

Commander VFWIL:

I am currently President of the Will County VAC and seeking some basic information and answers concerning the State's involvement in our Veterans Assistance Commission of WILL County. It is my belief that the actions and opinions by VFWIL are the result of misinformation and are biased. As a lifelong member, I urge you to gather facts. The misinformation coming from members throughout the state is dishonoring the VFW as a whole.

First, you need to be aware that the Will County Executive, Will County Auditor, and Will County State's Attorney have all opined at one point or another that there has been ZERO illegal activity performed by WCVAC. None of the WCVAC board members, myself included, has been contacted by the FBI. That rumor has been circulating for some time now and I am ashamed to say that it started with our current Assistant Superintendent. The legal system was only triggered because Will County Treasurer Candidate Raj Pillai has filed suit, and a temporary restraining order, against the current WCVAC Board. I was in the courtroom when Will County Judge John Anderson opined on the temporary restraining order stating that in order to sue the WCVAC, Raj and his team must also include the County of Will. There has been no action, or re-file on Raj's part. The next court date for his original injunction is 11/28/2022. It is my belief that no actions will be taken by Raj and his team until after the Nov 8 election when Raj's candidacy for office is over.

If any evidence of illegal activity had been provided to the FBI or in Will County Court of Law, charges would have been filed. We must be patient and allow the legal system to work. In the meantime, VFW IL is stepping into a nightmare caused by few, but has the potential to negatively affect many.

Accusations and innuendoes have been the norm from Davin throughout his tenure with VFWIL. I find it hard to believe that VFWIL would continue to entertain his thoughts on any matter as it is known he is about the title, and not serving veterans in a time of need unless credit received.

The marketing grant received from the County of Will was voted on by 25 members of the Will County Board, and subsequent resolution from the Executive was then voted on by all 26 (Koch) included. Just as VFWIL grants scholarships that shall only be used for educational purposes, the VAC received funding that could only be used for marketing. No other veteran issues or problems were allowed to be addressed forthright with the marketing dollars. Right at the beginning of this mess people accused the VAC of not helping veterans with housing issues, claims, and most other issues WCVAC staff had handled at one time. What has not been stated from staff or board is that the VAC received grant dollars from federal agencies for housing, transportation, and food. All grant dollars were managed by VAC Assistant Superintendent under the assignment of "Grant Manager", yet somehow she is held harmless in this mess. The normal activities of the Commission were not impacted by the Marketing Grant as the marketing grant operations were outsourced to a nationally recognized subject matter expert. The Auditors office of Will County has stated that the procurement code of Will County was not violated. Outsourcing was necessary as effective marketing skills are not in the purview of VAC staff, particularly during a global pandemic. It has been made very clear to myself and others involved that messaging matters. Relying on the current VAC staff to communicate with the public on the Commission's behalf has been my miscalculation of the integrity and the motivation of the current staff.

Dutch DeGroot email statement is partially correct *"We really need the assistance of every VFW Post in Will County. We are trying to make some progress in getting control of the VAC back in the hands of the veterans organizations."* The VAC is not trying to take control from Veteran Service Organizations, but the direct opposite. We have been trying for years to get more Veteran Service Organizations active in the Commission. This year certified letters were sent out with the same disgusting results. For the VFW, of which I am a life member, to insert itself as our savior this year and totally ignore the last ten years is problematic & ignorant. For the last ten years myself, and other VFWs in Will County have been invited to VAC monthly meetings, received all of the agendas, meeting minutes, and attachments. They were invited to the discussion of the marketing grant in 2021 and received the work product from the marketing grant in 2022. These are the facts DeGroot is purposefully dismissing because they are not supporting his agenda, nor is he from Will County and would not have knowledge of these facts. Further, your representatives did not contact me or the Board but are using a political candidate and our Assistant Superintendent as their sources on all matters on the VAC. Veteran & Will County Candidate Raj Pillai has stated he & American Legion Post 13 are in alignment with Edgar County Watchdogs, and Raj is using the VAC in his political campaign throwing accusations at his opponent Will County Treasurer Brophy. Raj Pillai is not a member of a VFW because he does not qualify, so he involved Dutch DeGroot & further invited assistance from the Assistant Superintendent who is a member of the VFW and American Legion Post 13.

B. Another DeGroot email exchange;

Assistant Superintendent:

Hi Dutch,

Attached is the list of VFW delegates/alternates who attended the meeting last night. There are 2 posts who do not have delegates assigned.

I emailed MG (Dr) Kelley regarding being appointed delegate from the Legion. Hopefully he agrees and we can move forward with that today.

Please let me know if you need anything else, thank you for everything.

DeGroot:

"Jen, thank you very much.....All please see list from last evenings meeting especially MIA post. Friday 14 October at 3 PM Will County Executive Building 302 N. Chicago Street 2nd floor, Joliet. This is an important vote for VACWC officers. We have two candidates M.G. Kelly for President & John Davin for VP, it is imperative we get every VFW post representative there for this vote. It's obvious they called this vote for this time knowing folks work and wish to hijack the process. Bobby/Brett let me know you have this list. Thanks, Dutch Please forward to MG Kelly as I don't have his e-mail handy

The Assistant Superintendent failed to inform MG Kelley when and where Harwood Post 5 meets & that Post 5 is considering closing down. MG Kelley's integrity was called into question.

Since that time, Major General Kelley has rescinded his nomination for President after talking to others and investigating the claims against the VAC on his own. Major General Kelley's statement received on Oct 25, 2022:

"After consideration the executive board needs to focus on helping veterans. A contested election detracts from the boards mission. Ms. Koch has a long history of involvement with the VAC and it's executive board. This would make her accession into the Presidents role much smoother & without a significant learning curve. I have neither of those experiences. If I was selected for an open member at large position I could acquire the knowledge that would prepare me for future roles within the VAC."

It's important to note that Ms. Amanda Koch is a delegate representing VFW Post 1493. Ms. Koch believes her volunteer role on the VAC is important enough that she resigned from her paid role as Will County Board Member. Ms. Koch, like myself, understand the mission of Veteran's Assistance Commissions is to help, not hurt veterans or the reputation of the Veterans Assistance Commission.

Ms. Denise Williams is also a lifetime member of the VFW Auxiliary. Her auxiliary membership at VFW 367 allowed her to organize and the VFW 367 host the first ever Veteran Specific Job and Resource fair as well as the first Veterans Health and Wellness Fair well before the Department of Veterans Affairs was in Will County. Disrespecting her work in the veteran community is shameful and disrespectful to her and her son.

Delegate participation in the last few years quorum has been a problem. Meetings had to be rescheduled, delayed while we contacted any delegates for a scheduled meeting. Nationally chartered Veteran Service Organizations showed little interest in participation up until the point where the VAC was able to convince the Will County Board that the Veteran Service Organizations were also negatively impacted by COVID-19. The VACWC was able to assist each post that lost fundraising revenue apply for \$10,000 from CARES funding. Again, DeGroot would not know this because he is not from Will County. Davin's post was not eligible not because of loss of funding, but because of his inability to prove service to the Bolingbrook veteran community.

My opinion, the MVAA amendments presented needs to be examined by the VFWIL.

The amendments in the MVAA is riddled with case law spanning 10 years from different geographic areas across the state. The WCVAC has met the needs of the County of Will Veterans without the need of a tax levy. The WCVAC collaborated with Will County community organizations to provide PTSD mental health counseling, homeless services, housing, addiction treatment, transportation, and food. It is reckless to think any state statute would meet the needs of individual organizations or counties. A good lawyer should know case law is meant to be leaned on, not codified. There is no evidence to support these changes to the MVAA. The current changes to the MVAA supports the agenda of the Chicago collar counties, specifically Lake & McHenry, and do not recognize or even consider the best interest, needs, or relationships of the majority of the counties across the state. Property tax levies will hurt the veteran community by increasing the veteran civilian divide that the VFWIL has worked so hard to overcome. Despite being a collar county, Will County VAC questioned these changes and for that we are being attacked, which raises the question what is DeGroot & Davin's actual motivation.

The WCVAC Board is composed of dedicated volunteers who are not compensated in anyway. They are dedicated to serving all veterans in the County with little or no recognition for their service. To be accused of any illegal activity without facts is wrong.

Our delegate roster contains mostly Commanders, who are not regular attendees, up to this point. Again, VFWIL now trying to step in as a savior is ignorant, disrespectful, and deplorable. I am disgusted that my years of service in the VFWIL has amounted to nothing & has been ignored by you. I am hoping that the WCVAC will be able to survive this storm, but I doubt that anyone with any character or integrity will ever want to participate.

Respectfully

John (Jack) Picciolo