

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

September 14, 2023
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 and those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Steven Anderson	Vernon Laning	Murray Strom
Brian Bartlett	Gary Maddock	Jim Verwey
David Hilleren	Dave Rice	Glenn Wahus
Trish Hodny	Tom Ryan (TEAMS)	Hal Weninger
Lamar Kruckenberg		

Absent:

Richard Belling - Excused Joseph Bialke - Excused

Guests: Dani Hopkins, Governor's Office

Chairman Strom presented an ACOVA pin to new member Steven Anderson.

Motion by Lamar Kruckenberg to approve Agenda, second by Brian Bartlett. Motion passed unanimously.

NDCares: Michelle Gauvin-Panos, Director [POWER POINT PRESENTATION]

-Dunn County signed up to be a NDCares community.

-ND Broadcasters Association PEPS: ND Veterans Home, PACT Act/Blue Water Navy, COMPACT Act and First Link.

- Partnered with Health Association and will present information on the COMPACT Act at their Conference.
- Promoting gun locks and medicine safe storage: over 5,000 locks have been handed out at events. The locks are being provided by the VA.
- Peer support training: The commitment is 40 hours, but it is free. The State provides the training and there could be cost reimbursement for travel. If an entity wants the training, the State can go to their location. If interested, contact Michelle and she will pass the information on to the appropriate source. Check with Commissioner Wangen for more information.

Chairman Strom brought up the subcommittees and who has served on all subcommittees. He is open to moving people around to different subcommittees. At the end of the discussion, these are the subcommittees:

Gary, Brian, Vernon, Lamar –on Legislative Committee
Jim, Trish, Steve, Dave Rice – on PWTF
Dutch, Hal, Richard, Gary - Veterans Affairs

ND DVA Report – Commissioner Lonnie Wangen [POWER POINT PRESENTATION]

- Update on Department activities and programs
- New Claims FTE authorized for biennium, hired employee July 6th.
- County and Tribal VSO Conference October 2-5, 2023, at Baymont Inn, Mandan; 22 new VSO's trained in Biennium received individual training apart from the VSO Conference.
- Unable to get Vietnam Books so the memorial item was switched to a "Welcome Home" coin for Vietnam veterans. ACOVA members Dave Hilleren and Hal Weninger worked with the Commissioner on the coin's design.
- Legislation passed to name ND bridges after veterans who died in wars. House Bills 1351, 1352, 1354 and 1355 all named a bridge for specific veteran. The program is named, "Bridges for the Fallen".
- Chris Kratochvil, Director SAA, is a member on the National SAA Board. He was assigned 6 total risk surveys for FFY23, all of which have been completed.
- Veterans Preference cases for 21-23: 11 Appeals requested: one veterans preference case sent to Office of Administrative Hearings.
- National Guard members are now eligible for a Veterans Aid Loan.

Dr. Breton Weintraub, Fargo VAHCS Director

- End of Fiscal Year 23, there weren't many concerns that came up for the VAMC. FY24 will be leaner, our Region haven't gotten back to pre-COVID levels. Shifting demographics, people retiring and going south are causing fluctuations in the number of veterans receiving care while community care costs are increasing. Construction projects

are moving forward as planned. Fisher House – people from National came and saw 8 parcels, hopefully a local will be named soon. Staffing is difficult in a highly competitive market; the VA was able to hire a new dermatologist and a nurse practitioner. The contract clinic in western ND is getting better due to staff continuity. The VA has caught up with backlogs in Community Care appointments although travel reimbursements are still behind. The VA has a “Tiger Team” that came in and worked on the backlogs so travel reimbursement is now about 10 days behind. A COVID Booster is about to be approved by FDA. No word from National if it will be mandated to have the shot or to wear masks in medical facilities.

MAJ Jay Sheldon, ND National Guard [Slide presentation]
Update on Guard activities.

Mark Johnson, Director, ND Veterans Home

The Veterans Home did well during the Legislative Session. Vacant positions were taken out of the 23-25 budget but once filled, funding will be restored. One staff member with COVID; but there are no masks and no testing on a daily basis. Thanked NDCares for helping get the word out about the Veterans Home with public service announcements.

Vernon Laning is Chair of the ND Veterans Home Governing Board and Cathy Keogh was elected Vice-Chair. Mark named many board members that have served over ten years on the Board. At the last board meeting, there was discussion on staff members bringing their dogs to the Home while they are working. The board went on record that staff can bring their dogs on their own time, not work time; otherwise, it becomes a health issue for the residents.

Jerome Billups, ND Job Service Veterans Employment Programs Administrator (TEAMS)

There are still 5 veterans employment reps throughout the State. JSND has about 45,000 veterans registered on their website. Vet Reps have served under 1,000 veterans that have severe barriers to employment; underlying conditions impacting employment are being managed by the VA. ND does a very good job of employing veterans. North Dakota's unemployment rate is 1.9%, one of the lowest in the country. 14,000 state openings are listed on the website. Top fields with most positions available are healthcare, transportation, management, and administration, with maintenance and education at the bottom. Many job fairs are being held throughout the State. Vet Reps are using any means possible to communicate and assist veterans,

**Mitch Erhardt, President, ND Assoc. of County & Tribal Veterans Service Officers;
Morton and Oliver CVSO**

Many County/Tribal VSOs are very busy in their offices. The PACT Act is causing a lot of activity. In July, a letter was sent to U.S. Senators and Representatives asking them to support national legislation for federal funds to be sent to States to distribute to county veterans service offices. Mitch reported the Association agreed with all the proposed changes in policies that will be presented to ACOVA for approval.

Dani Hopkins, Governor's Office

Welcome to new members and welcome to returning members.

Recovery Reinvented is a free event that focuses on substance abuse recovery. It is being held on October 25th in Minot.

Chairman Strom read an email regarding a poll that was done on high school seniors regarding military.

Question for the roundtable: where were you on September 11, 2001?

Subcommittee meetings held.

September 15, 2023

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, those serving overseas.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Steven Anderson
Brian Bartlett
Joseph Bialke

Lamar Kruckenberg
Vernon Laning
Gary Maddock

Murray Strom
Jim Verwey
Glenn Wahus

David Hilleren
Trish Hodny

Dave Rice
Tom Ryan (TEAMS)

Hal Weninger

Absent:

Richard Belling - Excused

Guests: none

Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept the May 2023 minutes, Jim Verwey second. Motion carried.

Motion by Hal Weninger to accept the June 2023 minutes, Lamar Kruckenberg second. Motion carried.

Discussion on next meeting date.

Motion by Glenn Wahus to meet November 16 & 17, 2023 in Watford City at the American Legion Post with the meeting start time at 1:00pm on Thursday (16th), seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Veterans Affairs Subcommittee – report by Hal Weninger
Richard Belling voted in as Chair, Hal Weninger as Secretary.

#4 – Fund 410. Funds are in order with interest deposited correctly.

#5 – Policy Changes.

After discussion, subcommittee recommended approval of changes.

Policy #600: IMPACT – Purpose and Authority

Policy #601: IMPACT – Applications

Policy #602: IMPACT – File Access

Policy #603: IMPACT – Limits

Policy #604: IMPACT – Cancellation

Policy #605: IMPACT – Appeals

Policy #606: IMPACT – Payment

Policy #610: IMPACT – Eligibility

Policy #611: IMPACT – Administrative Committee and Department Employee's Eligibility

Policy #612: IMPACT – Assets
Policy #613: IMPACT – Income
Policy #615: IMPACT – Allowable Expenses
Policy #640: IMPACT Hardship Assistance Grant

#7 ND DVA Budget reviewed. 2021-2023 budget met expectations. 2023-2025 budget approved.

#8 – Audit – For the Two-Year Period Ended June 30, 2022: No Recommendations.

#9. Performance Audit – ongoing.

Motion by Hal Weninger to accept subcommittee minutes, seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Trish Hodny to accept policy changes, second by Dave Hilleren. Motion carried unanimously.

Legislative Subcommittee – report by Vern Laning
Brian Bartlett voted in as Chair, Vernon Laning appointed Secretary.

It was noted Tom Ryan will be replaced when the Governor makes the remaining appointment.

Met with Legislative Council and discussed the success of the 2023 ND Legislative Session. Commissioner Wangen presented some ideas for the 2025 Session.

Strategic Plan will be reviewed at a later time.

Motion by Vern Laning to accept subcommittee report, second by Trish Hodny. Motion carried unanimously.

PWTF & Appeals Subcommittee

PWTF Subcommittee – report by Dave Hilleren
Reviewed PWTF and remaining \$30,000 CD for reinvestment purposes.

PWTF interest earnings from 2021-2023 are available to ACOVA. The amount is \$248,606.66 of this \$50,000 has already been approved to start the 2023-25 biennium. The remaining amount will be put into 7 CDs to be available throughout the biennium.

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

Motion by Trish Hodny to take \$30,000 Legacy CD and put that back into another CD to mature 3-31-2025, second by Dave Hilleren. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Trish Hodny for Department to expend the State Treasurer's distribution of \$198,606.66 into 7 CDs; each CD in the amount \$28,372.38 to come due at 3 months intervals throughout the biennium, second by Dave Hilleren

Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept subcommittee report, second by Trish Hodny. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Brian Bartlett to have the State Treasurer purchase a CD(s) with the Fisher House funds deposited in Fund 410, second by Hal Weninger.

Appeals Subcommittee – report by Dave Hilleren

No appeals at this time.

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

Chairman Report

Attended Conference. North Dakota doesn't have an Amvets VSO. National Amvets let go of 40 National VSOs, they were hired by the VA.

Roundtable Discussion:

Topic was "where were you on September 11, 2001"; members and Commissioner spoke on the topic.

Other items mentioned:

Brian Bartlett: facilities are ok.

Glenn Wahus: great to be here at the meeting.

Steve Anderson: There's a lot to learn here.

Vernon Laning: Appreciated rotating members to serve on the subcommittees.

Dave Rice: Meeting was good. Enjoyed the reports given by speakers. Efforts are underway to do a 2.2 miles march starting at 9:22am on 9-22-2023. The march will start at the park near the VA Hospital and will end at the Fargo VFW.

Dave Hilleren: VVA Convention set for July 17-18-19, 2024 at the Van Hook Park, New Town. Meeting was good and the Vets Club is a good setting for the meeting.

Trish Hodny: Thanks for mixing up the subcommittees. It's good to find out what's changed from serving on previous committees.

Lamar Kruckenberg: Thanks to Steele Vets Club. Great meeting. Rotating members serving on subcommittees great idea.

Gary Maddock: The rotation reinvigorates you with new information. Awesome place to have a meeting. Speakers were all very good. Looking forward to Watford City.

Jim Verwey: Great speakers; welcome to Steve as a new committee member.

Hal Weninger: Attended the VVA National Convention in Orlando, FL. Going back to June 6th TEAMS meeting, information received on State Director's salaries. Talked about Commissioner's salary. We are certainly getting what we're paying for plus a lot more with Commissioner Wangen.

Chairman Strom talked about keeping employees rather than them going somewhere else.

JP "Dutch" Bialke: Sorry I wasn't to be here yesterday. Appreciate the hospitality at Steele.

Commissioner Wangen: Talked about the Bridges for the Fallen national program. Three bridges have already been named. Talking with Legislative Council, the discussion was about if the naming should be a legislative issue or can it be done without legislation. DOT, ND Veterans Affairs and ACOVA could do the naming. Discussion about ACOVA doing it, members were receptive to it. Bridge signs are relatively inexpensive. Entity wanting to have a bridge named would nominate the veteran and also fundraise for the costs associated with naming the bridge (bridge sign).

Dan Thorstad: appreciate the committee's patience with technology. Thanks to Amvets Club, it's a nice facility.

Cathy Halgunseth: Appreciate everyone at the Vets Club and Cobblestone Inn for making it easy to come to Steele for a meeting.

Tom Ryan: Really appreciate the presentations of Dr. Weintraub, Director VA, Maj Sheldon ND National Guard and Mark Johnson, Veterans Home. Attended a Veterans Home meeting and that went well.

Chairman Strom: Glad members liked the subcommittee change up.

Trish Hodny talked about the ND Veterans Governing Board being added to the agenda to give a report. Chairman Strom thought that was a good idea and will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

***Motion by Jim Verwey to adjourn by second by Vernon Laning.
Motion passed.***

Respectfully submitted:

Jim Verwey
Secretary