

GER Ron Hicks' Visit to Washington, DC

After two long days of airline delays, a cancellation, and a detour through La Guardia, New York, we finally arrived at DC Reagan Airport about 1:30 pm on Monday afternoon March 14. We were met by the smiling face of our Transportation Committee Chairman Steve Ravinsky, who was making his second trip to the DC airport for our pick-up. I caught a cab into DC for my Congressional and Agency Visits and Steve took Nancy home to Fredericksburg. PGER Paul Helsel met me in DC and we stayed at the Hampton Inn on H Street NW, just across the street from the White House. Monday night we went out to dinner at a nearby Irish Pub.



Tuesday morning at the hotel, we met Shawn Bullard, President of the Duetto Group, our Elk Representative in DC and a Member of the Arlington-Fairfax, Virginia, Lodge, along with cameraman Noel St. John. Shawn has worked with the Elks since 2010 coordinating meetings with Members of Congress and government agencies, but has been more personally involved in the meetings over the last two years, using his contacts and expertise to help us make great in-roads into the Department of Veterans Affairs, DEA, the Military, and Congress.



Shawn Bullard, PGER Paul Helsel, and Ron

Tuesday was a mild but overcast day as we walked to our first meeting at the office of Robert A. McDonald, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Secretary McDonald, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, served as CEO at Proctor & Gamble prior to his confirmation by the Senate in July 2014. Since joining the VA, he has led an ambitious effort to improve the care and service to our Veterans, and put our Veterans in control of how, when, and where they wish to be served.



Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald and Ron

He is also re-emphasizing VA's commitment to its I-CARE VALUES of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence. Our one-on-one discussions centered around Homeless Veterans, the Pilot Welcome Home Programs, and what the Elks can do as an official strategic partner with the VA to help address the homeless issue. The Elks have committed \$4 million to assist in this effort and the Secretary is quite supportive and thankful for our work with Veterans, as evidenced by his willingness to meet personally with us, one-on-one without staff, for over an hour.

Later in the morning we met with Christine Hill, senior staff attorney for the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Ms Hill, a graduate of Albany Law School, joined National Veterans Legal Services Program in 2005 and represents Veterans and their dependents before Veteran Boards and Appeal Courts.



Ron and Christine Hill

After lunch at a nearby Thai Restaurant,



we "Ubered" over to the Pentagon to meet with Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey. This was my first visit inside the Pentagon, which, in addition to housing the highest offices of the military, is a museum of military history with every corridor and wall filled with artifacts, photos and memorabilia. Security was heavy, and after



Ron and Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel Dailey

going through three checkpoints, we were escorted by Sergeant Alan Meyers, travel coordinator for Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel A. Dailey, through the complex maze of hallways to our meeting. Sergeant Major Dailey, at age forty-two the youngest Sergeant Major of the Army in Army history, is an enthusiastic supporter of the "Soldier for Life" Program, which is committed to the successful training and transitioning of active-duty military to civilian life and finding jobs. Again, we explained our long-time and current support of Veterans and asked how the Elks can help in this effort and perhaps help promote the Program with other branches of the Military.

We then Ubered back into DC to meet with Mary Lou Leary, Deputy Director in the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and Dalen Harris, Associate Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Public Liaison, both a part of the Executive Office of the President of the United States. This Office works to reduce prescription drug abuse, opioid and heroin abuse, and related overdoses. The Elks have committed to placing drop boxes in police stations for the collection of unused drugs, to help with the Drug Enforcement Agency with its annual "Take Back Days" for unused prescription drugs, and to be a partner in the new DEA 360 Program, an effort to reduce drug crimes and inform the public of the ravages of drug use on our youth and in our communities.



Dalen Harris, Ron, and Mary Lou Leary

Wednesday morning was a beautiful Spring day, with temperatures expected in the mid-seventies, bringing DC closer to the early arrival of the much-anticipated Cherry Blossoms. Unfortunately, METRO, the second largest metro system in the Country, transporting over 700,000 riders per day, was shut down for a 29-hour emergency inspection and repair. So, we again Ubered to our first meeting of the day with Chuck Rosenberg, Acting Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency. The fact we were able to have a one-on-one discussion with the DEA Administrator is a testament to the Elks status and recognition as a reliable partner with DEA. Representatives of DEA will be presenting at our annual Grand Lodge Convention in July in Houston.



Chuck Rosenberg and
Ron

We then went to the Russell Senate Office Building to meet with Kristen Molloy, Legislative Assistant for Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA), a former Governor of Virginia. Senator Kaine was unavailable because of other meetings. These are busy days in Congress as appropriations are being considered, Budget meetings are underway, bills are being "marked up" prior to final drafts, and everyone is either asking for money or wants a piece of our Representatives in DC. The Elks were not asking for



Ron and Kristen Molloy

anything, but wanted to explain our close relationship with the VA and DEA, encouraging Ms Molloy to make Senator Kaine aware of these partnerships and how the Elks are willing to support VA and DEA Programs in Virginia, as well as nationwide.



Lunch was at the Monocle Restaurant, an upscale eatery and former brothel that was spared when other older buildings in the block were razed for Congressional parking. (Guess the brothel owner knew someone!) After lunch we returned to the Russell Building to meet with Jonathan Daniell, a National

Security Fellow, and Nicholas Devereux, Legislative Counsel for Senator Mark Warner (D-VA), another former Virginia Governor. We

again explained our partnerships with the VA and DEA and asked what we can do to help promote Senator Warner's agenda with Veterans.



Nicholas Devereux, Jonathan Daniell, and Ron



Once again we travelled back across the Potomac River to the Pentagon to visit the National September 11 Memorial & Museum and the United States Air Force Memorial. The 9-11 Memorial is dedicated to the 184 souls who perished on September 11, 2001, when hijacked American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. Individual benches, with pools of water flowing beneath, have been erected to identify each of the victims by age and location at the time of the crash. The benches facing the Pentagon

identify the fifty-nine people who were on the airplane and the benches facing away from the Pentagon identify those who lost their lives in the Pentagon. The Memorial is bordered by an Age Wall, relative to the age of each of the victims and growing from "3" for three year old Dana Faulkenberg to "71" for seventy-one year old John Jamnicky, a Navy Veteran.

We then went up the hill overlooking the Pentagon and Arlington National Cemetery to the U.S. Air Force Memorial. The Memorial, dedicated in 2006 to the men and women who served and continue to serve in the Air Force and its predecessor organizations, features three tapered, triangular stainless steel spires rising 270 feet to evoke the contrails of jets streaking upwards. The Memorial, which also features Memorial Walls, Quotations, and an Honor Guard Sculpture, has a commanding view of DC. The Memorial is visited by approximately 250,000 visitors per year.



Back North of the River, we went to the Cannon Office Building, one of three buildings housing Congressional offices and meeting rooms for our House of Representatives, to meet with Congressman Dave Brat (R-7th-VA). Congressman Brat, an economist and professor at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia, is a member of the Budget Committee, which was in the midst of a hearing. Despite his busy schedule, he found time to leave the hearing chambers for a few minutes to meet with us. Brat is a strong supporter of the military and meeting the needs of our Veterans, and was very interested to hear about the Elks partnership with VA and Homeless Veterans. He asked that we contact his office at any time to offer suggestions of ways that he can assist the Elks in our resolve. While in the hallways awaiting Congressman Brat, we met John Perry from Gainesville, Florida, CEO of Altavian, who was in DC competing for a military contract for unmanned aircraft systems. After expressing his interest in the Elks, I handed him an Application and offered to Sponsor him for membership. He agreed and Paul and Shawn signed the Application as references, so maybe Gainesville Lodge will be getting a new Member in the near future.



Congressman Dave Brat
and Ron

Dinner Wednesday night was at the Old Ebbitt Grill, a landmark restaurant across the street from the White House and a favorite for politicians since the 1800's, and the site of political scandals, movie scenes, and many famous parties. It was a beautiful evening for our walk back to the hotel along the mall

in front of the White House, as we enjoyed the scenery and realized that we were standing in the midst of so much history, the cradle of democracy and the epicenter of the Free World.

Nancy drove into DC on Thursday morning, March 17, to pick Paul and me up for our drive to Dover Delaware and the MD-DE-DC Elks Association Spring Workshop. Paul knew the way, so he drove our vehicle out of DC and to our first stop along the way, Elks Camp Barrett in Maryland.

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

Send comments to webmaster@virginiaelks.org

