

**South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting
October 15-16, 2009
Cottage House – Michael J. Fitzmaurice Veterans Home
Hot Springs, South Dakota**

Members present: Chairman Bill Locken, Commissioner Mike Birnbaum, Commissioner Wade Hubbard, Commissioner Gene Murphy and Commissioner John Noyes.

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM (MT) on Thursday, October 15, 2009, at the Cottage House at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice Veterans Home in Hot Springs, South Dakota, by Chairman Locken. Chairman Locken led the Commission and attendees in saying the “Pledge of Allegiance” and then welcomed all guests and presenters. Chairman Locken welcomed newly appointed Commissioner John Noyes.

Review of Agenda – Chairman Locken reviewed the agenda as presented and there were no additions or changes to the agenda.

Consideration and Approval of Commission Meeting Minutes – Chairman Locken noted that the Commission had before them the Commission meeting minutes for February 10-11, 2009, June 16-17, 2009, and August 31, 2009. Chairman Locken asked the Commission how they wished to dispose of the minutes.

Commissioner Hubbard moved to approve the February 10-11, 2009, South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes as presented. Commissioner Birnbaum seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Discussion ensued regarding the June 16-17, 2009, South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Murphy asked that some amendments be considered. Chairman Locken requested that the Department PIO review said amendments and report back to the Commission at the conclusion of the meeting.

Commissioner Birnbaum moved to approve the August 31, 2009, South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes as presented. Commissioner Hubbard seconded the motion and motion carried.

Chairman Locken noted that all reports being presented to the Commission would be posted on the Commission’s section of the South Dakota Division of Veterans Affairs Web site.

Reports – South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs – Chairman Locken called on Adjutant General Steven Doohen. General Doohen thanked the Commission for the role they play and commended them for their development of a mission and vision for the Commission. He then reported on status and activities of the South Dakota Army and Air National Guard, as well as the issues and challenges facing the Guard. The General then reviewed future

deployments. General Doohen concluded his report by informing the Commission that Steve Harding would be serving as Acting Deputy Secretary while Andy Gerlach is deployed to Afghanistan. Harding will begin his duties with the Department in early November. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of General Doohen.

Reports – South Dakota State Veterans Home – Chairman Locken called on Larry Wilcox, Superintendent of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice Veterans Home. Wilcox reported on the resident counts and the status of all of the life safety projects at the Home. Wilcox noted that having a service officer has garnered increased revenues for the Home. Questions arose on the status of the on-going long-term care discussions. Wilcox noted that he was hopeful that some announcements would be made before year end. Gene Murphy, on behalf of DAV Chapter I, presented Larry Wilcox with a check for \$2,000 for the Veterans Home. The Northern Hills DAV Chapter 11 presented Larry Wilcox with a check for \$1,000 for the Veterans Home. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of Mr. Wilcox. Upon conclusion of discussion, the Commissioners thanked the Veterans Service Organizations for their unending support to the Veterans Home.

Reports – South Dakota Division of Veterans Affairs – Chairman Locken called on Acting Director George Summerside. Summerside reported on the mini conferences, the value of the Leadership Team and their upcoming meeting, Annual Benefit School, recognizing excellence in the veteran network, revision of the VSO manual, outreach programs, status of position reclassifications, legislative roundtables, meetings with Congressional delegation and staff, Fallen Heroes banner program, Mental Health Summit and ISFAC. Summerside also reviewed the report that had been presented by the Claims Office. Summerside then introduced Larry Person, Division Field Supervisor. Person reported on the status of the Bonus Program, reviewed the “Welcome Home” letter that is sent out and noted that 702 packets had been disseminated between June 08 – June 09. Person then provided the Commissioners with a map highlighting those counties that have partnered in hiring a VSO. Summerside then introduced Shane Olivier, Division Education Program Manager. Olivier reviewed outreach efforts that the Education staff has been involved with. He then reviewed ongoing discussions that have been held with our Congressional delegation and their staff with regard to educational benefits. Olivier noted that Ryan Fowler has joined the Division as the Education Representative. He concluded his report by noting that the Division staff continues to work together and demonstrate the spirit of cooperation. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of the Division staff.

Reports – SDNG Education Programs – Chairman Locken called on Charles Blasdell, Education Officer for the South Dakota Army National Guard. Blasdell reviewed the numerous services his staff provides with regards to educational benefits. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of Blasdell.

Reports – Black Hills Health Care System – Chairman Locken called on Peter Henry, Director of the Black Hills Health Care System. Henry provided the Commission updates on recruitment and key hires, FTE levels, veteran employment statistics, budget, equipment purchases, construction projects, program initiatives, surgical and specialty care services, primary care services, extended care and rehabilitation programs, accreditation, mental health issues, OEF/OIF outreach, homeless veterans and issues relating to H1N1. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of Henry.

Reports – Sioux Falls VA Medical Center – Chairman Locken called on Rachel Crossley, Associate Director for Patient Care at the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center. Crossley provided the Commission updates on staffing, budget, equipment purchases, program updates and initiatives, surgical care services, primary and specialty medical services, extended care and rehab services, mental health, telephone care, dental care, stimulus projects, outreach, volunteer opportunities and patient numbers. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of Crossley.

Reports – Women Veterans – Chairman Locken called on Amy Vannatter, Women Veterans Program Manager of the Black Hills Health Care System. Vannatter provided the Commission an update on what the VA is doing to meet the needs of our 1.8 million women veterans. Vannatter briefed on healthcare needs, the Women Veteran's Strategic Healthcare Group, mental health services, sexual trauma and outreach activities. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of Vannatter.

Reports – Congressional Delegation Reports – Chairman Locken called on Jesse Ewing from Senator John Thune's office, Chris Blair from Senator Tim Johnson's office and Tania Schepper of Representative Herseth Sandlin's office. Staffers briefed the Commission on legislation that has been introduced impacting our veterans and the status of the respective legislation. Staff also updated the Commission on funding for veteran programs, South Dakota projects, Honor Flight and the Defense Authorization Report and Bill. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of congressional staffers.

Commissioners thanked the staff for their reports and asked them to relay to the congressional delegation that we are appreciative of their support and their leadership in introducing legislative initiatives that benefit our veterans.

Reports – Transitional Assistance – Chairman Locken called on Kevin Speirs, Transitional Assistance Advisor for the South Dakota Army National Guard. Speirs provided the Commission with an overview of transitional care, Tri-Care, non-clinical case management, Yellow Ribbon program, community-based services and other services provided to assist the veterans. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of Speirs.

Reports – Veteran’s Organizations – Chairman Locken called on representatives from the Veterans Organizations for their reports

Rod Martens, State Commander for the South Dakota American Legion, reported on memberships, VA funding, Veteran Forums, Long Term Care, Honor Flight, and the state convention activities and resolutions adopted by membership.

Robert Hill, State Commander for the South Dakota Disabled American Veterans, reported on their 2009-2010 legislative initiatives, DAV Transportation activities, the VA breakdown of benefits by county, legislative roundtables, Disabled Americans for Life Coins and the various fundraising efforts that are ongoing.

Jim Foster, reporting for the South Dakota Paralyzed Veterans of America, outlined some of their upcoming activities, ADA training seminars and noted that information packets that would be distributed to schools.

Bill Barlow, State Commander for the South Dakota Veterans of Foreign Wars, reported on their memberships, the baseball programs, Honor Flight, Wreaths Across America, Veterans Day, Memorial Park, OEF/OIF hospital program, State Fair outreach, Shinseki’s visit to South Dakota, Welcome Home outreach, and upcoming events.

There were no reports from the National American Indian Veterans Inc. or the TREA.

Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of all presenters from the Veterans Organizations.

Consideration and Approval of June 16-17, 2009 Commission Meeting Minutes – Chairman Locken noted that Recording Secretary Audry Ricketts reviewed the suggested changes for the June 16-17, 2009, Commission Meeting minutes and suggested that the following changes be made. On page 1, the fourth paragraph, insert the date February 10-11, 2009, On page 3, paragraph two, insert the following verbiage - 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 asked the Commission how they wished to dispose of the June 16-17, 2009, minutes.

Commissioner Birnbaum moved to approve the June 16-17, 2009, South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes with the respective amendments. Commissioner Hubbard seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Chairman Locken recessed the meeting at 5:00 pm and announced that the meeting would reconvene at 9:00 am October 16.

Larry Wilcox, Superintendent of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice Veterans Home, then provided Commissioners and guests a tour of the State Veterans Home in an effort to demonstrate some of the changes that have been made to the facilities.

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM (MT) on Friday, October 16, 2009, at the Cottage House at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice Veterans Home in Hot Springs, South Dakota, by Chairman Locken. Chairman Locken led the Commission and attendees in saying the "Pledge of Allegiance" and then welcomed all guests and presenters.

Members present: Chairman Bill Locken, Commissioner Mike Birnbaum, Commissioner Wade Hubbard, Commissioner Gene Murphy and Commissioner John Noyes.

Chairman Locken reviewed the written report that had been provided by Larry Goette, President of the South Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association.

Chairman Locken noted that he would work with the American Legion to try to find some resolution to address the challenges faced by the American Legion Accreditation and report back to the Commission.

Reports – ISFAC – Chairman Locken called on LTC Harvey Fitzgerald of the South Dakota National Guard. Fitzgerald reported on the upcoming Health Summit and the background, goals and vision for the Inter Service Family Assistance Committee (ISFAC). Harvey then introduced Russ Korzeniewski, Director of Programs and Services for the American Red Cross, the lead agency working on achieving the ISFAC goals and mission. Korzeniewski reviewed the charter and outlined the partners that are being invited to participate.

Fitzgerald also introduced Keith Ham and Renee Oler.

Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of LTC Fitzgerald and Russ Korzeniewski.

Commissioner Birnbaum commended the players involved in the ISFAC project and requested that they come and report back to the Commission in six to eight months and update the Commission on the status of this project.

Reports – Black Hills National Cemetery – Chairman Locken called on Sara Ellton, Director of the Black Hills National Cemetery. Ellton provided the Commission with the number of burials, upgrades and changes made with stimulus funds, damages received in the 2009 hailstorm, Wreaths Across America, the Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service and the status of the new Columbarium. Commissioners and guests were provided the opportunity to ask questions of Sara. Discussions ensued regarding consideration for a National Cemetery in eastern South Dakota. It was noted that in South Dakota we are fortunate to have access to two national cemeteries in close proximity – Fort Snelling in Minneapolis, MN and Black Hills National Cemetery in Sturgis.

Sara reported that veterans from the states of Idaho, Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming are also buried at the Black Hills National Cemetery as these states do not have a national cemetery.

Consideration of Future Meeting Dates – Chairman Locken asked the Commission to discuss dates for future Commission meetings. After considerable discussion, the Commission selected the dates of December 9-10, 2009, for their next Commission meeting. The meeting will convene at noon on the 9th and the focus of the meeting will be to begin the process to review state statutes that pertain to veterans. Discussion ensued regarding the format to be used for this meeting.

Commissioners then discussed options for Commission meetings in 2010. Tentatively the Commission selected January/February, April, July and October timeframes for consideration for 2010 meeting dates. No formal action was taken. Discussion ensued regarding the need to have a meeting in December, perhaps via conference call, to allow for review of the Division's budget and legislative proposals, as well as review other legislative initiatives.

Review and Consideration of Commission Mission, Vision Statement, Core Values, Goals of the Commission and Current Issues Facing the Commission – Chairman Locken noted that the Commission had met August 31, 2009, to strategically discuss the role of the Commission and to develop a mission statement, a vision and goals for the Commission.

After considerable discussion, a motion was made by Commissioner Hubbard, seconded by Commissioner Birnbaum, to adopt the following mission statement for the Commission.

The South Dakota Veterans Commission (SDVC) is an advocate for veterans, their families and their survivors. The SDVC is a partner with county, state, tribal and federal agencies and service organizations and their auxiliaries to ensure that the highest quality of services are provided.

Motion carried.

Commissioner Birnbaum moved to adopt the following Vision Statement for the Commission. Commissioner Murphy seconded the motion and motion carried.

The philosophy of the South Dakota Veterans Commission is based on its view that support of veterans is the sole purpose for its existence.

Commissioner Murphy moved to adopt the following Core Values for the Commission. Commissioner Noyes seconded the motion and motion carried.

Service – Knowledge – Quality – Dignity – Integrity – Honor – Compassion – Loyalty - Leadership

Commissioner Birnbaum moved to adopt the following goals for the Commission. Commissioner Murphy seconded the motion and motion carried.

- Study all federal and state legislation affecting veterans, their spouses, their dependents and their beneficiaries
- Establish liaison with agencies dealing with veteran's affairs
- Make recommendations to the Legislature and to the Governor concerning veterans, their families and their survivors

Chairman Locken noted that the Commission had identified review of SDCL and lobbying policy as the main issues facing the Commission.

Chairman Locken then reviewed the proposed layout for the Commission Web site. After considerable discussion, a motion was made by Commissioner Hubbard, seconded by Commissioner Murphy, to approve the proposed layout of the Commissioner section of the Web page as discussed. Motion carried

A motion was made by Commissioner Birnbaum to go into executive session. Commissioner Noyes seconded the motion. The motion carried and the Commission went into executive session.

The Commission came out of executive session and Chairman Locken opened the floor for nominations for chairman of the Commission. Chairman Locken noted that there were four members present at this time.

Commissioner Birnbaum made a motion to nominate Wade Hubbard as chairman for the Commission. Commissioner Noyes seconded the motion and motion carried.

Commissioner Birnbaum noted that he believed Commissioner Hubbard was the leader to move the Commission forward.

Chairman Locken opened the floor for nominations for vice chairman. Commissioner Hubbard moved to nominate John Noyes as vice chairman of the Commission. Commissioner Birnbaum seconded the motion and motion carried.

Chairman Locken concluded the meeting by saying that it is time for the Commission and the Veterans Organizations to work together for the betterment of our veterans and to put some of these issues behind us. He noted that we have burned a lot of bridges and it is time to move forward achieving positive results for our veterans and their families.

Chairman Locken thanked Larry Wilcox and his staff for the hospitality extended to the Commission.

Chairman Locken noted that the Commission would recognize Paul Evenson for his commitments and dedication at a future Commission meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 pm (MT).

William Locken, Chairman
Audry Ricketts, Recorder