



STATE OF WASHINGTON

VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Meeting Minutes October 20, 2011 CPO Club – NAS Whidbey

Present:

Phil Ruhmshottel, Marine Corps League
Gary Pearson, PVA
Dick Whipple, VFW
Bob Schwartz, American Legion
Kathryn Hobbs, At Large
Lloyd Burroughs, NABVETS
Owen McCurty, At Large
Merl Gorton, MOAA
Roy Compton, American Ex-POWs
Alfred 'Tito' Medina, American G.I. Forum
Bill Nickerson, Washington Veterans Home
Ann Lawson, Washington Soldiers' Home
Cynthia Lefever, Advisor
Tommy Manning, Advisor
Frank Cordero, Advisor
Heinz Hickethier, Advisor

Excused:

Don Schack, AMVETS
Ryan Nabors, DAV
Oria Berndt, Advisor
Les Burger, Advisor
George Edmundsen, Advisor
Dick Kirk, Advisor

The meeting was called to order by Chairman, Lloyd Burroughs, who also gave the invocation. Dick Whipple led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

April Harris called the roll and determined there was a quorum to conduct business.

Welcome and Introductions:

Three new members to the committee were welcomed and asked to say a few words.

Alfred 'Tito' Medina was a submariner with eight years' active duty and continued his service in the Reserves. He is currently working on his MBA and is a service officer under the American Legion accreditation as a life-time member.

Owen McCurdy is a retired, Army non-commissioned officer. He is also a Veterans Employment representative with the Department of Employment Security in Lakewood. Owen says he is ready to roll up sleeves and help the committee.

Ann Lawson is a resident of the Washington Soldiers Home. She is also the Vice Chair of the home's Resident Council and a veteran of the Army.

Representative Barbara Bailey:

Representative Barbara Bailey represents the 10th district and has been in the Legislature since 2003. She expressed her appreciation for having the meeting in Oak Harbor. She stated one of her main interests is in helping veterans as she is the spouse of a 27-year veteran of the Navy. In addition, she sits on the Joint Committee for Veterans and Military Affairs in the Legislature, and was a member of the US Navy League for many years before becoming a State Representative. She stated there will be another meeting of the Joint Committee during Committee Days in December and there will be a special session of the Legislature in November. She provided her office phone number for anyone who has questions of her 360-786-7914.

Approval of Minutes:

Bill Nickerson made a motion to accept the minutes from the last meeting.

Dick Whipple seconded the motion.

In the discussion it was noted an error was made on who made the motion to accept the minutes at the last meeting. The correction was made to reflect Dick Whipple made the motion to approve minutes.

Bill Nickerson then made the motion to accept the minutes as corrected and Dick Whipple seconded.

The committee unanimously passed the motion to approve the minutes as corrected.

Nominating Committee:

The committee put for the names of Gary Pearson as Chairman for the next year with Kathy Hobbs as Vice Chair.

Bill Nickerson moved to cast unanimous ballot to accept nominations and Dick Whipple seconded the motion.

The chair asked for additional nominations of which there were none.

The committee cast a unanimous ballot for Gary Pearson and Kathy Hobbs.

Lloyd thanked John Lee and Alfie Alvarado as well as the spouses who support veterans.

Gary gave thanks to Lloyd a long-time veterans' advocate and stated he has big shoes to fill and feels it's a daunting task to begin with.

Presentations:

Base Commander, Gregory "Jay" Johnston gave a PowerPoint presentation of the base layout and mission.

Veteran Employment and Mobilization/De-Mobilization:

Tom Riggs, J-9 Director at Camp Murray pointed out the committee now has an employment expert in Owen McCurdy. He then provided a presentation on the Guard and Reserves Mobilization/De-Mobilization (attached).

Cynthia Lefever pointed out that during demobilization, VSOs need to be trained in TBI and PTSD to accurately guide the soldiers through their benefits application. There are many myths associated with TBI and PTSD. The VFW has created a questionnaire that is pretty extensive that their SOs go through with a veteran applying for benefits. Filling out the lengthy forms and sitting at a computer is very difficult for TBI/PTSD soldiers and most of the time a soldier suffers from both.

Question: Are you achieving results employing veterans?

Tom responded that the unemployment rate has been reduced from 14% to 7.4% in two years for the National Guard. The 81st Heavy Combat Brigade is redeploying and the Guard will provide the same services at Ft. McCoy as they did last time.

There will be a new office at the Smoky Point Center with two staff.

Homelessness/Justice Outreach:

Donald Lachman, WDVA Program Manager, reported that last week the agency conducted a Homeless Summit in Okanogan, prior to that a summit was held in Snohomish County with three adjacent counties. The agency is working with SAMHSA, counties, cities, Commerce's Housing Trust Fund and Catholic Community Services, among others to provide homeless services to veterans.

Recently, Pierce County received a \$2 million grant to serve homeless veterans and Whatcom County received \$1 million. In addition, the Housing Trust Fund has earmarked \$3 million for veteran housing.

WDVA is also working with Social Security on an expedited process to get veterans temporary disability while they wait for their VA benefits to take effect. This is a homelessness prevention tool.

DSHS operates 2 Mobile Community Service Offices that travel the state providing services for those who don't have the resources to travel.

The Justice Project incorporates six county partnerships. The veterans dockets overlay with the courts'. They take a team approach on why the person is in court and put together a package of services to resolve their problems and help them lead productive lives instead of sitting in jail. They also receive the necessary treatment and therapy.

Results are:

- Over \$1.5 million saved in Pierce County.
- 6% recidivism rate compared to 63% of general public.

Question: How many homeless vets in state?

There is a Point-in-Time count each January. Four to five years ago there was an estimated 8,000 and the number now is approximately 2,500. We are foreseeing spikes as the war draws down. We are also focusing on prevention, but there is not much money for that effort.

Cynthia pointed out intake people should not ask someone if they are a veteran, but rather, have they served in the military. Many don't believe they are veterans because they were not in conflict.

Hometown Heroes Raffle:

WDVA Communications Director, Heidi Audette reminded people to buy their Hometown Heroes Raffle tickets. The money goes to the Veterans Innovations Program fund that can be used for OIF/OEF/ONE veterans. WDVA partners with WorkSource, where most applications come from. The Veterans Legislative Coalition was able to get a bill passed for the Lottery to run a raffle for proceeds to go to VIP. To date: 153,000 sold and there are only three weeks left. Go to the website, see the commercials and buy your tickets. The odds are much better than the regular lottery. . . . 1 in 92.

Outstanding Veterans Awards:

Phil Ruhmshottel announced the winners of this year's awards. He reminded people about nominations and that it's the way you say 'thank you' to people you know who serve veterans. The nomination form is posted in the June/July timeframe and the deadline is September 30th each year, so there is plenty of time to do a nomination.

The awards presented after the Auburn Veterans Day parade at the luncheon. |

2011 Award Winners:

Patriotic Service: Spokane County

Brothers Zachary and Christopher Taylor chose to do their Eagle Scout projects at the Washington State Veterans Cemetery - Medical Lake. Their Scattering Garden and the Honor Guard walkway projects were completed on time with a ribbon cutting on July 4,

2011. Each scout also collected donations for the cemetery of \$6,200 each. They are accompanied in the parade by their parents, Joe and Sandy Taylor. (Read a WDVA Blog about the project: Eagle Scouts Complete Projects at State Veterans Cemetery)

Outstanding Service Officer: Pierce County

Mark Melton, Service Officer for Disabled American Veterans, received his award for going above and beyond in his service to veterans. In addition to exceptional service officer work, Mark volunteers at public events, works with state and federal agencies to better assist veterans, and has a special commitment to ending homelessness among veterans.

Outstanding Employee: Thurston County

Colleen Gilbert has worked for the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs for over 16 years. Colleen truly lives the agency's mission statement of Serving Those Who Served and consistently goes above and beyond to ensure that every veteran or family member she is in contact with receives outstanding service. Colleen can often be found conducting outreach at various events on her own time, especially at weekend community events and festivals. She has worked tirelessly on efforts around the veterans' memorials and other public events honoring Washington State veterans.

Outstanding Veteran Volunteer: Pierce County

Dennis Primoli has been a constant force in his quest to ensure veterans are honored and recognized for their service. As a former member of the Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee, member and former chair of the Veterans Legislative Coalition, he has successfully lobbied for a number of bills that benefit veterans. Most recently, he supported the Hometown Heroes Raffle and was instrumental in ensuring the bill was passed.

Outstanding Legislator: 29th Legislative District

Senator Steve Conway, of the 29th Legislative District, has supported countless veteran initiatives in the Senate and previously in the House. In 2011, he was the sponsor of Senate Bill 5806 which created the Hometown Heroes Raffle. The Raffle will replenish funds in WDVA's Veterans Innovations Program which serves returning veterans and their families in need, and otherwise would have run out of funding.

Outstanding Legislator: 23rd Legislative District

Representative Sherry Appleton, of the 23rd Legislative District, is a long-time supporter of veteran initiatives and friend to veterans throughout the state. She has supported many veteran bills, including one to provide property tax relief to disabled veterans. She is the widow of a distinguished Vietnam veteran, Ron.

70% Service Connected Legislation:

WDVA Deputy Director, Alfie Alvarado, spoke of the legislation currently in Congress that would allow payment of the full cost of care for 70% service-connected, and above, veterans in nursing facilities. Currently, it is not beneficial the way the payment system is set up. At Orting and Retsil it currently costs \$323 per day to provide care, but the facility is only reimbursed \$223. The House has voted to approve the bill for the prevailing rate. As early as next Monday the Senate may do the same. The President may be signing the bill on Veterans Day. Senator Murray was instrumental in getting through the Veterans Affairs Committee, and Alfie thanked everyone for writing to your senators and Congressmen.

Island County Commissioner:

Ms. Angie Homola is one of Island County's Commissioners. Her father is a veteran and her husband is retiring tomorrow. She has been involved in the salmon recovery project on the base as well as the work with military on SONAR protect the environment. She is a member of the Environment, Energy and Land Use Committee.

Commissioner Homola discussed the County's Veterans Relief Fund and how the process works in Island County. Jerry Pfannansteil said that now the VAF will pay for school clothing and school supplies for families of indigent veterans.

John McFarland acknowledged the work Jerry is doing and the support of Commissioner Homola. He is on the Board of Directors at the Veterans Resource Center in Freeland, which is a non-profit organization and is volunteer based. They have a drop in center and he believes they are a one-of-a-kind agency.

Alfie Alvarado commended Commissioner Homola, the board and Jerry for having the vision and fortitude to provide services to provide sustainability to veterans.

Good of the Order:

Merl Gorton: He mentioned there IS a draft for this war. It is our National Guard and Reserves. It is different because they come and go and we are going to have more problems with these people because of the prolonged deployments and time serving. .5% of all citizens are involved in these wars. It has never been done this way before.

Bud Compton: He said it was good to be back in Whidbey, his old stomping ground.

Kathy Hobbs: Thanks for the trust and confidence in me as Vice-Chair. Washington is so good to veterans we wanted to stay here when I retired.

Dick Whipple: Thanks to the island community. It is beautiful. It is gratifying to get out in the communities and see the work that is being done regarding legislation and

assistance. Things are different with injuries in that in years past, injuries were not survived as they are now and long term assistance for families is needed.

Frank Cordero: He said he served at NAS Whidbey in 1968.

Bill Nickerson: He said the bus at the veterans home needs to be replaced. Also, he'd like the labor organizations to get together and create military credit proportioned to their years of work toward retirement.

Ann Lawson: Ann mentioned they have one bus and it's running its wheels off for the various trips.

Alfie stated the WDVA fleet has been turned over to the Department of Enterprise Services and it will take time to get replacements but we are working on it.

Bob Schwartz: He said to get involved in Veterans Day events, especially at schools and cemeteries.

Heinz Hicketier: He will be at the Albany Oregon parade.

Cynthia Lefever: She is a TBI consultant for the committee. Her mission is to raise awareness of TBI/PTSD. She is also on the King County Veterans and Legislative Oversight Board. There are several things coming up (attached). She is the mother of a wounded warrior who lost his sight and hearing. He is featured on a hunting episode on the Outdoor channel.

Lloyd Burroughs: He was at a conference with Cathy McMorris-Rodgers. He said the needs in eastern Washington are different from western Washington and we desperately need outreach by service organizations. He participated on a Veterans Panel and discussed an additional co-pay. He said the feeling in the House is they must cut budget.

Public Comment:

VFW Past Commander – Mike Peterson

Dave Libby introduced himself as a National Guard Captain.

Skagit Co. homeless count, there are more than were counted in the point in time

Ben: He is the Service Officer for 7392 VFW Post.

Bob Wallace: Four American Legionnaires visited Senator Murray and talked about budget cuts and taking money away from veterans.

Jerry Hall: Said the emergency assistance or 'fish for a day' is the way to get veterans further help through the Veterans Assistance Fund.

Mike and Jane Montaney: They attended the National conference where they heard the Congress say they would not balance the budget on the backs of veterans and they lied to us. The Super Committee needs to understand we are not a special interest group. We earned these benefits.