

**ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMFORT INN, BISMARCK ND**

September 19 & 20, 2024
1:00 PM

Meeting called to order at 1:00pm by Chairman Murray Strom. Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence observed for POW/MIAs and the remains of a ND WWII veteran that has been identified as USS Oklahoma Sailor Edward D. Johnson.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Steven Anderson	Dave Hilleren	Cynthia Schlosser
Brian Bartlett	Tish Hodny (TEAMS)	Murray Strom
Joe Best	Lamar Kruckenberg	Jim Verwey
Jim Hapala	Vernon Laning	Jacob Volk
	Tom Ryan (TEAMS)	Hal Weninger (TEAMS)

Absent:

Gary Maddock - Excused

Guests:

Dean DePountis, Attorney, Attorney General's Office

Chairman Strom recognized new ACOVA members Cynthia Schlosser, Jim Hapala, and Jacob Volk. He presented them with an ACOVA pin.

Cynthia Schlosser – lives in Bismarck, has two sons and six grandchildren. Spent 29.5 years in military as a Nurse. Her last military assignment was serving on a special staff to a two-star General.

Jim Hapala – lives in West Fargo and was on the Veterans Legislative Council for four years. He served in Vietnam. He is married with two kids and worked at one company for forty years. He has been retired for some time.

Jacob Volk – lives in Devils Lake and has two kids. He worked at Montana-Dakota Utilities and served in the National Guard. He rides motorcycle and enjoys fishing.

Chairman Strom asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

Motion to approve Agenda by Dave Hilleren, 2nd by Vernon Laning. Motion carried.

ND DVA Report – Commissioner Lonnie Wangen [POWER POINT PRESENTATION]

Updated committee on the activity of Department Veterans Benefits Specialists for the period of Apr-June 2024. Claims work continues trending upward with the submission of 267 claims and 66 Appeals, with a biennium total so far of 6,469 claims submitted and Retro payments totaling \$16,510,467.15. Outreach interaction included three counties, Turtle Mountain Stand Down and the Spring Training Conference. Funeral Honor Coins can be purchased on-line through the State Historical Society. Donations are coming in to help place bridge signs for the “Bridges for the Fallen”. Instead of the families having to pay for the signs, veterans’ organizations are sending in funds.

Updates were given on the State Approving Agency, the Department Loan Division, and various programs the Commissioner is involved with such as the Fisher House and 988.

Jason Petti, Fargo VAHCS Director – There are 18,000+ unenrolled veterans in North Dakota. He has been doing a large media push trying get veterans to enroll. There have been over 230 flu shots given as of yesterday. Schedule a meeting with MHA Nation representatives (Three Affiliated Tribes) about travel issues. Fisher House update: six to seven properties are being looked at for a site. Properties are within a 5-mile radius of VA Hospital, with one in Moorhead. He will be leaving his post on September 30th. The Fargo VA Hospital was rated a 4 STAR facility; veterans get exceptional service at Fargo VA Hospital.

ND Cares: Michelle Gauvin-Panos, Director

ND Cares has been doing radio ads for the ND Veterans Home and a few other entities; they are now doing ads for Legal Services of North Dakota that is providing support to veterans. She is trying to get training in military culture for mental health providers to help providers understand veteran’s backgrounds better. Oil and Gas companies in Watford City put on a mental health event. There were several suicides of their employees who had veterans’ status. Discussion on the lack of Tricare behavioral health providers. There will be a Rural Suicide Awareness Summit at the end of September in Minot. ND Cares is working with the VA to do an event in Bismarck during the winter.

ND National Guard, LTC Sheldon, Adjutant General’s Office [POWER POINT PRESENTATION]

U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Mitchell Johnson officially assumed command as Adjutant General of the North Dakota National Guard this past weekend. He will also serve as the Director of North Dakota Department of Emergency Services.

FY23 National Guard Economic Impact is at \$315 million dollars. The largest amount is payroll, followed by expenditures and indirect wages and is spread throughout the State. Top five Budget Initiatives: Critical Infrastructure State Match - \$6M, Infrastructure Insurance - \$1.2M, Regional Training Institute Authority - \$34M Federal, Next Generation Leadership Pilot Program - \$1.09M and Williston Readiness Center Design Funds - \$2.5M. Top 4 Policy Initiatives: State Active-Duty Death Gratuity, State Active-Duty Medical Protections, Update Century Code to match Federal Law, and Prevent state from adopting Defend the Guard Legislation.

Job Service ND – Jerome Billups, Director DVOP & LVRS

There are 12,000 open jobs on the Job Service ND website. The majority of openings are in the larger cities. ND unemployment for nonveterans is at 2.5%, ND unemployment for veterans is 1.1%.

Job Service ND is assisting veterans coming out of prison, so they have the skills and tools needed for employment. This assistance is helping keep the recidivism rate low. Upcoming job fairs: today in Williston, 25th in Devils Lake, and 26th in Minot. The first veterans virtual job fair held across the nation is scheduled for November 7th. There are currently 1,500 active resumes on Job Service ND website.

ND Assoc. of County & Tribal Veterans Service Officers; Chris Deery, President, Cass County VSO

A successful Standdown was held on September 11th in Fargo; over 300 veterans attended the event. Cold weather gear was handed out and a meal was provided to the attendees. The Outdoor Adventure Foundation is set for October 21-23, 2024. It is a pheasant hunt located in the Fort Ransom, ND area. Fargo VA is giving flu shots. A \$21Million Mental Wellness Recovery Center is set to break ground in Fargo; it will be located on the VA grounds.

ND Veterans Home Governing Board: Vernon Laning, Chair

Staffing continues to be challenge at the Home.

ND Veterans Home: Dane Grebel, Administrator

Thanked the committee for their service and the work they do on behalf of veterans. There are 98 beds for basic care and 62 are full and 52 beds for skilled care with 51 beds filled. There is a waiting list for skilled care. To shift more beds to skilled care would require more nursing staff, which isn't feasible at this time. VA doesn't recognize

assisted living care, so veterans go from basic to skilled. In June, there was a Health and Human Services survey. The outcome was two small citations with no life safety citations. In July, VA did their yearly survey. The Home received two citations; one small and the other one was the same as previous year. A VA requirement is a contract needed with all medical providers a veteran comes in contact with, this requires an enormous amount of work from the Veterans Home staff. The ND Foundation golf Tournament had 120 teams and was very successful. A road project is underway to re-do the resident's parking lot, converting it from asphalt to concrete. In September, the resident/family picnic was held at the Home; it has been four years since the last event. It was a beautiful day, and everyone had a very good time.

Tom Ryan asked about a lawsuit that included several members of ACOVA. Mr. Grebel stated was unaware of the lawsuit. Tom asked the Administrator to investigate it and report back to the committee.

Chairman Strom named members to the following subcommittees:
Department of Veterans Affairs: Cynthia Schlosser, Hal Weninger, Vernon Laning, Gary Maddock, and Joe Best

PWTF and Appeals Committee: Jim Verwey, Trish Hodny, Dave Hilleren, Steve Anderson, Jim Hapala

Legislative Strategic Planning: Brian Bartlett, Lamar Kruckenberg, Tom Ryan, Jacob Volk

Subcommittee meetings held.

September 20, 2024

Committee reconvened at: 9:00am

Meeting called to order at 9:00am by Chairman Murray Strom. Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence observed for POW/MIAs, and those serving overseas.

ACOVA Roll Call:
Present:

Steven Anderson	Dave Hilleren	Cynthia Schlosser
Brian Bartlett	Tish Hodny (TEAMS)	Murray Strom
Joe Best	Lamar Kruckenberg	Jim Verwey
Jim Hapala	Vernon Laning	Jacob Volk
	Tom Ryan (TEAMS)	Hal Weninger TEAMS)

Absent:

Gary Maddock - Excused

Guests:

Dean Pountis, Attorney, Attorney General's Office

Motion by Vern Laning to accept May 2024 minutes, second by Jim Verwey. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion on next meeting:

Motion by LaMar Kruckenberg for the next ACOVA meeting to be held November 14 & 15, 2024 in Steele, ND, second by Jake Volk. Motion passed unanimously.

If Steele is unavailable, then the committee would return to Bismarck.

Chairman Strom asked for names for the ND Veterans Home Governing Board. Steve Frojen declined the ACOVA appointment made at the May 2024 meeting.

Trish Hodny talked about Dave Peterson, retired lawyer, who may be interested in serving on the Governing Board. Mr. Peterson is a Vietnam veteran.

Veterans Affairs Subcommittee – report by Joe Best, Secretary
Vern Laning, Chairman.

Policy 434, Hardship Assistance Grant – Medical: Hearing Aid

Change: 2) Annual funding limit from \$3,000 to \$2,500 per ear.

Change: 3) Interval of grant: remove “No more than two in a four (4) year period”

a.) One replacement of hearing aids every four years.

Subcommittee recommends approval.

Motion by Vern Laning to approve proposed changes, second by Joe Best. Motion passed unanimously.

Policy 442: Hardship Assistance Grant – General: Housing [See Policy for changes.]

Subcommittee recommends approval.

Motion by Jack Volk to approve proposed changes, second by Brian Bartlett. Motion passed unanimously.

Policy 606: IMPACT Hardship Assistance Grant - Payment

Change: 3) remove “rent or mortgage” and add “\$600 or greater per vendor”

“Applications for assistance \$600 or greater per vendor must be accompanied with a copy of the payee’s IRS Form W-9, SFN 53656 Substitute IRS Form W-9, or written confirmation they will accept payment via credit card.”

Subcommittee recommends approval.

Motion by Hal Weninger to approve proposed change, second by Jake Volk. Motion passed unanimously.

Reviewed Fund 368 and Department budget as of June 30, 2024. Everything looked good. Reviewed 2025-2027 budget submitted to Governor’s Office.

Other Business: JPMorgan statements reviewed and signed off by Chairman Laning.

Motion by Joe Best to accept minutes as presented, second by Vern Laning. Motion passed unanimously.

Legislative Subcommittee – report by Jake Volk, Secretary
Brian Bartlett, Chairman.

Commissioner Wangen went over possible legislation for the upcoming Legislative Assembly. A more thorough legislative update will be given to the full committee at the next meeting.

No changes for the strategic plan.

Motion by Jake Volk to accept minutes as presented, second by LaMar Kruckenberg . Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Wangen will email the legislative information to committee members for their review.

PWTF & Appeals Subcommittee

PWTF Subcommittee – report by Dave Hilleren, Secretary
Jim Verwey, Chairman

Reviewed PWTF Trust Fund clearing account and discussion with Cathy Halgunseth providing clarification of information on report. Reviewed CD investments for 2023-2025. Reviewed Patriotic License Plates revenue from 2015 – June 30, 2024, showing a total amount of \$94,330. Possible fundraising for PWTF, it was suggested 50% veterans gaming tax to be brought up at next legislative session.

No requests for PWTF funding.

Appeals Subcommittee – report by Dave Hilleren
Jim Verwey. Chairman

No appeals.

Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept PWTF and Appeals minutes as presented, second by Trish Hodny. Motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Report

One of the biggest project the AMVETS do is to distribute a pocket Constitution to every eighth grader in North Dakota schools. Murray Strom and Brian Bartlett worked on getting the books mailed to schools for distribution.

What did you miss doing this summer, what you didn't get done this summer?

Roundtable Discussion:

Trish Hodny: Did a lot of travelling, but not enough golf.

Hal Weninger: Still in Arizona. Great to be back attending meetings.

Cathy Halgunseth: Was able to get out and golf and play pickleball but not much motorcycle riding.

Dan Thorstad: Got to go to the lakes and camp, but not as much fishing this summer.

Lonnie Wangen: Was going to get a boat but it didn't happen so might try it next year.

In regard to parking at the VA, the VA got creative and now has 40 more parking spaces.

Cindy Schlosser: asked if the ACOVA is bonded. Dean DePountis stated the board was created by statute and members are serving in an official capacity. The members are covered by the State Risk Management Fund. Dean volunteered to do a segment on open meeting, open records, Roberts Rules of Order and HIPPA at the next meeting.

Commissioner Wangen will make an official request by email to him.

LaMar Kruckenberg: played with two great grandkids. Did a lot of veterans' stuff and smoked meat for DAV meetings; did his first ragu beef brisket.

Cindy Schlosser: Bought a place on Sibley Lake and it's kept her busy. Had a 4th of July gathering with family at the lake. Won a place on an Honor Flight as a volunteer representing the Freedom Riders.

Dane Grebel: Learning position as Administrator at Veterans Home. At end of August, bids to build resident's parking garages were opened. The bids came in over the money budgeted, so the Veterans Home is working with the bid winner. He became a grandfather for the first time this summer.

Vern Laning: Didn't get to golf this summer. He and his wife relocated to Stanton and it has kept him busy. Had an issue with a log splitter and hurt his thumb, it's still

recovering. He will be on ACOVA another year. He is also on the Veterans Home Governing Board.

Joe Best: Busy with his business this summer. Glad that hunting will be starting soon.

Jim Hapala: Retired and is doing fine, keeping busy with family. He had a very good summer.

Steve Anderson: Didn't get enough golfing and motorcycling in. Will be a grandfather for the first time in the next few weeks, his stepdaughter is due anytime.

Dave Hilleren: Paid membership on a golf course he hasn't played on yet. He did get to do some fishing though. Attended the Vietnam Veterans Picnic that was held outside of New Town in July. He was invited to a screening of the film, "A Real American".

Money raised from the film will go to veteran's issues.

Brian Bartlett: He is working on an addition to the Steele Vets Club, there will be a new meeting room, dining room and kitchen. He is also building a house. Didn't get to use the pontoon much this summer or doing much camping.

Jake Volk: Did a lot of motorcycle riding, over 9,000 miles; one ride was to Charleston. He will try to get one more trip in. His granddaughter is graduating and wants to be a travelling nurse. Also did a little fishing on Devils Lake.

Jim Verwey: Exceptional speakers this meeting. He has six grandchildren, and they are all in sports. He was able to get on the last Honor Flight out of Fargo.

Tom Ryan: He has been busy fixing bicycles, has 11 grandkids. He is spending time with two of them now.

Murray Strom: Travelled to Ohio. He only got to go camping twice this summer. Attended the AMVETS conference in Springfield.

Chairman Strom asked if there was anything else for the Good of the Order. No other items were presented.

Motion to adjourn by Hal Weninger, second by Lamar Kruckenberg. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted:

Jim Verwey
Secretary