

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
EXPRESSWAY SUITES, FARGO ND

September 25, 2014
1:00PM

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	Dean Overby
Ken Hasby	Myron Langehaug	Marlin Schneider
Jim Haukedahl	Robert Olzweski	Jim Verwey
Dave Hilleren	Ron Otto	Hal Weninger

Absent:

Marlys Morgenstern - excused
Steve Volk - excused
Carroll Quam - will be late

Chairman Overby stated there are two new members. One couldn't make due to a prior commitment but one is here. Chairman Overby introduced Myron Langehaug and asked him to say a few things about himself. Myron is from Bottineau and is here representing the AMVETS. He is glad to be on the committee.

Chairman Overby asked for approval of the minutes.

Ron Otto – There is a portion of the minutes where there was no action taken that dealt with the discussion of the letter from the Professional Advocates of North Dakota. Since there was no action taken, he's not sure why they are in the minutes; as per the Attorney General on how to do the minutes. Ron would like it eliminated, just list as discussion and that's how it should have been listed. Ron asked Jim (Verwey) if he listened to the recording. Jim said he did.

Chairman Overby it was part of the meeting and it was recorded.

Motion by Richard Belling, to approve the minutes of June 9& 10, 2014, second by Hal Weninger.

Ron said that portion of the minutes needs to be eliminated. The minutes appear to be vindictive.

Hal Weninger asked for a point of order and have the minutes read. Jim Verwey read the portion of minutes in question (starting page 5). Ron said it was discussion starting at the letter to the Governor and not part of the report. Commissioner Wangen asked Ron if that's based on the grounds there is no motion or actions and Ron agreed. Commissioner Wangen said there's a whole bunch of discussion on the Roundtable and there is no motion or actions, does that mean we remove it. Ron said it could be removed there is no action or discussion. That's the discretion the Attorney General's Office gave us with regards to making minutes. Commissioner Wangen said it's a lot of wasted discussion if we're not going to report it. Ron replied that it's in the recording and if anybody wants to get a recording they can.

Chairman Overby said the issue was addressed and it should stay in the minutes.

Trish Hodny expressed concern if the minutes are going to be verbatim then it may impact future discussions and minutes. It could squelch opinions and discussion.

Hal Weninger said there was considerable discussion. As far as he is concerned if anyone is doing anything that's counterproductive to the outcome that we're trying to accomplish for veterans to leave it in the minutes. There's a reason it's there.

Chairman Overby if they want the minutes changed there needs to be another motion and second. No other motion.

Ron Otto asked for a Roll Call vote. Motion passed 8 yeas [Belling, Hasby, Haukedahl, Hilleren, Schneider, Verwey, Weninger, Overby]; 3 nays [Hodny, Olzweski, Otto]; 1 abstain [Langehaug]. [MOTION #1]

Dr. Tim Peterson, Phd, NDSU:

Dr. Peterson served 25 years in the Air Force.

Study: Effectiveness of the Veterans Service Officers: North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana. (copies distributed to committee)

Dr. Peterson was contacted by Commissioner Wangen to do a study on effectiveness of VSOs. The focus of the study was to find if there was a difference in two types of Veterans Service Officers hired throughout the state – regional and county. Dr. Peterson spent three years working on the study, going to South Dakota and Montana first then North Dakota. The result of the study is that veterans are very pleased with how things are going with the VSOs and veterans don't feel they are getting support from the VA. Dr. Peterson wasn't sure what the VSOs could do about that. All state local and organizations were contacted to help locate veterans. There weren't enough surveys returned so someone was sent on the road to collect data.

Bob Olzweski asked how many veterans were selected? Dr. Peterson responded that veterans chose to do the survey. If there would have more time/students, more veterans would have been contacted.

Ken Hasby asked if there was any information on veterans crossing county lines. Dr. Peterson said there was no data on that issue.

Trish Hodny asked if those surveyed were getting compensation or pension benefits? Dr. Peterson responded that in the North Dakota study, they added another dimension of dependents being able to complete a survey if they were receiving benefits.

Chairman Overby stated they know the service officers are doing a good job, it's getting veterans to go to the service officers.

The committee was very appreciative of the study. Commissioner Wangen wanted to personally thank Dr. Peterson for all the work that went into the study.

Committee assignments handed out to members. It is up to the committees to elect their chairman:

Department of Veterans Affairs & Budget Subcommittee: Jim Haukedahl (D.A.V.), Robert Olzweski (AMVETS), Trish Hodny (V.V.A.), Richard Belling (V.F.W.) and Marlin Schneider (A.L.)

Postwar Trust Fund & Appeals Subcommittee: Jim Verwey (V.F.W.), Marlys Morgenstern (D.A.V.), Hal Weninger (V.V.A.), and Myron Langehaug (AMVETS).

Legislative Subcommittee: Steve Volk (V.F.W.), Ron Otto (D.A.V.), Ken Hasby (A.L.), Carroll Quam (AMVETS), and Dave Hilleren (V.V.A.)

Chairman Overby talked about Governing Board appointments. Connie Ebach and John Adolf's terms are up and members are needed for the ND Veterans Home Governing Board.

Chairman Overby and Secretary Verwey recommend Connie Ebach to another three year term and General Dornman to a three year term.

Motion by Ron Otto that Connie Ebach and General Dornman be appointed to three year terms, second by Trish Hodny. Motion carried.

Chairman Overby and Secretary Verwey recommend that Gary Skarphol remain as Chairman of the ND Governing Board.

Motion by Ron Otto that Gary Skarphol remain as Chairman of the ND Governing Board, second by Bob Olzweski. Motion carried.

Commissioner's Report [POWERPOINT PRESENTATION]

- ▶ Approved for two intern positions and three work study positions
- ▶ Dan and Mike attended NACVSO Training in Pierre, SD
- ▶ Brenda attended American Legion and Nat'l. Association of State Women Veterans Coordinator's training
- ▶ JoAnne attended seminar on Homelessness
- ▶ Commissioner met with Legislative Budget committee, congressionals, DOT and stakeholders on Highly Rural transportation grant, and attended Nat'l. Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs.
- ▶ Update on Grant and Loan Programs
- ▶ Transportation Van ordered and being picked up
- ▶ Federal grant to improve Veterans' Home Cemetery approved; Federal grant for Highly Rural Areas – hope to order vans next week
- ▶ Website being updated, over 100 Facebook posts, over 40 "Tweets". Estimated additional \$60,935 to complete website
- ▶ Legislation – Interim GSC Committee looking at income tax exemption. Meeting with Legislators on various items.

Break into Subcommittees.

Carroll Quam is in attendance.

LaVonne Liversage, Health Care System Director, FACHE

- ▶ Was previously in Denver CO. North Dakota native from Hamden which is north of Devils Lake
- ▶ Nationally, facilities are reporting wait times every two weeks. VA sent out groups to audit the schedulers, Fargo had no problems. Scheduling system is very old, new system in the works. She feels very fortunate to have the staff that is in Fargo.
- ▶ Road to Veterans Day – VA Secretary. Three major components: Rebuild Trust – one way is to hold town hall meetings, one already held in Fargo another planned for Bismarck; Improve Service Delivery – integrate websites together, looking at geographical maps – dramatic organizational changes; and Long Term Excellence – big component is the implementation of the Veterans Access Choice and Availability Act.

- ▶ Veterans Choice Program – 10 billion set aside, veterans living more than 40 miles from point of care or VA wait times more than 30 days, can seek services outside the VA. It will be interesting for a state like North Dakota given its VA and CBOC services.
- ▶ 5 billion set aside for staffing and access.

Ron Otto asked about the Business Office is now tied to the Central Office not the Hospital. Ms. Liversage said it hasn't happened yet and is not sure how it will work.

- ▶ Workload is up 2% from last year; an 8% increase in women veterans; CBOCs are doing extremely well.
- ▶ Veteran's ID cards should all be mailed by the end of the calendar year. There have been some glitches but they have been worked out.
- ▶ StandDown at the Fargo Dome in October.
- ▶ Many construction projects going on at the VA. The committee members will see a lot of it today on their tour of the VA facility.

Jim Verwey asked if the VA has been able to have VISNs talk to each other (Veterans Integrated Service Network). He said he's been contacted by a few veterans who go down to Arizona in the winter and have problems going to another VA for treatment. They are being asked to re-enroll when they're already in the system. Then the veteran has to go through the same thing when they return home. Ms. Liversage said it's not so much to re-enroll as to be given a new primary care doctor. She will bring that issue to her bosses' attention.

Many committee members were complimentary of the VA system in Fargo and the CBOC in their area.

Talk turned to the concern of appointments no longer set-up twelve months in advance. Reminder letters are no longer being sent and that's a problem for veteran remembering their appointment.

Peggy Wheelden, Public Affairs Office, will be giving a tour of VA facility for those who are interested. She just received her 40 year pin.

Committee recessed.

8:00am tomorrow morning the DVA staff will meet the committee members.

September 26, 2014
9:15 a.m.

Meeting called to order by Chairman Dean Overby. Pledge of Allegiance said and a Moment of Silence observed for POW/MIAs and all service people.

ACOVA Roll Call:

Present:

Richard Belling	Trish Hodny	Carroll Quam
Ken Hasby	Myron Langehaug	Dean Overby
Jim Haukedahl	Robert Olzewski	Marlin Schneider
Dave Hilleren	Ron Otto	Jim Verwey
		Hal Weninger

Absent:

Marlys Morgenstern - excused
Steve Volk - excused

Motion by Ron Otto to accept excused absences, second by Bob Olzewski. Motion carried.

ND DVA Staff introduced:

Tom Summers – 7 ½ years, retired Army Guard, served in Iraq 2003-2004. Recently switched into training role.

Peggy Swisher – Receptionist and works in claims, been at the department for 17 years

Joanne Rivera – newest member of staff, served in Army for two years, very honored to work with veterans.

Dan Thorstad – been with the department for one year, retired from Army after 26 years as First Sargent. As First Sargent took care of soldiers this was a perfect transition now he can take care of veterans. Very honored and humbled to do that.

Mike Conklin – has been with department a year, prior two years with AMVETS, Army 8 years - Airborne Ranger. He looks forward to coming to work every day. Most rewarding job he's ever had.

Committee introduced themselves and gave background information.

ND Veterans Home – Mark Johnson, Administrator

► American Legion Auxiliary President for her project she chose to do the Fountain Project – so now a fountain has been installed at the Home.

- ▶ Concrete added to back area to accommodate bigger group events; may need to add onto the space.
- ▶ Bid for the old building to be demolished came in just under \$780,000. Demolition will start the first part of December.
- ▶ Norgaard Fund – Attorney’s working on it. Going to legislative session to build workshop with Norgaard Fund in addition to other funding at a cost of around \$1 million.
- ▶ Admissions – Basic Care not full, approaching 90 beds. Skilled facility is full. Waiting list for Skilled somewhere around 10-12.
- ▶ Foundation – authorized to pay for three ADE units and a trainer. Toppers Car Club recently gave the Home \$10,000 – there are now four ADE units and a trainer working with the staff.
- ▶ Bus wrap funding will cost around \$15,000.
- ▶ Legislative Session – Special funds come from VA and private pay. Optional requests include the workshop, Administrator’s house, and bridge connecting the Veterans Home campus and a city street.
- ▶ Huge thank you to the Commissioner for helping Mark’s cousin who is having medical issues.

Discussion on the removal of asbestos from the former Veterans Homes.

Trish asked about signs on the highways for the Veterans Home. Chairman Overby is working with D.O.T. on getting signs.

PWTF/Appeals Subcommittee – Jim Verwey, Chairman

Minutes read by Myron Langehaug. Jim Verwey elected Chairman. Myron Langehaug appointed Secretary. Discussion on formula used to determine disbursements of funds. There doesn’t appear to be a formula. The committee believes the interpretation of the Century Code needs to be looked at. There are different percentages being used to determine how much goes to ACOVA for disbursement. Last biennium 83% to ACOVA and 17% retained for Fund. For FY2014, 38% to ACOVA and 62% retained for Fund. The committee will do some further investigation on the issue.

Motion by Dave Hilleren to accept PWTF/Appeals subcommittee minutes, second by Hal Weninger.

Ron Otto asked for a point of information - is the subcommittee questioning the distribution of earnings vs growth of fund. Myron Langehaug said that was correct, there is no consistency.

Commissioner Wangen went over information provided by the State Treasurer’s Office.

Trish Hodny would like to see more clarification on the “earnings” as stated in the Treasurer’s Letter.

Dave Hilleren wondered if we ever resolved the deductions that are being taken out of the funds, i.e. administrative costs, investment costs, management fees. Commissioner Wangen said the State Treasurer is entitled to pay those fees.

Hal Weninger thought perhaps the Treasurer’s Office may be misinterpreting how the funds should be disbursed since the Fund is a “Trust” Fund.

Motion carried.

Legislative Subcommittee – Carroll Quam, Chairman

Carroll Quam read the minutes. Carroll Quam voted in as Chairman. Dave Hilleren appointed Secretary. No minutes were available due to lack of quorum at previous meeting.

Motion by Ken Hasby to accept subcommittee minutes, second by Ron Otto. Motion carried. Motion carried.

Department of Veterans Affairs/Budget – Trish Hodny, Chair

Minutes read by Trish Hodny. Trish Hodny elected Chairman. Jim Haukedahl appointed Secretary. Reviewed the budget, Agent Orange funds have all been disbursed to the V.V.A. Reviewed the three year comparison of the Grant Program; dental and dentures were the cause for the increases. More information will be requested from the Department. Talked about having the VA provide more money for dental services for veterans. Committee recommends \$14,000 from van sales go to the Grant Program. Reviewed 2015-2017 Biennium request.

Motion by Trish Hodny to accept report, second by Richard Belling. Motion carried.

Motion by Trish that \$14,000 from van sales go to Grant Program, second by Richard Belling. Motion carried.

Coordinating Council wants to meet with ACOVA for the next meeting. Tentative dates are December 4-5 or 11-12. Comfort Inn will be contacted for availability.

Roundtable Discussion

Dave Hilleren: like to have a session at western North Dakota, preferably Medora. There are lots of veterans that came for jobs. Trish Hodny asked how the homeless situation is in western ND. Discussion on situation.

Myron Langehaug: previously sat on Labor Management committee. Looking forward to serving.

Hal Weninger: served on legislative committee and now on PWTF committee. Appreciated meeting the staff;

Carroll Quam: work together to fulfill objective of taking care of North Dakota veterans.

Ken Hasby: Learned a lot serving on the committee for the last six years and will continue working for veterans.

Carroll Quam: candidates knocking on doors, let them know to support veterans.

Marlin Schneider: still learning and still enjoying himself.

Richard Belling: like the idea of going to Medora. Would like to see the Commissioner and Chairman go on a radio show during legislative session. Trish – missed photo opportunity at VA

Ron Otto: once legislative session starts, it's a free for all. What you start with isn't always what you end up with.

Trish Hodny: thanked Commissioner for bringing in staff. Every chance she gets when talking with someone on legislation, she directs them to contact the Commissioner. Grand Forks Representatives want space on all the campuses for veterans. Commissioner Wangen has met with Chancellor about that issue.

Chairman Overby: last session all the bills from Coordinating Council/ACOVA started in one place. Lots of bills are brought in by individuals. Committee will stand behind a good bill that helps a veteran. Already talked with candidates in his area about veterans issues.

Commissioner Wangen talked with legislators last session about having a veterans' caucus; whereby a few legislators would know our bills and could speak on the bills on the House or Senate floor. Coordinating Council may have a meet and greet with the legislators. Ron Otto said he participated in the roundtable Senator Hoeven held in Dickinson.

Chairman Overby spoke about Norris Braaten and his present medical condition. Norris did a lot as Chairman for the ND Governing Board.

Jim Verwey asked if any of the measures affect veterans. Commissioner Wangen talked about the measure that would limit the ability of citizens to bring measures that have a fiscal note.

Discussion on how much funding should be requested from the Legislature for the PWTF and other issues that have been brought in the previous session.

Jim Verwey: talked about a discussion he had with a veteran about receiving benefits. Many veterans coming even to Valley City from other areas of other country.

Trish spoke about the discharge upgrades that will be increasing.

Ron Otto spoke on one of the first Stand Downs that he was able to help an elderly woman receive a VA benefit. When she died, he received a star quilt from the family.

Motion to adjourn by Carroll Quam, seconded by committee members. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

Jim Verwey
Secretary