

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
CAMP GRAFTON, DEVILS LAKE ND

November 16, 2017  
1:00 PM

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

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Richard Belling	Dave Hilleren	Marlin Schneider
Alan Fehr	Dean Overby	Murray Strom
Roy Fillion	Bill Peschel	Jim Verwey
Jim Haukedahl	Dave Rice	Hal Weninger

Absent - Excused:

Trish Hodny	Tom Ryan	Alan Wondrasek
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Guests:

Members of ND Veterans Coordinating Council  
Jon Nelson, State Legislator, ND House of Representatives  
Chet Pollert, State Legislator, ND House of Representatives

Chairman Overby welcomed everyone to the meeting. He stated there are three new members: Tom Ryan (DAV) – is currently in Puerto Rico for FEMA.

He invited the other two members to say a few words about themselves:

Murray Strom (AMVETS) – works in ND DOT

Alan Fair (AL) – Retired National Guard and is now a clinical psychologist in Dickinson

Chairman Overby stated members are from different organizations but are here to work for the veterans of North Dakota, this is not a political group. Once you walk in the door, we are here to make the best decisions for veterans and their families of North Dakota.

**Speakers:**

**John G. Knapp, Deputy Director, Fort Snelling, National Cemetery Administration**

Talked about the Rural Initiative coming from the Federal Veterans Administration, Information on VA Cemetery System, Burial Benefits and Memorial Benefits:

Long Range Goals #1 – Access to Burial Benefits. No national cemetery near North Dakota. Trying to increase visibility so that by 2021, 95% of veterans will have access to a national or state cemetery within 75 miles of home. Under the VA National Cemetery Rural Initiative, very small cemeteries with a 10+ year capacity for: Pre-Placed Crypt Casket burial sites, In-Ground cremation burial sites and Columbarium Niches for urns will be planned in rural areas. Fargo – Award design and build July 2017, construction begin -Spring 2018, completed by Winter of 2018 early 2019; contract award amount \$3,681,538.00. The cemetery will need to be named. The criteria for naming new national cemeteries are: (1) The name helps identify the location of the cemetery site; (2) The name has board appeal to the veteran population; and (3) The name provides a positive impression through its relation to history, region, community or other notable geographic features (lake, river, mountain, etc.).

The deadline for sending in names will be November 30, 2017.

Question: Is it possible to move someone from an existing national cemetery to another national cemetery? Yes, there is paperwork and the cost is on the family. A new marker will be provided. The old marker is destroyed since it is unique to the cemetery it has been placed in.

There is no reservation list, it is at time of need. Can do pre-need: complete form and send it to NCA.

**Dr. Breton Weintraub, Chief of Staff, Fargo VAHCS**

5 priorities for the VA:

#1 – allow greater choice for veteran

#2 – modernize systems. Current electronic medical records are written in COBOL.

Working to update system. Looking at buildings also, some are from Revolutionary War.

#3 – focus resources more effectively. Foundational services – services we do well, non-foundational – services don't do well and could outsource.

#4 – improve timeliness of services

#5 – suicide prevention. In 2015, on average about 20 veterans a day die from suicide, about 6 of those 20 are involved with VA healthcare. Trying to do more to reach out to veterans. An initiative the VA is working on now is to partner with faith based organizations in the community that are aware of veterans needing help.

This year, the Fargo VA is rated a five star, and is in the top 10% of all VA facilities.

The CBOC in Minot is located in the city, not at the Airbase. This seems to be a better location for veterans. Williston and Dickinson CBOCs are in the contracting phase.

Fargo VA is a pilot for the Choice program. Single Point Booking – when someone is making an appointment, they are given a choice of staying in the VA system or going out to a private provider.

**Darcie Handt, ND National Guard/ND Cares**

Update on Guard activity. NDARNG and NDANG Stationing Maps hand outs.

ND Cares budget comes through the Guard. It is a coalition of 40 entities. Priority of effort is related to Behavioral health services that focus on emotional health, and prevention/treatment/recovery of mental health disorders and substance use disorders. Expanding support network to 38 communities and 6 businesses. 39 mental health providers from 15 communities received the three phase ND Cares Behavioral Health Training, which included military culture.

For future activities:

Single Resource portal: one site to find mental health providers in the State, one click in your region for services, Commissioners mission to achieve this; To engage local, state, tribal and federal entities on priority issues; Regional Training; and Expanded integration to support network.

**Marlys Morgenstern, Job Service North Dakota**

Our DVOPs provide individualized career services to Veterans and certain eligible persons to aid them toward self-sufficiency. The Team provides referrals to resources and education to help overcome barriers and then prepare the Veterans for their job search. When the Veteran is job ready – they help them find the job they are looking for through connections with the many employers in their network. JSND employs Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists – or DVOPs - in Bismarck (1), Fargo (2), Grand Forks (1), and Minot (1). The grant also provides half-time funding for the State Veterans' Program Administrator.

The Team served over 800 Veterans in the past 12 months.

**Labor Market - October 2017:**

- 13,477 open and available positions (4.1 percent higher than one year ago)
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical reported the largest number of job openings with 1,299, followed by Sales and Related with 1,204 and Office and Administrative Support with 1,095

- Active résumés totaled 7,145 (14.6 percent lower than one year ago; 6,489 in-state; 656 out-of-state)

**Mark Johnson, Administrator ND Veterans Home**

Finally came to settlement with Comstock regarding contracts in building the Veterans Home.

Walk way bridge is half on Veterans Home property and half city property. The city is willing to work to get a solution.

Sent outline of presentation

Presented Strategic Plan from ND Veterans Home Governing Board. Auditors found that the Veterans Home should be giving ACOVA the Home's Strategic Plan yearly.

Under Performance Audit and it has been challenging. The auditors don't understand healthcare and have had to be educated in many aspects of healthcare. In two years, the Home has been deficiency free from the State and passes federal inspections. Mark compliments his staff in their dedication and competency.

Applied for grant through VA and will be getting a Telemedicine machine from the VA.

**Lonnie Wangen, Commissioner, North Dakota Veterans Affairs**

Power point presentation

**Chet Pollert, State Representative, North Dakota Legislative Assembly**

Met with Chairman Overby and Commissioner Wangen on communication problems that have been going on during the legislative session. The Performance Audit on the Department will help to show if a position needs to be restored. Also, the Audit will help answer questions about the Department. Talked about the cuts that were taken for the 2017-2019 budgets. The Department took more than an 18% reduction in the budget. The 2019-2021 will be a tough session also.

Chairman Overby gave out the Subcommittee Assignments:

Department of Veterans Affairs & Budget:

Roy Fillion

Hal Weninger  
Murray Strom  
Richard Belling  
Marlin Schneider

Postwar Trust Fund & Appeals:

Jim Haukedahl  
Dave Hilleren  
Jim Verwey  
Bill Peschel  
Alan Fehr

Legislative:

Dave Rice  
Alan Wondrasek  
Tom Ryan  
Trish Hodny

Subcommittees will meet at 8:00am, Friday November 17, 2017.

November 17, 2017

9:00 am

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
Alan Fehr	Dean Overby	Murray Strom
Roy Fillion	Bill Peschel	Jim Verwey
Jim Haukedahl	Dave Rice	Hal Weninger
Dave Hilleren		

Absent - excused:

Tom Ryan	Alan Wondrasek
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Guests:

Karen Meier, State Commander American Legion  
Russ Stabler, NDVCC

***Motion to by Richard Belling to accept Veterans Home Strategic Plan, second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #1]***

***Motion to accept minutes from August 3 & 4, 2017, seconded, passed.***

**Committee Reports:**

**Department of Veterans Affairs** – report by Hal Weninger

Richard Belling voted in as Chairman; appointed Hal Weninger as Secretary.

Update on PWTF grant usage by Commissioner. Discussion on Loan Fund. Motion made and passed that \$65,000 be put in 3-6-9 and 12 month CDs. It will leave \$83,000 in fund for loans. Discussion on DAV van replacements. Committee recommends that the 2009 12 passenger van be donated to the Service Dogs of America, Jud. Review Strategic Plan. Discussed Funeral Honor Coin.

***Motion by Hal Weninger to accept report, second by Dave Hilleren. Motion passed.***

***Motion by Murray Strom to donate 12 passenger van to Service Dogs of America, second by Roy Fillion. Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #2]***

**Postwar Trust Fund & Appeals Subcommittee:**

**Appeals Subcommittee** – report by Alan Fehr

Subcommittee voted to uphold Commissioner's decision on loan appeal. The appeal hearing was held after business yesterday.

**Postwar Trust Fund** report

Dave Hilleren elected Chair and Alan Fehr as Secretary. Fund 410 was discussed along with ways to raise the Postwar Trust Fund principal. Donations received for funeral coins deposited in Fund 410 account. Reviewed coin design, suggestions for coins: \$10 per coin, distribute through CVSOs and Veterans Service Organizations can purchase coins to give out or sell.

Discussion on how to handle coins, concerns about accountability as far as the sale and tracking of coins.

***Motion by Jim Haukedahl to accept the report and second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed.***

**Legislative Committee – report by Trish Hodny**

No Chairman picked as two members are missing. Dave Rice and Trish attended ND Veterans Coordinating Council meeting as guests on 11/17/2017.

***Motion by Trish Hodny to approve report, second by Dave Rice. Motion passed.***

Russ Stabler, NDVCC, spoke on Funeral Honors Coin and design ideas. New officers are Karen Meier-President, James Markey-Vice President, and Ron Mathews-Secretary. The Council will be updating its By-Laws and Strategic Plan. Names for the National Cemetery: Red River National Cemetery or Agassiz National Cemetery.

**Round Table Discussion:**

Roy Fillion – attended many meetings and enjoyed all. Liked hearing about the national cemetery. Spoke with some of the people from the coordinating Council.

Jim Haukedahl – Test for Hep C at VA, it's a new procedure. Staff trained and certified Wednesday on the test.

Marlin Schneider – enjoyed meeting, always interesting. We do a lot of good for the veterans even though veterans aren't aware of the Committee.

Bill Peschel – thinking about a coin and where to get the money to get the first batch. Experience working with organizations, would be nice for the firing squad to present coins. Instead of getting coins to Posts, they could go to the CVSOs. It would be more accountable going to CVSOs instead of Posts.

Dave Rice – Good idea to invite Representative Chet Pollert to meeting, should invite local senator/representatives to meetings. Veterans hour on Saturday at 4:00pm 790 2377-9548

Trish Hodny – Apologized for missing yesterday. Item brought up in Coordinating Council meeting, about getting quality CVSOs and regionalize it under the State.

Alan Fehr – liked idea of soldiers cross on the coins. Cost of \$10.00. Can Posts pre-purchase coins using gaming funds? Need to learn more about Strategic Plan. Didn't discuss number of state fund entities beside Veterans Affairs and Home, ND Cares and Outreach services. Would be better to integrate state-funded entities.

Murray Strom: First time member. Interesting to see where money goes in budget. Card to go with coin, have organizations listed. Good idea to have legislators invited.

Jim Verwey: Either meet at Camp Grafton or Bismarck; how to get rural legislators involved. Hoping coins get to families, some families don't want military funeral honors. Good discussion on cemetery.

Richard Belling: another interesting meeting. Welcome Murray to committee. Thanks to VFW as I'm back on committee.

Dave Hilleren: It's great to see interest from the Representatives. Agrees with Davie Rice to invite senators and representatives to meetings. Funeral Directors would be a good place to start in getting coins to the family. Is there a state funeral directors association, if so maybe they would like to participate in the discussion.

Hal Weninger: Great discussion on coins and cemetery. Really appreciated Rep. Pollert candor and words he said. Welcome to Murray and Alan. Appreciated Murray's input on Veterans Affairs subcommittee.

Chairman Overby: we're here to work for the veterans of North Dakota. I appreciate your taking the time to work on issues. Great to see legislators here. Everybody go home and send in proposed named for the national cemetery. They extended the time so we could contribute.

The Commissioner will make arrangements to have the next ACOVA meeting at Camp Grafton, February 15 & 16, 2018.

Darcie Handt, NDCares would like to partner with ACOVA.

People don't really know about the Veterans Coordinating Council.

Need to figure out how to get marketing dollars, to get the word out about the ACOVA, the Department, and the Coordinating Council. Good discussion is the main thing.

Safe travels and thank you for your work.

***Motion to adjourn, second. Motion passed.***

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey  
Secretary