

**ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
VETERANS CLUB, STEELE ND**

May 19, 2022
1:00 PM

Chairman Strom explained the Legislative Subcommittee was meeting with the Legislative Council. Commissioner Wangen is also in attendance at the Legislative Council Meeting. He will call the meeting to order at 1:20 or sooner depending on the subcommittee and Commissioner return.

Meeting called to order at 1:10 PM by Chairman Murray Strom. Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence observed for POW/MIAs, those serving overseas.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Brian Bartlett	Vernon Laning	Tom Ryan
Richard Belling	Gary Maddock	Murray Strom
Dan Brown	Dean Overby	Glenn Wahus
Mamie Havelka	Dave Rice	Hal Weninger
Dave Hilleren		

Absent - Excused:

Joseph Bialke	Jim Verwey
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Guests:

Danelle Hopkins, Governor's Office
Gary Nelson, Vietnam Veteran introduced by Tom Ryan

VAHCS-Fargo: Jane Matejcek, Telehealth Nurse Manager
Tele-med demonstration.

Once an appointment is set for a veteran using telehealth, there are five different emails sent with a link to connect with the provider.

During the demonstration a veteran, who uses telehealth, was contacted using one of the devices available from the VA. He is satisfied with using telehealth and he doesn't have to take time off from work for appointments. He uses his iPhone and sometimes an iPad. He has not been disconnected although sometimes his wi-fi signal is weak and the conversation cuts in and out.

The VA will provide a device for veterans in areas outside of the Fargo area and can be used outside of the State.

Dan Brown stated that he uses his iPad to use VA Telehealth. He is from the Williston area and is able to get a good connection. He would rather be face to face for appointments but this is a good alternative to get health service.

Clinical Video Telehealth – clinic based, veteran would go to the clinic and the staff would set up the meeting in a private room

Store & Forward – i.e. heart monitor which would send information to doctor and data would then be interpreted for care

Remote Patient Monitoring – monitoring veterans health with the “Anywhere to Anywhere” initiative. This initiative would cover the United States.

VA Video Connect – Care provided to veteran in their home and uses a personal video device.

Remote Patient Monitoring – Technology used to remotely monitor health data from home, uses a Home Telehealth Unit, Disease Management Protocols: i.e. Asthma, COPD, Dementia, Depression, Diabetes, Hypertension, Post Hospital Discharge, PTSD, Weight Management.

Data shows an increase in the usage of Telehealth. It has saved veterans time by not having to drive into Fargo for appointments.

460 veterans are being monitored by nurses at this time. Almost 7,000 veterans are using some sort of telehealth device.

ND DVA Report – Commissioner Lonnie Wangen

PowerPoint presentation

Unable to hire anyone for the Temporary position. An alternate plan will be to try and bring someone in for data entry and other similar tasks instead of claims work.

New VSO Training: by the end of May there will be 5 VSOs in for training.

Funeral Honor Coins sold: 714 in 2020, 913 in 2021 and 216 in 2022.

Gave update on SAA Director, Chris Kratochvil, activities.

Three Veterans Preference cases: in two cases the agency awarded preference properly and one case is in process for determination.

Update on Postwar Trust Fund and Fund 410 accounts.

Dan Thorstad researching grant management software to replace legacy software for increased efficiency and reporting features, would eventually like to go to a paperless system. Dan is also investigating online payments software for funeral honor coins.

Three replacement vehicles have been ordered for the Highly Rural Transportation Grant program.

Commissioner Wangen presented Dean Overby with farewell gifts and thanked him for serving on the committee. This was Dean's last meeting on the Administrative Committee. He is the longest serving member and was the longest serving Chairman. Dean was appointed to the committee from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2022 and served as Chairman from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2021. He will be missed as a committee member. Dean was appointed to the ND Veterans Home Governing Board for one more year.

Mark Johnson, Veterans Home Administrator
Not able to attend.

Major Jay Sheldon, ND National Guard (TEAMS)

PowerPoint presentation

NDNG Across ND – 4,490 Total Employees of that there are 3,207 Traditional Guard and 1,093 Full-Time Guard.

Guard Support to Civil Authorities Over Last Two Years – COVID support, Civil Unrest, Aviation Fire Response, Federal Deployments/Mobilizations (overseas and state-side), Train Derailment Fire Response and Pembina County Flood Response.

Top priority is getting approval for funding to build an Armory in Williston. Land has already been set aside in Williston.

Transitioning Camp Gafton from just a Military Training Center to a Military and Law Enforcement Training Center.

Military Museum would be a joint effort between the State Historical Society of ND and the NDNG. It would be a two-story 60,000 sq foot facility, located in the heart of the state capitol. There is a lot of support for this idea.

Dr. Breton Weintraub, Fargo VAHCS Director, (TEAMS)

Needed to be on-site at the VA for this meeting. Fortunately COVID numbers are remaining low. Running into problems, like everyone else, in hiring staff. He received approval to hire additional mental health staff. VA Secretary visiting the Dakotas (North and South). The Fisher House is in the land acquisition phase, it is a lengthy process. VA is planning additional space for the Bismarck CBOC to accommodate more services. Commissioner Wangen thanked Dr. Weintraub on sending staff for the telehealth presentation.

Mitch Erhardt, ND Association of County & Tribal Veteran Service Officers President

Attended the State training in the Spring in Fargo. Able to bring staff from the Fargo VA and from the Twin Cities VA facilities. The PACT Act has passed in House and is currently in the Senate; it is a comprehensive bill to address the health impacts of those who served overseas and were exposed to toxic hazards, such as burn pits radiation and Agent Orange. The full title of the Act is: *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022*. Veterans whose claims have nothing to do with the “Blue Water” claims are slowing. Stand-Down is being planned in Bismarck.

Chairman Strom distributed information from the ND Veterans Home regarding donations. The Home is in need of items for their Memorial Garden: trees, chairs, benches, and light poles. Chairs and benches are able to be engraved and the trees and light poles will have a plaque. Anyone interested in making a donation should contact Belinda Black at 701-683-6502.

Michelle Gauvin-Panos, ND Cares Director (TEAMS)

Update on Governor’s Challenge. Receiving assistance and training from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the VA in suicide prevention. Social Workers are putting in more effort to identify veterans and their families to help them access VA programs.

Jerome Billups, ND Job Service Veterans Employment Programs Administrator

One of the Virtual Job Fairs included all 50 states and was used to get to word out about North Dakota. Job Service is hosting a Job Fair today. Employment rate for veterans is doing better than other groups.

TAP programs are trying to get both veteran and spouse involved. They are trying to reestablish themselves on the Reservations such as Belcourt and Spirit Lake. Job Service is also getting back into Bismarck corrections facilities to work with incarcerated veterans. Still involved with NDSU and UND veterans going to school. Doing lots of outreach to assist veterans throughout the State. All Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) and Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVER) positions in the State are currently filled.

Vern Laning asked: Do you do the paperwork for veterans’ apprenticeship programs.
Jerome: For the GI bill benefits the State Approving Agency handles that.

Danelle Hopkins reported that ACOVA appointments are coming up. Justin Assel, Governor’s Office, will be working on those appointment applications. As far as she knew, names hadn’t come in from the veterans organizations.

Chairman Strom asked committee members to think about their best memories of their military service. He would like them to talk about the memories at the roundtable at the end of the meeting.

Subcommittee meetings held.

May 20, 2022

Committee reconvened at: 9:00am

***Motion by Brian Bartlett to approve February 2022 minutes, 2nd by Hal Weninger.
Motion carried unanimously.***

Time and Place of next meeting: September 15 & 16, 2022 in Bismarck.

Veterans Affairs Subcommittee – report by Hal Weninger

#3 PWTF Grant usage and funds – fund 410 on track with spending

#4 HBOT expenditures 50% of budget. Funding is derived from ACOVA budgeted PWTF interest earnings and private donations.

#5 Loan Fund – CDs are ok

21-23 budget expenditures on track

Waiting on ITD waiver request

Conversion to new database cost prohibitive.

Due to Legislative inaction, no change in HRTG supplanting general fund dollars for salary funding of \$68,000 for Loan and Grant Officer.

***Motion by Hal Weninger to accept subcommittee minutes, second by Richard Belling.
Motion carried unanimously.***

Commissioner Wangen – extend HBOT without income limitations. Donated funds for HBOT be used.

Motion by Dan Brown to use any donated funds received by NDDVA for Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment (HBOT) grants. Grants to be for eligible ND veterans on any treatable issue as per policy #435. The veteran's income and assets would not be considered for these grants. second by Hal Weninger.
Motion carried unanimously.

Legislative Subcommittee – report by Mamie Havelka
Met with ND Veterans Legislative Council and reviewed possible legislative items for 2023 Legislative Session. These are items Commissioner Wangen compiled throughout the last two years. Subcommittee discussed items and was in agreement to support items. Discussed the Strategic Review and information sheet. Very important to re-acquire lost staff due to cuts, return supplanted funds and retain staff.

Motion by Mamie Havelka to accept subcommittee report, second by Gary Maddock.
Motion carried unanimously.

PWTF & Appeals Subcommittee – report by Vern Laning.
Reviewed PWTF and Fund 410 clearing account. Reviewed other sources of funding: Patriotic License Plates (\$51,665 since 2015) and Income Tax Return Check Off (\$67,821.06 since 2019.).

Motion by Vern Laning to accept subcommittee minutes, second by Dave Rice. Motion carried unanimously.

Appeals Subcommittee – no appeals have been received.

Motion by Vern Laning to accept subcommittee report, second by Dave Rice. Motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Strom reported that he signed the letter requesting U.S. Senators Hoeven and Cramer and U.S. Representative Armstrong support Senate Concurrent Resolution 3 – Authorizing the Use of the Rotunda of the Capitol for the “Lying in State” of the Remains of the Last Medal of Honor Recipient of World War II.

Chairman Strom reported that Steele AMVETs ordered a tablecloth that contains all the military symbols, including the Space Force. A tablecloth was on display for the committee members to see.

Dean Overby reported that there needed to one more appointment for the Governing Board.

Motion by Dean Overby to reappointment Curt Twete for three years to the ND Veterans Home Governing Board, second by Dave Hilleren. Motion carried unanimously.

Jim Nelson reported that the Legislative Council met Thursday, September 19, 2022. They agreed in principle to the items put forth by Commissioner Wangen. Action on the items will take place at the next meeting, tentatively scheduled for September. The items should then be in bill form for better discussion.

Roundtable Discussion:

Cathy – Looking forward to hearing about everyone's military memories. Good meeting with lots of information. Enjoyed working with Dean throughout the many years.

Lonnie: Thanked Dean for everything he's done as Chairman. Lots of good times in the service, served overseas. Best times were probably in Germany.

Dave Rice: ND VFW, KFGO Veterans Hour – will be covering Memorial Day veteran's activities, interviews: "On the Water" veteran's group, Pamela Helbling-Schafer from the Veterans Cemetery in Mandan, and Cass County VSO talking about what CVSOs do. Served 42 years in military, best memories were having a 3 Star Admiral on board and being in Hong Kong and Taipei.

Dan Brown: Reported that he will be American Legion Department Commander and Glenn Wahus was elected National Vice Commander. Dan will be stepping down from ACOVA to serve on the Legislative Council. McKenzie and Williams County has lost 20 veterans to suicide. Even civilian suicides affect military families, lots of work to be done on mental health. Thanked the committee for their work. He spent 21 years in the Army, lot of travelling to countries such as Spain, France and Germany. Has lots of great memories of Venice. Misses the military and people he got to know.

Mamie Havelka: Memorial Day in Bismarck: program will be at the Veterans Cemetery. 33 years in active duty and reserve. Her job was the best kept secret in military and when she retired the duties were spread out to eight different people. Fascinating people at the Pentagon.

Richard Belling: Another good meeting. Golf Tournament currently has 16 teams signed up and lots of sponsors. Army service in Vietnam.

Tom Ryan: Good meeting and thanked staff. His term of serving as the west region commander is up. Has been working with American Legion baseball and involved with organizing more activities for families and kids. Legion Post donated for school's trap shooting program. DAV is also looking into more family activities. He was in Germany, Korea and Iraq to name a few countries. He remembers eating things in different countries that made him sick.

Dean Overby: It will be hard to leave committee; he always just wants to take care of veterans. He will continue helping veterans through his involvement with the VVA and American Legion. He is leaving with the committee in good hands. 4 1/2 years in Marine Corp. good times in the Philippines. The best friends in the world are military friends.

Hal Weninger: Congratulated Dean on his distinguished career on ACOVA. Told a story of his time in Vietnam, had a nickname "Ranger Hal". Appreciates everyone on the

committee. With the turnover at the Legislative level, we need to make sure they know who ACOVA is and what we stand for.

Gary Maddock. Congratulated Murry on a successful meeting. We all learned something from Dean, thanked him for that. Visited seven different countries. One of them was Greece. Told a story of meeting a serviceman and spending three years serving in the same places with him. Urged members to keep in contact with those you served with.

Glenn Wahus: Nice seeing the Telehealth presentation and knowing it's available for veterans. Commented on the wealth of knowledge of the committee. Thanked Dean for being on the committee. Served four years in Navy, was in the Pacific, Alaska, Australia, and Singapore. Made a lot of good friends and still talk with a few. There will be a suicide awareness and prevention walk at American Legion Convention in support of veterans. Another walk is planned in Williston and the community will be invited to join.

Dave Hilleren: VVA meeting in Casselton, third weekend in July. Joined Air Force in 1968, was working at Boeing at the time. But he gave up spot to help out a coworker. He did get drafted, went to helicopter school and ended up in 101st Airborne in Vietnam. Told a story about some time over there. Twenty-two graduated from helicopter school and there are seven remaining of the group. It's been a pleasure working with Dean.

Brian Bartlett: Thanks Lonnie and staff. Thanked Dean for helping veterans. Military career has been in the National Guard and he has been to Germany, Iraq, Egypt, and California. Friendships you make in the military stay with you forever. Told a story about when he was just starting in the military. Encouraged veterans to get on an Honor Flight, it is a really good program.

Vern Laning: Enjoys time on the committee. Looking forward to serving on the ND Veterans Governing Board. Appreciates the cohesive direction ACOVA gives during the Legislative Session. 3 years active duty in Army, ROTC in college. Got to drive a tank under water, on purpose. Drove under a lake and didn't need to use the small air tank he was given. To be able to drive the tank you needed to be scuba certified. It was fun.

Murray Strom: Good meeting. Thanked Dean for his service and he is welcome to come back anytime. Was over in Germany, one memory was pouring concrete during a battlefield exercise. A hard hat meant you were not in the game and couldn't be shot. There was an AC/DC tribute band in next town so they worked really quick to get the concrete done so they could go hear the band. There are lots of beer fests in Germany.

Chairman Murray wanted everyone to leave the meeting on a happy note which is why he asked members to share their military memories.

***Motion to adjourn by Hal Weninger, second by Dean Overby.
Motion passed.***

Respectfully submitted:

Jim Verwey
Secretary