

**ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMFORT INN, BISMARCK ND**

February 13, 2025
1:00 PM

Meeting called to order at 1:00pm by Chairman Murray Strom. Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence observed for POW/MIAs.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Steven Anderson	Lamar Kruckenberg	Murray Strom
Brian Bartlett	Vernon Laning	Jim Verwey
Joe Best	Gary Maddock (TEAMS)	Jacob Volk
Jim Hapala	Tom Ryan (TEAMS)	Hal Weninger (TEAMS)
Dave Hilleren	Cynthia Schlosser	

Absent:

Trish Hodny - Excused

Guests:

Chairman Strom asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

Motion to approve Agenda by Lamar Kruckenberg, 2nd by Jack Volk. Motion carried unanimously.

ND DVA Report – Staff

Updates on Department's activities.

Commissioner unable to attend due to death in the family.

VAHCS-Fargo – Rodney Geller, Interim Director

His assignment to the VA has been extended until May. A new VA Secretary has been confirmed - Doug Cullens. The Fargo VA is still working on completing the Grand Forks and Fergus Falls Outpatient Clinics this year. UND is vacating their building on the VA grounds and has given it to the VA. Parking is still an issue, but they are working on it. One proposal is to add a FM Metro Clinic to help relieve space issues. The Fisher House

location has not been announced but it is planned for Fargo; no other information is available.

ND National Guard: BG Mitch Johnson-Adjutant General's
Report on NDNG activities and legislative issues.

ND Cares: Michelle Gauvin-Panos-Director
Updates given on ND Cares activities. Suicide rates were reduced in 2024. Firearms are still the leading cause of deaths. In-Person Training will be taking place in the city of Horace, at the University of Jamestown, and at Legal Services of ND. Media Campaigns are in place for 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and ND Hopes.

Job Service ND: Jerome Billups-director DVOP & LVRS
Report given on employment services for ND Veterans.
Dusty Hillebrand does a JSND podcast called, "The Job Pod."

ND Assoc. of County & Tribal Veterans Service Officers; Chris Deery, President, Cass County VSO
Chris had another meeting to get to, but we did get his slide deck for the committee to see.

ND Veterans Home Governing Board, Vernon Laning, Chair
Deferred to Veterans Home Administrator for a report.

ND Veterans Home: Dane Grebel, Administrator
They are getting daily applications for both Basic care and Skilled care. Residents in Basic Care are at the top of the list to move to Skilled Care when there is an opening. SB 2007 is the Veterans Home budget. There were two hearings on the bill, and it has passed in the Senate, and is in the House. Construction of new storage units continues and hopefully they will be done by June. Understaffing is still an issue at the Veterans Home, 30% of their nursing staff are contract workers.

The Governing Board meeting is set for Thursday, February 20th and the Veterans Home Foundation meeting is on Friday, February 21st.

ND Assoc. of County & Tribal Veterans Service Officers; Chris Deery, President,

Cass County VSO

Chris came on TEAMS and gave his report. Veterans can get their taxes done for free from the SENDCAA Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program. The program provides free tax services by IRS Certified Volunteers for low-income individuals and families. Clients must be North Dakota residents of Cass, Ransom, Richland, Sargent, Steele or Traill Counties in the Eastern part of the State.

ZenLily Films: Stephanie Manesis

Presented on the status of “Marked by Grace” - Compassion Prevails on the WWII Battlefield. She told a story about a German soldier who was saved by an American soldier. She is doing four documentaries about acts of kindness on the battlefield.

Committee recessed.

February 14, 2025

Committee reconvened at: 9:00am

Meeting called to order at 9:00am by Chairman Murray Strom. Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence observed for POW/MIAs, and those serving overseas.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Steven Anderson	Trish Hodny (Teams)	Tom Ryan (TEAMS)
Brian Bartlett	Lamar Kruckenberg	Murray Strom
Joe Best	Vernon Laning	Jim Verwey
Jim Hapala	Gary Maddock (Teams)	Jacob Volk
Dave Hilleren		

Absent:

Cynthia Schlosser - Excused	Hal Weninger - Excused
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Guests:

Chairman Strom gave the question “What do we do as a committee?” to be answered at the Roundtable session.

Motion by Vernon Laning to accept November 2024 minutes, second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion on next meeting:

Motion by Lamar Kruckenberg to hold the next meeting on May 15 & 16, 2025 at the Comfort Inn, Bismarck ND, second by Vern Laning. Motion passed.

Chairman Strom stated the meeting could start at 8:00am on Friday to help those that had another organizational meeting to get to that day.

Veterans Affairs Subcommittee – report by Joe Best, Secretary
Vern Laning, Chairman.

Fund 410 was reviewed with two requests for policy changes. Reviewed Veterans Aid Loan program reports and investments. Reviewed ND DVA’s 2023-2025 budget and 2025-2027 budget request. Reviewed past Audits updates. No new business to report.

Policy 413 – Hardship Assistance Grant-Income. The grant income limits are based on the VA Pension rate.

Policy 613 – IMPACT Hardship Assistance Grant-Income. The IMPACT grant income limits are based on the annual LIHEAP limits.

The subcommittee is tasked to review the income limits for the grant programs at the beginning of the year.

Motion by Vern Laning to approve the changes to Policy 413 and Policy 613 as presented, second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed.

Legislative Subcommittee – report by Jack Volk, Secretary
Brian Bartlett, Chairman.

Legislation is going well. Some of the bills were discussed.

***Motion by Jack Volk to accept minutes as presented, second by LaMar Kruckenberg .
Motion passed unanimously.***

PWTF & Appeals Subcommittee

PWTF Subcommittee – report by Dave Hilleren, Secretary
Jim Verwey, Chairman

Reviewed Fund 410, status of Postwar Trust Fund, status of Patriotic License Plates, and status of Income Tax Return Check Off. Discussed increasing Veterans Gaming Tax with 50% of tax to go to PWTF, this is to be returned to Legislative Council for consideration. No requests for PWTF monies.

Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept PWTF minutes as presented, second by Steve Anderson. Motion carried unanimously.

Appeals Subcommittee – report by Dave Hilleren
Jim Verwey. Chairman

No appeals.

Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept Appeals minutes as presented, second by Steve Anderson. Motion carried unanimously.

Roundtable Discussion:

Chairman Strom’s question to the members was “What does the Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs do”

Gary Maddock: Review Department Policies, select Commissioner, select committee members to oversee the Veterans Home. As far as the meeting, the speakers were very good.

Tom Ryan: Speakers and information were good. VA Interim Director gave positive information on VA. Dane gave good information on the Veterans Home. NDCares is doing a lot and provides a point of contact in his area.

Chris Deery: From his standpoint, the committee responds to issues that the CVSOs bring forward and find solutions. Provides assistance to ND veterans with the grant programs. Good working relationship with the ACOVA. The Commissioner does a heck of a job.
Trish Hodny: Having three people from each of the major organizations get together to evaluate the services the Department provides and providing oversight is important. It would help to have the speakers recorded or live streamed so the veterans throughout the State could hear the information.

Discussion on live stream suggestion.

Motion by Trish Hodny to live stream the speakers and subcommittee reporting at the next meeting, second by Joe Best and Tom Ryan. Motion carried.

Jim Verwey: When he was a CVSO, the committee was very supportive of changes being proposed to programs.

Murray Strom: Always getting updated information from the speakers is beneficial.

Brian Bartlett: Overseeing the Veterans Home and taking an active role in putting people on the Governing Board.

Jack Volk: Good information from the speakers. VA Interim Director is doing a good job. Thanked Trish for the livestreaming idea for parts of the meeting.

Dave Hilleren: Oversight is the biggest point, along with decisions on Department Policies. It also helps to get information from other groups. NDCares is trying to implement programs to help reduce suicides. Canada's Vietnam Moving Wall will be placed in a museum. He has been working a lot with the Canadian veteran groups.

Steve Anderson: The committee is basically a second set of eyes for veterans.

Joe Best: Committee provides accountability for the Department by reviewing Veterans Loans and funding, and PWTF Fund 410.

Jim Hapala: He serves on the Veterans Home Foundation Board and there is a problem because there isn't more housing for the workers at the Veterans Home. There isn't even a restaurant in the town. The committee is doing great work. Talked with the Administrator about putting some housing on the land around the Home.

Vern Laning: Oversight is the most important role of the Committee. My intention is to resign from ACOVA and would like to be considered for another term on the Veterans Home Governing Board.

Lamar Kruckenberg: Oversight is important, and it keeps the public informed on what is happening. Having input at the Fargo VA and expressed how good a place it is-first class operation. CBOC (Community Based Outpatient Clinics) have really grown in the communities and provide a valuable service.

Dan Thorstad: As a staff member, he appreciates the work that is done on the policies and programs, how to help veterans and include more programs. The committee is very open to future projects. The committee is necessary and gives the Department a chance to talk with the major veterans' organizations in the State. Live streaming is a good idea, we can record the session also.

Cathy Halgunseth: The Committee provides insight into what is happening with veterans throughout the State since the committee members are from different areas of the State.
Murray Strom: How can we save money; how can we spend money. Funeral coins and license plates were ideas that came into being and provided additional funds.

Lamar Kruckenberg talked about giving a veteran a Vietnam veteran coin, and the veteran really appreciated it. He has also given out the funeral honor coins to family members, also.

Motion to adjourn by Jack Volk, second by Lamar Kruckenberg. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted:

Jim Verwey
Secretary