

APPROVED
South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting
October 4-5, 2011
Sheraton – Sioux Falls, SD

The meeting of the South Dakota Veterans Commission was called to order at 8:00 am (CT) on Tuesday, October 4, 2011, by Chairman Birnbaum.

Chairman Birnbaum noted that all legal requirements as outlined in SDCL 1-25-1 and 1-25-1.1 were met with regard to this meeting.

President Birnbaum led the commission and attendees in the pledge of allegiance.

Roll Call - Chairman Birnbaum asked staff to take roll call. Roll call indicated Commissioners present were: Mike Birnbaum, Wade Hubbard, Bill Locken, Gene Murphy, KC Russell and John Noyes.

Staff: Deputy Secretary Steve Harding, Director Charles Claussen and Public Information Officer Audry Ricketts were present.

Review of Agenda – Chairman Birnbaum asked if there were any additions or changes for the proposed agenda. Commissioner Birnbaum noted that Sarah Bierman, USDOL, and Martin Skye, USTDC, were unable to attend the meeting and that Deputy Secretary Harding would cover all of his issues at one time. Commissioner Murphy made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Russell, to approve the agenda with those changes noted. Motion carried.

Consideration of Minutes – Chairman Birnbaum asked the Commission how they wished to handle the February 1-2, 2011, Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Murphy pointed out that the roll call section on page one of the minutes should be corrected to read that Commissioner Noyes was excused. Commissioner Hubbard moved the approval of the minutes as amended. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Locken and motion carried.

Department Report – Chairman Birnbaum called on Deputy Secretary Harding for the Department of Veterans Affairs report and the South Dakota National Guard update. Deputy Secretary Harding reviewed the changes that had and will be taking place with regard to Governor Daugaard's issuance of the executive order to create two departments – the SD Department of the Military and the SD Department of Veterans Affairs. He noted that Command SGT MAJ Larry Zimmerman has been named the Secretary for the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs effective January 1, 2013, and that until that time Lt. Governor Matt Michels will serve as the Interim Secretary. Harding also noted that he would be serving as the deputy secretary for both departments. Deputy Secretary Harding then reviewed some of the legislative issues both departments are working on with regard to the expansion of BOMA and veterans designation on driver's licenses. Discussion ensued regarding these proposals. Commissioners shared their thoughts and concerns. Commissioner Murphy asked if there was any way this administration would work with us in securing the data regarding the number of veterans employed by the state.

Deputy Secretary Harding then briefed the Commission on the status of the veteran's home projects. He noted that by the end of October we would know if we're awarded the VA funding for the western veterans

home. He noted that, if approved we could go to bid as early as spring. If turned down for the grant, the Department would have to resubmit application the following year. He also noted that the Request for Proposal for the Eastern Veterans Home had been released and that proposals are due in by December 15. Chairman Birnbaum asked that the Commission be kept up to date on the status of the eastern and western veteran's homes.

Deputy Secretary Harding then briefed the Commission on SDNG deployments.

Future meeting dates were also discussed. The consensus was to hold a conference call in December of 2011 after the Governor's budget address and then in 2012 hold a meeting in February in Pierre and a meeting in early September out west.

SFVAHCS Report – Chairman Birnbaum thanked Shirley Redmond for all the arrangements she made for the Commission meeting. He then introduced Patrick Kelly, director of SFVAHCS. Director Kelly noted the correlation between the Commission's mission and the SDVAHCS's mission. Kelly then updated the Commission on staffing, budget issues, homelessness, telehealth, centralized billing and CPACs, veteran trends, mental health, caregivers program, IHS collaboration, and women veterans programs.

Congressional Reports – Chairman Birnbaum welcomed congressional staff members Benjamin Ready (Sen. Thune's office), Amy Bilka-Skillbread (Sen. Johnson's office) and Suzanne Veenis (Rep. Noem's office). Each of the respective offices provided an update on legislative issues, budgetary issues, and the role of the supercommittee. Commissioners shared their concerns with regard to the VA's consolidation of services, Priority Groups 7 and 8, Rep. Ryan's study, the federal budget, and that consideration be given to expand the caregiver program to all veterans

Veterans Service Organization Reports - Chairman Birnbaum called on the representatives of the veterans service organizations for their reports. Reports were provided by Harold Muilenberg (DAV), Verne Hansen (VFW), Dennis Brenden (American Legion), and Ken Laughlin (NCPVA). They briefed the Commission on youth programs, Boys State, oratory programs, mid-winter conferences, legislative forums and conferences, district meetings, state convention, memberships, fundraising efforts, stand downs, foster care programs, technologies being used to attract younger members and contributions made to support Honor Flight.

The Commission recessed at 11:55 am for lunch.

The Commission came back to order at 1:00 pm.

Division Report – Chairman Birnbaum called on Director Charles Claussen for his report. Claussen reviewed the number of claims processed, number of OJT and Apprenticeship programs processed, the number of veterans bonuses paid out to date, the status of the university outreach, veterans courts, and the VetraSpec software.

Director Claussen requested that the Commission consider writing a letter to those county commissions that have not bought the VetraSpec software encouraging them to make the investment.

Commissioner Hubbard noted that he would assist Director Claussen in his endeavors to secure a veteran's court.

Commissioner Murphy congratulated Mr. Claussen on being named Midwest Region Vice President. **ESGR Report** – Chairman Birnbaum called on Ronald Mielke, ESGR Chairman for his report. Mielke reported on the relationships between the SDNG, the Reserves and the employers. He then briefed the commission on activations, deployments, employment initiative program, mediation services and state active duty.

Sicangu Akicita Owicaha Veterans Cemetery - Chairman Birnbaum noted that presenters for the Sicangu Akicita Owicaha Veterans Cemetery were unable to attend the meeting and that we would schedule their presentation for a future meeting.

Vets Center Report – Chairman Birnbaum called on Brian Wallin, Team Leader for the Vets Center. Wallin reported on staffing, outreach activities, use of skypeing, incarcerated veterans, transition programs, and marriage encounter programs.

Dakotas Regional Office Report – Chairman Birnbaum called on Director Jim Brubaker. Brubaker briefed the Commission on staffing, funds secured for veterans, homelessness, rating accuracy, appeals, PMC timeliness, consolidation, Ebenefits and electronic communications. Commissioners shared their concerns with Brubaker regarding consolidation of services, electronic filing and the emphasis that is being put on new veterans vs. the pending claims for older veterans and/or spouses.

Old Business – Chairman Birnbaum asked if there was any old business. There being none, the Commission moved on to “new business.”

New Business – Chairman Birnbaum noted that the New Business item that needed to be addressed was the election of officers. Chairman Birnbaum then opened the floor for nominations for chairman. Commissioner Murphy nominated Bill Locken for chairman, Commissioner Noyes seconded the nomination and voice vote indicated unanimous support for Bill Locken for chairman. Chairman Birnbaum then opened the floor for nominations for vice chairman. Commissioner Noyes nominated KC Russell for vice chairman, seconded by Wade Hubbard. A voice vote indicated unanimous support for KC Russell for vice chairman. Chairman Birnbaum indicated these individuals will take office at the December 2011 Commission meeting.

Commissioner Murphy noted that the Commission had not taken action on Director Claussen's request. Commissioner Murphy made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Hubbard, that the Commission send a letter to all county commissions that are currently not utilizing the Vetra Spec software, encouraging them to make the investment. Motion carried.

Meeting recessed at 3:45 pm.

The Commission meeting reconvened at 9:00 am on Wednesday morning, October 5, 2011, and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll call indicated all six commissioners were present - Commissioners: Birnbaum, Hubbard, Murphy, Locken, Noyes and Russell.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hubbard, seconded by Commissioner Murphy, to adjourn and participate in the tour of the VA facilities. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 9:15 am.

Mike Birnbaum, Chairman