

Tom Ridge

December 2, 2016

The Honorable Ashton Carter
The Honorable Robert O. Work
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Carter and Deputy Secretary Work:

The Vietnam War Commemoration Committee is pleased to submit its report of findings and recommendations to help enhance the marketing and communication strategy for the execution phase (Fiscal Years 2016-2018) of the Vietnam War Commemoration.

Michael Rhodes established the Committee's Communication Working Group on April 25, 2016 to study and make recommendations to the full committee on the Vietnam War 50th Commemoration staff's communication plan and marketing strategies. The Communication Working Group members included Mr. Paul Bucha, Chief Warrant Officer Three Donald M. Clarke, Mr. Morton Dean, Ms. Ann Mills-Griffiths, Lieutenant General Roger C. Schultz, and Mr. Jan C. Scruggs. Mr. Dean served as the Group's Chair. Mr. Michael Gable served as the Designated Federal Officer.

The Commemoration staff had previously described their need to develop a "national voice," specifically, messages, message distribution, and marketing to ensure that potential Commemorative Partners and the public are aware of their Congressional mandate to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War. Good marketing is of utmost importance to the Commemoration staff's mission. There must be an increasing number of Commemorative Partners and subsequent events to honor eligible Vietnam veterans and their families by presenting certificates and pins in dignified presentations.

As the Communication Working Group briefed the full Committee on September 19, 2016 and we went on to vote on their recommendations, we had two goals. The first goal was to not make a recommendation on a complex issue covered by another Federal agency. For example, we rejected any recommendation that would require the Commemoration staff to maintain statistics on veteran suicide rates. The second goal was to acknowledge any overwhelming barriers to the Commemoration staff's ability to implement a recommendation. For example, though we agreed that the Vietnam War 50th Commemoration needs a national spokesperson, we also believe the spokesperson's message should be delivered after the presidential election to have a chance at getting the media's attention. Thus, the national spokesperson recommendation was deferred for a later report.

The Committee also received a thorough presentation on the Certificate of Honor Program. We believe the Certificate of Honor Program is going well and is an exemplary model for veteran commemoration efforts.

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Five recommendations were unanimously approved for your consideration, to be implemented by the Commemoration staff:

1. Strengthen the message and focus of our public service announcements on assisting the nation in honoring Vietnam Veterans; especially targeted for to schools, veteran service organizations, and Commemorative Partners.
2. Publish articles about the Commemoration in magazines. We also recognize the Commemoration staff's difficulty in getting national newspapers to print articles. We suggest the staff connect with a major event (e.g., sporting event) that is honoring Vietnam Veterans as the hook for a local newspaper to write a corresponding article.
3. Engage with the top ten Commemorative Partners that give us the greatest return on investment. Ensure that these Commemorative Partners have the support they need and check on their progress in thanking and honoring Vietnam Veterans.
4. Acknowledge Vietnam Veterans who returned with disabilities in talking points and remarks.
5. Continue to highlight the difficulties experienced by Vietnam Veterans as a result of their service, but not to the extent of maintaining statistics.

The Committee is proud of our service to the Department of Defense. We trust these recommendations will be of use to the Commemoration staff.

Respectfully submitted,



Tom Ridge, Chairman
Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee

cc:

David Tillotson III, Acting Deputy Chief Management Officer
Michael Rhodes, Director of Administration

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