

**ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
QUALITY INN BISMARCK ND**

September 23-24, 2021
1:00 PM

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

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Dan Brown	Dean Overby	Murray Strom
Dave Rice	Jim Verwey	Richard Belling
Dave Hilleren	Glenn Wahus	Gary Maddock
Hal Weninger	Brian Bartlett	Vernon Laning
Joseph Bialke	Mamie Havelka	

Absent:

Tom Ryan

Guests:

none

ND DVA Report – Commissioner Lonnie Wangen
PowerPoint presentation

Mark Johnson, Veterans Home Administrator

Hired Architect to design the memorial garden. Overall cost of garden estimated at \$300,00-350,000 and will be located on the site of the old veterans home.

Marketing firm hired for TV and Radio ads. Recruitment ads also. 30-40% staffing now. Covid vaccine mandate-staff who are not vaccinated are deciding what to do. Lost 2 staff the day after President announced the new mandate. Could lose another 20-30 staff members. About 58% of staff vaccinated. Some resident's COVID testing were read wrong so some residents who moved to the COVID unit were actually negative (had false positive test results). Has been tough on residents. 60-70% occupancy which is the same as civilian homes. Busy filling up with 4 admissions in skilled and 4 in basic care last week.

Staffing: using 4 agencies for staffing. Doing retention bonuses for staff and paying differential amounts using COVID dollars. Lots of COVID dollars but still cannot attract staff. Looking for any help in employee retention incentives.

Dean Overby asked about the need to get legislative approval for use of COVID funds. Mark stated they have legislative authority, but it needs to be used for COVID related reasons such as staff retention, supplies, etc.

Hal Weninger asked if donations were given to the Veterans Home could they be used to help with staff retention programs or incentives, appreciation events etc. Mark explained that donations to the Veterans Home Foundation could be used as stipulated by the donor. Commissioner Wangen explained that a donation to any government agency is tax deductible under IRS code.

Mark discussed the frustration of staff for having to wear masks all day. Kudos to our staff for their diligence and great work but it is difficult.

Dr. Breton Weintraub, Fargo VAHCS Director

-Unable to attend. Sent letter. Commissioner Wangen read the letter to the ACOVA members.

MG Dohrmann, ND National Guard Adjutant General

-Unable to attend.

Michelle Gauvin-Panos, ND Cares Director

Explained ND CARES is a coordinator of services for veterans and military members, they look for gaps in services and strengthen what needs strengthening. Reviewed executive member staff members and coalition members. Last year we identified 2 areas of concern. One of the areas was reducing the stigma of seeking mental health services. Command Chief Sergeant Major speaking about mental health needs on radio ads. American Legion State Commander speaking on his issues with mental health on next ad for radio and television.

ND Cares also has ads for the ND Veterans Home. We reached out to Mark Johnson for collaboration on the next commercial advertising programs. Human Services Centers were not in-network providers under Tri-Care. Addressed this but now learned that national guard members are not included. Now working with Tri-Care to get more coverage but many roadblocks. There is a need for more providers. There is a credentialing issue in ND, Tri-care has different standards so we are working on waivers.

Jerome Billups, ND Job Service Veterans Employment Programs Administrator

In North Dakota, we still do not have enough people for the thousands of jobs available. We're trying to get the word out to other states to help address this issue. One way is promoting ND as a good place to live in getting people to move here. Nationally we have 200,000 veterans transitioning out of service every year. We try to match them up with each State's program administrator to ensure a smooth transition for the service members. To date we've navigated two people to North Dakota, one stayed so we're on

the map. Discussed retirement benefits in ND to encourage veterans to choose ND. My team is up to full speed, with positions located in Minot, Bismarck and Fargo filled. Had one retirement in Bismarck and replaced him in a relatively short time with Christopher Smith, a former guard member and retired veteran as well. As always in we are in collaboration with ND Cares and other Partner Networks.

We were getting more windshield time and once again COVID did a number on everybody but hope it slows down so we can travel more again. During this time-period we've adapted to virtual outreach. We consolidated positions which would allow us not only to do an outreach to the veteran but at the same time we can make contact with the employers out there. Previously laws from Congress prohibited us from doing anything other than job development now we can go out with our business service team advocate for hiring veterans about apprenticeship programs.

Currently working with the HVRP program which is a homeless veterans reintegration program. The purpose is to fill the gap where we don't have services. Our requirement is 180 days of service with anything other than dishonorable discharge; HVRP service requirement is at least one day of military service and be homeless. The program has plenty of funding.

Vern Lanning asked about training for veterans to get ready for some of these jobs. Yes, we have programs that do that and have the funding.

David Bratton, ND Association of County & Tribal Veteran Service Officers Vice-President

Provided update on ND Association of County and Tribal Veteran Service Officers, 52 ND counties and all tribes are members. Their Association works with NDDVA on services for ND Veterans and does a lot of networking. We identified the biggest issue which is nobody knows we exist. Many veterans are still trying to get benefits directly through the VA. We need your help to get the word out.

They have been very involved in helping to get the first ND Veterans Court established.

Next training will be in October 2021 in Bismarck.

Thomas Beadle, ND State Treasurer

Introduced himself. Shout out to Vernon Laning former ND legislator. Spoke on the Veterans Post War Trust Fund authority under the North Dakota State Constitution and North Dakota Century Code. Spoke of spendable income for the 2021-2023 biennium at about \$232,000. Have had funds invested with Edward Jones since 2006. Growth of over \$1Million in the last year. Currently over \$8M balance. Have 32% income and 68% Principal growth. Limited on investing for social benefits otherwise very open. Have seen inflation grow over the last 6 months so real growth is less, we monitor that.

Revenue Generators: Income tax check off and Patriotic License plates. About \$76,000 added.

Mamie Havelka asked about getting a detail list of investments. Information will be given to us.

JP “Dutch” Bialke asked about percentage and management fees for investments- at about 17 basis points which many of the sources the State Investment Board use are about 40 basis points.

Chairman Murray Strom announced the committee assignments. When naming the subcommittees, he had each member stand, introduce themselves and give a little background information.

2:53PM Subcommittee meetings held.

September 24, 2021

Committee reconvened at: 9:00am

*Motion by Jim Verwey to approve May 2021 ACOVA minutes, 2nd by Dave Hilleren.
Motion carried unanimously.*

PWTF Subcommittee – Report by Vern Laning.

Jim Verwey elected Chair. Vern Laning appointed Secretary.

Guests: State Treasurer Thomas Beadle and his employee Ryan Skor.

Discussed investment strategies and other ways to increase PWTF. Gaming funds not an option. Reviewed current Fund 410 balance of which \$30,000 remains invested in a CD due to mature September 30, 2021. Commissioner already has authority to re-invest or cash this CD as appropriate to fund ACOVA approved programs.

State Treasurer announced \$232,399.67 in spendable interest available to ACOVA from the 2019-2021 biennium. ACOVA already approved \$50,000 at the May 2021 meeting for the 1st quarter of 2021-2023 Biennium. The remaining amount is \$182,399.67.

Subcommittee recommends approval of the remaining \$182,399.67 for use by NDDVA to fund ACOVA approved programs. \$ 2,399.67 to be made available immediately and NDDVA is to invest the remaining \$180,000 in six (6) \$30,000 CD’s maturing quarterly for the biennium. First CD will mature December 31, 2021 and last CD maturing March 31, 2023. Commissioner to coordinate with State Treasurer’s office to cash or reinvest CDs as needed each quarter.

***Motion by Vernon Laning to accept subcommittee minutes, second by Dave Hilleren.
Motion carried unanimously.***

Motion by Vernon Laning to invest the PWTF interest earning as recommended by the subcommittee Second by Dutch. JP Bialke. Motion carried unanimously.

Appeals Subcommittee – report by Vern Laning.

- Reviewed the appeals folder. Missing 2 folders, Tom Ryan who is absent has one folder. May need to produce one more folder for Vern Laning.
- No appeal hearing held.

***Motion by Richard Belling to accept subcommittee minutes, second by Brian Bartlett.
Motion carried unanimously.***

Legislative Subcommittee – report by Mamie Havelka.

Gary Maddock elected Chairman. Tom Ryan was absent. Mamie Havelka appointed secretary. Subcommittee reviewed and will continue to follow legislative bills that failed in previous legislative assemblies.

- HB1120 Deer Hunting for disabled veterans
- HB 1143 Patriotic projects for children
- SB 2225 Tuition Waiver for dependents of 50% or higher Disabled Veterans
- Licensure compacts as needed
- HB 1354 and 1015 Guardianship/Conservator funding next session

Motion by Mamie Havelka to accept subcommittee minutes, second by Gary Maddock.

- *Jim Verwey had question on what grades were to conduct Patriotic Projects (HB 1143). Commissioner clarified it was for Elementary students.*

Motion carried unanimously.

Veterans Affairs Subcommittee – report by Hal Weninger

Richard Belling elected chairman. Hal Weninger appointed as Secretary.
Reviewed PWTF fund 410 usage and balance.

- Reviewed 2019-2021 fund 410 usage. 1 CD for \$30,000 remains.

Reviewed NDDVA Budget for 2019-2021 and 2021-2023.

Reviewed Audit report. No concerns

Motion by Hal Weninger to accept subcommittee minutes, second by Dean Overby.

- *Murray Strom discussed the \$30,000 CD remaining. NDDVA has authority to reinvest or cash for use on programs.*

Motion carried unanimously.

ND Veterans Home Governing Board Appointment – Discussion on appointment of the two open positions on the board.

Motion by Jim Verwey to re-appoint Steve Frojen to the board for a 3-year term.

Second by Richard Belling. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Richard Belling to re-appoint Dean Overby to the board for a 1-year term.

Second by Dave Rice. Motion passed unanimously.

Roundtable Discussion: Chairman Strom asked each member to provide some goals they would like the committee to address for the next year.

Dean Overby: Goals for this year- no veteran left behind. Steer veterans in right direction. Goals-address Suicide prevention. Thanks for support while I was Chairman. Chairman only as good as committee so please support our new chairman.

Dan Brown: Goals to help veterans get to services. Need to address mental health services in western ND. Have learned a lot here and appreciate everyone that is here.

J.P. “Dutch” Bialke: Thanks for warm welcome to the committee. Likes the fact there are all veteran on the committee serving veterans. He discussed the Dept. of agriculture’s the “Home Grown by Heroes” national program adopted by 40 states, ND not yet. Products made or grown by veterans. Much like “Pride of Dakota” logo would be made to promote these products. (Dutch is employed by USDA)

Mamie Havelka: Goal- no veterans left behind and the suicide prevention programs.

Glenn Wahus: Goals for this year- suicide prevention and getting veterans to service providers. ND American Legion website and Facebook-you will see the programs we have conducted this year. Looking at national reports not including drug overdose deaths which could be suicide.

Hal Weninger: Welcomed new members. Learns something every meeting. Discussed his stroke last year and his experience with the HBOT treatments he received at the Healing with Hyperbarics Clinic in Fargo.

Dave Hilleren: What we are talking about is awareness. That is an important part of what we need to do. I applaud each of you for being dedicated to assist veterans to be aware of what is available to them.

Gary Maddock: Thanks to Hal for bringing this information to us. Goal of suicide prevention is good to maintain. Discussed how states report suicide among veterans and service members.

Vernon Laning: Thanks for accepting me onto the committee. Look forward to these activities.

Dave Rice: Agree with no veteran left behind and suicide prevention. Spoke about his "Veterans Hour" radio show. This show is about awareness. Best to get advice from the providers and get the information from the experts. Check out the VFW.org and Americanlegion.org etc. to get information directly. Honor Flight-not doing any flights this fall, hopefully next spring. Red Hawks had an Honor Flight night with veteran service organizations providing flag honors. Currently have 150 Korean war veterans and 300 Vietnam veterans on list waiting for next flight. Still taking applications.

Richard Belling: Great to be back to in person meetings. I agree with what has already named for goals.

Lonnie Wangen: Thanked Dean Overby for his hard work over the years as chairman.

Jim Verwey: Spoke of the Funeral Honor Coin and the great effect the coin has on the families. Very productive meeting-thank you.

Brian Bartlett: Interesting couple of days, thank you for the warm welcome. Looking forward to learning more. I will take the information back to our post.

Murray Strom: Spoke on NDDVA website. Provided his phone number and email to the committee members. Spoke about his daily job and a little about himself. Spoke about using the Teams meeting for those that must miss meetings.

Was notified he was appointed chair only 2 days ago so he will provide his goals and mission for this committee at the next meeting. His idea is to solve problems. Not looking to change what is working, I am a problem solver so finding problems and fixing them is my goal. Awareness campaign is important also.

Next meeting to be held November 18-19, 2021 in Fargo, pending availability of accommodations. Would like ACOVA members to meet NDDVA staff.

-Dan Brown unable to attend due to Legion commitments.

-Richard Belling suggested checking with the West Fargo VFW for meeting.

-Dean Overby suggested one hotel with meeting room and meals available.

Motion to adjourn by Jim Verwey, second by Glenn Wahus. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted:

Jim Verwey
Secretary