

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
COMFORT INN, BISMARCK ND

March 12, 2015
2:00PM

Meeting called to order by Chairman Dean Overby. Pledge of Allegiance said and a Moment of Silence observed for POW/MIAs and those serving overseas.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Richard Belling	Myron Langehaug	Carroll Quam
Ken Hasby	Marlys Morgenstern	Marlin Schneider
Jim Haukedahl	Robert Olzweski	Jim Verwey
Dave Hilleren	Dean Overby	Hal Weninger
Trish Hodny		

Absent:

Myron Langehaug (excused)	Ron Otto (excused)
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Guest:

Megan Carranza, U.S. Senator Heitkamp's Office

Chairman Overby welcomed everyone to the Committee meeting.

Cheri Giesen, Executive Director, Job Service North Dakota

Background – grew up in Plaza ND. Every year Plaza holds a ceremony honoring veterans every year, she hasn't missed one ceremony in 40+ years. Her grandfather served in Navy.

Job Service employs seven Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists through federal funding provided by the Department of Labor's Jobs for Veterans State Grant. This team are all veterans themselves and they work only with veterans. Last year, JSND procured an additional \$240,000 in federal funding to maintain the team through FY15.

In the past two years, a member of the Veterans' Employment Team has won national recognition from the DAV and American Legion. Additionally, in 2013, the Team was the recipient of the Mark Sanders Award from the National Association of State Workforce Agencies for their services to disabled veterans.

Commissioner Wangen reported that the State Directors are looking at resolutions/legislation that would give the State the option would remove the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs) from the Department of Labor and put them under the State. Nothing would change in North Dakota if this were to happen.

Major General Sprynczynatyk, Adjutant General, ND National Guard

- ▶ Fewer than twenty deployed overseas, they will be back next July/August time frame.
- ▶ Three dozen down in Laredo flying helicopters at night in support of the border patrol.
- ▶ Guard recruitment is down.
- ▶ Army: will be losing positions within the next few years, possibly 400-500 overall by 2020.
- ▶ In May, will promote the first female Colonel to General Officer in North Dakota.
- ▶ Legislation: SB 2016 came thru Senate with no adjustments. It's in the House now. Veterans Bonus is in the budget. Acquiring another 35 acres of land at the Veterans Cemetery. Well over 4,000 service men and women interred at the Cemetery, including family members the number is around 6,000. This is the 25th year of cemetery and a special ceremony will be held on Memorial Day. Five veterans outreach officers throughout the State are temporary positions so the Guard is asking for funding for these positions to become full-time. Also requesting funding for the two Military Service Centers, one in Fargo and one in Bismarck. Spoke on ND Cares budget request. Did some housekeeping on outdated laws.

Chairman Overby asked how the retention is within the Guard. Gen Spry reported retention is very good; North Dakota has one of the highest retention rates in the country.

Peggy Wheelden, Acting Public Affairs Officer, VHA-CM

- ▶ Continues to grow, 2% increase. More women veterans are using the VAMC.
- ▶ Vascular Surgery sharing agreement in Fargo
- ▶ Veterans Choice Act: 272 veterans so far have contacted the Veterans Choice program. The Choice Act doesn't impact existing veteran's present healthcare.
- ▶ April is Sexual Awareness and Protection month.
- ▶ No Veteran Dies Alone Program – staffed by voluntary services. Volunteers sit with veterans who are dying and either has no family members or when family members need a break. The number of people volunteering have been overwhelming.
- ▶ A program honoring veterans who pass away at the VA facility is in the planning stage. An honor guard would accompany the body to the morgue.
- ▶ Construction update: remodeling and expanding dental area.
- ▶ Bismarck clinic opened February 25th
- ▶ Townhall meeting to be held in Minot, sometime in April.

Carroll Quam asked about the chapel and any changes happening with it. Ms. Wheelden said she's not aware of any changes and described how the chapel is used at the VA. If anyone has concerns about the chapel's use, they should contact Ms. Wheelden.

Trish Hodny asked if dental will be expanded at any time. The majority of grants for the Grant Program are for dental. Ms. Wheelden didn't believe it will happen but she will look into when she gets back to Fargo.

Ken Hasby asked about the potential move of the Minot CBOC from the base into town. Ms. Wheelden said it was being looked at in part because the lease is up and Minot wants the space and because of the security issue of getting on the base.

Commissioner Wangen asked about getting a Fisher House on VA property. The grant process for a Fisher House should be open soon. She will talk with Lavonne Liversage, Director, about the possibility of getting a Fisher House. Fisher Houses provide military families housing close to a loved one during hospitalization for an illness, disease or injury.

Lt. Colonel Retired Shirley J. Olgeirson

- ▶ Retired from ND National Guard and served in Desert Storm. She is currently the Executive Director of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves.
- ▶ Editor of the 164th Infantry News. 164th Infantry Units were located in every community in North Dakota during World War II. The 164th Infantry Regiment landed on the shores of Guadalcanal to reinforce the 1st Marines.
- ▶ The 164th Infantry will be holding its 70th Annual Reunion coincides with the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. It is being called the Victory Reunion and will be held October 10th in Bismarck.
- ▶ Because of the extent of participation of North Dakotans during World War II, she came up with the idea of recognizing the 1,990 -2,300 WWII veterans still living in ND. She has talked with the ND Newspaper Association and they are going to participate in finding these veterans. She is asking for the ACOVA's endorsement as they move forward. The ND Veterans Coordinating Council has endorsed this endeavor.

Motion by Carroll Quam that ACOVA endorse the Victory Reunion and recognizing those World War II veterans still living, second by Richard Belling. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Wangen said that the Department's website has a page for "Fallen Heroes". He would like to have family members contact our office to make sure those veterans that have passed away are included on our website.

Commissioner's Report – Commissioner Lonnie Wangen

- ▶ Dan Thorstad resigned and is now Cass County Veterans Service Officer. 79 applications were received for the Veterans Benefits position.
 - ▶ Mike Conklin is helping in Traill County while their CVSO is doing Guard training for three weeks.
 - ▶ Brenda Bergsrud is serving on the ND Cares Board.
 - ▶ Commissioner, as President of NASDVA, will be testifying before Congress next week.
 - ▶ Update on Veterans Aid Loan program: 131 current loans with an outstanding principal balance of \$306,574.10 as of January 31, 2015. Available balance in fund - \$277,004.05
 - ▶ Update on Hardship Grant program. All approved grants will be paid for with biennium money. There are some pending grants that will be approved when funding becomes available. July 1, 2015 there will be interest earnings available for the new biennium. Total grants paid this biennium - \$193,272.07: Dental - \$59,609.54; Dentures - \$116,153; Hearing - \$10,295; Optical - \$5,132.27; Transportation - \$334.84; Housing - \$875; and Discretionary - \$1,165.17. Total ACOVA funding to date: \$230,264.43. Current grants approved: \$61,360 for a difference of -\$24,367.64. April 1 there will be an additional \$25,000 available for grants.
 - ▶ Transportation vans – waiting for delivery of second van.
- Federal Transportation Grant – had to go to Legislature to get authorization to spend the money. H.B. 1364 has passed both House and Senate and is waiting to be signed by the Governor. It is only for highly rural counties, either to have a van or to pay for veteran's rides on other transportation. The bill has passed thru the Legislature and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

Gary Maddock reviewed legislative bills:

- HB 1007 & 1025 – Veterans Home and Veterans Affairs Budgets: Conference committee
- HB 1104 – ND National Guard Operations & HB 1105 Criminal History Record Check: have passed.
- HB 1106 – Veterans in Court: committee meet, should pass
- HB 1127 – Residency for Tuition Purposes: passed Senate
- HB 1131 – Veterans Employment Preference: passed Senate
- HB 1208 - Honoring Certain National Guard and Reserve Members as Veterans: passed House
- HB 1360 – Create Patriotic Number License Plates, DAV Plate Changes: not voted on
- HB 1364 – Appropriation for Vehicles for Transportation-Related Services for Veterans: passed
- HB 1372 – Agent Orange Grant: Hearing sent for tomorrow
- HB 1417 – Armed Services' Member Room in County Buildings: not been heard
- SB 2016 – Adjutant General Appropriations
- SB 2023 – Appropriations: not been heard

SB 2102 – Nat'l Guard: State Employee Retirement Plans and Contributions: passed House
SB 2113 – Property Tax Credit for Disabled Veterans: passed House
SB 2142 – Motor Vehicle Veterans' Purple Heart Number Plates: passed House
SB 2238 – Veterans' Military Caskets and Urns: no action. Commissioner spoke on meeting held with legislators and stakeholders (funeral directors and county employees) regarding this bill.
SB 2242 – Veterans' Cemetery Burial Fees for Dependents of Veterans
SB 2323 – Book of Veterans Serving in Area of Conflict
SB 2346 – County Veterans' Service Officers Accreditation Requirement
SB 2042 – Tax Exemption: Military retirement pay
HB 1469 – Transportation Services for Veterans

Commissioner Wangen reported that he has gotten a call from a legislator that someone is saying that the Department has a \$300,000 slush fund and why can't it be used for caskets and other items. The Commissioner is thinking it could be referring to the Federal Grant Transportation money, it is \$380,000. The person saying this is claiming to be a Veterans Service Officer out in the Killdeer area. Commissioner Wangen is trying to find out who the person is and wants this rumor to stop. There is no "slush fund". He is asking the members to help squash this rumor.

Chairman Overby said there are two legislative bills being heard tomorrow and he would like the committee members to attend.

9:00am: HB 1372 – Agent Orange Grant

10:30am: HB 1469 – Transportation Services for Veterans

He is changing the agenda so subcommittees will meet and make their reports so the Committee can finish the meeting today.

Committee recessed.

Subcommittee's held meetings.

Meeting reconvened.

Motion by Ken Hasby to approve the January 13 & 14, 2015 minutes, second by Richard Belling. Editorial corrections offered by Trish Hodny: Page 2 Wednesday not Friday, and Page 5 regarding information sent to Stacy Jo Dufault. Motion passed.

Chairman Overby turned the meeting over to Secretary Jim Verwey. Secretary Verwey reported there are two openings on the Veterans Home Governing Board. Dean Overby and Steve Frojen were serving but their terms are up and both are willing to serve again. Floor opened for nominations.

Motion by Ken Hasby for Dean Overby to be appointed to the ND Governing Board, second by Richard Belling. Motion passed.

Motion by Dave Hilleren for Steve Frojen to be appointed to the ND Governing Board, second by Steve Volk. Motion passed.

Committee Reports:

Postwar Trust Fund Subcommittee: reported by Marlys Morgenstern
The total interest earnings for 2011-2013 was \$315,000 and \$262,371.92 was distributed to ACOVA. State Treasurer will be invited to next scheduled ACOVA meeting. Recommendation that committee members contact legislators to add money to the Post War Trust Fund. No requests for PWTF. Strategic plan review still in progress.
Motion to accept report by Carroll Quam, second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed.

Appeals Subcommittee: reported by Marlys Morgentern
No appeals.

Motion to accept report by Trish Hodny, second by Jim Haukedahl. Motion passed.

Legislative Subcommittee: Dave Hilleren reported.
Legislative overview and handout distributed by Chair Quam. Update given by Gary Maddock. Talked about future legislation and having key personnel and readiness issues.
Motion to accept report made by Ken Hasby motion second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed.

Chairman Overby thanked Gary Maddock, Lyle Schuchard and Bob Olzweski for spending time at the legislature monitoring the bills.

Department of Veterans Affairs & Budget Subcommittee: Trish Hodny reported. Morning spent on drafting by-laws for ACOVA. Reconvened in the afternoon. Commissioner's evaluation done by Trish Hodny and Richard Belling. Committee recommends Commissioner receive legislative increase on July 1. Committee reviewed Grant Hardship Policy #413 – Income guidelines and they decided guidelines should remain the same. Committee recommends that the Commissioner use the remaining Fund 410 clearing account funds for the 2013-2015 biennium. Committee recommends ACOVA authorize \$50,000 in PWTF to the Department on July 1, 2015. Reviewed the Department Budget and everything appeared at acceptable levels. Department will be undergoing an audit, it is tentatively set for March 24-26, 2015. Started review of the strategic plan, some suggestions and corrections will be passed on to the Commissioner. Peggy Wheelden will check with the VA to see what triggered the drop to 10% for audiology and vision services.

Motion by Trish Hodny that the Commissioner, upon receiving a satisfactory evaluation, receive the recommended legislative raises for the 2015-2017 biennium, second by Richard Belling. Motion passed.

Motion by Trish Hodny to transfer the remaining funds in the Fund 410 clearing account to the Department, second by Bob Olzewski. Motion passed.

Motion by Trish Hodny that \$50,000 from the Postwar Trust Fund be transferred to the Department to be spent on approved ACOVA programs, second by Jim Haukedahl. Motion passed.

Motion by Trish Hodny to accept report, second by Bob Olzewski. Motion passed.

June 20th is the date names are to be in the Governor's Office for appointment to ACOVA.

Next meeting tentatively set for July 30 & 31, 2015 at Camp Grafton.

Motion by Jim Haukedahl to adjourn, second by Richard Belling Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey
Secretary