

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
COMFORT INN, BISMARCK ND

July 28, 2016  
2:00 PM

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	Trish Hodny	Marlin Schneider
Roy Fillion	Marlys Morgenstern	Jim Verwey
Ken Hasby	Dean Overby	Hal Weninger
Dave Hilleren	Bill Peschel	Alan Wondrasek

Absent:

Jim Haukedahl, excused      Myron Langehaug, excused

Guests:

Megan Carranza, U.S. Senator Heitkamp's Office  
Laura Baillet, Attorney General's Office  
Coordinating Council Members

**Speakers:**

**Lavonne Liversage, Director, Fargo VA HCS**

▶ MyVAaccess Declaration: VA's pledge to provide timely care, such as same day access to primary care and behavioral health appointments for Veterans. Extended hours have been in place in Fargo for quite some time.

▶ Commission on Care: A 15-member Commission that looked closely at VA and made recommendations. A 308-page report was presented July 6 to President and Secretary McDonald. There are 18 recommendations in a 19-page Executive Summary Report.

▶ Fargo VAHCS Information: Largest increase in Grafton CBOC, largest decrease was in Fargo; doing well with budget; contracts with Williston and Dickinson is expiring – out for bids; Grafton and Bemidji are getting additional space.

▶ Watch for "Open House" on projects that have been going on the VA grounds.

Chairman Overby – American Legion National Commander toured the Fargo VA and said it was the best VA he has ever been in.

Dave Hilleren presented Lavonne Liversage with the 50th year Vietnam Veterans Plaque.

**Kristy Wolf (Raise it for Health Coalition) and Erin Oban (Executive Director, Tobacco Free ND)** spoke on ballot measure to increase North Dakota's tobacco tax:

- ▶ Cigarettes: Raise tobacco tax from .44/pack (22 mills/cigarette) to 2.20/pack (110 mills/cigarette) and all other tobacco products: from 28% to 56% of wholesale purchase price.
- ▶ Allocates: General Fund: 20 mills/cigarette + 50% tobacco product collections (leaving the tobacco tax collections alone); Cities: 2 mills/cigarette (leaving the current tobacco tax collections alone); Veterans Tobacco Tax Trust Fund: 44 mills/cigarette + 25% tobacco product collections (50% of new revenues from increase); and Community Health Trust Fund: 44 mills/cigarette + 25% tobacco product collections (50% of new revenues from increase)
- ▶ Background information on how this measure was started. More than enough signatures were collected to put the measure on the fall ballot.
- ▶ ACOVA will oversee the veterans' tobacco tax trust fund.
- ▶ They are here to share information on how the tobacco tax will impact ACOVA if it passes. They are not to ask ACOVA members to participate in getting the measure passed.

**Davinia French, National Guard**

- ▶ Greetings from National Guard AG Dohrmann,.
- ▶ Pleased to report that not one day of state active duty so far this year.
- ▶ The new Deputy Adjutant General is BG Bob Becklund..
- ▶ ND Cares – Joe Fowler resigned as Executive Director and Colonel Retired Darcy Han will be taking over.
- ▶ Record turnout for Memorial Day, 2530 people and over 450 motorcycles.
- ▶ National Veterans Cemetery will be in Fargo.
- ▶ Only about 23 people mobilized right now.
- ▶ Will lose about 350 positions throughout the State; Air Guard will actually grow this year. Nearly 400 members short on the Army side and 150 members short on the Air Guard side.
- ▶ Family Support has two camps: fish and music
- ▶ Guard would like to discuss activities they are unable to continue working on with ACOVA and the Department.

**Gary Skarphol, Chairman, ND Veterans Home Governing Board**

- ▶ Spoke on activities that have been going on or will be planned at the Home.
- ▶ Hoping to break ground in September/October on a resident workshop.

- ▶ Significant cuts to Veterans Home total \$569,000. Luckily there are special funds to help cover these cuts. These funds will need to be authorized by the Emergency Commission. No other nursing homes in the State have to take these cuts, just the Veterans Home.
- ▶ Priority is taking care of the veterans.

**Megan Carranza:**

- ▶ Vet Center opened in Grand Forks. This is on a trial basis for six months, continuation will depend on usage by veterans in the area.

**Commissioner's Report** – Commissioner Lonnie Wangen [POWERPOINT]

- ▶ SAA director position posted and closed. The top five will be interviewed. State Approving Agency Office will be in Fargo.
- ▶ Tom Summers resigned and is in Minot as a Pastor.
- ▶ Bryan Watters promoted to VSO supervisor. He will be retiring from the Guard at the end of July.
- ▶ Tom Webb has been hired to the VSO position vacated by Bryan. He will start in August.
- ▶ PR Intern has been working in the Department this summer. Working on a weekly Veteran Forum as a supplement to the newspapers throughout the State, similar to the Farmers Forum. Commissioner will be reaching out to other groups such as the Guard to get involved with the project. PR Intern worked on getting Twitter account and Facebook page up-to-date. She has done an outstanding job.
- ▶ Department has full access to the new DD214 and DD215 system from the Department of Defense.
- ▶ Update on Federal Transportation Program: purchased 11 vans this year plus the 10 DAV vans and over 30 transit providers and contractors, if you need a ride anywhere in ND it's available.
- ▶ Updates given on Loan Program and Grant Program.
- ▶ Update on PWTF funding
- ▶ National Cemetery to be located in eastern ND off County Road 20 in Cass County. It is protected by the Sheyenne Diversion. Building will take 24-30 months before it will be opened.

Marlys Morgenstern asked about the tobacco increase. Are there any statistics from other states that have raised their tobacco taxes? Commissioner Wangen stated that yes, other states have seen a decrease of 20% in use in the first year. There is hard data from other states.

Chairman Overby assigned members to the various subcommittees.

Department of Veterans Affairs & Budget Subcommittee: Jim Haukedahl (DAV), Bill Peschel (AMVETS), Hal Weninger (VVA), Richard Belling (VFW) and Marlin Schneider (AL)

Postwar Trust Fund & Appeals Subcommittee: Marlys Morgenster (DAV), Dave Hilleren (VVA) and Alan Wondrasek (AMVETS)

Legislative Subcommittee: Jim Verwey (VFW), Roy Fillion (DAV), Ken Hasby (AL), Myron Langehaug (AMVETS), and Trish Hodny (VVA).

Break into subcommittees.

Committee will reconvene until tomorrow morning.

July 29, 2016

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  
Roy Fillion  
Ken Hasby  
Dave Hilleren

Trish Hodny  
Marlys Morgenstern  
Dean Overby  
Bill Peschel

Marlin Schneider  
Jim Verwey  
Hal Weninger  
Alan Wondrasek

Absent:

Jim Haukedahl, excused      Myron Langehaug, excused

Guests:

***Motion by Richard Belling to approve April, 2016 minutes, second by Dave Hilleren.  
Motion passed.***

Chairman Overby asked the new member to introduce himself and tell the committee about his background:

Alan Wondrasek stated he comes from a military family and is from Bottineau. He joined the Army 1971 went in as private made rank of Colonel. He retired and went back to Bottineau. He has been married to his hometown sweetheart for 44 years and has 6 kids. He started in rental apartments and also started Big Al's Jack of all Trades on Lake Metigoshe. Five years ago, veterans asked him to become involved with getting the Veterans Memorial Building situation straightened out in Bottineau. He has been involved in veterans' issues since.

### **Training Session:**

Tricia Bartell, HRMS Training Officer  
Roberts Rules Cheat Sheet  
Introduction to Robert's Rules of Order

Sandy DePountis, ND Attorney General's Office  
Open Records and Open Meetings Training  
[www.ag.nd.gov](http://www.ag.nd.gov)  
Manuals – Opinions – Fact Sheets

### **Committee Reports:**

**Postwar Trust Fund & Appeals Subcommittee:** reported by Dave Hilleren  
Dave Hilleren voted in as Chairman. The Commissioner explained the State Treasurer's Report; appears the investments are losing money in PWTF investments. Formal request to the Treasurer's Office for an explanation of the PWTF showing an end of month balance June 15 of \$5,700,885 to May 16 of \$147,085. Are we losing money? Where has the difference of dollars been spent and need an explanation of fees. Request individual of Treasurer's Office attend the next ACOVA meeting and brief the Post War Trust Fund subcommittee. Discussed request from Department to use PWTF to assist in the IT expense of having interns, work studies, and Vista workers work in the Department.

Commissioner Wangen explained the differences between interns, VA work studies and AmericaCorp Vista workers.

Chairman Overby stated there is another subcommittee discussing the request so it will wait for until that time.

***Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept report, second by Marlys Morgenstern. Motion passed unanimously.***

**Appeals Subcommittee:** reported by Dave Hilleren  
Review Appeal Handbook. No appeal hearings.

***Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept report, second by Marlys Morgenstern. Motion passed unanimously.***

**Legislative Subcommittee:** Ken Hasby reported.

Trish Hodny voted in as Chairman. Ken Hasby appointed Secretary. Subcommittee attended the Coordinating Council meeting prior to the ACOVA meeting. Tabled items 4-5-6-7 from the April 2016 minutes. Created Item 8A to review draft strategic plan for funds if the tobacco tax is successful. Commissioner talked about putting together a strategic plan in case the tobacco tax is passed. Chairman Hodny went over the subcommittee's draft of a strategic/operation plan for 2016-2017. Activities would include Homeless, Education, Employment, Financial, CVSO, NSO, PWTF, Legal, Public Relations and Aging & Disability Programs. Chairman Hodny went over the plans, outcomes and goals they have put together so far: Plan #1 Services, Programs and Benefits, Plan #2 Veterans Health & Well Being and Plan #3 Financial Security of Full Assets.

Chairman Overby explained this is a framework and a living document that can and will probably be changed.

Discussion from committee on going forward with the plan and areas that will need to be addressed, i.e. resources, who will do what

The Commissioner will put together the information in a more formal document. This will be used by the committee to expand on at the next meeting.

***Motion by Trish Hodny to accept report, second by Ken Hasby. Motion passed unanimously.***

***Motion by Trish Hodny to accept the framework of the strategic plan, second by Jim Verwey. Motion carried unanimously.***

Marlys Morgenstern expressed concern about hearing legislative issues from the Coordinating Council if there is no Legislative Subcommittee. It was explained that the Legislative Subcommittee will stay in place until after the general election, depending on what the vote is for the tobacco tax.

Commissioner Wangen talked about the one legislative bill the Coordinating Council is considering which deals with gaming.

**Department of Veterans Affairs & Budget Subcommittee:** by Hal Weninger. Richard Belling voted in as Chairman. Hal Weninger appointed Secretary. Discussion on PWTF, expenditures are adequately funded. Requested Chairman Overby contact the State Treasurer's Office regarding the fund. Budget – discussed the 4.05% cut already taken and how it affects the Department and ACOVA. Travel options suggested were carpooling, geographic location, and possible room sharing. Department requests concerning internships, work study and AmeriCorp Vista. Considerable discussion on the merits of these programs. Due to budget cuts, the Department can't support these programs with IT equipment. Subcommittee recommends up to \$15,000 for the use of these programs to pay for IT costs for these positions. There appears to be enough in the PWTF dollars to cover this expenditure.

***Motion by Hal Weninger to accept report, second by Richard Belling.***

Trish Hodny asked what the PWTF can be used. Commissioner Wangen cited the ND Constitution regarding the PWTF and ACOVA. Chairman Overby listed what the funds have been used for in the past. He prefers the funds be used to help living veterans. Discussion on the uses of the trust fund, is it prudent to use for equipment.

Trish Hodny is concerned how it will appear using the PWTF for funding in the department rather than the Grant Program. She realizes having the additional help in the Department is important and isn't possible due to the budget cut.

Marlys Morgenstern also expressed concern since adjustments to the Grant Program were voted down by the committee.

Trish Hodny asked for clarification on some of the expenditures from the department's budget.

Bill Peschel spoke on how restrictiveness of the grant program. If we can help veterans who are going to school through the AmericaCorp Vista program, “we’re getting a lot of bang for our buck.”

Commissioner Wangen doesn’t want to turn away free labor because we don’t have a computer for them to work on. He stated the Department may not even need the entire \$15,000, it depends on how many people can come in and work.

Motion by Richard Belling to give Department authority to spend up to \$15,000 of PWTF dollars this biennium to house and support the needs of the interns, work study and AmeriCorp positions, second by Hal Weninger.

***Motion passed unanimously by Roll Call vote. [Motion #1]***

**Round Table Discussion:**

Ken Hasby: We should all look at the tobacco vote in November. I think we’ll do a good job for all of our veterans. We’ve had to set aside a lot of things for our veterans because we didn’t have the funding. Hopefully when it passes, we’ll be able to do a lot more.

Roy Fillion: This session working on the Legislative Committee was interesting. The work we’re doing as a committee is important. I think there will be challenges we won’t know what’s coming.

Trish Hodny: Suggestion that going forward have meetings at the Capitol, they have microphones and it would be better visibility for the committee. Expectations of time – it seems like sometimes to be a rush to get thru things. Sometimes there is a need to work late in the evening since the meeting starts at 2:00pm. Very productive meeting.

Dave Hilleren: Some issues that should be brought forward, i.e. Treasurer’s Office. Not happy we’re getting charged fees out of the Trust Fund. Need to provide support for the Department if they do get interns or other positions. Can’t ignore public perception but through discussion we move things forward.

Marlys Morgenstern: Troubled about the fees also. Really like the strategic plan. Possible speakers Red Cross has a veteran’s representative and Shawn Bohn, Director, VA Regional Office.

Alan Wondrasek: Only recommendation is to have some explain the Treasurer’s Report. They manage the money so every meeting someone should be coming in talking to the Committee. It’s important to know where the money is and how it’s being managed.

Bill Peschel: Kinda excited about the AmeriCorp and intern situation. Help a multitude of people with the services provided by these folks. More veterans will benefit and that’s a good thing.



Lonnie Wangen: If the tobacco tax goes through, it will cause some difficult times even though it's a win-win situation for veterans. Going through the first legislative session will be tough. This will be a good committee to handle the situation.

Jim Verwey: The meeting is tape recorded but sometimes it's difficult to hear the members when reviewing the minutes. Please talk with your legislators. They have no idea sometimes about veteran issues. A thank you to Trish with helping to understand the tobacco measure. Agrees with Bill on supporting the intern, etc. What happens in January with a newly elected Governor.

Commissioner Wangen stated the committee members are done, their resignations are considered submitted. If you receive a letter from the Governor accepting your resignation, you're done; otherwise keep coming.

Richard Belling: Another good meeting and good committee members. Hopefully in November everything passes.

Hal Weninger: Most exciting time. Lot more accountability and responsibility. With Bill on the intern, work-study and AmeriCorp programs.

Marlin Schneider: Agree with Bill and Hal on supporting the intern and other positions. Feel good about the tobacco issue and we will be challenged by getting the money. I know we can handle it.

Dean Overby: Governor's Office called and asked if he would be Chairman again because he does a good job. He said I'm only as good as the people I have here. Thanked the committee members for their work on the strategic plan. If the tobacco tax goes through there will be a lot of work to be done. When he went to the State Conventions, he thanked them for the people on the committee. Needs to put someone from each organization on the Legislative Committee. We will contact the Treasurer's Office with the questions from the PWTF committee. The next meeting may need to be extended from Thursday thru Saturday with a start time of 2:30pm depending on if the tobacco measure passes.

Next meeting tentatively set for November 17, 18 & 19, 2016 at the Comfort Inn, Bismarck.

Trish Hodny asked for a report on the number of claims each organization is handling. She would like to have one of the staff come in and discuss the process of filing a claim.

***Motion by Ken Hasby to adjourn, second by Roy Fillion. Motion passed unanimously.***

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey  
Secretary