

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
VETERANS CLUB, STEELE ND

November 15, 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	Gary Maddock	Tom Ryan
Roy Fillion	Dean Overby	Jim Verwey
Jim Haukedahl	Dave Rice	Hal Weninger
Dave Hilleren	Marlin Schneider	Alan Wondrasek

Absent - Excused:

None

Guests:

Members of ND Veterans Legislative Council  
ND Legislators

Chairman Overby welcomed Tom Ryan. He has been working in Puerto Rico for FEMA for the past year.

**Speakers:**

**Dale DeKrey, Associate Director, Fargo VA Healthcare Services**

Robert McDivitt is the new VISN 23 Director. Mr. McDivitt was the Fargo Director from 2006-2009. VA Secretary has four issues that will be priority:

- (1) Customer Service,
- (2) implement Mission Act,
- (3) Replace aging electronic system, and
- (4) transform our business system.

The Minot Vet Center is set to open December 14<sup>th</sup>.

There is a new website: VA.GOV; it is a one stop shop for veterans looking for information.

November 28 will be the opening of the emergency center at the VA Hospital.

Fargo VA promoting whole health, acupuncture, massage therapist, chiropractor. The goal is to keep people healthy, instead of focusing on their illness. This is a pilot program.

**Jaime Wood, Deputy District Director, Small Business Administration**

Federal policies are in place to serve the veteran demographic. Public Law 105-50 is the biggest law in place. Their goal is to serve the next great generation with counseling and training, government contracting and disaster assistance. There are 68 SBA District Offices across the U.S. and they have many partners and resources to help them.

**Wendy Klug, Program Manager, Veterans Business Outreach Centers**

There are 22 centers nationwide and their mission is to help veterans start a business. Wendy works with a diverse group, i.e. college students, retired military, spouses of military members.

Boots to Business: an entrepreneurial training program that takes place on military installations; including Minot and Grand Forks ND.

Boots to Business Follow-on options: Market Research, Revenue Readiness and Business Fundamentals.

Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development and an Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs: looking for North Dakotans to serve on the two boards.

David Martin, State Director, Dakotas Veterans Business Outreach Center was introduced.

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

Staff Presentations:

Mike Conklin – Has been with the Department for seven years and worked for the AMVETS before coming to the Department. He had three BVA Hearings this month; one of the hearings he was able to get a Vietnam Veteran service-connected for PTSD and entitled to a retro check going back for five years. Mike talked about the County and Tribal VSO Fall Conference that was held in Fargo Oct 14 – 17, 2018. Not only do the State VSO's work with veterans to receive federal benefits, they also work with veterans to apply for state benefits.

Calie Lindseth is the Department's Women's Veteran Coordinator. She is attempting to do more outreach to female veterans and works on six to ten claims related to sexual trauma each month. She is also a resource for education benefits. Calie has been piggybacking with other organizations to be able to do outreach due to the Department's budget. She has been doing outreach in Rolette County, Devils Lake, Bismarck, and New Town. She attended the County and Tribal VSO Fall Conference that was held in Fargo Oct 14 – 17, 2018.

Tom Webb is the newest member of the team. He attended the Rolette County Veteran Outreach and the VALOR Board Meeting at NDSU. He was the Keynote Speaker at NDSU's Veteran Day Flag Raising Ceremony. Tom spoke on working on the grant and loan applications every other Friday in addition to his other duties. He also attended the County and Tribal VSO Fall Conference that was held in Fargo Oct 14 – 17, 2018.

Bryan Watters is the VSO Supervisor, and Grants and Loans Manager. He attends the VA Director's Meetings, represents the Commissioner at the ND Cares Executive Meeting, the Single Resource Hub Working Group and the ND Cares Coalition. Bryan attended the County and Tribal VSO Fall Conference that was held in Fargo Oct 14 – 17, 2018. He thanked Mike, Calie and Tom for all the work they do for the Department and talked about each individual's specialty.

Trish asked about how many comp and pensions claims come in from the counties. Bryan replied that two-thirds come from CVSO's and the rest from the Department NSO's. Somewhere between 100-125 claims come in a month. The Department has had a big increase over the past year.

Trish talked about the quality of the fully-developed claims from the counties. Bryan said there is no consistency from the counties; there has been turnover in some counties; some of it is due to the county population but he has seen a lot of improvement from the counties. He would like to spend one week a month visiting service officers that need assistance to give them training.

Chairman Overby recognized Representative Kim Koppelman:  
Representative Koppelman (District 13): Bring greetings from ND Legislature; we appreciate all the work you do for veterans. He chaired the Judiciary committee and is the senior House member from Cass County. An organizational meeting will be taking place soon with the Legislature starting in January 2019.

Commissioner Wangen introduced Chris Kratochvil, State Approving Agency Director. Chris provides technical assistance to School Certifying officials and promotes on-the-job training and workplace apprenticeships, i.e. plumbing, electrical. He reviews school catalog updates at the colleges and universities. Chris handles the entire State of North Dakota by himself. The State Approving Agency is a federally funded agency. He is a former CVSO and is a member of the North Dakota Guard.

Trish asked what is the advantage for a veteran to do an apprenticeship. Chris said for example, police department - attending the academy, receiving pay like a regular employee and getting a stipend from VA. Anyone under the GI Bills is eligible for an apprenticeship or on-the-job training.

Commissioner participated in the NASDVA Executive Meetings; HRTG meetings; meetings with legislators, long meeting with Governor regarding the Task Force for Veterans Affairs, met with Lt. Governor about rural mental health needs. The National Cemetery in Fargo has been officially named “Fargo National Cemetery”. Finished up with the NDDOT Grants, \$2.5 million granted to ND transit providers. Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee: Commissioner made recommendation to move away from highly rural and move to Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA), this would make little towns in counties that would otherwise be considered urban because of one large city become available to use the transportation vans. At the Special Medical Advisory Group (SMAG) meeting; transportation needs are on the Secretary’s radar to help overcome the distances in the Dakotas and Montana.

Commissioner Wangen asked Calie to talk about social media. She said the younger generation gets their information from social media. She works on the Department’s Facebook page, ACOVA Facebook page, Twitter and has started on Instagram account.

Commissioner gave updates on Grant Program, Loan Program and Funeral Honor Coin Program.

### **Major Jay Sheldon, ND National Guard**

State Tuition Assistance (STA) Program: Students were notified there would be changes going into the next semester.

Training Area Expansion at Camp Grafton South: The Guard needs to enlarge its current training area (9,000 acres) and would like to expand to an additional 6,000 acres which will be used for machine gun and larger weapons training. Currently units go out of state to do training. The Guard wants to work with willing landowners on the exchange of property. The expansion would be paid for by the federal government.

NDCOMPASS (North Dakota Commission on Military Priorities and Strategic Sustainment): Four areas of concern: tax exemption for serving military and retiree pay; licensure portability for spouses and military training; educational credit for military training and service; and improved accessibility and affordability of behavioral health.

### **Jerome Billups, Veterans Program Administrator, Job Service North Dakota**

Talked about the changes in Job Service. With his new position, there will be one DVOP in Fargo. It is hoped that a second can be hired.

**Mary Vetter, Vice President, ND County and Tribal VSO Association**

Mary is the Richland County Veterans Service Officer, a member of ND Cares and a member of the Veterans Home Governing Board.

She is currently the Vice-President of the Association. 52 of 53 counties and all the Tribal reservations are members of the Association. There is a need to have more training in addition to the two training conferences a year. There are two legislative bills they are proposing: change the verbiage concerning accreditation and change the verbiage concerning definition of a veteran for the purpose of veteran's preference. The Association would like to be more actively involved in talking with local legislators. The Association is also a member of the Association of Counties.

Discussion on how the definition change would impact veteran's preference for employment purposes.

**Subcommittee meetings held**

November 16, 2018

10:00 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  
Alan Fehr  
Roy Fillion  
Jim Haukedahl  
Dave Hilleren

Gary Maddock  
Dean Overby  
Dave Rice  
Marlin Schneider  
Murray Strom

Tom Ryan  
Jim Verwey  
Hal Weninger  
Alan Wondrasek

Absent - excused:

Trish Hodny

Guests:

Members of ND Veterans Legislative Council  
***Motion to accept September 2018 minutes by Alan Wondrasek, second by Jim Haukedahl.*** Corrections to the minutes read by Jim Verwey. ***Motion passed.***

**Sean Cleary, Governor's Office**

A very productive meeting was held a month ago with the Governor, Chairman Dean Overby, Commissioner Lonnie Wangen and MG Dohrmann.

Governor Burgum announced the Task Force for Veterans Affairs. He wanted to take a high level view on the governance and services provided by the State through the ACOVA, the Department and the Veterans Home; what is going on now and what could potentially be improved on. Today is the deadline for applying for a position on the Task Force. There will be representation from ACOVA and ND DVA on the Task Force. An informational meeting will be held before the Legislative Session starts and the Task Force will meet four times during the next year. Task Force will issue a written report on the recommendations. The Executive Order states eleven to fifteen members will serve on the Task Force. General Robert Fode was selected as Chair for the Task Force. No official agenda has been set. The Informational meeting will provide an overview on veteran's services. Immediately following the legislative session, the first meeting will be scheduled. Subject matter experts will be brought in, i.e. Human Services, Job Service.

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

Received notice from the VA that funding was approved for \$600,000, this will go back in Norgaard Fund. There was also a donation given to the Home by an individual to help cover the cost of the workshop. The total cost of workshop is \$1 million.

Lisbon is the first veterans home facility to get telemedicine. The mental health piece is very positive for some of the veterans in the facility. There are other areas that can be offered: audiology, cardiac, ophthalmology, dermatology. Telemedicine will also be offered to people on the southeastern side of ND.

One piece in the strategic plan is to bring someone in to review the Veterans Home, how to plan for the future of the Home and develop the grounds, and to include a Memorial Garden.

Many issues going on with the Administrator's House on the grounds of the Veteran's Home. The big issue is the mold in the house. There are also significant structure issues.

The Governing Board decided to demolish the Administrator's House and move the boilers. The Board will be working with OMB and other agencies on how to proceed. Risk Management came in to identify safety issues. There will be one main entrance (Front door) for the Home rather than all the side entrances for safety/security reasons.

Tom Ryan – what percentage of the residents utilize behavioral health services? Mark Johnson's response, "around 85% of residents have issues."

The Veterans Home has been down beds, so 4 positions haven't been hired. Losing 6 FTE's may cause the Veterans Home not to be able to have the entire facility open. They are at 70% capacity, which is the market norm. When the Veterans Home is able to do some advertising, they see an increase in activity.

### **Subcommittee Reports:**

**Department of Veterans Affairs** – report by Hal Weninger  
Committee reviewed the policies using Audit recommendations:

#### **Veterans Aid Loan Program Policies:**

##### **Policy 204: Underwriting**

The subcommittee discussed if the spouse's income is used, the need for the spouse to sign the Promissory Note and obtaining a credit report. Currently when the veteran dies, the debt is written off. If the spouse signs the Promissory Note, then they would be responsible for the debt.

Commissioner Wangen explained the Department already looks at the spouse's income as contributing to the household expenses but doesn't make the spouse liable for the debt nor obtains a credit report on the spouse.

#### **Hardship Grant Policies Reviewed:**

Policy 261: Collection

Policy 200: Loan Purpose and Authority

Policy 201: Application Requirements

Policy 202: File Access

Legislative Subcommittee looking to make a change in Century Code

Policy 205: Appeals- Veterans Aid Loan

Policy 210: Applicant Eligibility

Policy 211: Administrative Committee and Employee Eligibility

Policy 212: Payment Priority Disbursement

Policy 230: Terms and Limits

Policy 231: Active Loans Allowed

Policy 232: Interest Refunds

Policy 250: Late Fees  
Policy 260: Delinquent Loans  
Policy 262: Charge Off

***Motion by Hal Weninger to accept the policies as written and to take effect after legal counsel has reviewed them, second by Alan Fehr. Motion carried.***

Reviewed and agrees with procedures on Veterans Aid Loan CD's.

Van program update given by Commissioner. Vans will be moved around to get the maximum mileage allowable. It looks like two vans may need to be replaced in 2022. Murray Strom asked about the ridership, it looks like there is no need for 12 passenger vans.

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

**PWTF Subcommittee** – report by Alan Fehr.

Reviewed Fund 410 report and State Treasurer's Report. No new ideas for raising additional revenue even though there is a need.

Commissioner Wangen gave information on the Funeral Honor Coins.

***Motion by Alan Fehr to accept report, second by Jim Verwey. Motion carried.***

**Appeals Subcommittee** – report by Alan Fehr

Appeals hearing was scheduled for this morning but had to be postponed. It is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, November 21<sup>st</sup>. Committee reviewed the applicant's file.

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

**Legislative Committee** – report by Dave Rice

Jim Nelson is the lobbyist chair for the ND Veterans Legislative Council. Reviewed past bills. Reviewed Audit recommendations. Reviewed the Strategic Plan and will give a full report on it at the next meeting.



**ND Veterans Legislative Council – Ron Matthews**

- #1 Funding for StandDown events – Rep Magrum will sponsor, still debating how much funding is needed.
- #2 Funding for Service Dogs/ND Veterans with PTSD – Rep. Lanning will sponsor
- #3 Funding for DAV Vans –funding for two vans - \$37,200, no sponsor
- #4 NSO/SSO funding \$50,000 each organization – no sponsor yet
- #5 NDDVA to accept and expend funds on continuing basis – Rep. Lanning will sponsor
- #6 NDDVA to work with/apply for benefits with private entities – Rep. Lanning will sponsor
- #7 ACOVA to set goals, objectives and asset allocation of PWTF – Rep. Lanning will sponsor
- #8 Change name of ND Veterans Coordinating Council – Rep. Magrum will sponsor  
ND Veterans Legislative Council
- #9 Military retirement exempt from income tax – Rep. Steve Vetter will sponsor
- #10 Military Sacrifice License Plate – sent out email to reconsider this bill
- #11 Income Tax Check Off for ND Income Tax – Rep. Karla Rose Hanson will sponsor  
Add to the principal of the ND Veterans Post War Trust Fund
- #12 NDDVA File Access –
- #13 ND Association of County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers changes - Sen. Judy Lee will sponsor

Alan Wondrasek asked the Commissioner to explain the strategic plan and some of the changes proposed.

***Motion by Dave Rice to accept the report, second by Alan Wondrasek. Motion carried.***

Next meeting to be held February 14 & 15, 2019 at the Quality Inn, Bismarck ND.

Chairman Overby stated due to weather conditions the committee will forgo the Round Table Discussion.

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

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey

Secretary