



# North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council

15 NORTH BROADWAY  
FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA  
58072

ORLANDO V. "DUKE" ELLINGSON, PRESIDENT  
ELMER M. EKERN, VICE PRESIDENT

MILTON W. KANE, SECRETARY  
RAYMOND STELMACHUK, TREASURER

## VETERANS COORDINATING COUNCIL

### MINUTES

American Legion, Fargo, ND

November 20, 1989

A special meeting of the North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council was called for Monday, November 20, 1989, at the Fargo American Legion by President Ellingson, Elmer Ekern, Vice President, presided.

There were 108 representatives of various veterans organization from North Dakota and Minnesota present including congressional representatives. The purpose of the meeting was to address the proposed move of the VA Regional Office Claims Division and other entities of the Regional Office from Fargo, North Dakota, to St. Paul, Minnesota.

Vice President Ekern explained that this had happened 25 years before and the effects it would have on the veteran population.

Mr. Donald Colston, Director of the VARO & Medical Center, addressed the group outlining that this proposal came about by a study done by a National Administrative Committee of Veterans Affairs. He first became aware of this the last week of October at Phoenix, Arizona. Those who were affected were told this was nothing to get excited about. However, due to the wording of the document it would appear this could happen in the given time frame. At this point only the adjudication division would be moved. There are 33 employees at the Regional Office, 19 in adjudication, 10 to be relocated to St. Paul, 9 are to be absorbed at the Medical Center.

This move would take away the opportunity for the veteran to have a face to face hearing and also the business of the claims adjudication would probably be handled over the phone. The directive stated that March of 1990 would be the start of staff attrition with entire shift be completed by June of 1992. Because the staff at the Regional Office is a young staff there would be no early retirements. December of 1989, a plan would be developed therefore, if a response is to be made it should be made very soon.

Mr. Colston did an excellent job of explaining the dilemma and received a very favorable applause for his presentation.

AMERICAN LEGION  
JAMES O. COATS, Dept. Cdr.  
VERN USELDINGER, Dept. Adj.  
EARL REDLIN, Rep.

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA  
LARRY SENGER, State Pres.  
DIANE SIEBEL, State Sec.  
KENNETH ZENT, Rep

DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS  
LLOYD D. HALVORSON, Dept. Cdr.  
ROBERT HANNAH, Dept. Adj.  
ORLANDO V. "DUKE" ELLINGSON, Rep.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS  
OTTO EVENSON, Dept. Cdr.  
RAYMOND STELMACHUK, Dept. Adj.  
BERNARD BEACH, Rep.

AMVETS  
VIGO J. PEDERSEN, Dept. Cdr.  
ELMER M. EKERN, Dept. Adj.  
JOSEPH J. O'BRIEN, Rep.

#### MEMBERS AT LARGE

FLOYD HENDERSON, Veterans of World War I  
WALTER ENGEL, ND American Ex-POW, Org.  
JAMES McDONALD, Pres. ND CVSO Assn.  
DAVID SCHMIDT, Publicity Chairman

BERNARD A. WAGNER, Chm. ND Adm'n. Comm.  
LEO SWENSON, Dir. Vet. Emp. & Fog.  
CHARLES BARSTAD, VFW Service Officer  
JOHN BERGE, American Legion Service Officer  
GREGORY SEURER, DAV Nat'l Svce. Ofcr.

M/G A. P. MACDONALD, Adjutant General  
DONALD H. COLSTON, VA Center Director  
MILTON W. KANE, Comr. Veterans Affairs  
JAMES WELDER, Commandant, Veterans Home

Veterans Coordinating Council Minutes--continued

Page Two

November 20, 1989

Chairman Ekern called upon each organization for response. American Legion Service Officer, Dave Schmidt, responded by saying the National Organization opposed reorganization by resolution at the National Convention and the position has not changed. This would limit organization representation. Dave mentioned Federal Law limits such a reorganization in Title 38. This has not been changed prior to the President submitting the budget. Department Commander Jim Coats endorsed Dave Schmidt's comments. Minnesota American Legion also spoke in opposition to this move. The Veterans of Minnesota are also very concerned.

Otto Evenson, VFW State Commander, stated because of the age of the WWII veteran the need is here now greater than ever before; this is not an appropriate time for this type of move. Charles Barstad, VFW Service Officer, stated this is not working in Wyoming. Assistant Claims Director of Minnesota VFW spoke in opposition.

Bob Hannah, DAV Adjutant, also stated they had passed a resolution at their National Convention that would prevent any consolidation and the DAV still oppose the concept of Regional Office consolidation from Fargo to St. Paul. Greg Seurer, DAV Service Officer, also spoke in opposition. The AMVETS, VVA and every other organization present spoke in opposition.

Senator Conrad's Fargo office manager spoke as did Representatives for Congressman Dorgan, Stangeland & Boswicks office. All indicated opposition to the move.

The Council discussed what action should be taken. A petition drive was mentioned. This did not meet with the approval of the Council. A letter writing campaign was decided upon.

The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Vice President of the Coordinating Council was charged with the responsibility of formulating a letter to be mailed to the President of the U.S., Secretary Derwinski, Representative Montgomery and Senator Cranston. This should be done immediately and be mailed prior to the first of December.

Service Organization representatives to meet at the Regional Office, Tuesday morning at 8:30 a.m. to formulate letters to be mailed to President Bush, Secretary Derwinski, Representative Sonny Montgomery and Senator Cranston opposing the Regional Office move.

This letter should be sent, not only by organizations but also by individuals. The addresses will be furnished for those to receive the letter, not to include the congressman; they are supporting us and additional correspondence would be unnecessary.

This information would go to the adjutants of the various veterans organizations and the County Service Officers for distribution. Again time is important because the mechanics of this proposed move could start going into effect in January. It was pointed out that wording of the letter is important.

Veterans Coordinating Council Minutes--continued  
Page Three  
November 20, 1989

Joe O'Brien proposed resolution as follows: "Coordinating Council representatives of North Dakota and those Organization representatives from Minnesota, send the resolution to all powers that be, stating opposition to transfer of Regional Office to St. Paul", second, approved.

There being no further business meeting adjourned.

For the President

Milton W. Kane  
Secretary

vio  
December 8, 1989