

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
VETERANS CLUB, STEELE ND

June 28, 2018  
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	Trish Hodny	Murray Strom
Alan Fehr	Dean Overby	Jim Verwey
Roy Fillion	Bill Peschel	Hal Weninger
Jim Haukedahl	Dave Rice	Alan Wondrasek
Dave Hilleren	Marlin Schneider	

Absent - Excused:

Tom Ryan

Guests:

Laura Balliet, ND Attorney General's Office  
Members of ND Veterans Coordinating Council

ND Legislators:

- Representative Vernon Laning, District 8

**Speakers:**

**Lonnie Wangen, Commissioner, ND Veterans Affairs**

Update on Staff Outreach/Presentations

Update on AmeriCorps VISTA – Rick Voldseth – Military Service Education Credit Research. Rick will be done in October; two new VISTAS will start work.

Facebook – 1469 likes; 1463 followers

Update on Commissioner Speeches/Visits

Veterans Preference – Four appeals with one appeal going to the ND Office of Administrative Hearing. All four appeals were denied, the hiring agencies followed correct procedures.

Update on Loan and Grant Programs and Funds.

Funeral Honor Coins – 5,000 coins produced with 1,132 ordered from Funeral Homes.  
Patriotic License Plates: 531 Flag, 423 Eagle, 38 Boonie Stomper  
Audit: DONE, it was reported to the Legislative Audit and Fiscal Review Committee

There were no recommendations on the ACOVA portion of the Audit. Therefore, no response was needed from Chairman Overby.

Highly Rural Transportation Program: Commissioner played TV ad.

Fargo National Cemetery: broke ground; Director will visit first week of July. Will not use Red River since there is also a Red River in Texas. The goal is to open in 2019.

Mark Johnson asked about the federal grant regarding the Veterans Home Cemetery. Commissioner Wangen will check into it.

**Don Larson, Director of Strategic Engagement, ODNEY: PEW Charitable Trust  
Shane Gettel, North Dakotans for Dental Access.**

They would like to get the Legislature to approve dental therapy in North Dakota. Military has focused on dental readiness as well as military readiness. National Guard personnel lack access to dental care unlike their military counterparts.

A Dental Therapist is trained in about 40 dental procedures. One in four dentists in North Dakota would hire a dental therapist. The dentist doesn't need to be in direct supervision of the dental therapist. This means, the dental therapist can work when the dentist is out of the office and expand the hours available for dental care.

**LaVonne Liversage, Director, Fargo VA Health Care Services**

The pending nomination of the VA Secretary, Robert Wilke, looks very favorable. The VISN 23 Director retired at the end of May and Pat Kelly, Minneapolis VA, is the interim director. VA is doing well budget-wise and has received additional funding. Access is good, primary care is very good. There is recruiting for specialty care positions at this time. Williston and Dickinson VA clinics will be opening on July 2, 2018. The Minot CBOC is moving from the Air Base into town. This should work better for veteran's access.

Brief overview of VA Mission Act of 2018 [HANDOUT]

1. Streamlines VA's Community Care Programs

Consolidates seven VA community care programs into one streamlined program.

Removes arbitrary 30-day/40-mile barriers to veterans' care in the community.

Provides \$5.2 million for the Veterans Choice Fund.

2. Improves VA Healthcare Delivery

Removes barriers for VA healthcare professionals to practice telemedicine  
Allows the VA to modernize assets and infrastructure

3. Expands Caregivers

Expands eligibility for VA's Caregiver Program to veterans of all generations.  
Requires VA to implement an information technology system to better support, assess and monitor the program.

The only money that was provided is \$5.2 billion for the Veterans Choice Fund.

Lots of construction happening at the VA Facility; possibly finished in 2019.

**Joe Hall, Veterans Employment Team, Job Service ND**

Brings Greetings from Michele Kommer, Executive Director of Job Service.  
He is a DVOP (Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program) specialist responsible for the SW quadrant of the state, including the Standing Rock Reservation. The Veterans' Employment Team provided career services to over 750 veterans in the past 12 months. Statistical information given on the number of job openings, areas of work and number of people looking for jobs in North Dakota. Within a six-week timeframe this Spring, JSND hosted 8 large venue job fairs. The first ½ hour of some of the job fairs are open to Veteran job seekers only. JSND has made the labor exchange system more attractive to Veteran job seekers by adding a "Veteran Friendly" characteristic for businesses to select when posting jobs. Almost 1,000 ND businesses now indicate that they are Veteran Friendly in the system. Information given on veterans incarcerated at the ND State Penitentiary and the programs aimed at skills training for inmates and employer education and awareness to promote hiring opportunities.

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

Prioritized Issues

1. Tax free Retiree Pay / Tax free Military Pay
1. Transitioning Licensure and Credentialing, Education Credit for Military Training or Education, Spouse Licensure Reciprocity
3. Medical and Dental – Behavioral Health, Tricare for Federal Employees, Tricare Education, Dental costs and providers that accept Tricare (United Con.). Behavioral Health capacity is low. Better oversight of Health Net

2019 ND National Guard State Legislative Agenda

1. Funding statewide maintenance projects
2. Expansion of maneuver training areas and weapon ranges (Camp Grafton)

3. Funding Dickinson Readiness Center FY22
4. Authorization and funding Fargo Readiness Center
5. Expand National Guard tuition program
6. State Defense Force language modifications.
7. Receipt and execution of funds by ND Cares

#### ND Cares

Update on activities

211 First Link has the best database for one resource for information

#### **Henry Gerving, President, ND County and Tribal VSO Association**

The Association represents 52 of 53 counties and 4 of 4 tribal offices. Between myself and Mary Vetter, one of us will be attending ACOVA meetings.

#### **Mark Johnson, Director, ND Veterans Home**

Workshop is going well and is in use a lot more. About 3 years ago, a federal grant was applied through the VA, as a result \$700,000 will be coming back to fund the workshop. There is a 99% occupancy rate in skilled; basic care is down. PBS did a promo for the Veterans Home; it has resulted in more tours and interest in the Home. The Foundation Golf Tournament was successful, there were 36 full teams playing in the tournament.

Changes in the VA Mission Act of 2018 may impact on the Veterans Homes; especially the initiative on funding caregivers which will keep veterans in their homes longer. National Awards were won by Mark Johnson – Eli Pick Award; Wanda Cavett– Nurse Director of the Year for the State of North Dakota and Nurse Director of the Year for Central Region of the United States; and Jan Neameyer – Social Worker of the Year for the State of North Dakota.

June 29, 2018

9:07 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:

Present:

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

Absent - excused:

Tom Ryan

Guests:

Members of ND Veterans Coordinating Council

Chairman Overby announced there are appointments that need to be made on the North Dakota Veterans Governing Board. He then turned the meeting over to Secretary Jim Verwey to conduct the nominations.

Secretary Verwey reported there are two openings on the Veterans Home Governing Board. Dean Overby and Steve Frojen terms are up and both are willing to serve again. Floor opened for nominations.

***Motion by Richard Belling for Dean Overby and Steve Frojen to be appointed to the ND Governing Board, second by Hal Weninger. Motion passed.***

***Motion by Jim Haukedahl to re-appoint Gary Skarphol as Chairman of the ND Governing Board, second by Dave Rice. Motion passed.***

**ND Veterans Coordinating Council – Ron Matthews**

- Womens Veterans License Plate are not needed at this time.
- Formed subcommittee for lobbyists.
- Discussed gaming laws and how it will affect the veterans organizations.
- Talked about DAV vans, whether they need them or not. Followed Commissioner's recommendation not to replace.
- Combining some of the bills 1-2-3-8 & 4-5-6.

**Subcommittee Reports:**

**Legislative Committee** – report by Trish Hodny

Hodny will continue to serve as Chairman. The Subcommittee sat in on ND Veterans Coordinating Council meeting.

Bills Combined: #1 – Funding for Stand Down Events, #2 – Funding for Service Dogs, #3 – Funding for DAV Funds and #8 – NSO / SSO Funding \$50,000 for each of the organizations.

Bills Combined: #4 – ND DVA to accept and expend funds for Funeral Honor Coin, #5 - ND DVA to accept and expend funds on continuing basis and #6 – ND DVA to work with/apply for benefits with private entities.

Bill #7 – ACOVA to set goals, objectives and asset allocation of PWTF.

It is hoped that working with the State Treasurer will negate having to submit a bill on the issue. An MOU will be sought between the State Treasurer and ACOVA

Recommendation that the full ACOVA back the bills the Coordinating Council has accepted.

Discussed DAV van issue and referred it back to Commissioner to continue best practices.

Requested Commissioner get copies of the bills being considered by the National Guard as described by Darci Handt.

Discussed the Audit Report, will defer to the full committee as to the sustainability of ACOVA. Deferred action on strategic plan.

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

***Motion by Trish Hodny that ACOVA support the eight bills as read by Ron Matthews, second by Hal Weninger.***

Commissioner Wangen reported Representative Lanning was receptive to sponsoring a bill. There is an ad hoc veterans caucus, they have decided not to submit any bills. He will go back to the caucus to try and change that and going forward to work with ACOVA and Coordinating Council on the bills.

Discussion on the importance of having legislators knowledgeable about the bills going through session

***Motion passed.***

**Trust Fund & Appeals Subcommittee:** Alan Fehr  
Discussion on Fund 410. No requests for PWTF monies.

***Motion by Alan Wondrasek to accept report, second by Jim Haukedahl.***

As of June 2018: \$14,880 has been raised by license plates. \$25 fee, first year DOT recoups \$20, PWTF gets \$5; succeeding years, DOT gets \$10, PWTF gets \$15.

Trish Hodny brought up letting the DOT decide if there would be other license plates rather than ACOVA and NDVCC.

***Motion passed.***

**Appeals Subcommittee** – report by Alan Fehr  
No appeals.

***Motion by Alan Wondrasek to accept report, second by Jim Haukedahl. Motion passed.***

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

Underwriting guidelines. Member of ND DVA will meet with the AG and Bank of ND to establish underwriting procedures. Member of ND DVA will meet with AG for guidance for a structured plan to recover principal amounts.

Discussion: we need to determine exactly what type of discharge qualifies for a hardship grant. Member of NDDVA will meet with AG to properly define “veteran”.

Agreed with ND DVA optional package for 2019-2021 budget.

Recommend NDDVA work to establish a distribution of Impact Foundation funds with only ACOVA approval necessary.

ACOVA and ND DVA did not agree with Audit finding on number of members from service organizations.

DAV van: Authorizes Commissioner to move funding from vans to salary funding. Authorizes the Commissioner to request to the Emergency Commission to increase spending authority of \$80,000 for programs for ND Veterans; money to be received from private sector.

Reviewed complaints, no action at this time.

Reviewed strategic plan, no action at this time.

***Motion by Hal Weninger that the full ACOVA adopt the proposed policy and procedures and the application for the Commemorative Coin to include mailing out the coins, second by Richard Belling.***

Discussion on how to simplify having families complete the form and getting the coins to them. The form will be provided to funeral homes, veterans service officers and available on the Department's website. The Department is the only entity that can sell the coin, no other entity or individual can do it, this is information from the Attorney General's Office and Office of Management and Budget.

***Motion passed.***

***Motion by Hal Weninger that the full ACOVA move \$37,200 from transportation vans to salary budget line, second by Richard Belling.***

Alan Fehr asked for clarification on the vans. The legislature passed a line item for vans and funded it from the Department's operating budget. The DAV received a free van so the van funding isn't needed this biennium. It won't be until 2021 when a van will be needed.

The Department will be experiencing a budget shortfall due to \$100,000 from federal funds that replaced general funds for salaries. The 10% administrative cost from federal will not cover the salary expenses.

The Emergency Commission approved Department's requests.

***Motion passed.***

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

Chairman Overby spoke on the Audit report as presented to the Legislative and Audit Review Committee. The auditors didn't contact any stakeholders, such as ACOVA or the veterans' organizations. There were no recommendations made by the Auditors on the ACOVA audit, only negative comments. The ACOVA doesn't just have oversight over the Department, they are there to take care of North Dakota's 57,000 veterans and their families.

Alan Fehr talked about the importance of having geographical representation. The ACOVA membership covers the entire State.



Trish Hodny wonders who the stakeholder(s) were that the Auditors referenced in their report and can an open records request be made to find out the names. Chairman Overby said it's hard to get a fair audit if all the stakeholders weren't included in the discussion.

Discussion turned to the loan program. Trish Hodny talked about increasing the loan amount up to \$10,000. Commissioner Wangen said it would take a legislative change to increase the loan amount as it is \$5,000 in Century Code.

Commissioner Wangen stated there is no definition of dishonorable discharge in Century Code. According to the Attorney General, if there is no definition, you use the common wording. The auditors looked at the federal definition but the Department can't use the federal definition. They made a mistake in their finding.

Alan Fehr stated there is an opportunity in using the Audit to make a positive statement on who ACOVA is and what we do. Trish Hodny said "to say thank you for the audit and here is what we're doing to make it better." Chairman Overby agreed and said he and Commissioner Wangen will get together and write a response.

***Motion by Hal Weninger that he would write a positive response to the Audit for a press release. second by Trish Hodny. Motion passed.***

**Round Table Discussion:**

Roy Fillion: Veterans Home Golf Tournament: thanked everyone who came and supported it, profit of close to \$10,000

Jim Haukedahl: another good meeting

Hal Weninger: very good and informative meeting. Disillusioned with the audit, they put more authority on people who are not involved with ACOVA or the Department

Dave Rice: Military Appreciation Night at the Red Hawks game – great turnout; Veterans Honor Flight of North Dakota and Minnesota – new name and getting more press, planning another flight for the fall, cost is \$150,000 per flight.

Richard Belling: good meeting, thanked Steele Veterans Club, Service Dog "Whopper" is doing well in his training, July 12<sup>th</sup> Red River Valley Fair Hometown Heroes – he is one of the recipients of the award.

Marlin Schneider: we all work well as a committee. They didn't get a lot right in the audit.

Dave Hilleren: ND Native American Honor Flight will be going in the fall.

Murray Strom: Thanked the committee for coming to Steele. Referring to the Audit, he's not aware of any "young" veterans group.

Jim Verwey: Vietnam Veterans having their annual picnic in July. Really a great meeting. Really upset about Audit, there were no recommendations. Information on dental therapist was great, not sure it will go through legislatively.

Alan Wondrasek: Audit – it's absolutely appropriate to put something out about it, Veterans Memorial in Bottineau wasn't done by County but by the veterans. As past commander of AMVETS \$15,000 was raised for the Service Dogs. The past Auxilliary president raised over \$5,000 to Annie's House for a veteran program – it helps disabled veterans.

Alan Fehr: wondering if ACOVA should make a motion in support of the dental therapist.

***Motion by Alan Fehr that ACOVA support the licensure of dental therapists, second by Alan Wondrasek. Motion passed.***

Bill Peschel: Discussion of having Treasurer meet with the Postwar Trust Fund subcommittee.

Trish Hodny: <http://www.vettix.org/ref/411451> - free tickets to concerts for veterans. All you pay is one fee for handling. Will hold tickets at will call for you to pick up. The company is a non-profit. She was appointed in March 2012, Audit regarding the lack of qualifications for ACOVA membership – she was very bothered by it. As a veteran, she uses the VA and has full confidence in the care she receives there. She feels the auditors overlooked the experience that the members have as veterans, and as members who have served many years on ACOVA. Geographic location is important as much as everything else. She works with young people on UND campus, and the young people prioritize their family over joining organizations. Audits are there to improve, not just to take a few stakeholders opinions.

Commissioner Wangen: will get back to the NCA name for the cemetery. It will probably be Fargo National Cemetery. He did type up a response to every recommendation in the audit.

Jim Verwey asked where the Commemorative Coin policies will go. Commissioner Wangen explained a packet will go to funeral directors containing: a thank you letter, the program policies and an order form. The same information will be on our website and emailed out to VSO's and commanders.

***Motion to accept minutes from February 15-16, 2018 by Bill Peschel, second by Murray Strom. Motion carried with 1 abstain (Trish Hodny wasn't present at that meeting.)***

Chairman Overby talked about the diversity of the ACOVA membership. The one thing they all have in common is that they care about the veterans of North Dakota. The

auditors didn't talk to the stakeholders they should have rather than the few they did. The State Treasurer didn't agree with the audit that there were problems between her and ACOVA. Sometimes it was strained but they are both committed to helping the Fund grow and help North Dakota's veterans.

Tentatively schedule meeting for September 13 & 14, 2018 with hope the appointments will be made. Meeting to be at Steele Vets Club.

*Motion to adjourn, second. Motion passed.*

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey  
Secretary