Minority Veterans. This was done due to the recognition of these Veterans being under-served by other organizations and agencies.

Six committees were formed. Three were identified as permanent elements- Organizational Development, Political and Communications. Three were identified as serving a special purpose, and hopefully not being needed in the future- the

Committee on Women Veterans, Committee on LGBT Veterans, and the Committee on Minority Veterans.

The Vice Chairs were each assigned half of the committees to serve as liaisons between the committees and the Executive Board. The 1st Vice Chair was assigned Political, Communications and the Committee on Minority Veterans. The 2nd Vice Chair was assigned Organizational Development, the Committee on LGBT Veterans and the Committee on Women Veterans.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This committee is tasked with overseeing and organizing recruitment of new members; retaining our current membership; handling of bylaws amendments proposed by members of the Caucus; performing member services; developing the organization; overseeing events of the Caucus; ensuring the membership is properly informed on matters before the Caucus; coordination of the different volunteer services for Veterans; helping fill vacancies on Caucus committees; maintaining a Member Handbook; helping the Caucus connect to other Veterans and Political Organizations; managing interactions between Veterans Democratic Clubs throughout the State and the Caucus; and other tasks as referred to it by the Executive Board or General Membership. Reid Milburn was appointed to Chair this committee in June. She moved to another assignment in February. Kate MacKay was appointed to Chair this committee in February.

COMMUNICATIONS

This committee is tasked with overseeing and organizing internal and external communication of the Caucus. They oversee media relations, press releases, social media content, the Caucus quarterly newsletter, Caucus updates and any other communication of the message of the Caucus to the membership and beyond. It also performs other tasks as referred to it by the Executive Board or General Membership. Cres Vellucci was appointed to Chair this committee in August. Cres stepped down for personal reasons in February. Reid Milburn was appointed Chair of this committee in February.

POLITICAL

This committee leads and organizes political, campaign and legislative efforts of the caucus. This includes reviewing and taking "support" or "oppose" positions on legislation; updating the Veterans Caucus of the California Democratic Party's plank on odd numbered years; recommending resolutions to the Veterans Caucus membership and the California Democratic Party; monitoring elected officials for their actions or inactions regarding Veterans Issues; performing campaign services for the candidates endorsed by the California Democratic Party in cooperation with the Veterans Caucus; helping to recruit Veterans who are interested in running for office; tracking Veterans who currently serve in office; managing any political requests from Veterans Democratic Clubs; assisting with any asks of the Caucus from non-profit and government Veterans organizations; and providing other political opportunities for the caucus to participate in. It also performs other tasks

as referred to it by the Executive Board or General Membership. Shawn Terris was appointed to Chair this committee in August.

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN VETERANS

This committee is tasked with investigating the many different issues specifically affecting our Women Veterans and suggesting to the Executive Board and Caucus the different ways we can get involved in giving these issues a voice and actions they have not previously been provided. It also performs other tasks as referred to it by the Executive Board or General Membership. Dana Little was appointed to Chair this committee in May. She stepped down for personal reasons in December. Kristen Kavanaugh was appointed to Chair this committee in January.

COMMITTEE ON LGBT VETERANS

This committee is tasked with investigating the many different issues specifically affecting our LGBT Veterans and suggesting to the Executive Board and Caucus the different ways we can get involved in giving these issues a voice and actions they have not previously been provided. It also performs other tasks as referred to it by the Executive Board or General Membership. Apolonio Munoz was appointed to Chair this committee in August. He stepped down for personal reasons in January. Evelyn Thomas, who was serving as the committee Secretary, was appointed Chair in January.

COMMITTEE ON MINORITY VETERANS

This committee is tasked with investigating the many different issues specifically affecting our Minority Veterans and suggesting to the Executive Board and Caucus the different ways we can get involved in giving these issues a voice and actions they have not previously been provided. It also performs other tasks as referred to it by the Executive Board or General Membership. Ralph Cansimbe was appointed to Chair this committee in August. He stepped down for personal reasons in January. Mark Henderson, who was serving as the committee Vice Chair, was appointed Chair in January.

PROJECTS

The Caucus undertook several projects throughout 2013. Each of these projects was intended to fulfill specific missions and tasks.

OPERATION: REINFORCEMENTS (ACTIVE)

This project was officially launched on September 1, 2013. It specifically sought solutions at the state level to the epidemic of sexual assault in the military and the care of those survivors now living with Military Sexual Trauma (MST). It is still active, working for legislation that will set California forward as an example to the rest of the nation on how to properly handle sexual assault investigation and prosecution to maximize justice in every case possible. It brought the communities working on this specific issue together and took them forward with a single plan of action all were united behind.

OPERATION: RETURN TO VALOR (ACTIVE)

This project was officially launched on October 15, 2013. It specifically sought to ensure that priority on restoring the discharges of those who exited the military under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and other homosexuality related charges, were returned to honorable. It is also still an active project. It is working to bring together the different communities surrounding this issue and moving them forward with a single plan of action.

OPERATION: NO VETERAN LEFT BEHIND (ACTIVE)

This project was officially launched on November 1, 2013. It specifically seeks to bring together the many different groups of Veterans who ethnicities are underserved by Veterans Affairs. This is an active project and is still pulling resources together.

OPERATION: VETERAN BLUE (ACTIVE)

This project was launched with the launching of the Political, Communications and Organizational Development committees. It is tasked with continuing efforts to establish the Caucus in its new role within the different political and Veterans elements of the State. It is still active.

OPERATION: VETFAM (ACTIVE)

This project was launched to take on issues specific to those who are family members of Veterans and Military personnel. As 2014 unfolds, it will seek to unite the different groups focused on these issues and connect them with the State Legislature for action requests developed by the group as a whole. It is still active, but will hold its hard launch in April of 2014.

LEGISLATION & ADVOCACY

The Political Committee has taken on legislation and is working to ensure that all pieces of legislation in the California State Legislature that have anything to do with Veterans are carefully considered, tracked and an appropriate position is taken on them. Bills that are supported receive notification to their authors of said support and are lobbied for when necessary. Similarly, Bills that are not supported are lobbied against. The option of no action is also available.

The Caucus released an aggressive 31 Legislative priorities and distributed them to the entire State Assembly, State Senate and Congressional Delegation. This resulted in several meetings with many offices and has produced several bills that are coming forward from their respective offices soon.

Lobbying within the halls of the California State Legislature has also included letters of support, letters of opposition, presentation of testimony to committees of the legislature considering different bills, and maintenance of a presence at the different events where the many ideas for Veterans Affairs have been promoted.

Advocacy efforts have included connecting the Caucus with the many different agencies that do political and/or Veterans advocacy. The Caucus now has working relationships with the California Department of Veterans Affairs, California State Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, California State Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee, California Military Department, California Labor Commission, California Commission on Women and Girls, multiple Veterans of Foreign Wars posts, multiple American Legion posts, multiple other Veterans non-profits, multiple Caucuses of the CDP, multiple County Central Committees, and many other organizations.

CAMPAIGNS

As the election cycle heats up, the Caucus is establishing relationships with the many persons seeking office and helped to get them up to speed on the issues facing Veterans.

In addition to this, several campaigns have been given strategy outlines for either "Veterans For" or "Veterans Against" campaign sub-committees to assist them in providing a place for Veterans directly on their teams to advise them on the development of Veterans Affairs platforms and allow the issues facing Veterans in their districts to remain at the forefront of debate and discussion.

CALIFORNIA YOUNG DEMOCRATS

In an effort to ensure that Veterans continue to be brought into the party and Caucus through any means necessary, a group of CYD members were given assistance with the re-launch of the Veterans Caucus of the California Young Democrats, which had previously fallen defunct.

Lead by a young Navy Veteran, Rebecca Taylor, this group plans to officially re-launch their Caucus at the March 2014 convention of the CYD.

CLUBS, COMMITTEES, & LIAISONS

As the Caucus has sought to ensure that full lines of communication exist between the party structures of the counties and the Caucus, we have toured parts of the State to ensure that they were aware of the many things being done. Additionally, we have assisted the different County Chairs with the formation of Veterans Democratic Clubs, Veterans Committees, or Veterans Liaisons. What specific route was taken was based on the size of the Veterans within the party of each county. We plan to continue covering counties in 2014.

ON THE HORIZON

As we move into 2014, here are some of the things we are working on or thinking about bringing forward:

- NATIONAL COALITION OF DEMOCRATIC VETERANS CAUCUS CHAIRS- This would be a group tasked with three things. 1) Sharing best practices between state caucuses. 2) Helping state parties without a Veterans element to get one underway. 3) Helping to coordinate the lobbying of congressional delegations towards similar goals.

- VETERANS CAUCUS ACADEMY- This would be a place where different resources for political action on behalf of Veterans would be taught via webinars to assist with the furthering of Veterans Affairs.
- AIDE PROGRAM- This is a program being developed where those who wish to intern with the Caucus may do so through a primarily telecommuted means.
- STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE- This would be a new committee tasked with ensuring that advocacy continues around the state for the different needs of Veterans. It would also handle Campaign Services outlined above.
- ANNUAL REPORT CARD- This would be a comprehensive look at all Democrats in the California State Legislature and the Congressional Delegation to report on how well they served Veterans over the course of a year.
- ANNUAL CAUCUS SUMMIT- This would be an additional time where the Caucus get meet, free from any of the distractions that exist at Convention and Executive Board meetings. This would facilitate the chance for all who are interested in the Caucus and its mission to come together.

SUMMARY

The state of the Caucus is strong. The work needed to keep going in this direction will be hard and time consuming. A lot is accomplished when one considers that we are entirely made up of volunteers who take their time and dedicate it to our cause.

2014 will be challenging. It will test us. It will push us to greater heights and exhaust us along the way. But it is on course to become one of the greatest years we have ever had...