

**SD Veterans Commission Meeting  
22-23 October, 2007 ~ Canyon Cottage  
Hot Springs, South Dakota**

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

Members of the Commission, Larry Person, George Summerside, Sue Zilverberg and Delbert Foster met at 9:00 A.M. for a tour of the VA Black Hills Domiciliary and Hospital in Hot Springs, South Dakota. The staff was very welcoming and provided the Commission with excellent information about the facility, its patient care and various veterans programs provided.

Commission Members convened on the Veterans Home Campus in Canyon Cottage. Chairman Don Loudner called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M. leading the "Pledge of Allegiance".

George Summerside welcomed all attendees and recognized Major General Doohen. Chairman Loudner asked everyone in attendance to introduce himself/herself and recognize the organization they were representing.

South Dakota Veterans Home Superintendent, Larry Wilcox, invited the Commission and attendees to spend November 11<sup>th</sup> with the staff and residents of the VA Home. It will be their 118<sup>th</sup> year celebration for providing service to Veterans.

He also noted in his report, with 75% of the year remaining, Management and Administration and Staffing are running within budget. 2.2 million dollars was appropriated for the VA Life Safety Project; being 18<sup>th</sup> on the Life Safety list leaves 114 million dollars to distribute. Mr. Wilcox is hopeful the Life Safety Projects VA \$2,295.00 Grant will be approved in October and received in November of 2007.

Bio-Mass project is on hold due to heating plant location costs.

Commissioner Locken requested a copy of priorities of the Life Safety Project be provided in the future.

Commissioner Murphy inquired as to the availability for residential and couple living.

Commissioner Evenson asked about the number of beds available. Mr. Wilcox said there are 142 beds with authorization for 150.

It was noted by Commissioner Birnbaum the study on Long-term Care is an area needing to be discussed, in the future, with Major General Doohen. A number of beds can be authorized for anywhere in South Dakota and still be under the direction of the VA.

Commissioner Clarke feels grants concerning this should be looked into.

Frank Salvas expanded saying federal law states these beds would have to be applied for by September 30, 2009. There are 100 beds nationwide and the needs of each area will be considered.

At this time Commissioner Birnbaum formally introduced Major General Doohen to the group stating he will be a great asset to the Commission, for all Veterans organizations and as our new Secretary of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Major General Doohen addressed the Commission and attendees commenting he is pleased and excited to be part of this organization; to be patient and he is looking forward to working with everyone in the future.

Goals are in place and include the following:

- Make the Veteran aware of his/her entitlements and for him/her to receive the benefit
- Work with all C/TVSO's - to educate or give them the knowledge to inform our Veterans of available benefits and programs – to overall improve this process
- Work toward good communication skills in all areas

Major General Doohen also expressed his "*Open Door Policy*". He has had representatives from a couple of the Veterans' organizations stop at his office to introduce themselves and inform him on organization activities, he would like to continue this type of policy and camaraderie.

All members of the Commission thanked, welcomed and encouraged Major General Doohen to continue his open door policy; they also look forward to helping meet the outlined goals to be achieved.

Jerry Lolley, Meade County Veteran Service Officer, noted he would like the Department of Veterans Affairs to work on outreach and House Bill #67, which grants monies to states for outreach and training. Maybe this is a bill we could look into and support if appropriate.

Andy Gerlach, Department Deputy, gave the department overview report noting the following:

- State Budget was submitted to BFM on September 11, 2007

- Budget includes an increase for
  - 1) State Home
  - 2) Division of Veterans Affairs
  - 3) Air National Guard
  - 4) Army National Guard
- On December 4<sup>th</sup> the budget will be presented to Legislature with a response from the Governor
- Mid December the proposal is public

Commissioner Locken would like to request a report be sent to all Commissioners when it becomes available. Commissioner Murphy requested the report include funds and legislative issues put forward by the Commission. It was asked by Commissioner Birnbaum if and who testifies. Mr. Gerlach stated he works with the Governor's office and will share comments with the Commission before he testifies. Major General Doohen said he would testify where needed and if the Commissioners were needed to testify they would be called upon also. Mr. Gerlach was thanked by Chairman Loudner for his report.

Deb Dodson, Executive Assistant to the Director, Black Hills Health Care System, reported Steve DiStasio has returned to the Black Hills VA effective October 1. The system currently has job openings for various positions, there have been recent hires including Primary Care Physicians, OEF/OIF Program Manager and Executive Assistant to the Director. Other points of interest are as follows (see handout for details):

- FTEE Levels
- Veteran Employment Statistics
- Budget
- Equipment
- Program Updates and Initiatives
  - Access to Surgical/Specialty Clinics within 30 days
  - Reaching out to non-VA facilities to reach goal
  - Linn Medical Clinic provider for Pierre CBOC and Wessington Springs CBOC
- 713 Veterans in the system – 550 completed – computer flagged to identify if testing is required for TBI
- Depleted Uranium
  - End of July – 8 referrals at Black Hills
  - End of July – 7 referrals at Sioux Falls
- American Indian Veterans
- 64 projects are currently in the works or projected for FY 2008
- Hot Springs VAMC Celebrated 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on September 14-15, 2007

Commissioner Clarke expressed words of encouragement in regards to the Wessington Springs clinic and hopes these outreach clinics will continue as planned. 1 of 12 TBI cases is detected. Have any from here been referred to the

Minneapolis VA was a question posed by Commissioner Birnbaum. Chairman Loudner comment on the continued progress for starting the CBOC's in Watertown and Wagner. Commissioners Murphy and Evenson confirmed the issues on continuing resolution for mental health funding. The continuing resolution will go into March 2008. Inquiry was also made as to if the appropriate positions are filled for all areas of need.

Ms. Dobson said no referrals to Minneapolis have been made. She also clarified the system is able to hire because recent programs are figured into the budget for 2 years, continuing resolutions fall in the timeline. The Black Hills Health System direct hires at 25% verses 31% nationally. There are positions needing to be filled in the social work field.

Commissioner Murphy asked if the 30 day timeline was difficult to meet. Ms. Dobson replied if it is difficult to schedule a Veteran within the 30 day timeline they are referred outside the system. Commissioner Evenson asked if caseloads were at an acceptable number. Depending on the program and type of Veteran, 8 to 10 is an acceptable number for caseloads was Ms. Dobson's reply. Commissioner Evenson also asked if PTSD Veterans were treated individually in gender or in gender mixed groups, are they finding one way is more successful verses the other way. Ms. Dobson stated previously treatment was separate as time goes on they are seeing great progress in mixed gender groups.

Commissioner Locken would like to know if Fargo is offering, or not offering DU testing. He feels if they are not offering DU testing many, Veterans in the northern part of our state, using the Fargo facility, are not getting the care they need.

Chairman Loudner had concerns about the clinics in the Eagle Butte and McLaughlin areas. He was told a Veteran was not seen at these clinics because he had to be seen at a VA facility, there was a posting on the door stating this. The Veteran was also told it was because of their budget. Commissioner Locken feels if these are IHS clinics this issue should be taken to them. An American Indian Veteran should be allowed to be treated at an IHS or VA facility. Darrell Shoemaker commented his understanding is when IHS is lacking funding they refer Veterans to a VA facility. He will check into this matter and inform the Commission. Commissioner Clarke stated an option might be to invite IHS to a meeting and ask them direct how these matters are handled. Mr. Summerside was asked to include the IHS on the agenda for the next meeting.

Chairman Loudner would also like the VA hiring procedures explained. He feels some Veterans are not being hired over non-Veterans. It was suggested to have Earl Schultz explain this issue at a future meeting.

Commissioner Birnbaum reported on the VSO Task Force Study. Other members of the committee are Gene Murphy, Bill Locken, Kevin Graber, George

Summerside, Larry Person, Andy Gerlach and Charles Quinn. In October 2006, the Legislative Review Committee requested the Department address the need for an increase in compensation paid to VSO's, to ensure services are provided to Veterans in the most efficient manner and cost effective manner, and to examine all options to improve the delivery of services to Veterans.

The following objectives are recommended:

- Track the activities of C/TVSO's
- Efficiency in helping Veterans
- Provide knowledge to C/TVSO's thru trainings, forums, etc.

It is felt if these objectives can be met the service and efficiency will improve and the increase in wages can be justified to the counties.

Commissioner Locken wants the dollar and numbers explained extremely well; the figures look expensive; would it be beneficial to go to the counties to explain the plan. He feels a partnership in certain areas of the state is needed to be successful. The committee worked hard to improve the program and increase wages for the C/TVSO's.

Commissioner Birnbaum said the Legislative Committee wanted the Commission to show why the salary increase is needed.

Concerns from Commissioner Evenson on partnership between counties and the amount of travel involved was expressed; can the State direct counties, by law, if the proposal goes through.

George Summerside stated the Director and counties in the past have made sound agreements on how an area will be covered to best help the Veterans.

Commissioner Locken commented the C/TVSO's are only part of the equation; county commissioners, the state and our department are all involved to make these improvements.

Mr. Summerside feels reports will help show where Veterans' needs are met and how we need to improve our help to Veterans.

Chairman Loudner recessed for a 10 minute break at 3:15 P.M.

At 3:25 P.M. the meeting reconvened with Todd Kolden giving a general overview of his department's purpose for individual knowledge. He then posed to the Commission, do you see your C/TVSO's and Field Officers purpose as helping make the Veterans aware of benefits available to them - networking is important to the Department of Labor. His report included the following figures and activities:

- 2% of SD Veterans unemployed
- 38% nationwide unemployed

- SD in the top 5 of employment and retention of jobs
- TAP Workshop
  - 2 ½ day workshop
  - Search for job, develop resume, interviews, etc.
- Job Fair – Sioux Falls
  - 120 Veterans – 38 Employers
  - Some hired on the spot
  - Looking at holding Job Fair in Rapid City
- Stand Down
  - June attended Pine Ridge Stand Down
  - August attended Rapid City Stand Down
- Dakota Roots
  - Designed to bring former SD Veterans currently out of state back to South Dakota

Commissioner Evenson inquired about federal monies and a resolution for coming together on our department issues - looks like a small increase – 14 career centers – 2 non vets (not paid by VA monies). Commissioner Murphy commented there are 25% federal employees who are Veterans and 5% of our state employees are Veterans. Mr. Kolden feels these percentages are higher from information his office has acquired. He also feels the preference law is adequate - it could possibly be worded for better individual understanding.

Commissioner Locken suggested an official census of Veterans employed by the state be requested from BOP. He then made a motion to request from the State of South Dakota an official census report showing the parentage of employed Veterans. Motion 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Murphy, Chairman Loudner asked for a vote, all voted in favor, motion passed.

Chairman Loudner moved to the next agenda item asking Todd Otterberg, SD Transition Asst. Advisor to present his report. The following points of interest were given (see written report for other details):

- 1 NG Unit in country
- Reintegration Drill Program – Charlie Battery, Yankton
- MIA/POW Ceremony
  - Army National Guard
  - Air National Guard
- Federal Job Listings
  - Receives listing from George Summerside
  - 700 e-mails sent on list serve
- TBI Screen Training
  - October – November time frame to train
  - Mild screening to be done at guard drill after training
- DU testing is discussed at briefings
- Mr. Otterberg is employed by a private company contracted by the Guards
- Summits to be held

- November 7<sup>th</sup> – Rapid City
- January 16<sup>th</sup> – Watertown

All Commissioners commended and thanked Mr. Otterberg for his report.

Chairman Loudner asked Martin Miller with the Rapid City Vet Center to give his report. Mr. Miller started with an overview on the history of the Rapid City Vet Center and its expansion over the years. Mr. Miller also stated 75% of the staff at the Vet Center are Veterans. Free counseling services are available, all counseling is confidential and their purpose is to serve Veterans and their family. The following additional information in handout provided (see handout for details):

- Types of Counseling Services Available
- Bereavement Counseling
- Military Sexual Trauma Counseling

Commissioner Clarke asked about a budget for public relations and is the Vet Center involved in Veteran forums. Mr. Miller responded by suggesting the Guards could help with Vet Center awareness and the Vet Center is working to be "User Friendly".

Concerns about the Vet Centers travel budget was raised by Commissioner Evenson, he is with the understanding the Sioux Falls Vet Center does not have a travel budget. This is a concern for all.

Commissioner Murphy commented on the 800 hotline number and its use. It is available at all times.

Congressional Representatives, Jesse Ewing (Senator Thune), Tania Schepper (Congresswoman Herseth-Sandlin) and Darrell Shoemaker (Senator Johnson) were asked to come forward to report by Chairman Loudner. Jesse Ewing started with the following remarks:

- Senator Thune is committed to ensure our Veterans the best health care and benefits in return for their service to our nation
- 14% of South Dakota's population are Veterans and live predominantly in rural areas
- Critically important for Veterans to access CBOC's
- VA announced the establishment of two new CBOC's; one in Wagner and one in Watertown
- Will support Senator Johnson's bill for mandatory funding for health care – Senator Thune is on the Veterans Affairs Committee and has the most ability to pass such a bill
- When Senator Johnson introduces a mandatory funding bill which will not raise taxes, Senator Thune plans to cosponsor
- Senator Thune introduced the Veterans Disability Compensation Automatic COLA Act, this would make the annual cost of living increase

for Veterans' Disability Compensation automatic, not requiring an act of Congress

- Senator Thune has been working to ensure a Disabled Veterans Memorial will be established on the National Mall in Washington, DC
- The American Veterans Disabled for Life Commemorative Coin Act is co-sponsored by Senator Thune
- Senators Ken Salazar and Senator Thune led a bipartisan effort to successfully create the Office of Rural Health in the VA
- Dignified Treatment of Wounded Warriors Act addressed shortfalls in the care of wounded warriors as they transition from the military to the VA.
  - Ends the inconsistent ratings for the same disability by the DOD and the VA
  - Extends the period of eligibility for VA health care of combat veterans of the Persian Gulf War, or future hostilities from two years to five years after discharge
  - Bill has passed as part of the Defense Authorization Bill, currently in conference

Darrell Shoemaker with Senator Johnson reported the following updates Senator Johnson is committed to:

- Coin Bill – Senator Johnson introduced a bill to mint coins in commemoration of Veterans who became disabled for life while serving
- MilCon-VA – in conference and optimistic it will survive, this bill is the first bill Senator Johnson voted on since returning from his absence
- American Indian Veteran Health Care Improvement Act has been introduced and is co-sponsored by Senator Thune– ensures Indian Veterans are not liable for co-payments required by the VA
- Senator Johnson just indicated he will introduce the Native American Veterans Charter Bill – this legislation establishes the Native American Veterans as a charter group
- Mandatory Funding is a commitment of Senator Johnson's – as chairman of the VA Appropriations Subcommittee; Senator Johnson is pleased the VA will be fully funded for the first time in the 21 year history of the Independent Budget
- Senator Johnson signed on to the Dear Colleague letter – the letter is part of an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act placing temporary moratorium on the use of personality disorder discharges for service members who have served in a combat zone
- Major General Doohen and Senator Johnson met to discuss Guard issues while the Senator was in South Dakota

Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin's delegate, Tania Schepper, reported the following activities:

- September 17<sup>th</sup>, Rep. Herseth Sandlin introduced HR 3553 to head off an expected cut in funding for SAA's

- SD SAA provides assistance to 47 schools and 192 training establishments and businesses
- If funding is reduced SD will drop from \$207, 000 in FY2007 to \$140, 760 in FY2008
- If bill passes SD will receive about \$270,000 in FY2008, an increase of \$63,000
- Hope to have bill passed before continuing resolution expires November 16<sup>th</sup>
- As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Rep. Herseth Sandlin supports and is working to put together legislation to incorporate the changes proposed by the Benefits Commission
- MGI Bill updates hearing was held on October 18<sup>th</sup> – service organizations are pushing a concept called the Total Force Montgomery GI Bill
- Total Force Montgomery GI Bill would combine statutory authority for both active duty and selected reserve Montgomery GI Bill programs under the VA – this would move selected reserve programs from the DOD and shifting oversight responsibility to the VA Committees from the Armed Services Committees
- As Chairwoman of the House Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, Rep. Herseth Sandlin believes we need to ensure equitable and appropriate recognition of service when a National Guard or Reserve Soldier returns

Why is the American Indian Veteran being the only Veteran to get bill passed for them not to pay medical co-pay was raised by Commissioner Locken. He feels this should be a benefit for all Veterans not for just a few, a Veteran is a Veteran. Is there anyway we can find out were this bill originated from and it would be helpful if a copy of the bill could be provided.

Commissioner Murphy questioned why the budget could not be on time and why \$1000 to the Merchant Marines

Commissioner Evenson thanked the delegates for coming and complemented our Senators and Representative for greatly representing South Dakota.

Commissioner Birnbaum suggests a concurrent receipt being looked into and passing a bill through congress.

Chairman Loudner expressed thoughts of amending the American Indian Veteran Health Care Improvement Act to state IHS co-pay instead of VA co-pay.

VFW Vice-Commander, Dick Pickering, was recognized to address the delegates. He inquired about a bill stating there could not be a flag folding ceremony at a Veterans funeral/burial, because it referenced "God". It was explained this was a memo sent to the directors and then forwarded to the organizations conducting the ceremonies.

A motion was made by Commissioner Birnbaum to compose a letter to send to the head of the national cemetery requesting the tradition of flag folding be an option to families. Commissioner Evenson 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion, all voting in favor, motion carried.

The Commission then discussed the procedure for hiring a Director for the Division of Veterans Affairs. It was agreed upon the Commission would be involved in the interview process.

Commissioner Birnbaum moved to adjourn the meeting – 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Clarke, all voting in favor, motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 5:26 P.M. to reconvene the following morning.

On October 23, 2007, 8:02 A.M., Chairman Loudner called the meeting to order and asked Commissioner Evenson to lead the “Pledge of Allegiance”.

Mr. Summerside announced there were extra copies of written reports available at the back of room.

Commissioner Murphy felt Todd Otterberg should invite the Veterans’ organizations to Transition Meetings. He feels this would help make guard personal aware of the organizations and of the services they provide. Commissioner Birnbaum said he would relay this message to Mr. Otterberg.

Delbert “Jim” Foster announced the SD Veterans’ Council will meet right after the Commission meeting, all are invited to attend and Dick Pickering will conduct the meeting.

Commissioner Birnbaum moved to approve the minutes of the 16-17 July, 2007 meeting. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Murphy, all voted in favor, minutes were approved.

Chairman Loudner moved on to the first agenda item of the day, VA Memorial Affairs, Frank Salvas, Director of State Cemetery Grants Program – Mr. Salvas previously was the Director of State Homes for the VA. Mr. Salvas thanked everyone for welcoming him and being so friendly – he commented he enjoys working with the states and feels he is an advocate for us, even though he works on the federal level. He feels it is important for him to be here, to educate us in the process of making improvements on life safety and other issues.

Mr. Salvas stated continuing resolutions create pressure on states because of the time in which grants are distributed. National criteria are:

- 170,000 Veterans to qualify for a cemetery in a radius of 75 miles
- National Cemeteries are owned and operated by the Federal Government
- State Cemeteries are run by the state

A state would need to develop a program showing costs for architect and engineering fees, irrigation, entrance to cemetery (off of a major highway ideal), row of flags and maintenance of 100 acres over a 10 year growth. Legislation would have to be passed and the state would need 35% of project to start. Grant program would reimburse and cover the remaining needed funds.

Mr. Salvas said an estimate could be done and a handout of a map showing areas to consider for a NCA/State cemetery can also be provided. The program would also help with fencing, grass, etc. A benefit of the cemetery is to improve the respect for our deceased Veterans and for military families to feel comfortable with their loved one being buried at the cemetery.

Mr. Salvas expressed it is important for the State to think about what they want to do. The State needs an upfront awareness of what is required in all aspects of this type of project.

Commissioner Loudner assured members Mr. Salvas would commit to this project and be a voice for South Dakota.

Commissioner Locken would also like an estimate for the maintenance of the cemetery. Mr. Salvas can provide an estimate after a proposal is done. Again Mr. Salvas expressed to the members to consider true costs of a state home or cemetery east river.

Mr. Salvas told Commissioner Murphy there are 126 national cemeteries and 67 state cemeteries nationwide and if there is a need for change in regulations; consider your opportunities to help change these regulations for rural areas.

Commissioner Evenson thanked Mr. Salvas for the valuable information and commented on the need to look at this as an investment; will there be a return on this investment/project. Look at all aspects - added jobs, etc.

Commissioner Birnbaum inquired about additional costs/fees for a cemetery. In regards to satellite bed units, Commissioner Birnbaum is with the understanding a bordering state has 10-12 satellite bed units across their state, would this be an option for South Dakota. Mr. Salvas said he could provide this information to help Major General Doohen and the Commission come to a conclusion.

Commissioner Clarke wanted to know if assistance can be given to a state with a study. Mr. Salvas said help can be given in some areas but would not want to influence or impede the decision being made. Commissioner Clark asked if testifying on behalf of the state is beneficial, we are not wealthy and we are a rural state. Mr. Salvas feels it is the responsibility of the State to express or testify for their needs.

The floor was then opened by Chairman Loudner for any organizations to make comments or ask questions. In regards to a cemetery he commented - start small then the program would help with expansion.

VSO Dave Stroh asked about a timeline for the cemetery once money is available. Mr. Salvas said as soon as the State is prepared with final drawings and completed application, grants can be prepared. It will also depend on how aggressive the state is. The state has 3 national cemeteries with one currently operating.

Commissioner Loudner thanked Mr. Salvas for coming and being an advocate.

Daniel Cassidy, Director for Black Hills National Cemetery, reported the following:

- 14 of 16 employees are Veterans as of April 30, 2007
- FTEE include an additional 12 temporary employees
  - Advertised in newspapers and meetings
  - Only 5 hired due to lack of applications
- Authorized to hire an additional 6 employees with the support of Ft. Meade and Hot Springs Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program
  - Employees contracted thru the rehabilitation program
- The FY07 budget has been submitted and approved
- Continue to strive to meet our goals in regards to the National Shrine Standards
- Interments
  - 689 Total for FY 2007
  - Total Internments to date 22,202 – 17,772 headstones
- Direct Burial of Veterans
  - Memorial service of unaccompanied burials
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of each quarter at 0900
- Outreach
  - Attend briefings to inform on burial benefits
  - Travel fund reduced
- BLM Land
  - Acquisition letter submitted on March 14, 2007 for the BLM land adjacent to the cemetery
  - Acquisition of the land would provide an additional 120 acres
- Solar Light
  - No American flag currently flown year round
  - SDVCSC supporting efforts to acquire lighting for illumination of the American Flag at Ft. Meade
- Avenue of Flags to be flown from Good Friday through Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- Projected Needs – in the process of gathering information to submit to the Denver office (see submitted report for details)

Will the columbarium have to be used for burial was a question posed by Commissioner Locken. Mr. Cassidy informed him the ashes can also be buried in a burial plot. Commissioner Locken also asked Mr. Cassidy to further explain the seasonal employee issues. Mr. Cassidy said it was difficult to get enough qualified applications to compose a list. The process has changed with a new HR and the feeling is optimistic they will be able to hire the needed staff in coming months. Commissioner Locken felt Mr. Salvas might be able to help acquire the BLM land in an efficient manner. Mr. Salvas will contact Mr. Turks and make him aware of this issue.

Chairman Loudner recognized Dave Jungemann with TREA; he expressed the organizations feelings in regards to flag folding ceremonies at services. He is with the understanding a family member, or next of kin was offended by the reference to "God" in the ceremony. A directive, from the administration, then came down the line after this incident discontinuing the ceremony. Commissioner Birnbaum would like some research done to figure out the circumstances with the family and who sent the directive. After this is done and facts gathered a resolution can be sent representing the Commissions' thoughts and feelings on this case. It was brought to the attention of the organizations, if their organization is not included on the list, they can perform the flag folding ceremony. At this time Chairman Loudner requested a copy of the words the organizations use when conducting the ceremony. All organizations will provide a copy to the Commission. Mr. Jungemann stated he sent an e-mail to Representative Herseth Sandlin on the topic, he received an email from her saying she would look into the matter. He feels Veterans need to stand up and express their feelings on this matter if they don't want songs, ceremonies, etc. to be prevented at burials, because they reference "God".

Chairman Loudner thanked Mr. Cassidy for coming and then asked Robert Sack, the SDNG Military Funeral Honors Coordinator, to come forward to present his report. Mr. Sack provided a handout and reported the following:

- The State Director Program started 7 years ago
- All Veterans are entitled to the flag folding, Taps and rifle salute if wanted
- Program designed to provide a professional military ceremonial service to all eligible veterans when requested or authorized by a family
- Counties can call for help if wanted
- East River Team
  - 40 members East River Team
- West River Team
  - 34 members
- FY 2007
  - 41 services
  - Statewide coverage
- FY 2008
  - NGB Goal 200
  - Projected 200

- 0 performed
- Team instructors trained in Little Rock, Arkansas
  - Team instructors will be used to train in SD
- \$50 reimbursement per funeral if part of team
- Federal monies from Department of Defense – Army
- Program is to help honor the Veteran, not to take over any organization working to help the community
- Money issues for equipment
- Funding of new team is biggest challenge
- Contract with Sioux Falls should be in place by December 2008

Commissioner Clarke inquired about the travel to counties/organization to explain training. Mr. Sack said travel is made at the request of the counties/organizations to explain the program and for training – they only go when asked. Commissioner Evenson is glad to see a resolution passed to fund the efforts of the program. Commissioner Murphy inquired about the bugle playing; is it a recording, live or electronic bugle and are soldiers hired 5 days a week to be part of the team. Mr. Sack replied the playing of Taps depends on what is available in the area for being a recording, live or electronic. Gary Knudson, VFW, asked if 2 was the minimum of people on a team. Dick Pickering, VFW sees a goal of getting qualified team members by going out and explaining the program and conducting trainings. Teams can be certified within 2 months with a signed contract. Monthly reports need to be submitted for reimbursements.

George Summerside, Acting Director, Division of Veterans Affairs, thanked everyone for coming and reported the following:

- Sioux Falls claims office has two new staff members
- Annual Benefits School held in August was a success
- Majority of exams good – result letters sent to county commissioners
- TRIP training at VA Regional Office
- Outreach efforts continue
  - First Drill Back
  - Stand Down
  - Capitol for a Day
  - Letters published on TBI and Hypertension related to Herbicide Exposure
- Veterans Benefits School Survey (see handout)
- Monthly Activity Reports
  - Goal is to develop a complete accounting of services provided by C/TVSO
  - A quarterly report will be compiled when all reports are submitted for July, August and September
- C/TVSO Field Testing Pilot – Conducted by FO Steve Oliva
  - Implemented in August 2006 as a means to determine which benefit programs require additional training

- Four test developed and given
  - Compensation and Pension
  - EVR and VAF 21-8416 from completion
  - DIC
  - CHAMPVA
- Input from participating service officers positive and see the tests as a learning tool
- Outreach/Training Field Staff (see handout for details)
- Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Bonus Claims
  - Total Claims – 5847
  - Total Outlay - \$2,518,050.00
  - Average Claim - \$430.66
- Veterans Education – SAA
  - SAA Database is being updated to organize data, ease of data entry, ease of information retrieval and report creating
  - System was up and running October 1, 2007
  - Report development remains to be completed
- Agency Workload
  - Vouchers for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter prepared
  - Continued efforts, from support staff Bill Regynski and Sue Zilverberg, assist with these projects being completed on time
- Outreach/Training – SAA
  - Tom Murphy and George Summerside attended national training in Kansas City and trained C/TVOS's at the Annual Benefits School
  - George Summerside attended a Retiree/Veteran Benefit Summit, VSO Congressional Form and NASDVA Conference in Maryland

Mr. Summerside thanked the Division staff for all their hard work and dedication during the last six months. Additional thanks to the Veterans' Commission, Veterans' Organizations and other service partners for their teamwork.

Commissioner Clarke inquired on the status of the bonus program. Mr. Summerside commented John Fette is continuing to promote the program. There is a fluctuation in workload, John is always willing to fill in and help where needed.

Commissioner Birnbaum stated the appointment/hiring of the Director will be the priority of the Commission.

How did the Sioux Falls office fair without two employees, was there a backlog was asked by Commissioner Evenson. Mr. Summerside and Mr. Person both advised the Sioux Falls office they would send one of the Pierre staff to Sioux Falls, if they would like or needed an extra person, while in the process of hiring new staff. No request was made. The Sioux Falls office did a good job keeping on top of business during this time and should be commended for their hard work. Commissioner Evenson also wanted to know how many staff had

participated in the TRIP training. Five or six have attended the National County Service Officers Association Training.

Commissioner Murphy thanked George, Larry and the Sioux Falls Claims office for all their work and inquired how many pilot tests have been given. Mr. Summerside said all of the CVSO's in Steve Oliva's area have taken the tests.

Commissioner Locken brought up Virtual VA; how it works and who has access. Commissioner Evenson would like an in-depth explanation at a later date. Commissioner Locken commented the Monthly Activity Reports will give the study group the needed information and the annual evaluations will start the beginning of the year. He wanted input on going to each county to explain study and county performance evaluations.

Chairman Loudner then asked the attending organizations to give a small report to the commission.

- American Legion – Commander Gary Watts
  - Completed commander program
  - Marty Conatser – September 24
  - Toured Ft. Meade and Hot Springs
  - Forums are being offered
  - Boys State - \$20, 000 – 3 scholarship in the past 5 years awarded to someone in South Dakota
- DAV – Gene Murphy
  - Attended the PowWow for Veterans in Sioux Falls
  - Attended the Convention in New Orleans
  - 1.5 million given for transportation program
  - Golden Corral appreciation coming up
  - 2900 raised by Poker Run for DAV Transportation
  - 5 or 6 vans coming
- PVA – Delbert “Jim” Foster
  - Pheasant hunt in Parker – September
  - Pheasant hunt in Platte – November
  - Veterans Ceremonies – November 11 – Augustana campus
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Ice Fishing – January 4<sup>th</sup>
  - Attended PVA Training
  - Distributing computers donated by Lodgenet
  - 5800 packets were distributed to schools for poster contest
  - Sponsored dinner at Royal Fork
  - FOCUS
  -
- TREA – Dave Jungemann
  - Folding of the Flag at burials
    - Email sent to Rep. Herseth Sandlin
    - TREA will push this issue for a resolution to keep tradition
    - Provide requested materials used in ceremony

- Presented plaque at the state fair for WWII, Vietnam and Korean War Veterans
- Unable to attend the National Convention – a report will be given in February
- VFW – Dick Pickering
  - They like having SDDVA Field Officers at their meetings
  - 48<sup>th</sup> season completed in baseball
  - RB Campground – flyer provided
  - Pheasant hunt in Faulkton
  - National Military Program doing well
  - Christmas cards from Wal-mart being sent to Iraq troops
  - Burger King fund raiser – money goes to family with troops overseas
  - Concerns about Funding bill for VA
    - Bill provides compensation – Tri-Care
    - Looks at VA ratings
  - Continued effort to support troops
- National American Indian Veterans, Inc. – Don Loudner
  - Asked for Congressional update on Woodrow Keeble – Medal of Honor
  - Code Talker Bill – lesser medal because of cost was suggested – currently in limbo
  - The Sioux Falls PowWow was a success and encouraged all Veterans to attend next years event
- Women’s Auxiliary - Connie Haggelstad
  - Extended invitation to Service Officers to attend meetings
  - Love Tokens – this is a grant for auxiliary cancer patients - \$32,000 in grants were awarded last year
  - Snowball Express – this is a trip given to children of deceased Veterans
  - Wreaths Across America – there will be a special dedication on December 14<sup>th</sup> in Pierre at the state capitol
  - Ft. Meade – currently working to restore its historical marker

Chairman Loudner and all attending thanked the Women’s Auxiliary for their dedication and hard work.

The Commission set a date of November 5<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 A.M. – 4:00 P.M. to screen applications – a date will be set later for interviews.

Commissioner Locken made a motion to set the next meeting date the same as the Legion meeting in Pierre during legislature. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Clarke, motion passed with all voting in favor.

Commission members would like Mr. Person to confer with BOP to find out if the applications for Director can be sent to them by mail, for reviewing. At this time Mr. Foster wished the Commission well in the task of choosing a Director.

Commissioner Locken expressed his view and feels we should not give up our rights – hopes the commission will write a letter in the future, if requested, in regards to the flag folding at military burial ceremonies.

Election of officers was opened by Chairman Loudner. Commissioner Evenson placed a nomination to move forward Mike Birnbaum as Chairman; nomination 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Locken; nominations to cease made by Commissioner Clarke; all voted in favor to forward Commissioner Birnbaum as the Chairman.

Vice-chair opened for nominations; Bill Locken was nominated by Commissioner Murphy. Nominations ceased; with a second by Commissioner Clarke; all voted in favor to forward Commissioner Locken as Vice-Chairman.

Don Loudner thanked everyone for his time as Chairman and wished Chairman Birnbaum well.

Chairman Birnbaum adjourned the meeting at 11:54 A.M.

Respectfully submitted:



George Summerside, Director  
SD Division of Veterans Affairs



Susan Zilverberg, Recording Secretary

March 17, 2008  
Date