

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
CAMP GRAFTON, DEVILS LAKE ND

February 15, 2018  
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	Murray Strom
Alan Fehr	Dean Overby	Jim Verwey
Roy Fillion	Bill Peschel	Alan Wondrasek
Jim Haukedahl	Dave Rice	

Absent - Excused:

Trish Hodny	Marlin Schneider
Tom Ryan	Hal Weninger

Guests:

Members of ND Veterans Coordinating Council

ND Legislators:

- Senator Dave Oehlke, District 15 Devils Lake.
- Representative Dennis E. Johnson, District 15 Devils Lake
- Representative Chuck Damschen, District 10 Hampden

**Speakers:**

**Dale DeKrey, Associate Director, Fargo VA Health Care Services**

Direct Scheduling - will be implemented in the areas of Audiology, Podiatry, and Optometry to improve access for veterans without them having to go through their primary care doctor. The VA is revising regulations for payment for emergency treatment for non-service connected treatment. April 8, 2016 statements and forward will be reviewed to find out if they fall under the revised regulations. VA Secretary signed executive order so outgoing service members will get one year of mental health care. Gave update on CBOCs: Grafton CBOC will be opening March 18th; Williston and Dickinson are contract CBOCs, they should be opening soon; and Minot CBOC is to open November or December.

The VA is working with communities on military suicides; VA hiring two more coordinators for a total of three coordinators. The VA is reaching out in communities to identify people who are in need of help; one step is to talk with churches.

Representative Dennis Johnson District 15:  
Vietnam veteran, able to relate to veterans. Thanks for what you (committee) do.

James Wang Chairman State Charitable Gaming Commission will be meeting with PWTF subcommittee.

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

Current Strategic Plan will focus on growing capabilities at Camp Grafton; updating training sites, modernizing the firing ranges and adding capabilities to the Armory. Six vendors have contracted with the NDNG to use land and air space at Camp, with another two companies working through the contracting process. This is a revenue source to set stage for future camp expansion. As of February 9<sup>th</sup>, the end strength of the NDARNG was 2968. We are focusing efforts to hit 3000 (our structure allowance is 3100) so we don't jeopardize existing force structure. Updates on National Guard and Air National Guard. 1-188 ADA soldiers may be returning to ND this weekend. Looking forward to increased communication with ACOVA and ND DVA, especially on strategic initiatives and legislative proposals; synchronize our military voice.

**Dustin Hillebrand, Grand Forks DVOP, Job Service North Dakota**

Job Service is going to try and highlight what the state offers veterans in each quarter of the state. Dustin works in the northeastern quarter of the State and his work involves: going out to the Grand Forks AFB twice a month for the transition classes talking with those folks about their next step when they get out of the military; does monthly outreach to the Spirit Lake Region and Devils Lake; and participates in the KNOX 1310 veterans radio program by bringing up issues affecting veterans such as searching for employment. North Dakota is very close to having a functional zero homeless veterans' population. Workforce Employment and Opportunity – low veteran enrollment. VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment – great program to assist veterans. Working with 10 veterans in the VA VRE program. There are small companies using drones who want to hire veterans with flying experience. Strategic Plans for his area – build relationships with employers and potential employees for an easier transition.

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

The new wood working and art studio has opened and residents love the room. Local artists have come in to teach residents in creating art, i.e. painting. The Veterans Home will celebrate 125 years on September 8, 2018. Starting the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of memorial Garden. The Home is struggling to fill basic care side and has had to close some of the unit. They are undergoing a Performance Audit which should be wrapping up soon. It is consuming a lot of staff time but there doesn't seem to be anything of significance. Auditors brought up many things, not all can be implemented. Auditors have been looking at healthcare even though it's not in their expertise. No deficiencies in the State surveys and Federal surveys. The Home has good employees and good staff. There have been issues in the press and people need to remember that everyone is entitled to their opinion. Anyone can contact the Home and make requests under open records law.

Connie Ebach sent in a letter of resignation from the Veterans Home Governing Board. Chairman Overby reported that after looking for candidates, he and Secretary Verwey recommend Mary Vetter for the Governing Board. Mary is the Richland County Veterans Service Officer and has a background in healthcare.

***Motion by Jim Verwey to appoint Mary Vetter to the Veterans Home Governing Board, second by Richard Belling. Motion passes unanimously. [MOTION #1]***

**Lonnie Wangen, Commissioner, North Dakota Veterans Affairs** [Power point presentation.]  
Update on staff activities.

AmeriCorps VISTA – Rick Voldseth, started September 21, 2017. He has conducted background research and completed first version of a strategic plan for the project. He is currently working on converting military service to college credit. He chose the top 10 MOS and is working on that conversion.

Experience Works is down to one person. The other Experience Works person, whose funding ran out, is now a volunteer. They have updated over 7,400 records and have inputted over 800 new DD214's with full data.

Commissioner activities: lots of concerns from County Commissioners.

Update on Loan Program and Grant Program.

No more paper DD214's after April 1, 2018. Access will be through DMDC.

Funeral Honor Coin – received \$6,465 from veterans’ organizations and also sent out letters to non-veteran organizations. This will be an ongoing program. Need to find a good funding stream to pay for the program.

Patriotic License Plates:  
394 Flag  
293 Eagle  
28 Boonie Stomper

Performance Audit – ongoing with no expected end date and they have been helpful in getting the Grant Database usable so we can get accurate information from the inputted data. The Legislative Subcommittee and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee have work to do on the Funeral Honor Coins. A request has gone in to the Emergency Commission to get authority to accept and expend funds.

Questions from a committee member: Any restrictions on who can purchase Funeral Honor Coins? Yes, only family member and blood relative can purchase coins.

Chairman Overby stated subcommittees will now meet. Full committee will reconvene at 8:00am Friday morning.

February 16, 2018

8:00 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  
Alan Fehr  
Roy Fillion  
Jim Haukedahl

Dave Hilleren  
Dean Overby  
Bill Peschel  
Dave Rice

Murray Strom  
Jim Verwey

Absent - excused:

Trish Hodny  
Tom Ryan

Marlin Schneider  
Hal Weninger

Alan Wondrasek

Guests:

Members of ND Veterans Coordinating Council

*Motion to accept minutes from November 16 & 17, 2017, seconded, passed.*

**Committee Reports:**

**Trust Fund & Appeals Subcommittee:** Alan Fehr

**Postwar Trust Fund** report

Reviewed last meeting's minutes. Met with Mr. Wang, subcommittee was informed ACOVA couldn't become charitable organization, but ND Veterans Coordinating Council could become a charitable organization. NDVCC could set up their own trust funds since they probably won't want the money to go into the Post War Trust Fund. Reviewed Fund 410 and recommended asking for a formal Attorney General's Opinion regarding State Treasurer's role with the PWTF. Informal AG Opinion, PWTF is completely under the State Treasurer's control.

*Motion by Jim Verwey to accept report, second by Dave Hilleren. Motion passed.*

**Appeals Subcommittee** – report by Alan Fehr

No appeals.

**Legislative Committee** – report by Dave Rice

Dave Rice and Alan Wondrasek sat in on the ND Veterans Coordinating Council meeting. Council reviewed eight bills and reviewed bills that had failed in past sessions.

Jim Markey reported on North Dakota Veterans Coordinating Council meeting:

Reviewed possible upcoming legislation and discussed previous legislation; decided to table the property tax exemption bill. They are reviewing the possibility of setting up a trust fund.

**ND DVA Budget:**

**Funding for two FTE's, a temp employee, and NDVSO and CVSO training; remove mandate on offsetting Highly Rural Transportation Grant funds; and move DAV van funding back in department operations budget.**

Bill #1	Funding for Stand Down Events:
Bill #2	Funding for Service Dogs / ND Veterans with PTSD
Bill #3	Funding for DAV Vans
Bill #4	ND DVA to accept and expend funds for Funeral Honor Coin
Bill #5	ND DVA to accept and expend funds on continuing basis
Bill #6	ND DVA to work with/apply for benefits with private entities
Bill #7	ACOVA to set goals, objectives and asset allocation of P WTF
Bill #8	NSO / SSO funding, \$50,000 each organization

**Bills that failed in past sessions:**

**2013 Legislation:**

HB 1205	Fees for veterans plates, passed in 2015
HB 1219	Tuition reduction for Dependents of Disabled Veterans
HB 1254	Income tax deduction for Military Retirement Pay
HB 1306	Property Tax exemption
HB 1308	Melvin Norgard Memorial Fund
HB 1323	Patriotic License Plates, passed in 2015

**2015 Legislation:**

HB 1196	National Guard Members reduced hunting/fishing fees
HB 1198	National Guard Free Vehicle Registration
HB 1205	Tuition reduction for Dependents of Disabled Vet
HB 1262	Renter Credit for Disabled Veteran
HB 1413	Veterans Scholarship Grants / Program
SB 2042	Income tax deduction for Military Retirement Pay
SB 2242	State Veterans Cemetery Burial Fees for Dependents of Veterans

**2017 Legislation:**

HB 1056	Income tax deduction for Military Retirement Pay
HB 1225	Property Tax Credit Disabled Veteran Family Trust
HB 1285	Prop. Tax-Freeze value of residence disabled veterans and over 65
HB 1295	Homestead Credit Exemption Disabled Persons or over age 65
HB 1350	Hunting – Retired Veterans and Non-ND resident land owners nonresident fee waived

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|----------|---|
| HCR 3022 | Higher Education to provide financial aid counseling to veterans and dependents |
| SB 2217  | Gaming tax on veteran organizations, 50% to go to PWTF                          |
| SB 2226  | Veteran hunter education: veterans exempt from taking hunter ed.                |

**Department of Veterans Affairs – report by Roy Fillion**

Letter read from Fargo VA thanking the Department in assisting for transportation for non-travel eligible North Dakota veterans.

Reviewed State Treasurer's Report on CD's for Veterans Aid Loan Program. Reviewed Department budget and discussed ACOVA meeting funds. Next meeting could be held at West Fargo VFW and have a one day meeting. ND DVA could apply to Watford City gaming for \$5,000 to pay for ACOVA meeting in Watford City. Discussed vans, no van replacement projected until 2020. Reviewed funeral honor coins, suggested \$10 + sales tax. Murray Strom brought up the possible need to charge sales tax. May need legislation to make the coins tax exempt.

***Motion by Roy Fillion per North Dakota Century Code 37-18, the Department has approval from ACOVA to accept and expend funds for the commemorative memorial coins, second by Murray Strom.*** Commissioner Wangen stated the Department needed authorization from both the ACOVA and the Emergency Commission. ***Passed.***

***Motion by Roy Fillion per North Dakota Century Code 37-18-12, the Department has approval from ACOVA to accept and expend funds, such as Impact funds, second by Richard Belling.*** Commissioner Wangen explained the Department had already received approval from ACOVA when we started receiving Impact Funds. The Auditors determined that authorization only applies to the biennium in which it is approved. The Department would like to get authorization for continuing authority to accept and expend. Legislation is needed for this change. So for now, the Department will need to go to Emergency Fund. ***Motion passed.***

***Motion by Roy Fillion that ACOVA authorize the Commissioner and Department to work with any public or private entity to gain access and service to veterans, second by Murray Strom.*** Commissioner Wangen explained the Auditors interpreted that the Department should only work with government entities. A legislative change would make it permanent for the Department to work with outside public and private entities. Chairman Overby pointed out the Department has been working with the DAV on the van transportation program, and the legislature has been giving money for Service Dogs of America, a private organization. Commissioner Wangen will work with Laura Balliet, Attorney General's Office, on the legislative bill language to cover public and private entities. ***Motion passed.***

Reviewed Policy 413 – Income. No action taken.

Reviewed Policy 415 – Allowable Expenses. No action taken.

Reviewed complaint by Brenda Bergsrud, nothing inappropriate was said, no action taken.

***Motion by Roy Fillion to remove section B from Policy 410, second by Richard Belling.***

Murray Strom explained why the change is needed, per the Attorney General's Office and State Auditors.

Veteran goes to boot camp and gets hurt. VA can treat the leg and make it service connected. They would not meet the definition of a veteran under North Dakota Century Code. Committee passed the change in August, Attorney General reviewed and originally okayed the change. In further review, the change can't be made because of the N.D.C.C. 37-14.01.1 so the policy needs to be reversed.

Jim Verwey asked about a Guardsman getting hurt if they would qualify for our programs. Commissioner Wangen replied No, under N.D.C.C. they don't meet the definition of a veteran.

***Motion passed.***

***Motion by Roy Fillion to accept report, second by Richard Belling. Motion passed.***

Chairman Overby reported that Brenda Bergsrud did write a letter requesting a formal apology. Commissioner Wangen reportedly said her name at a Bottineau County Commissioner's meeting. The Attorney General's office listened to the tape as did Richard Belling, Veterans Affairs Subcommittee Chairman, and her name was not mentioned by the Commissioner. She was not referred to in anyway. Chairman Overby said the tape is available for any committee member that wants to listen to it. There will be no apology from the Commissioner.

Chairman Overby talked about emails he has received. He has received an email every day from someone because they feel he hasn't answered the complaint. The Attorney General's Office said he doesn't need to answer because the issue was brought up and addressed at an ACOVA meeting. Alan Fehr asked what the issue was about. Chairman Overby said the issue was the Department Service Officers were illegal members of the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO). NACVSO researched the issue and it turned out a member for their organization at the time made a change in their policies without any organization notification or vote. There was no record of this change. Upon learning the information, NASCVO changed their policies



back to the original wording. Therefore, the Department was not in violation of NACVSO regulations.

**Round Table Discussion:**

Dave Hilleren - probably will need a campaign to solicit some funds to help with Department budget shortfall.

Bill Peschel – Attorney General Opinion as far as the investment of the PWTF is a good idea. Letter should go with to explain why we are requesting the formal opinion. Appreciate that the fund has grown, more funds available for programs. Committee would like input as far as how much goes to growth and how much available for programs. Getting more cooperation between Committee and State Treasurer's Office would be good. Committee would like to set goals rather than getting a set amount as determined by the Treasurer's Office every biennium.

Alan Fehr – Funeral Honor Coins as to who can purchase the coins, should ACOVA weigh in on that. Didn't realize there would need to be sales tax. Many people would like to buy a coin because they collect coins. Wondered if ACOVA voted on the legislative bills.

Commissioner Wangen reported, the Coordinating Council didn't have a quorum to vote on the bills. Once they do, the bills will come to ACOVA for the Committee's input and vote.

Alan stated he is a clinical psychologist and is a subcontractor who does examinations for the VA for compensation disability. The VA fee for the exam is very low and he can understand why there are so few people doing the exams.

Ron Matthews– passed

Dan Stenvold – as of December 31, the Vietnam Veterans of America pulled accreditations for Service Officers in North Dakota and 19 other states. Congress gave the VVA an end date. Basically, the organization is looking at closing itself down. The claims the VVA holds, they are liable for those forever. Discussion at the National level on what the VVA will do with its assets.

Jim Haukedahl – how to come up with funding

Jim Markey – interesting couple of days for the Council. Majority of members had to conference call in, some couldn't show up because of the weather. He will address the membership to either show up or send an alternate.

Dave Rice - pinewood derby event at the Fargo VFW; last year the VFW donated over \$60,000 to VA. Fargo VFW hosting conference 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of June and Fargo Legion hosting conference last weekend of June. WDAY Honor Flight changed to Veterans

Honor Flight of North Dakota/Minnesota. Changing Facebook and website page to reflect changes. Next flight scheduled for May 20th.

Dave Hilleren asked if there was any coordination with the Native American Honor Flight. Dave Rice said there was communication but they want to do their own.

Jim Verwey – whoever invited Jim Wang, it was very beneficial for the subcommittee. Valley City is a charter member of ND Cares.

Murray Strom – funeral honor coins: if 1 in 4 coins are sold, it would fund the program. Under legislative intent, you can use PWTF funds to help the program.

Roy Fillion – enjoyed the meeting, all presentations were good. Having to take minutes at subcommittee showed him the importance of being secretary.

Richard Belling – good meeting, lots for subcommittee to do. June 8<sup>th</sup>, Mapleton Golf Course for Veterans Home Foundation. Hoping to get Joel Heitkamp to broadcast from there. Thanked Murray and Roy for their work on Subcommittee.

Darcy Handt – ND Cares working on issues such as working with Human Service Centers to get them on board with Tri-Care services. Looking to help with Stand Downs, other events in communities.

Commissioner Wangen posted an email sent to Chairman Overby from Dan Thorstad, Cass County VSO regarding the delays in getting grant and loan applications processed.

Commissioner Wangen explained there isn't enough staff or time to devote full-time to the grant and loan programs.

Chairman Overby said the Commissioner should use his discretion in getting the work done. All the VSRs will be coming in one day to get through the applications. Applications are to be sent to the VSRs to review. If the applications aren't complete, it's sent back to the CVSO.

Commissioner Wangen to revisit how the applications are processed to see if there are ways to decrease the decision time.

Discussion on when the next committee meeting. Chairman Overby would like to wait until the audit is completed even if it means postponing the meeting.

Richard Belling said we could wait and find out if Watford City would come through with funding. Otherwise, there is the West Fargo VFW.

Dan Stenvold asked if there is a meet and greet when the legislators get to Bismarck for the legislative session. Darcy Handt reported ND Cares has a Legislative Day at the Capitol. ACOVA would be welcome if they want to be involved.

Meeting scheduled for May 17 & 18, 2018. Amvets has their convention scheduled for May 18 & 19, 2018.

Meeting will be moved to May 10 & 11, 2018.

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

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey  
Secretary