

NORTH DAKOTA VETERANS COORDINATING COUNCIL

Dakota Inn, Jamestown, North Dakota

July 22, 1983

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Paul Aaberg. Those in attendance were:

DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

Mike Vandrovec, Dept. Cmdr.
Lee Lamb, Rep. Dept. Adj.
Louis Hanson, Rep. Council Rep.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Bill Stepp, Dept. Cmdr.
Ken McGaughey, Dept. Adj.
Paul Aaberg, Rep. Council Rep.

AMERICAN LEGION

H. F. "Sparky" Gierke, Dept. Cmdr.
Vern Useldinger, Dept. Adj.
Milt Kane, Council Rep.

MEMBERS AT LARGE

Charles Code, Commandant, Veterans' Home
W. M. Williamson, State Director, Veterans Emp. & Trng.
Lloyd Zander, Commissioner of Veterans Affairs
Jim Zeigler, Vietnam Veterans of America
Ron Zeller, Vietnam Veterans of America
Jack Hilleboe, Chairman, Administrative Comm. on Vet. Aff.
Bill Hill, AMVETS
Elmer Ekern, Dept. Adj., AMVETS
Floyd Henderson, Veterans of World War I

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Alph Hamre, President, County Veterans Service Officers
John Meyer, Secretary, County Veterans Service Officers
Robert Hanson, Vietnam Veterans of North Dakota

Vern Useldinger moved the minutes be approved as distributed. Motion seconded by Ken McGaughey and carried.

Ken McGaughey presented the treasurer's report. Bill Stepp moved the report be accepted. Motion seconded by Lee Lamb and carried.

Vern Useldinger moved the Executive Director purchase new letterhead, listing our new officers. Motion seconded by Bill Stepp and carried.

Chairman Aaberg read a letter from Governor Olson, expressing his regret at being unable to attend our meeting, and stating that Lt. Governor Sands will address our meeting.

The Council considered a constitutional amendment which would include representation from the County Veterans Service Officers Association as a member-at-large of the North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council. Bill Stepp moved we pass the constitutional change. Motion seconded by Mike Vandrovec and carried.

Discussion followed on the interim study on veterans benefits which will be made as a result of the passage of H.C.R. 3043. We have offered our help to the committee who will study the feasibility and fiscal impact of extending veterans' benefits to peacetime servicemen. It was noted that there is a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the dates of service, and that we must cooperate and work with the committee in an effort to correct this misunderstanding.

The Veterans Administration provided the information that there are 18,000 Vietnam veterans in North Dakota. Of this number, 11,000 had service in Vietnam. North Dakota is #1 in the

nation in the percentage of Vietnam veterans actually serving in Vietnam.

representatives appointed to work with the Interim Study Committee were: VFW - Bill Stepp; DAV - Greg Seurer and Mike Vandrovec; American Legion - "Sparky" Gierke and Milt Kane; VVA - Jim Ziegler. The AMVETS and County Veterans Service Officers will notify us of their representatives as soon as they are selected.

Milt Kane moved we include a memorial of \$15 to the DAV Century Fund in memory of Andy Nomland, a charter member of the North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council. Motion seconded by Lee Lamb and carried.

Elmer Ekern reported that the AMVETS now have a membership of over 1100 members. They received application for another Post this past week. Their other resolutions will be brought up at a later time during the meeting.

Jim Zeigler reported that the Vietnam veterans and Vietnam Era veterans will be holding a reunion and picnic at Minot on July 26 and 27.

Frank Lucas, a representative of the National Federation of Federal Employees, from the Veterans Administration in Fargo, addressed the Council. He noted he wanted to bring to the attention of the Council the VA budget and staffing problems in connection with the construction projects and new technology. The staff at the VA center is quite shorthanded. He feels their services are not the supervised treatment veterans are entitled to. Some of the services have only one person in them, and if that person is absent, a veteran may be sent home if he comes in as an out-patient. Many of their services are very dependent upon non-VA employees and temporary and work-study students to take up a lot of the slack in the workload. There will be some relief with the completion of the new addition. The out-patient load has been increased because of Agent Orange. The VA hospital has been working at a higher daily census than that which they have been funded for. He noted they have a good relationship with the Director of the VA, however, the lack of funds prevent him from giving approval to fill positions. The changes in Medicare have also caused an increased workload. The employees feel there is no relief in sight for their workload. Many of them feel that they are not giving the veteran his total entitlement under these services. They are concerned over the fact that when they administer oxygen treatments and respiratory treatments, they are not supervised. The veteran is getting his treatment, but is he getting the quality treatment he is entitled to? Mr. Lucas noted that these are the concerns he wanted to bring to the Coordinating Council. He noted that they also have a problem with part-time physicians with the VA Center. They have virtually no employment rights. He stated they will bring this to the attention of Congress.

Lt. Governor Ernest Sands addressed the council: "I bring you greetings from the Governor. He is in Boston, so was unable to attend your meeting. I would like to visit with you about the Legislature. I have been a legislator for sixteen years. I would like to say to you, when you approach a legislator, don't tell him - visit with him. He is just an ordinary guy. Show him what you want and tell him why it is important that the particular thing be done. Be positive. Show him how it would work. Most of all, do not threaten a legislator. Never threaten a legislator. He has too many methods of destroying what you want, without being caught. There are all kinds of amendments and shortcuts. You don't want the animosity of the legislators and you will get it if you threaten. Legislators have very long memories. Most of all, ask for their support. You get a lot more by asking than any other means.

"In all of my years in the legislature, the veterans have been held very, very high. Legislators are just ordinary people. They come from your community. They get down there and get in a whirlwind and it's a very, very busy schedule. They are very busy people. Really, there are other people that want to talk to the legislator, not just you, and he wants to talk to them and listen to them.

"There were 1400 bills at the last session. Those bills were all important to somebody, somewhere, or they wouldn't be there. A legislator doesn't read all of those bills, so he relies on the committee that hears the bill, and the man that he feels will give him the straight answer. It's very important for you to contact the committees and those who will vote on it first. The legislator himself is eager for straight talk. He likes the guy that tells it to him straight, and without any loss of time. The legislator wants to help. That's why he's in the legislature. It's only fair that you can go to the legislator and present your side. If he asks what is the other side, be sure you give it to him fair and square.

"I have been in the legislature sixteen years and we have never had politics as far as veterans organizations are concerned. Never have I known or considered what politics one person or another is. They are either for the veteran or against the veteran. Veterans' legislation has always been right straight up until this year. My advice is that veteran legislation should not get involved in party politics. I think that you ask for and you will receive the support of the majority from both parties. I can't see that you will gain anything at all by getting involved in party politics. I don't think you should let your organizations be used for that purpose.

"During the session H.B. 1117 proposed to remove the payment of fees from the free tuition for dependents of POW/MIAs and dependents of certain veterans. It ended up that the fees for the aviation courses were the only ones removed. The thing I worry about with that bill is that they have opened the door. This was a very good law and I would hate to see them get their foot in the door on this fees business, and next year it will be the fees on something else. It is a dangerous precedent. This bill went through smoothly and hardly anyone knew anything about it. It came from the Education Committee. Whether you realize it or not, we are losing our majority. We don't have a majority of veterans any more, and especially in Congress. I think it is imperative that you encourage your comrades to become involved in the legislative process.

"I was at the Prisoner of War convention last week or the week before and they have a proposition to set up a bounty system and they would like the veterans organizations of North Dakota to raise \$100,000 as a reward for a prisoner of war. They would like the veterans organizations of North Dakota to promote nationally the raising of \$1 million and that reward is to go to the organization that brings the first live American POW home from Vietnam. Personally, I have stated many times that I believe we have Americans in Vietnam. I am sincerely convinced of it. If this is a way to get them back I'm for it. There is no question that the government will not like this kind of proposal. They will frown on it and speak out against it. I feel something has to be done, because I know how long those days are when you sit in a cell. It's an eternity, and those men have been there for years and years. Maybe this isn't the answer, but we have to get some action of any kind."

The Council suggested that the Prisoner of War organization submit a letter or a resolution to the Veterans Coordinating Council so that they know what their intent is.

Resolutions were presented by the veterans organizations. Those which pertained to the Veterans Coordinating Council are listed below:

1. Change Memorial Day from the last Monday of May to May 30. This was passed at Department conventions of all veterans organizations.

Milt Kane moved that the Veterans Coordinating Council seek legislation to accomplish the end result of changing Memorial Day back to May 30. Motion seconded by Bill Stepp and carried.

2. Recognition of Floyd Henderson with State Award. This resolution was also passed at Department conventions of all veterans organizations.

Ken McGaughey moved that the incoming President appoint a committee of people in the Bismarck area to check into what awards might be available, what the criteria is, and report back to the Council at the next meeting. Motion seconded by Vern Useldinger and carried.

3. A resolution was passed by AMVETS seeking voting membership on the North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council.
4. A resolution was presented by AMVETS, which was passed at their Department convention, seeking membership on the Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs.

It was noted that the AMVETS will have twelve posts and a membership of over 1,100. Mike Vandrovec moved to accept the resolution and give AMVETS voting membership on the Council. Motion seconded by Lee Lamb. Discussion followed on criteria that should be set up for other veterans organizations wishing to join the Council in the future. Lee Lamb withdrew his second, and Mike Vandrovec withdrew his motion.

Ralph Hamre noted that the North Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association will be holding their annual training conference in Fargo at the Biltmore Motor Hotel on October 24, 25, and 26. Dorothy Starbuck, the Assistant VA Director from Washington, D. C. will attend the conference. The banquet will be held on Tuesday evening.

Discussion followed on criteria for voting membership on the Veterans Coordinating Council.

President Aaberg asked for a report from the committee on the feasibility of moving the Department of Veterans Affairs to Bismarck. Vern Useldinger reported that the three Department Adjutants, in discussions on the phone, came to agreement on the following recommendations:

1. That there is not only a definite need but also a serious responsibility for the Department of Veterans Affairs to be officed at the State Capitol to provide services and assistance to Departments of Government and to legislators concerned with law and regulations on veterans benefit programs, and that we believe this to be a mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs. We can no longer go on expecting that these duties be carried out largely on a volunteer basis.
2. That the Department of Veterans Affairs provide staff support as Executive Director of the North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council.
3. That the Department of Veterans Affairs assist with legislative duties.
4. That we invite the North Dakota Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs to favorably consider these recommendations and to incorporate their judgment and participation in working out a plan to implement these recommendations.

Jack Hilleboe, Chairman of the North Dakota Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs, noted that the same subject was discussed in their meeting. They suggested that the Council consider Leo Swenson for the position of Executive Director. The Administrative Committee, at the recommendation of the subcommittee, passed a resolution stating that a staff person of the Department of Veterans Affairs be located in Bismarck, no later than July 1, 1984. In the discussion that followed, the Veterans Coordinating Council asked Lloyd Zander to develop a job description for this position in Bismarck, and see if he can incorporate some of the lobbying duties into the job description. Mr. Zander agreed to do this.

Pete Helm, Chairman of the subcommittee on veterans affairs, reported that he was elected Chairman, with Curt Twete as Vice Chairman. Most of their discussion centered on moving

one staff member of the Department of Veterans Affairs to Bismarck by July 1, 1984. A loan collection contract will be filed with the Fargo - Moorhead Collection Bureau. They will receive 25% of all loans collected. The collection bureau was informed that they were not to harass or go after a veteran who is unable to repay his loan. Mr. Helm noted that there will be public service announcements on all radio stations in North Dakota informing veterans of their benefits.

Bernard Wagner, Chairman of the subcommittee on the North Dakota Veterans' Home, noted that they presently have 125 members at the Home. Seven are women, with two of them being veterans. They have received six applications that have been accepted, and six that are pending. They will phase into the name change of the Home gradually, with stationery changes, etc. They expressed their appreciation to the veterans organizations for their good response to a request for donations. Their Food Service Supervisor resigned. They received 22 applications, and hired a man with very good credentials. He worked about 22 years at the Ramada Inn in Minot, and is a World War II veteran.

The lawsuit against the Home is still pending. They have received a new application from the man, requesting admittance to the Veterans' Home. The committee has been working on revising the rules and regulations of the Home. They will be submitted to the Attorney General's office to be sure that they are all within the law. The committee went on record expressing their appreciation to Pete Helm for his work as Chairman of the subcommittee on the Veterans' Home during the past few years.

Chuck Godke reported that at the present time the congressional delegation from North Dakota will not approve a budget item of \$40 million for the new hospital at the Minot Air Force Base. The Air Force Base and the congressmen from North Dakota have not gotten together.

Frank Gathman, Center Director of the Veterans Administration, reported that the VA does have some problems. One of prime importance is timeliness of admissions. It is not good, but it will be improved. The VA is funded for an average daily workload of 148. They are running about 10% above the planned out-patient treatments. The clinic addition should be completed during the summer of 1986. During Fiscal Year 1985 they will have a new nursing home with 126 beds, rather than their present 50 bed unit.

Milt Kane moved we establish criteria in order to be eligible for consideration for voting membership on the Veterans Coordinating Council, as follows:

1. Must have membership of 750, with five Posts or Chapters.
2. Must be an organization made up of veterans having national Veterans Administration accreditation.
3. Must have a functioning National, Department, and local Chapter or Post status.
4. Must be fiscally able to pay the dues assessment to the Veterans Coordinating Council, of a minimum of \$150 in a non-legislative year. *225 by year*
5. Must hold an annual State Department convention.
6. Must be an organization made up of veterans who must have specific criteria and eligibility dates for membership.

Motion seconded by Mike Vandrovec and carried.

Milt Kane moved the constitution and by-laws be changed, placing AMVETS in voting status membership on the Veterans Coordinating Council, subject to their meeting established criteria. Motion seconded by Lee Lamb and carried.

Ken McGaughey moved that the resolution from AMVETS asking for membership on the Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs be brought before the Council at our July meeting in 1984. Motion seconded by Bill Stepp and carried.

President Aaberg called for nominations for President. Ken McGaughey nominated Milt Kane for President. There being no further nominations, Ken McGaughey moved nominations cease and a unanimous ballot be cast for Milt Kane for President. Motion seconded by Bill Stepp and carried.

President Aaberg called for nominations for Vice President of the Council. Ken McGaughey nominated Mike Vandrovec. Since there were no further nominations, Bill Stepp moved the rules be suspended and a unanimous ballot be cast for Mike Vandrovec for Vice President. Motion seconded by Vern Useldinger and carried.

Lee Lamb nominated Vern Useldinger for Secretary of the Council. President Aaberg called for further nominations. There being none, Bill Stepp moved a unanimous ballot be cast for Vern Useldinger for Secretary. Motion seconded by Mike Vandrovec and carried.

President Aaberg called for nominations for Treasurer. Bill Stepp nominated Ken McGaughey for Treasurer. Since there were no further nominations, Vern Useldinger moved a unanimous ballot be cast for Ken McGaughey for Treasurer. Motion seconded by Mike Vandrovec and carried.

The next meeting of the Council will be held in Valley City on November 21 and 22, 1983.

Vern Useldinger moved the Council pay Marlys Schuler \$50 for her expenses in taking minutes of the meeting. Motion seconded by Bill Stepp and carried.

The meeting was adjourned.