

## SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING

Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota Veterans' Home

Building 3 Auditorium

Hot Springs, SD

April 5-6, 2004

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bill Locken at 1:30 Mountain Time in the Auditorium of Building 3 at the South Dakota Veterans' Home in Hot Springs, SD. He led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance. Dennis Foell made the announcement that those interested were invited to lunch with the residents on Tuesday noon with a tour of the Veterans Home to follow.

The agenda was changed to move the Veterans' Home report by Gene Eiring up to 2:00 April 5<sup>th</sup> and Bob Poe from the Black Hills National Cemetery was added to the agenda following Dr. Randy Petzel, also April 5<sup>th</sup>. Approval of the agenda as changed was moved by Loudner, second by Clarke and approved.

The minutes as printed were approved on a motion by Murphy, second by Benson.

General Mike Gorman then presented a report on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Included was a deployment update. There are now three more units (total of 4) which have returned to South Dakota. One unit has been deployed to Afghanistan. 2,600 have been mobilized and 1,640 are overseas or have an imminent departure. There are 370 Air Guard members overseas, and 50 are stationed around the globe.

The General also mentioned the mailings from the schools for the several holidays. These were wonderful for the soldiers. The Beef Producers have shipped beef jerky and beef sticks overseas, the Bankers and State Employees have all been very supportive of various programs to provide avenues of communication between the units and the families back home.

Very noteworthy are some firsts that South Dakota has initiated. Benefits people including SD DVA personnel and CVSO's were among the persons available at the Demob Stations at Ft Carson, Ft Leonard Wood, and Ft McCoy to assist these people in transitioning back into civilian life. There are also two brochures for those recently returned soldiers highlighting VA Benefits, Education Benefits, Counseling Benefits, and that just mentions a few. These are being put together and provided jointly by SD Division of Veterans Affairs, Dept of Human Services, the VA Vet Centers, the SDNG, and the SD Dept of Labor. Another first is a meeting set up by Betty Oldenkamp, Director of the Department of Human Services, to acquaint the various organizations of what each other provides so a "client" may be steered to the appropriate agency, organization, or people.

General Gorman also mentioned the Korean War Memorial Dedication on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004, in Pierre and the preparations being made for that. The food service negotiations are going on this week and the Veterans Home is very interested in the outcome. The Guard and the Department are staying up-to-date on the Concurrent Receipt issue, also known as the Disabled Veteran Tax, and the Widow's Tax also.

There are major changes at the Veterans' Home. Gene Eiring was recognized for his outstanding work done at the Home for two years. A plaque was presented to him by General Gorman. The new superintendent was introduced. Larry Wilcox has been in the Medical Services Corps of the SDNG Guard and is a retired Lieutenant Colonel. He will have Randall Meyers as Director of Operations. He has been a manager of people, budgets and facilities over his years in the SDNG.

Questions were fielded regarding voting opportunities, and this is already being addressed in the deployment stations by having forms for absentee ballots already sent out. In regard to the volume of veterans filing claims, Dr. Randy Petzel of VISN 23 commented that documentation of any situation must be made, the history is very important for claims filing. Dave Wherry and other have already seen and heard from some of the returned servicemen especially regarding their dental care. It is important to know, too, that the VSO's and Division have been proactive in addressing family support groups in preparation for returning soldiers.

Gene Eiring reported on the SD Veterans' Home. He is retiring from the position and will be running for the District 30 House Seat. The general planning is now to increase the special needs/care beds and decrease the independent living quarters. The Budget is in good shape. Frank Foster and Peg Buckwheat worked very hard to get a \$1.2 million grant to assist in renovating old or building new facilities. There will be a Second Annual Memorial Day Ceremony hosted at the Home. The Staff and Residents use this way to honor fallen comrades and it was very well received last year.

There was a question put to Eiring regarding the requirement to have a licensed administrator for the Home. Peter Henry from VA Black Hills Health Care System will find out if the VA has a requirement for licensing. There is a "tradition" thereof in some surrounding states. One of the residents from the Home was in attendance and wanted everyone to know they had come a long ways and he wanted to welcome the new administrators.

Joe Dalpiaz, Director and COO at the Sioux Falls VAMROC, had a report, please see the handout.

Peter Henry, Director of VA Black Hills Health Care System, had a report, please see the handout. Both Directors fielded questions from the Commissioners.

Dr. Randy Petzel, Network Director of VISN 23, VA Upper Midwest Network, see handout. He talked about CARES, on April 22 the CARES Statement will be made. It is expected to endorse the CARES plan recommendations of the committee. That would mean no change at Black Hills, specialty services are to be bought, and 21 CBOC will be approved (gradually)-the final approval for the CBOC must still be from the VA. Two facilities will be combined in Knoxville, IA.

The 2004 Budget looks good. In the past four years the operations money came from capital/equipment/maintenance to handle operations. The workload has expanded, thus the budget is good, we must keep the workload up in order to keep the budget money. All of this is due to the extra \$1.4 billion added by Congress. The 2005 Veteran Health Care Budget is a question mark. The continuing Resolution is okay for the VA.

There is a Joint Commission Review of the Black Hills Health Care Facilities. South Dakota has the highest percentage of veterans/state. We have and are taking care of the veterans.

Questions fielded were about the Category 8 veterans being pulled out. It relieved the pressure and the VA is getting a handle on the wait lists. Even with the generous budget, they system cannot handle the Category 8 workload. The issue of Category 8 is evaluated every year in November and the VA Secretary will make a decision on policy to include or not include the Category 8 Veteran. Petzel did not feel it would change for several years. What are the VA-mandated staff and the total of the staff at VISN 23. The Agenda for American Indians will be shared with Loudner.

Bob Poe had a report on the Black Hills National Cemetery at Fort Meade. The demographics were impressive in that he is burying 50% of the eligible veterans of South Dakota at the National Cemetery. (There were 693-primarily veterans-buried in 2003.) He is prepared for active duty burials in that he has a supply of blank headstones which he can then have ready in time for a burial. In the regular process it will take up to 60 days or 4 weeks to get the headstone. There will be special locations for these active duty burials. Poe wanted the new veterans to know they are eligible for burial there. For dependents there are 3 questions? Handicapped? Unmarried? Dependent upon the veteran?

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday there will be a special service for those veterans without family or benefit of any services. Chaplains have committed their service and VFW Post 1273 will be providing military honors. Schools will be invited to come to participate/observe/pay homage and honor to these unaccompanied veterans.

Poe also has secured marble headstones to replace the approximately 50 wooden crosses in the Hot Springs cemetery. His staff will assist in setting these stones. This is all through the National Cemetery Program.

Armond Gaddy from Senator Daschle's office had a report and a handout. Still want more done on Concurrent Receipt and Category changes.

Darrell Shoemaker from Senator Tim Johnson's office had a report. He talked about Mandatory Funding. There are 28 co-sponsors now but it is still an uphill road. He too talked about full concurrent receipt and was relieved to hear that Black Hills Health Care system would probably not be affected by the CARES.

Earl Schultz gave his report. Important to him was that the veterans know that when they contact their former employer about their former job, they need to be ready to go back to work. They have only 90 days barring other circumstances, to notify employer about coming back to work in their "former" position. SMOCHTA-hiring the Iraqi War Veterans-hired with a stipend or part of salary paid by federal VA. There are tax credits, too. This hiring plan is just for returning Iraqi War Veterans, with special hiring authority in Federal Government, especially for the disabled service-connected.

Todd Kolden from the SD Department of Labor talked about networking. He wants to be sure that there are options for veterans through the Department of Labor. Peculiar to South Dakota is a working relationship between Military and Veterans Affairs, i.e. Division of Veterans Affairs, and the SD Department of Labor. The SD Budget will be cut (from the US DOL) but Labor has said they will pull salary funding from somewhere. "Troops to Teachers" info is available through DOL Veteran Services. The Good Will Industries loan application for providing services to incarcerated individuals was not successful.

The State Veterans' Preference does not go into effect for these returning veterans right now, perhaps this issue can be revisited with State Government. Kolden wanted all to know that if speakers are needed for veterans' labor issues at meetings, conferences, etc., he is available.

The meeting was adjourned.

At 8:00 AM on April 6<sup>th</sup>, the meeting was reconvened at the Veterans' Home Auditorium.

Paul Evenson spoke for the American Legion on the legislative priority issues. (See handout.) He also thanked Governor Rounds, MG Gorman, Dennis Foell and the DVA Staff and the network of County and Tribal Veteran Service Officers for taking care of these new veterans. Mr. Evenson also wanted to notify everyone that there is another full time employee at the State Headquarters in Watertown. The American Legion through the local posts is promoting special recognition of World War II Veterans in conjunction with the dedication of the national memorial in Washington, DC. Glenn Green is representing South Dakota at the dedication in the national capitol.

Mrs. Irene Sears addressed the Commission and those assembled from the American Legion Auxiliary. They are finishing up the Spring District Meetings. Projects for the new veterans include packages and dinners for them.

Gene Murphy spoke for the DAV. The State Convention is coming up at the end of April in Rapid City. There will be a "Veterans Town Hall Meeting" as part of the program. The DAV has grave concerns about the President's Budget, that it is nowhere near enough or adequate for the needs. The SD DAV has six new vans to be placed in Lake Andes, Pierre, Pine Ridge, Rapid City, Redfield and Sioux Falls. Mr. Murphy also spoke about a new Mobile Office that will be in South Dakota at the end of April and beginning of May so they are more accessible for veterans not able to make the longer trips to the VA Regional Office Centers.

Dave Jungemann spoke on behalf of TREA. He also had handouts to point out the increasing public debt. He had a suggestion to be passed on to the newly returning veterans-they should get complete copies of their medical records, or the Military should provide the veteran with a copy of the medical records. TREA and their related Auxiliary help provide a big picnic in Rapid City, chili feeds at the Club Home all for the residents of the SD Veterans' Home. He felt the CWT program from the VA was remarkable. He wanted to make known that TREA was donating \$1000 toward the Code Talkers Memorial project. They were also instrumental in establishing the Avenue of Flags at the Black Hills National Cemetery, which was dedicated just before Memorial Day of 2003. This organization is celebrating about their new building. One

half of it is for the Bingo Operation, the other half for the Club. They will put the Korean War Veteran Information Sheet into their newsletter.

A report from Jerry Lolley who is co-chairman for the upcoming National School event for County and Tribal Veteran Service Officers, was made. He wishes to thank anyone present for their help, donations, assistance to make this a successful school or training event for the Service Officers attending. There will be some SD Service Officers among the attendees.

The TSCL (TREA Sr. Citizens League) was established to fight the issues associated with "The Notch".

The PVA offered greetings and announced the upcoming Pizza Party at the VA for patients on April 15<sup>th</sup>. There will also be a bowling tournament with fun door prizes. There is a Bass Tournament coming up at Okoboji, IA, and a Walleye Fishing Tournament in conjunction with the firefighters at Cedar Shores in Chamberlain.

Dennis Foell's report included these points.

- As Major General Gorman stated, budget-wise in the 2004 Session, the Department fared well.
- The Veterans Bonus that passed was sponsored by Governor Rounds.
  - There will be 2 bonus applications (active duty personnel or veteran).
  - The maximum bonus amount is \$500 for duty in hostile area as in the past bonus.
  - The maximum bonus amount is \$240 for duty in non-hostile areas.
  - If deployed with Reserve or Guard Units from South Dakota, the service member is eligible for the bonus-but cannot then claim a second bonus from another state.
- There are 2 new FTE for implementation of the Veterans Bonus and they will be housed in the Soldiers & Sailors Building.
- For questions on the South Dakota Bonus, contact DVA in Pierre. Payments probably will begin in July.
- There is another FTE for a public relations/information position. This person too will be housed in Pierre.
- The Korean War Memorial Dedication is scheduled for September 18, 2004, in Pierre. The planning committee is headed up by John Moisan and Alice Wright. The Parade Committee is looking for participants. The form to participate will be available soon. The Committee is also seeking volunteers. There are reservations for the Commission Members at the Holiday Inn Express.
- The Legislation pertaining to the Gulf War has been brought up to date. It now reads "August, 1990 to a date to be determined by the South Dakota Legislature."

Claims Office Supervisor Dave Wherry had a handout with his report.

- The Claims Office is doing their regular work but also is involved in training and liaison visits.
- Staff Members attend many of the American Legion District Meetings to represent the Division.
- The Staff also participates in national level training.

- They help provide the trainers for the four mini-conferences held across the State for the C/TVSO's.
- In May the new Veteran Service Officers Orientation training will be held in Sioux Falls.
- Helen Van Laecken has been honored by the VA in Sioux Falls for her work especially on behalf of women veterans.
- Mr. Wherry commented that the "hiccups" from the Pension Maintenance Center causing complaints are "way down".
- Major General Gorman will get contact established with Air Guard and Dave Wherry to be sure info on veterans benefits gets to the Air Guard.

Tom Murphy from SAA had a handout for his presentation.

- Part of the problems for SAA has been caused by 4 different ELR's over the last 16 months.
- There are presently 108 OJT programs, broken down 54 OJT (6 to 24 months long) and 54 Apprenticeship programs (2 years to 4 or 5 years in length).
- There are 52 schools approved for VA Benefits, also used by Chapter 35 persons, child or spouse of a deceased or permanently disabled veteran.
- SAA is really concentrating on outreach with letters to various types of offices; "cold calls" just stopping by; State Personnel new employee folders has a flyer, a Customer Satisfaction Survey forms was recently sent out and already a 50% or better response.
- SAA in South Dakota is a model for the nation.
- Dave Jackson is a federal employee of the US Department of Labor in Pierre.
- Karen Bak works with the Guard Education at Camp Rapid.
- Another form of outreach are the 1999b's which interrupt training for these deployed Guardspeople, or the form to get the program re-instated.

Jerry Lolley spoke again about the NAFSCO School being held 23-28 May in Rapid City. There are 152 with room reservations already and they are expecting from 200 to 250 to attend. The Women Veteran Coordinator's Conference is being held at the same time and they have an international speaker in the Princess of Jordan. The Governor has been invited to be a speaker on the opening day, especially as part of the part of the program to honor the Code Talkers. At a minimum there will be bulletin board at NAFSCO Training School in honor of the Code Talkers.

Motion was made by Murphy and seconded by Evenson to have Don Loudner as the Veterans Commission Representative to the NAFSCO Training School, especially because of the Code Talker Honoring. Motion passed.

Jerry Lolley commented that the one thing still needed for the School was a good copy machine and Dave Jungemann from TREA said they would be able to assist with a machine for them to use.

The issue of the Emergency Clause for State Veterans' Preference is in the hands of attorneys now because it was not in the original wording. MG Gorman will try again to get it addressed.

Motion made by Murphy and seconded by Evenson to draft a letter to the Congressional Delegates asking for their support for 1) Mandatory Funding; 2) an Independent Budget; 3) Full Concurrent Receipt; and 4) Survivor Benefits. Motion passed.

Don Clarke commented that the Vietnam Veterans Conference in Mitchell and the Hand County Veterans' Forum were both positive, informative meetings.

Murphy asked to Commission to go on record requesting one of the new VA Medical Vans out to South Dakota to go into remote areas, i.e. the reservations. They are self-contained with doctors, nurses, adjudicators, even checks in some cases. Jerry Lolley reminded them that the van would need to return in 90 days to these same remote areas in order to carry through with claims processing. Check with North Dakota contact Greg Soyer to see what they've done to bring this into their area. It was written up in the last DAV magazine.

Final announcements and questions were received:

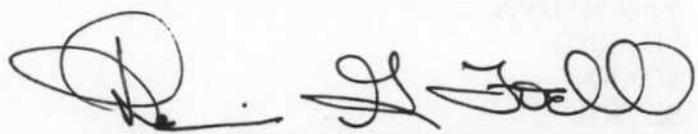
The next scheduled Veterans Commission Meeting will be 22-23 July in Sioux Falls, SD at the PVA Chapter Home. The fall meeting will be held on October 14-15, 2004, in Aberdeen. The site is yet to be determined.

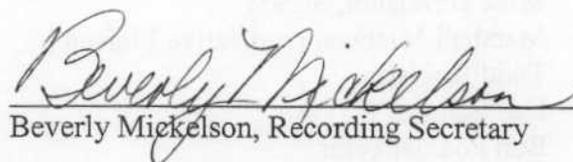
There will be a tour right after lunch with the residents through the Veterans Home Complex.

Dr. Sam Holman, originally from Aberdeen, and a new resident of the SD Veterans Home was introduced.

There were questions raised about the organ in the chapel and the proposed chapel for the Veterans Home.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45.

  
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Dennis Foell, Director SD DVA  
5-06-04  
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Date

  
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Beverly Mickelson, Recording Secretary

Attendees for the April 5-6, 2004, Meeting at the SD Veterans' Home in Hot Springs, SD

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Dennis Foell, Director	SD DVA
Don Loudner	SD Veterans Commission
Gene A Murphy	SD Veterans Commission
Bill Locken, Chairman	SD Veterans Commission
Michael A. Gorman, Dept. Secretary	Dept of Military & Veterans Affairs
Paul A. Evenson	SD Veterans Commission
Donald Clarke	SD Veterans Commission
Roland Benson	SD Veterans Commission
Dr Thomas Murphy	SD DVA-SAA
David Wherry, Supervisor	SD DVA-Claims Office
Randall Meyers, Director of Operations	SD Veterans' Home
Larry L Wilcox, Superintendent	SD Veterans' Home
Delbert "Jim" Foster	PVA
Joseph M Dalpiaz, Director	Sioux Falls VA
Irene C. Sears, Department President	SD AL Auxiliary
Dave Jungemann, President	TREA, Rapid City
Gary Smither	TREA, Rapid City
Gene P. Eiring	Guest, Hot Springs
H. G. Krosschell	SD DAV Commander, Rapid City
David Purtill	CVSO, Fall River County
Jerry Lolley	CVSO, Meade County
Dave Stroh	VSO SD DVA
Mike Birnbaum, SCSM	SDARNG
Marshall Michels, Legislative Liaison	SDARNG
Todd Kolden	SD DOL
Earl Schultz	VETS - US DOL
Bob Poe, Director	Black Hills National Cemetery
Pee Wee Douthit	NEC, American Legion
Peter Henry, Director	Black Hills Health Care System
Robert Petzel	VA Midwest Health Care Network 23
Armon Gaddy	Senator Daschle's Office
Darrell Shoemaker	Senator Johnson's Office
Frank D. Foster, Physical Plant Manager	SD Veterans' Home
Stan Seymour	VFW State Commander
Loren Murren	SD Veterans Council
Myron Zeeck	Marine Corps League
Ron Tolrud	American Legion
Hal Weber	VFW