

**South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting
16 & 17 June 2009
VA Medical Center 4th Floor Auditorium
Sioux Falls, South Dakota**

Members present: Chairman Bill Locken, Commissioner Mike Birnbaum, Commissioner Paul Evenson, Commissioner Wade Hubbard, Commissioner Don Loudner, and Commissioner Gene Murphy.

The meeting was called to order at 9:04 AM (CT), at the VA Medical Center-4th Floor Auditorium, by Chairman Locken. Chairman Locken led the Commission and attendees in saying the "Pledge of Allegiance" and then welcomed all in attendance.

MOTION: Commissioner Loudner moved to approve the agenda - 2nd by Commissioner Murphy. Motion passed with a vote of 6-0. (Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken).

MOTION: Commissioner Murphy moved to amend the February 10-11, 2009, minutes under **Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Congressional Representatives** on pages 3 & 4 and **AGENDA ITEM – VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS** on pages 5 & 6. After discussion a vote was called, the motion died with a 3 to 3 vote. (Yes – Evenson, Loudner, Murphy No – Birnbaum, Hubbard, Locken)

AGENDA ITEM – SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Brigadier General Dave Holman, Assistant to the Adjutant General reported the following to the Commission:

- Overall Strength for Army National Guard – 3196 Authorized, 3429 Assigned – 107%
- Army Guard Recruiting slowing down
- Boss lift with the 1st Battalion currently in Ft Hood, TX was a success, deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom will be in June 2009
- 25th Annual Golden Coyote Exercise will be held June 6-21, 2009 consisting of 63 units equaling 3,368 troops from 24 states, Canada and Suriname
- The SD National Guard responded to the North Dakota flooding
- Construction and upgrades in the Army and Air Guard facilities are taking place or have been completed
- F-16 is an outdated aircraft – this is an item of concern
- The SD Air Guard is sponsoring an air show in Sioux Falls, July 25 & 26 featuring the Blue Knights

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Brigadier General Dave Holman responded to questions asked by the Commission (and Tom Gohn, CVSO) in regards to the Golden Coyotes considering projects east of the river and tuition assistance payments. It was suggested Colonel Kit Cline, Army National Guard or Lieutenant Colonel Al Punt, Air National Guard be contacted with concerns and ideas for the Golden Coyote projects.

ACTION ITEMS - Brigadier General Holman will provide rules and regulations on the choosing of projects. Brigadier General Holman will check on the tuition assistance payments and report back to the Commission.

AGENDA ITEM – SOUTH DAKOTA DIVISION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Larry Person, Field Officer Supervisor, reported the following points of interest to the commission:

- Spring Mini-Conferences were held May 12-15 in Watertown, Mitchell, Pierre and Rapid City
- C/TVSO Orientation School was held in Sioux Falls and coordinated by Dave Wherry
- Annual Benefit School will be held in Pierre August 31 – September 3
- SDDVA Staff are working to update the Service Officer Manual
- Tom Murphy retired effective May 18, 2009
- Job listings for the Pierre and Sioux Falls offices have been posted
- Audry Ricketts is the new Department Public Information Officer located in Pierre
- Reclassification of three positions are being considered
- HB 1025, HB 1031, and HB 1270 were all passed in the 2009 Legislative Session
- SDDVA Survey focused on the training needs and customer service – an overall positive feedback was received and the survey will provide the division opportunities to review our services and delivery
- There will be 3 CVSO's retiring July thru August of this year
- 13 counties have combined their resources for hiring VSO's
- State forms are currently being converted and will soon be available on the state Military and Veterans Affairs website
- Veterans Bonus and Emergency Loan reports were provided

Dave Wherry, Sioux Falls Regional Claims Office Supervisor, reported the following:

- Nolan Ruby, resigned his position and will begin work with the VA Regional Office
- Jon Gohn, was activated with his unit in early April 2009 – estimated return late spring 2010
- Claims Office conducted the C/TVSO Orientation training May 18-20

- Claims Office Service Officers and Claims Examiner attended training on June 9 to gain access to the Compensation and Pension Record Interchange Program

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – South Dakota Division of Veterans Affairs Report

Commission members shared concerns with regard to the makeup of the Leadership Team, reclassification of positions, staffing, VSO funding and the Department's strategic plan.

Chairman Locken called for a short break at 10:49 AM.
The meeting reconvened at 10:59 AM.

AGENDA ITEM – VETERANS ADMINISTRATION REGIONAL OFFICE

Darryl Brady, acting Director and Donna Meyer-Hickel, Service Center Manager reported on the efforts taken to improve processing timeliness, pilot program started to provide checklist that include information or evidence the claimant must submit with claim, pilot program started to accelerate claims and appeals processing, and the revision of the fiduciary accounting requirements. Legislative changes were reported along with the VA's focus for the remaining fiscal year. An explanation on the Post 9/11 GI Bill was provided. See reports for details on these issues.

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Veterans Administration Regional Office

The Commission asked if the definitions for Brown Water and Blue Water were decided. The Brown Water has been defined, working on the Blue Water, as it is a difficult task. The VA is retro active (March 21, 2007) of claims concerning nursing home long-term care – Security Act. Concerns from the commission on the time it takes to change and implement laws were expressed. It was suggested flags be kept or given to the state's Division office, for distribution, to help avoid delay of flags for burial purposes.

AGENDA ITEM – MILITARY ONE SOURCE

South Dakota Joint Family Support Assistance Program Consultant, Todd Otterberg, presented an overview of the Military One Source program including its mission, the services it provides, and the commitment to quality of service. A detailed report was provided.

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Military One Source

Commission thanked Mr. Otterberg for his report and explanation of the program. Mr. Otterberg commented he would be willing to give the Military One Source presentation to all those that inquire and want to know more about the program.

A break was taken for lunch at 12:11 PM.

The meeting reconvened at 1:02 PM. Present – Birnbaum, Hubbard, Murphy, and Locken. Evenson and Loudner joined the meeting at 1:10 PM.

AGENDA ITEM – MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS PROGRAM

Robert Sack, Coordinator, and Lieutenant Colonel Harvey Fitzgerald, SD National Guard came forward to report on the joint efforts for military honors. Fitzgerald addressed the Commission on the partnership with guard and family support services, assisting the veteran organizations and veteran service officers in providing military honors. He also informed them on the federal rules and regulations set forth. Mr. Sack told the Commission there are teams in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Miller, and Mitchell. Forty training sessions have taken place and teams are members of the Authorized Provider Program. Each branch takes care of their own – currently over 96,000 honors have taken place across the United States. US Army TACOM issues ammunitions and weapons.

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Military Funeral Honors Program

Clarence Kooistra asked for the floor to inquire about legislation being drafted for the ammunitions provided for the weapons purchased by his team. The ammunitions for his team's weapons are not funded under the current regulations. Mr. Sack, Mr. Koositra, and congressional delegates will meet and work on a solution to fund this expense. It was noted the VA Cemeteries have ammunitions for distribution.

The Military Funeral Honors Programs works well with funeral homes to do everything possible to have a team at a funeral to do honors.

AGENDA ITEM – NATIONAL CEMETERY UPDATE

Commissioner Loudner reported the latest on a national cemetery being built in eastern South Dakota. There was a National Cemetery meeting held in Ft. Bliss, TX. It was suggested the Veteran Organizations pass a resolution at their annual meetings to take forward to Washington.

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – National Cemetery Update

A couple of the veteran organizations said they already have the resolutions suggested by Commissioner Loudner and they are available at anytime the National Cemetery Committee would like them.

AGENDA ITEM – CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES (Reports Provided)

Eric Lahammer, Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin reported the following:

- Rep. Herseth Sandlin is working on HR 1088, The Mandatory Veterans Specialist Training Act of 2009 and HR 1089 Veterans Employment Rights Realignment Act of 2009 – both bills will help serve and protect our veterans
- HR 1037 and HR 1211 are two bills that have passed the subcommittees and sent to full committee for consideration
- Five other bills are being worked on with the Veterans Affairs Committee and the full House to advance
- A roundtable discussion was held with west river CVSO's – many important issues were brought up

- Other key veteran initiatives being supported
 - Advanced Appropriations
 - Premium Conversion
 - Concurrent Receipt
 - Post 9/11 GI Bill

Amy Bilka-Skilbred, provided the following goals for Senator Tim Johnson during the 111th Congress:

- VISN 23 will benefit from four grants totaling over \$17 million
- The VA opened enrollment to an increasing number of Priority 8 veterans
- Senator Johnson toured the newly renovated area at the VA Medical Center and visited with veterans
- Senator Johnson is working to improve women veterans health care and supports the Family Caregiver Program Act of 2009

Ben Ready, Senator John Thune updated the Commission with the following:

- Advanced funding for medical care for veterans was cosponsored by Senator Thune
- Rural Health will allocate over 1.5 million dollars for mental health services in rural areas with in South Dakota and Minnesota - \$215 million nationwide.
 - Established to reduce the wide disparity in care between rural and non-rural veterans
 - Committed to better serve the rural veterans
 - Telehealth technology used to serve rural veterans nationwide
- Senator Thune is the cosponsor of six legislative items that will benefit our veterans

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Congressional Representatives

The Commission expressed the following concerns to the Congressional Representatives:

- Blue Water Veterans
- Suicide
- Nursing Home Care and Costs
- Costs of prosthetics
- TBI – PTSD

Ben Ready requested specific individuals contact the delegates in order for appropriate research to be done and for the appropriate help to be provided to that individual. The Commission would like the reimbursement for the State Home rate to be reviewed.

Chairman Locken called for a break at 2:52 PM.

The meeting reconvened at 3:15 PM with all members present (Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken).

AGENDA ITEM – VISN 23 AND MEDICAL CENTER UPDATES

Cynthia Breyfogle, acting Deputy Network Director, Sara Ackert, Associate Director, Sioux Falls, and Peter Henry, Director, BHHCS came forward to present their reports. Cynthia Breyfogle informed the commission of the following:

- Dr. Petzel was appointed the acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health at the VA Central Office in Washington, DC
- VISN 23 received a 4 percent budget increase in fiscal year 2009
- 18.6 million dollars was received for rural health projects
- 2009 openings are planned for CBOC's in Watertown and Wagner
- The VA VHA founded a national suicide prevention hotline to assist veterans in emotional crisis 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
- Suicide Prevention Coordinators are Janelle Christensen (east river) and Cheryl Michaels (west river)

Sara Ackert gave an update on the Sioux Falls Medical Center, it included the following:

- Sioux Falls will receive 2.7 million dollars in stimulus money for additional construction projects
- New equipment has been a major purchase for the medical center
- New surgical and specialty care services are being provided and offered in rural areas to help meet policies and regulations
- Extended care and rehab service lines are always improving
 - Medical Foster Home Program
 - Poly trauma Center and clinical providers refer veterans severely injured or score positive on TBI screening to the team
 - Home Based Primary Care is provided for 88 enrolled patients within a 60 minute driving radius
 - Palliative care team provides advance care planning for veterans and their caregivers
 - Low vision/blind rehab clinic opened in September 2008
- Mental Health – renovation of the six-bed inpatient unit is complete
- Telephone care is monitored to improve access and veterans' satisfaction
- A major renovation is in the design phase for the dental clinic, new equipment has been purchased for six treatment rooms
- A Memorandum of Understanding and land use permit was signed by the VA and Indian Health Service in January to locate the Wagner CBOC near the IHS facility
- Outreach includes the local Honoring Veterans Pow-Wow, partnering with the DAV at their Night at the Canaries, and a Welcome Home Booth during the Air Guard Air Show

Pete Henry updated the Commission; his report included the following points:

- Outreach clinic at Pine Ridge
- Reaching out to veterans living on reservations to increase or help with:
 - Enrollment
 - Transportation
 - Health conditions more prevalent

- Partnering with Sinte Gleska University to provide seminars to members of the Rosebud Tribe
- BHHCS has provided support to the Rosebud and Oglala Sioux Tribes in grant writing for VA construction
- Use of technology provided in rural health areas
- Home Based Primary Care Program provides in-home visitations by health care professionals
- VA has joined with SD Hospice agencies to create the SD Hospice-Veterans Partnership to improve end of life care for veteran patients
- Rapid City Veterans Outreach Center has received a mobile counseling center to service rural area in South Dakota
- 20 million dollars will be spent this year purchasing care from non-VA sources in western South Dakota – some care is purchased under the auspices of Project HERO
- Increase seen in women veterans needing VA services

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – VISN 23 and Medical Center Updates

Commission members thanked the VISN 23 and Medical Center presenters for their time and dedication to helping veterans. Concerns were expressed on Administration costs being cut. Medicare/Medicaid is part of why no rise is seen in benefits and at medical centers. Dr. Julius answered concerns on sending veterans outside for care – when done the timeliness of care improves and has provided the specialized care needed. The BHHCS contracts with nursing homes and has 3 FTE working with HUD Urban Development

Betsy Geiver, Employment Coordinator Services, was introduced to the Commission at this time. She explained her position and purpose of employment at the Sioux Falls Medical Center.

AGENDA ITEM – VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS

Jim Huls represented the American Legion and reported their organization continues to support Boys State and Stand-downs, attended the Women Veterans Appreciation at Pine Ridge and the dedication for Master Sergeant Keeble, and have held 14 vet forums across the state. Their convention will be held in Huron, June 25-28, 2009, at the Crossroads.

Disabled American Veterans, Robert Hill, came forward and reported to the Commission that their convention was held April 23-25, 2009, provided a calendar of upcoming events and their fall conference would be held in Oacoma on October 10, 2009.

Delbert Foster, Paralyzed American Veterans, invited the commission and all attendees to the annual picnic and BBQ, June 17, 11:30 – 1:00 at the PVA Building.

Veterans of Foreign Wars – no representative for the VFW came forward.

Native American Indian Veterans, Inc. representative, Don Loudner, presented a wreath at the memorial in Washington, informed the commission of the code talker coin made by the state of Wisconsin, the governor of California established a Department Secretary of Minorities Affairs in the VA, and Sara Elton agreed to hold the spring national cemetery meeting at the Black Hills National Cemetery.

No representative present for TREA.

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Veterans Organizations

The commission will check into the completion of a study to track the number of veterans hired by the state of South Dakota and for the state to provide stats.

ACTION ITEM: Action of study completion to be taken by Locken.

The meeting recessed at 5:24 PM.

The meeting reconvened and was called to order June 17 at 8:31AM with all members present (Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken). Chairman Locken opened the meeting by leading the group in the "Pledge of Allegiance". On behalf of the commission, Chairman Locken thanked the VA for their hospitality and commented on the veterans' stories televised on the local TV stations.

AGENDA ITEM – STATE VETERANS HOME REPORT

Superintendent, Larry Wilcox from the State Veterans Home provided and presented the following information:

- Submitted first request for reimbursement on 70% of residents
- Hoping to have safety projects completed by October 1, 2009
- Sent wish list to veterans organizations
- Service Officer at the state home has been one of the best hire decisions for residents

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – State Veterans Home Report

Commission members inquired to several issues at the State Home.

- Safety compliance issues – once the safety projects are complete, the only issue will be the emergency staircases located on the outside of buildings
- The Service Officer for the home has attended state and national trainings
- CBM food contract is working well – many of the recipes used are the veterans' recipes convert to work with the use of CBM food contract
- Reimbursement covers 100% of total care cost
- 90-95% of residents eventually wear emergency devise
- Long-term care study process is at the Governor's office for review – the Governor will share the information once it is available

AGENDA ITEM – C/TVSO ORGANIZATION REPORT

Larry Goette, President, addressed the commission and gave the following points of interest:

- Members were asked for input on the SD Service Officer Manual and training by the Division
- Receive questions and requests for assistance from Guard members about eligibility for benefits and the issue of impartiality
- Continue to work on ways to work with the VA
- Encourage the VA and veterans to work through region or their office to verify eligibility of benefits
- Concerns on Ch 33 – education to the veteran community is needed
- C/TVSO and Division teamwork – suggested the organization be informed of legislation and have input on these issues
- County offices are cutting costs – is it possible to purchase supplies through other avenues – state supply or surplus for computers
- Concerns with the VA in Fargo and the task staff
- It is not possible to access a veteran's VA records if the American Legion is the POA

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – C/TVSO Organization Report

It was discussed and suggested the counties look into purchasing supply items from the state supply website and the PVA has computers to give away. It was also noted the Division and Division Regional offices have copies of DD214's that can be requested. It was encouraged by the organization and commission members for Field Staff to attend VA outreach meetings and forums with Congressional Representatives.

MOTION: Murphy moved to have Bill Locken and Larry Goette work to resolve the VA Fargo Task Staff issue. 2nd by Hubbard. Voting Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

ACTION ITEM: An American Legion representative (Paul Evenson) and Larry Goette will work together to resolve the issue of a service officer not being able to access a veteran's record through the VA system if their POA is the American Legion.

ACTION ITEM: The commission would like a copy of the letter and Welcome Home booklet that are sent to returning veterans.

A break was taken at 10:05 AM – the meeting reconvened at 10:15 AM.

AGENDA ITEM – SIOUX FALLS VET CENTER

Brian Wallin, Team Leader, reported that as of February 1, 2010 there will be a Mobile Vet Center used across the state, services are provided to active veterans and family members, gas cards are provided to veterans for special events, seeing an increase to OIF/OEF veterans, a PTSD group for veterans formed due to combined efforts from VA, Division, vet groups, and through media campaign. The Vet Center is fully staffed.

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Sioux Falls Vet Center

The commission asked about the budget – contract fees in the Aberdeen area are over-budget and all overnight travel has to be pre-approved. The center's medical services are working on ways to dilute the stigma on mental health.

MOTION: Murphy moved to send a letter in support of travel reimbursement to Washington delegates for the Vet Centers. 2nd by Evenson. Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

ACTION ITEM: A letter will be composed by Murphy, sent to Locken for final approval, signature, and mailing.

AGENDA ITEM – OLD AND NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Hubbard asked for the floor and then addressed the members stating that after making some inquiries he found out fees are not paid for commission members to be lobbyists.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: Hubbard moved, Murphy seconded, to amend the February 10-11, 2009 minutes under **Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Congressional Representatives** on pages 3 & 4 and **AGENDA ITEM – VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS** on pages 5 & 6 as submitted:

Page 3 & 4 – Chairman Bill Locken requested the members of the South Dakota Veterans Commission not use the communication word **WE** until the commission take a position on Veterans Legislative Issues when asking the congressional delegation for their support and/or opposition on an issue.

Page 5 & 6 – Michael Birnbaum, Bill Locken, and Wade Hubbard were registered as lobbyists for the South Dakota Veterans Commission. The questions of who appointed them and who paid the lobbyist fees weren't answered. Since the Commission had no policy regarding lobbying, Birnbaum and Locken testified in support of HB 1025 and HB 1031, without the specific approval of the members of the total Commission.

After discussion a vote was called, the motion passed with a 6 to 0 vote. (Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken)

Next meeting date was set for 15 & 16 October 2009 in Hot Springs.

It was suggested a workshop day be set to discuss the research on commission roles, responsibilities, and policies.

MOTION: Birnbaum made a motion to meet in Pierre August 31, 2009, for a workshop, to discuss the roles, responsibilities, and policies of the Commission. 2nd by Hubbard. All voted in favor, motion passed 6-0. (Yes- Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Locken, Murphy, Locken)


ACTION ITEM: Commissioner Hubbard will research the roles and responsibilities of other boards/commissions for providing information to the commission to help write the role and responsibilities for the South Dakota Veterans Commission.

ACTION ITEM: The invitation for the Tripp County Centennial Celebration was discussed and Sue Zilverberg will RSVP for Commissioners – Birnbaum, yes – Evenson, maybe – Hubbard, yes – Loudner, yes – Murphy, will RSVP himself – Locken – yes.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: Commissioner Evenson moved to send a cordial letter to BOP asking for the statistics on veterans hired vs. non-veterans and the number of hires with service connected disabilities. The tracking to be begin at the beginning of the month from the date of the letter. 2nd by Loudner. All voted in favor, motion passed (Yes, Birnbaum, Hubbard, Evenson, Loudner, Murphy, Locken).

MOTION: Birnbaum moved to adjourn, 2nd by Murphy. Yes – Birnbaum, Hubbard, Evenson, Loudner, Murphy, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

Meeting adjourned at 11:23 AM.



William Locken, Chairman

10/15/2009

Date