

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
COMFORT INN
BISMARCK, ND

January 14, 2011
9:00 a.m.

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

Roll Call:

Present:

John Adolf	Ken Hasby	Dean Overby
Ron Braaten	Dave Hilleren	Carroll Quam
Lee Finstad	Orletta Kilen	Lyle Schuchard
Mike Fisher	Mark Landis	Jim Verwey
Jeff Hall	Ron Otto	

Absent:

John Hanson (excused)

Guests:

Jerry Samuelson, ND CVSO Association
June Veit, Senator Conrad's Office
Gene Kouba, NDVCC, Legislative Committee
John Jacobson, NDVCC, Legislative Committee
Representatives from Job Service North Dakota
Leslie Ross, Stark & Dunn CVSO
Jerry Meske, U.S. Department of Labor

Motion to accept the November 19, 2010 meeting minutes by John Adolf, seconded by Jim Verwey . Friendly amendment accepted to correct November minutes to reflect September 24, 2010 minutes being approved instead of November 24, 2010. Motion passed unanimously.

Speakers:

Colonel Thiele, Director of Personnel, ND National Guard

- ▶ National Guard is requesting funds from the Legislature to create a Military Service Center in Fargo. It is designed to be a one-stop shop for all veterans.
- ▶ Another Social Worker has been assigned to eastern part of State.
- ▶ Preparing flood operations for this Spring.
- ▶ Under the new GI bill, servicemen are able to transfer their benefits to their children

Marlys Morgenstern, Veterans Program Administrator, Job Service ND

Marlys explained the TAP (Transition Assistance Program) Employment workshops held at the Minot and Grand Forks Air Force Bases. The workshop is presented through facilitated discussion on topics such as: strategies for an effective job search, researching careers, creating an effective resume, interview skills, and follow-up discussion on actual job interviews.

Job Service has 4 TAP forums:

Forum 1 is the month 2 ½ day workshop at the each of the Air Force Bases

Forum 2 is a mini-TAP pilot program. It was originally targeted at recently returning veterans and has not been expanded to veterans that have applied for Unemployment Insurance.

Forum 3 is a mini-TAP targeted at incarcerated veterans who are within 45 days of release.

Forum 4 is a mini-TAP recently coordinated by Jerry Meske, Dept. of Labor Representative, for ND National Guard security personnel who will be transitioning off active duty in September 2011.

Dale DeKrey, Associate Director for Operations and Resources, VA Medical Center

▶ CBOC's in Williston and Dickinson are up and running. Devils Lake may be opening in October 2011 if all goes well with the contracts. Staffing CBOC's is a challenge difficult throughout the State.

▶ Operating rooms are being replaced with an end date of October 2012. There will be a two story addition with five new state of the art operating rooms.

▶ Updating signage to help direct people to different areas of the hospital

▶ The VA Secretary wants patient line care teams instituted to take care of veterans.

Medical records are online and accessible at the time of veteran's appointments so there is no wait time in getting their medical information.

▶ The Fargo VA is meeting the timelines given for veterans to be seen by medical personnel. For Primary Care, the VA is suppose to see 99% of the people within fourteen

days of the day they want to be seen and Specialty Care is 98% of the people within fourteen days of the day want to be seen.

▶ The Fargo VA facility has flood protection to 45 feet.

Mike Fisher asked about the houses that are still on the VA grounds. One house is a fitness center. Ron Otto asked if there was still shuttle service from the back parking lots to the front door. Mr. DeKrey stated they still have the shuttle and are working on better ways to free up parking closer to the building. There is no phone number to call to get the van.

Mark Johnson, Administrator, ND Veterans Home

▶ Construction is progressing on the new Veterans Home; completion date is targeted for April 1, 2011.

▶ Working on flood preparation such as the possibility of trying to get the D section certified so residents can be moved over to the new building. Last spring the per diem funding was lost since the residents were not moved to a certified VA facility because of the flood. The per diem runs about \$6,000 a day.

▶ Testified on budget and will be returning in the next few weeks for a more detailed look at the budget by the Appropriations Committee.

Mark was asked about the old Veterans Home and the possibility of turning part of it into a veterans' museum. There is an individual who is talking with some of the legislators about this idea.

Mike Fisher asked about the status of the Administrator's Home. One option is to get funding for heating the home since the heating source is tied to the old building. The other option is to build a new home. Both have been submitted for consideration in the 2011-2013 budget. A resident had willed the Veterans Home mineral rights and the Home is now receiving checks for drilling. Some of those dollars may be used to help with the Administrator's home.

Chairman Schuchard reported the North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council does not have a quorum. He then turned the meeting over to the Legislative Subcommittee, Lee Finstad, Chairman.

Lee reported on the subcommittee meeting and asked Commissioner Wangen to go over the legislative bills.

Postwar Trust Fund

Legislation has been filed, but has no sponsor or bill number.

Changes to the bill are to set the amounts to \$400,000 in Section 1 and \$2 million in Section 2. An additional \$500,000 was included for the Veterans Aid Loan program in Section 3.

*Motion by Mark Landis to accept the proposed changes, second by Carroll Quam.
Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #1]*

Veterans Preference

The bill does have a sponsor and is filed but does not have a bill number yet. It takes language from the ND Administrative Code and put it in the Century Code to make it easier for employers and veterans to understand. Commissioner explained Section 2 which is the competitive personnel system

Gene Kouba, ND Veterans Coordinating Council, pointed out that “wartime veteran” is being removed from the law.

Appeals Hearing Open to the Public – H.B. 1316

No substantial changes made to the bill.

Budget Bills for Veterans Home and Veterans Affairs – H.B. 1007

Hearing held January 13, 2011 on bill. Commissioner requested an FTE position for training purposes, it was included in the optional package but not but in the Governor’s recommendation.

Property Tax Exemption - H.B. 1116

Changes full and true value to taxable value; the change makes no difference in current exemption amount. This bill was submitted by the Tax Department.

Honor and Remember Flag - H.B. 1163

Motion by Dean Overby to support H.B. 1163, second by Jim Verwey.

This flag is in remembrance for fallen members of the armed forces. John Jacobson, NDVCC Legislative Committee, gave background information on the flag.

Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #2]

Women Veterans’ Month - H.B. 1167

No changes to this bill.

Veterans License Plate – H.B. 1170

Motion by John Adolf to support H.B. 1167, second by Mike Fisher.

The proceeds will be going to the Veterans Cemetery Fund. Lee Finstad wondered what it would do to the license plate the committee is already supporting. Mark Landis questioned whether it will be confusing to the public between the two plates. The license plate the committee supports goes to the non-profit foundation to assist veterans in need.

Motion failed, yeas – 2 nays – 11 (Fisher, Hall, Hasby, Hilleren, Kilen, Landis, Otto, Overby, Quam, Schuchard, Verwey), abstain – 1 (Finstad). [MOTION #3]

Funding for StandDowns - H.B. 1177

Motion by Ken Hasby to support H.B. 1177, second by Orletta Kilen.

John Adolf asked how the funding would work. Chairman Schuchard explained the last sentence of the bill gives spending authority to the State Treasurer. Ron Otto stated that an amendment to the bill is possible to remove the last line. Committee consensus is to work on amending the last sentence so spending authority rests with the Department.

Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #4]

Income Tax Deduction - H.B. 1178 & H.B. 1275

H.B. 1178 provides for an income tax deduction for retired military.

H.B. 1275 provides an income tax deduction for a portion of retirement benefits for firefighters, police, highway patrol officers, military personnel, and government employees. The bill expands those eligible and has a cap of \$5,000. Mark Landis pointed out the bill pertains to those fifty or older which may not help to entice retirees to stay in the state. Some of the retirees coming out of the military are younger. The Commissioner stated every state has some type of exemption and over 50% of the states have a total exemption for military.

Motion by Dean Overby to withdraw support for H.B. 1178, second by Dave Hilleren.

Mark Landis questioned if the Administrative Committee could withdraw its support since it did go through the Coordinating Council. Chairman Schuchard asked Gene Kouba and John Jacobson to contact the Coordinating Council for their action.

Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #5]

Motion by Jim Verwey to support H.B. 1275, second by Carroll Quam.

Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #6]

Veteran Indicator on Driver's License - H.B. 1197

No substantial changes.

Property Tax Exemption - H.B. 1275

No substantial changes.

Korean War Service Dates - H.B.1271

No substantial changes.

Property Tax Exemption - H.B. 1306

Crosses out 50% or greater and changes it to the percentage the veteran is rated at by the Veterans Administration.

Motion by Orletta Kilen to support H.B. 1306, second by Ken Hasby.

Motion passed – yeas – 13, nays – 1 (Adolf). [MOTION #7]

Guard Budget – S.B. 2016

Honor Guard - S.B. 2060

No substantial changes.

National Guard Covering Active Duty Medical Expenses- S.B. 2069

National Guard Calling Up Former Members - S.B. 2071

Operation of the National Guard – S.B. 2090

Liability of Federal Government Employees - S.B. 2091 (National Guard)

Direct Disposition of a Descendent's Remains - S.B. 2116 (National Guard)

Traumatic Brain Injury - S.B. 2163

The Department would provide peer mentoring services for those with brain injuries..

Motion by Lee Finstad to support S.B. 2163, second by Mike Fisher.

Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #8]

Veterans Preference - S.B. 2211

Adds exemptions to veterans' preference: assistants to the president and athletic team coaches.

Motion by Dave Hilleren to approve the legislative subcommittee report, second by Dean Overby. Motion passed unanimously.

Strategic Plan

Chairman and Secretary gave updates to Commissioner so plan should be updated up to this quarter.

Commissioner's Report [HANDOUT]

- ▶ Reported on training and meetings attended by Commissioner and staff
- ▶ Reported on the Grant and Loan Programs
- ▶ No appeals hearings
- ▶ Three veterans preference cases, all were resolved.
- ▶ Van sold and money deposited with State Treasurer.
- ▶ Minot van will still be in service at this point in time.
- ▶ Study contracted by State Treasurer is in the draft stage. More information is being given to correct errors in the study.

Ron Otto recognized Leslie Ross, Dunn & Stark County Veterans Service Officer. Leslie thanked the Commissioner for working on the van issues. She spoke on the lack of women veterans programs in the western North Dakota. The problem she deals with is there is no advertising for the women's programs for the state and the women's coordinator is not out in the field as a resource. She encourages the committee and the Commissioner to prioritize the womens coordinator position. We need to know what to expect from the program and the women's coordinator. Ron Otto questioned why the women's coordinator doesn't have a phone on her desk and equipment. The Commissioner explained she has the equipment she needs and is working on the phone issue with Brenda. They feel a cell phone would be best since she is on the road so much. Ron questioned the Commissioner on how much money is available for travel and what the travel plans are for her. He would like to see a report from her at the committee level. Dean Overby spoke on the Commissioner's report and the travel done by all staff members. Ron spoke that as a service officer he doesn't see a plan for the women's coordinator position. He knows there is activity in his area but there is no activity in western North Dakota. Dean suggested the Department should put in for more employees since one person has to cover the whole state. It's not up to the committee to dictate where she goes.

Chairman Schuchard thanked Laura Bearfield , Attorney General's Office, for her help on the legislative bills.

Appeals Subcommittee – Mike Fisher, Acting Chairman

There were no appeals. Handbooks were given to committee members. Discussion held on conference calls and daytime conferences deemed to be the best time for everyone.

Motion by Carroll Quam to approve minutes, second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed unanimously.

Budget Committee – Ken Hasby, Chairman

2011-2013 budget discussed along with the Training position being requested. Chairman Schuchard added the presentation was made yesterday and the Commissioner spoke on the training position.

Motion by Ken Hasby to approved report, second by Ron Braaten. Motion passed unanimously.

Postwar Trust Fund – Orletta Kilen, Chairman

Mark Landis gave the report. Ron Otto reported they have a sponsor for the PWTF bill.

Motion by Orletta Kilen to approve report, second by Ken Hasby. Motion passed unanimously.

Veterans Affairs Committee – Dave Hilleren, Chairman

Grant Policy 432 discussed. Committee recommended that meals and lodging be reimbursed at the state GSA rates. The Commissioner updated the committee on department activities. Mike Fisher requested hearings on legislative bills be sent to committee members.

Motion by Dave Hilleren to approve report, second by Mike Fisher. Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Schuchard spoke on a portion of the old Veterans Home being used for a Veterans Museum. The idea was discussed at a legislative hearing but didn't get a very good reception from some committee members. There is a petition is going around in support, if you're so inclined sign your name to it. Everyone should be getting timely updates on the bill. John Jacobson is sending out this report. Chairman Schuchard encouraged committee members to sit in on the hearings to show support for the bills. He complimented the Veterans Home and Veterans Affairs staff for their presentations at the hearing. He received a letter from the Veterans Cemetery thanking the committee for their \$125 contribution in the memory of Debbie Hall.

ACOVA Meeting

January 14, 2011

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Date & place:

Chairman would like to hold the subcommittee meetings on a Friday in Fargo and have the full committee meeting at the Veterans Home in Lisbon. May 6 & 7, 2011 will be the meeting dates.

Motion to adjourn by Carroll Quam, second by Mike Fisher. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted

Ron Otto
Secretary