

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
COMFORT SUITES, BISMARCK ND

December 5, 2019
1:00 PM

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

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Richard Belling	Dave Hilleren	Jim Verwey
Dan Brown	Gary Maddock	Glenn Wahus
Alan Fehr	Dean Overby	Hal Weninger
Roy Fillion	Dave Rice	

Absent - Excused:

Tom Ryan	Marlin Schneider	Murray Strom
Mark Wagemann		

Guests:

Laura Balliet, Attorney, Attorney General's Office
Danelle Hopkins, Governor's Office

Speakers:

Dale DeKrey, Associate Director, VAHCS Fargo, ND

Dr. Weintraub has been selected as Director for Fargo VA. A search committee for a Chief of Staff will be put together. The Fargo VA was rated #4 in the nation as one of the best places to work. Five new CBOCs opened this year. The Mission Act for Fargo is not going well; third party providers have not done a very good job in their duties.

The Fargo VA is now tobacco free. If someone wants to smoke, they need to go off the property which is basically outside the gate that surrounds the VA. There is a new VA Hyperbaric project. It is a limited pilot program for veterans. If two traditional treatments haven't helped, a veteran can be referred by their provider. Two veterans have gone through hyperbaric treatments already.

The VA is a register site for the Million Veteran Program. This is a research project that veterans can sign up for – blood samples are drawn to find out if certain genes affect a person's health. A new boiler plant is planned for next Spring, it will take over a year to put in place. The present system is 44 years old and the replacement schedule says to do it at 40 years old. Security will be upgraded at the VA: armed police officer stationed during business hours and additional cameras placed throughout the facility.

Lonnie Wangen, Commissioner's Report (Power point)
Overview of office staff and programs.

Darcie Handt, ND Cares

Commissioner's Challenge is at 347 completed watching S.A.V.E.: 196 went through Psych Armor website and 151 watched from other sources, i.e. youtube.

A planning session will be held to reduce two goals to one: it will pertain to reducing barriers to behavioral health services.

Community clergy training was held in Medora, this was accomplished by working with the VA. A training session was held in West Fargo with 16 clergy participating; of the sixteen attendees eight were veterans.

ND Cares is working with FirstLink and the VA about a veteran's callback program. FirstLink runs the suicide hotline and places veterans into the call back program. There is a lot of success with the call back process so there's no regression for the veteran who needs help. Veterans and military will be included in the program, there maybe federal grant monies to help fund this initiative.

Kelly Schmidt, ND State Treasurer

Ryan Skor, Finance Director, is the direct link between the Treasurer's Office and the Commissioner's Office.

Ms. Schmidt introduced Troy Nelson with Edward Jones; he helps manage the PWTF. Received additional dollars from the patriotic plates, \$4,265 for FY20 to date; these funds go into the principal of the PWTF. Discussion on three things: (1) Fiduciary of the plan, (2) explain the investments and (3) leave time for questions. A Fiduciary always looks out for your (beneficiary) best interests (legally) meeting the beneficiary needs of today and tomorrow. The goal is to minimize the losses and maximize the increases.

Investments: Stocks – ½ and Bonds – ½ (gives the current funding). Mr. Nelson has worked with Kelly over ten years on the veterans' account, it is up almost \$2 million at this point. Moving forward, the ACOVA should temper their expectations for the future. Realistically going forward 5 – 5.5% not the 7% gains there has been in the past.

The Committee wondered what can be done to get additional dollars to ACOVA for programs. Bonds are lower than they have ever been. Normally the fees that are paid are 2% for mutual funds but the fees are under 1.05% that are charged to the PWTF.

Discussion on how to get more funds for ACOVA programs, bottom line there isn't any way to do that. There is a need to mitigate risk and plan for long term.

Current law dictates that any CDs must be from the Bank of North Dakota which has extremely low rates. Discussion on changing the law for Fund 410 and Fund 368 so CD's can be purchased from other financial sources. Ryan Skor, Treasurer's Office, will work with the Commissioner on this issue.

BG Huber, National Guard Adj. Gen Office:

Recruiting successful; made both quotas for Air and Army National Guard Strength. It's been the best of the last 7-8 years. Sen Hoeven involved in getting new operation center in Fargo ND approved as pilot program for air guard tuition assistance program but can't start because no funding; eight to ten states were chosen to be part of the pilot program. Broke ground on new readiness center in Fargo \$35 million facility, because of weather delays it will be finished in 2021-2022. Approved for new readiness center in Dickinson, east side of town. The selection process for an architect and contracting firm is starting. Guard will be working on getting a new facility in Jamestown. 25% cost share with State for acquiring the land, probably a FY2026 project. Veterans Cemetery Columbarium experienced a setback on the current design – working with architect on new design. Guard is updating strategic plan – people and relationships: new line of effort. Big project: Camp Grafton South acquiring new land for expansion capability for all weapons training. Negotiations ongoing, five to ten year goal. Blizzard operational exercise, working with the division of emergency services on flood preparedness. Highest level in 125 years of tracking moisture in the soil. Legacy Funds: idea for ND National Guard Museum. A part-time historian has been hired to go through Guard's documents for preservation purposes. Update on ongoing deployments and timelines on troops returning.

Mitchell Erhardt, ND ACTVSO

Mr. Erhardt is the County Veterans Service Officer serving Mandan and Oliver Counties. He completed the annual training with ND Department of Veterans Affairs in October.; received updated information on the Blue Water Navy Act and visited the National Cemetery in Fargo. Mary Vetter elected President of the Association. The ND ACTVSO works closely with the Association of Counties and an Association member, Henry

Gerving, was appointed to the Governor's Task Force. The ND ACTVSO would like to work with ACOVA and Department on legislative issues, especially on the Department's position for Loan and Grant Programs. March 22-25 2020 is the Spring Conference for VSO training.

Joe Hall, Veteran Representative Job Service North Dakota

Greetings from Brian Klipfel, Executive Director and Jerome Billups, State Veteran's Program Administrator. Everyone reminded they can go to www.jobsnd.com and the LMI section to keep up with employment statistics and wage data across the state.

Among North Dakota's 53 counties, 36 reported an over-the-year increase in job openings, while 15 reported an over-the-year decrease and 2 remained constant. Cass County reported the largest over-the-year increase in job openings with a change of +551. Williams County reported the largest over-the-year decrease with a change of -98. Cass County reported the largest number of job openings (4,609), followed by Burleigh County (2,324) and Grand Forks County (1,357).

Job Service is getting more and more listings throughout the State by "spidering" out to other sites that post jobs and contacting businesses about jobs that should be listed or jobs that should be removed. Currently there are 5,000+ active resumes in Job Service system; half are probably good resumes and the others are just minimal. Veteran unemployment averages under 1%.

Job Services is 97% funded from federal funding, the rest comes from other sources, including a small portion of State funding.

Ms. Danelle Hopkins, Governor's Office

Excited to work with ACOVA and the Department on veteran's issues.

Mark Johnson, Administrator, ND Veterans Home

Update on issues affecting Veterans Home.

By-Laws

Attorney General's Office – Laura Balliet advised against changing the By-Law regarding the Chairman of the Governing Board as per the motion from September 2019 meeting. Discussion followed.

Committee recessed until Friday morning

December 6, 2019

9:00 am

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

ACOVA Roll Call:

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Tom Ryan
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Marlin Schneider

Guests:

Danelle Hopkins, Governor's Office

Chairman Overby asked for approval of the September 2019 meeting.

Motion by Alan Fehr to approve minutes of September 4 & 5, 2019, second by Dave Rice. Motion carries unanimously.

Time and Place:

Checking into meeting and sleeping rooms at the Quality Inn for March 23 & 24, 2020. This is the same time as the ND Association of County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers Spring Conference.

Legislative & Strategic Plan Subcommittee: Reported by Dave Rice.

Reviewed and approved minutes from last minutes. Reviewed possible legislation items for 2021. Recommend the ND Legislative Council and subcommittee meet to go over legislation that was not passed and to see if any of those issues should be brought forward again.

Chairman Overby talked about the Veterans Home leave policy for residents.

Motion to accept report, second. Motion carried.

PWTF and Appeals Subcommittee: Report by Dan Brown

PWTF: Recommend pursuing legislative action to be able to invest Fund 410 outside the Bank of ND. Still discussing avenues to raise money for the PostWar Trust Fund. No requests for funds.

Appeals: Heard a grant appeal. Subcommittee voted to uphold the Commissioner's decision to disapprove the grant. Recommendation that the veteran and CVSO work together to find transportation for the veteran.

Motion by Alan Fehr to accept report, second by Hal Weninger. Motion approved unanimously.

Department of Veterans Affairs Subcommittee: Hal Weninger reported.

Loans and Grants. Recommended adopting proposed Dental Grant #431 which is similar to the Denture Grant. Recommends legislation to the Legislative Committee concerning the \$100,000 that resulted in the loss of one office employee. Recommends the Stanley Elementary School donation of \$1,500 go to the grant program as requested by the school.

Discussion on motion concerning ND Veterans Governing Board from September 2019 meeting. Attorney General's Office, Laura Balliet, had concerns regarding the motion and her recommendation was to rescind the policy. Policy now to read: The Chairman and Secretary will appoint a seven-member governing board for administration of the Veterans Home. All Governing Board appointments are to be approved by full ACOVA Committee.

Motion by Hal Weninger to accept report, second. Motion approved unanimously.

Discussion on Grant Policy #431 Dental

Hal Weninger explained the proposed new language to the policy.

6) Exception:

- a. Total dental procedures exceeding the total annual dental funding limit per applicant may be included in one grant providing that:
 - i. Total dental grant amount is limited to the annual limit for two years
 - ii. Applicants total grants approved shall not exceed annual policy 403 limit for two years
 - 1. Utilizing this exception exhausts all dental grant eligibility for current and following calendar years
 - iii. Sufficient PWTF interest earnings are available

It is the same methodology used for the revised Denture policy.

Motion by Hal Weninger to accept the policy change, Richard Belling second. Motion carries unanimously.

Round table:

Gary Maddock: Productive speakers, enjoyed listening to them. ACOVA accomplishes a lot of things, he is proud to be a part of it.

Glenn Wahus: Lots of things to learn, lots of knowledge in this room. Wondered about the last Task Force meeting.

Dani Hopkins: There has been discussion on the size and membership of ACOVA. No decisions have been made yet. There is a meeting planned in January.

American Legion did submit a woman for ACOVA but her mailing address is Minnesota. The Governor's Office did not select her for that reason.

Dave Rice asked about getting the Task Force proposed changes to the ACOVA members and to the veterans' organizations so they can review them. Dani will email the Task Force meeting dates to ACOVA members.

Roy Fillion asked about getting the Task Force minutes. Dani will check into it and get them to ACOVA members.

Roy Fillion: Particularly liked getting information on the hyperbaric chambers. Kelly Schmidt information was good and he felt the PWTF was being invested very prudently.

Richard Belling: Meeting was good. Looking forward to working with the Commissioner on issues.

Dan Brown: Another productive meeting, lots of stuff to learn. Appeals hearing was interesting to go through. Would be good to get better interest rates than the rate from the Bank of North Dakota. Hyperbaric Chamber information was great.

Hal Weninger: Very good meeting. Every meeting is a learning meeting. How can we take our money and get better interest rates to get a better return?

Alan Fehr: Always enjoy the meetings, speakers are really good. Working at Minot AFB at a temporary job; military retraining him and keeping him busy with other duties.

Dave Rice: Honor Flight is doing well, planning future flights. National Cemetery doing well, 40 internments during the first few weeks it opened. KVLV is doing a special on the Cemetery on Dec 17th; interviewing a family and Color Guard. Reiterated he would like the legislative subcommittee to meet with Legislative Council at the next ACOVA meeting.

Dean Overby: Good thing to work on Veteran's Homeless and work on suicide prevention; these especially needs to be addressed. We need ND Cares to provide one number for help and get Behavioral Health on board.

Gary Maddock stated that on December 16th at 7:00pm there will be a Suicide Prevention and Awareness event in Bismarck.

Commissioner Wangen stated he was glad to hear ND Cares is back working on mental health issues.

Governor's Office sent letter from a veteran and his family who had care at the VA and how well they were treated and taken care of.

Dave Rice commented on the activities provided by the VA Hospital that doesn't take place in other Hospitals.

Commissioner Wangen stated he was really happy to have the State Treasurer at the meeting. Discussions with her office are going well. Very happy to see fund grown to \$6 Million. Disheartened to hear that the Treasurer's office and Edward Jones do not feel the Committee's goal of \$300,000 in spendable income per biennium is possible and were not open to discussing what would be needed to make it happen. Mr. Nelson stated the fiduciary's goal is to meet the needs of today and tomorrow. Edward Jones has not reached out to the ACOVA to inquire about their needs for today, future goals, or concerns. Edward Jones treats the treasurer's office as the beneficiary not the Veterans and ACOVA.

It seems the Postwar Trust Fund investments are more geared towards the future instead of looking to take care of veterans today.

ACOVA used to be able to allocate monies for the DAV vans, Service Dogs and the Stand Downs. They can't do that now since the interest earnings aren't at a level for those costs.

Commissioner Wangen stated he will continue to push for more employees. We can't do what we need to do being short staffed.

Task Force asked a lot of questions about Department programs. The committee members didn't realize the Department took a 30% reduction. They had a lot of good questions.

Legislators are invited to committee meetings.

Motion to adjourn, second. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey
Secretary