

South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting
March 21, 2013
SDNG Museum – Pierre, SD

The meeting of the South Dakota Veterans Commission was called to order at 8:00 am (CT) on Thursday, March 21, 2013, at the South Dakota National Guard Museum in Pierre, SD, by Chairman Russell.

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

Chairman Russell led the commission and guests in the pledge of allegiance.

Roll Call - Commissioners present were: Mike Birnbaum, Wade Hubbard, Gene Murphy, John Noyes, Jim Ross, and KC Russell.

Staff Present: Secretary Zimmerman, Deputy Secretary Steve Harding, Director Charles Claussen, Public Information Officer Audrey Ricketts and Veterans Field Supervisor Larry Person.

Guests Present: Ken Laughlin (DAV), Ray Carpenter, Gordon Richard (SDVSO Association), Jack Kempter (VVA), and Roger Papka (VVA).

Review of Agenda – Chairman Russell asked if there were any additions or changes for the proposed agenda. Commissioner Hubbard asked that “Old and New Business” be added to the agenda. Commissioner Murphy made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Hubbard, to approve the agenda with the addition of Old and New Business. Motion carried.

Consideration of Minutes – Chairman Russell asked the Commission how they wished to handle the October 10, 2012, Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Birnbaum moved approval of the October 10, 2012, Commission meeting minutes as presented. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Hubbard and motion carried.

Department Report – Chairman Russell called on Secretary Zimmerman. Secretary Zimmerman welcomed all those in attendance and requested that everyone introduce themselves. Zimmerman noted that he has scheduled meetings with the veteran’s service officers during March and April and that he is looking forward to visiting one-on-one with the service officers.

East River Veterans Cemetery – Chairman Russell called on Secretary Zimmerman. Secretary Zimmerman reviewed HB 1221 – an act to provide for the establishment and maintenance of a state veterans and public servants cemetery and memorial park. Zimmerman updated the Commission on the bill history. He then called on Director Claussen to review the criteria for the VA’s Rural Initiative Plan. Discussion ensued regarding death rates, VA funding, cremation, and cemetery expenses and revenues. Director Claussen noted that if the cemetery included public servants, VA funding could not be used. A motion was made by Commissioner Murphy, seconded by Commissioner Birnbaum, that the Department research all options for an East River veterans and dependents cemetery. Motion carried.

Discussion of Definition of Veteran – Chairman Russell called on Secretary Zimmerman. Secretary Zimmerman reviewed HB 1250 – an act to honor veterans as certain persons who performed service in reserve components. Zimmerman stated that although this bill was tabled in the Senate State Affairs Committee, he would like to see the Department develop a position in support of language similar to HB 1250 for next year. Commissioner Murphy suggested that the Department draft a bill that could be introduced next legislative session and that this draft be shopped with the veteran’s service organizations. Deputy Secretary Harding suggested that the Department draft the proposed bill, forward it to the Commission for comments and then shop it to the veteran’s service organizations.

Study of Delivery of Services to Veterans – Chairman Russell called on Secretary Zimmerman. Zimmerman reviewed HB 1223 – an act to establish a task force to study the delivery of services to veterans and noted the concerns shared by Representative Magstadt and that after visiting with Secretary Zimmerman she requested the House State Affairs Committee table her bill. He then reviewed the letter of intent that had been shared with legislative leaders and the Governor with regard to the Department studying the delivery of services to our veterans. The letter of intent states that the Department will compile a study group to review the delivery of services to South Dakota’s veterans. This group will be comprised of a representative from each of the six entities: Department of Veterans Affairs, South Dakota Veterans Council, County Veterans Service Officer, Tribal Veterans Service Officer, South Dakota Veterans Commission, and South Dakota County Commissioners. Secretary Zimmerman will chair this group and will report back his findings to the Appropriations Committee by October 1, 2013. The task force will review such items as: salaries for VSOs, resources available to VSOs, education, outreach, VSO availability, VSO hours, knowledge skills, accountability, effectiveness, professionalism, and use of technology. It was pointed out that 15 counties are not using VetraSpec. The Department wants to use this opportunity to discover what is working and find solutions to fix these issues. Zimmerman noted that he believes it is his job to enhance the services that are being provided.

Chairman Russell appointed Wade Hubbard as the Commission’s representative on the task force and John Noyes as the alternate.

Sequestration Impacts - Chairman Russell called on Secretary Zimmerman. Secretary Zimmerman and Deputy Secretary Harding reviewed the impacts sequestration and continuing resolutions will have on programs and services.

Veterans Commission Mission Statement – Chairman Russell called on Secretary Zimmerman. Zimmerman noted that he had changed the vision and mission of the Department and thought it was appropriate for the Commission to review theirs to see if it needed any changes. After considerable discussion, it was requested that this be added to the next meeting’s agenda.

Old Business – Chairman Russell asked if there was any old business. Commissioners shared concerns with not being updated on legislative issues during session, Commission not being invited to Governor’s bill signing of veteran’s bills, and function of the Commission. Chairman Hubbard suggested that the function of the Commission be added to the next meeting’s agenda.

New Business – Chairman Russell asked if there was any new business. Commissioner Murphy updated the Commission on Korean War events scheduled for this summer, Freedom Bird and questioned ADA

accessibility into the Soldiers and Sailors Building. Commissioner Murphy requested that the ADA accessibility at the Department's office be added to the next agenda.

Dialogue – Chairman Russell opened the floor for Commission dialogue. The Commissioners discussed West River State Veterans Home, East River Veterans Home, Telehealth, and veteran's preference.

Chairman Russell thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting. Commissioner Murphy moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Birnbaum seconded the motion and the motion unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 11:23 AM.

KC Russell, Chairman