

**South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting
10 & 11 February 2009
South Dakota National Guard Museum
301 East Dakota Avenue
Pierre, 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 1:00 PM (CT), at the South Dakota National Guard Museum, Pierre, by Chairman Locken. Chairman Locken led the Commission and attendees in saying the "Pledge of Allegiance" and then welcomed all audience members.

MOTION: Commissioner Murphy moved to approve the October 2008 minutes. 2nd by Commissioner Hubbard. Motion passed with a vote of 6-0. (Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy and Locken).

Changes to the agenda were noted. The changes were made in order for the commission to attend a committee hearing at the capitol.

AGENDA ITEM – SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS REPORT

Maj. Gen. Doohen reported to the commission the following points of interest:

- SADR Unit from Madison to be deployed to Afghanistan
- Recruiting/retention is good in both the Army and Air Guard
- 350 troops back from Iraq in September
- UCI inspection
- Looking at updating equipment
 - F-16 25 years old
- Yellow Ribbon Program is growing
- Banner Project is an event to be held in August 2009 to honor the 25 families of fallen soldiers from South Dakota
- General Johnson is working with the Division to make services available to all Veterans in South Dakota
 - A tour of the North Dakota facility was proposed to see if this is a center that South Dakota would like to duplicate

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

Maj. Gen. Doohen responded to questions asked by the Commission in regards to SB 166 (Closing of Armory), SB 167 (Board of Military Affairs), family support, concerns of deploying service connected soldiers with PTSD, and location of

center (options: two locations and mobile service – keep in mind the location should be a place where all veterans can be served).

At this time Mr. George Summerside, Acting Director, was asked to introduce Mr. Shane Olivier, State Approving Agency – Education Program Specialist. Mr. Summerside also provided a written report detailing the South Dakota Division of Veterans Affairs interests and activities, including both the Pierre and Sioux Falls offices.

AGENDA ITEM – PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE, LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COUNCIL

Director of Legislative Research Council, Mr. Jim Fry informed the Commission on Parliamentary Procedure. He gave insight to the Commission on how to run a smooth and efficient meeting with the following suggestions and rationale:

- Parliamentary Procedure is used to run an effective and efficient meeting
- Deal with issues
- Keep the meeting moving
 - Set clear goals and have end results
- Atmosphere should be formal
- Be fair and appear fair
- Place high priority in the middle – not first – not last
- The person who presides should maintain the meeting
 - Presider should not make motions – if presider makes a motion the meeting should be facilitated by the vice-chair during this time
 - When a motion is made - read back the motion for clear understanding, 2nd the motion, record vote and announce
- To help the recorder
 - When making a motion write it down and have the chair or recorder read it back
 - Summarize decisions
 - Always have a sign-in sheet
- Break if/when needed
- When addressing items – assign member(s), have someone take ownership
- Get feed back – evaluate how meetings are being conducted

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Parliamentary Procedure, Legislative Research Council

Mr. Fry was asked to explain to the Commission if and when the Chair is able to vote. He commented all members have the right to vote. If there is a tie, the motion is defeated. It is important the Commission have guidelines and policies of their own set in place.

**AGENDA ITEM – CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES
(Reports Provided)**

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

- Representative Herseth Sandlin met with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs – she feels the Secretary will help the VA overcome the challenges it faces
- An oversight hearing is planned for February 26 with the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee to evaluate the progress the VA has made with the Post 9/11 GI Bill – deadline August 2009
- Concerns about the CBOC situation in South Dakota
 - Wagner project agreement met between the VA and HIS
- Representative Herseth Sandlin plans to reintroduce two Veterans bills
 - The Veterans Physical Therapy Services Improvement Act
 - The Pilot College Work Study Programs for Veterans Act
- Veteran suicide rate is a concern and is being assessed

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

- Senator Johnson favors Advanced Appropriations for the VA
- Cosponsored legislation and amendments on the matters regarding the National Defense Authorization Act
- Stimulus Bill will provide the VA and Military with construction funding
- As Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman, Senator Johnson, continues to fully support all efforts to provide for our Veterans

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

- Funding for Veterans was completed on time and for the full fiscal year – this is one of the few agencies whose work was completed and is not operating on a Continuing Resolution
- Congress is expected to resume the traditional Appropriations process
- Senator Thune was an original cosponsor to the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform Act of 2008 – this would allow a two year budget
 - Working to introduce this legislation in the 111th Congress
- Senator Thune will most likely reintroduce the Veterans' Disability Compensation Automatic COLA Act
- Senator Thune looks forward to working with the Veterans' Commission and the Service Organizations to ensure Veterans receive the care and respect deserved

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – Congressional Representatives

The Commission expressed their thanks to the Washington delegates for sending representatives to address the Commission and for their continued partnership with South Dakota, in Washington, regarding Veterans Affairs. The

Commission also expressed concerns of the military receiving less funding and asked if this will include the VA. Mr. Ready commented it was unlikely the VA will get fewer monies. No further discussion.

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.

MOTION: Commission Murphy made a motion to break; the motion was 2nd by Commissioner Birnbaum. All voted in favor Yes- Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, and Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

Chairman Locken called for a short break at 2:58PM.
The meeting reconvened at 3:10PM.

AGENDA ITEM – VA MEDICAL CENTER SIOUX FALLS AND VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Paul Bockelman, Director, and Steve Hillberg, Facility Planner came forward to present a power point showing demographics for the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center. Comments were also made on the Watertown and Wagner CBOC's, Priority 8, and the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center will be celebrating their 60th year in July. Mr. Hillberg stated the demographic funding is based on Veteran use, there should be a good market penetration growth in the next 10 years, and most of the Veterans fall in priority groups 7 and 8. Please see handout for details.

Mr. Steve DiStasio, Director, also presented a power point for the Black Hills Health Care System showing quality of care, travel concerns, aging infrastructures of current facilities, changing demographics of served population, workload change, stewardship of funding, and retention/recruitment issues. Please refer to handout provide by Mr. DiStasio for details.

Commission discussion of Agenda Item – VA Medical Center Sioux Falls and VA Black Hills Health Care System

Commission members thanked Mr. Bockelman, Mr. Hillberg, and Mr. DiStasio for their presentations and inquired about contract care, CBOC clinics, and the access and quality of care for Veterans. The VA provides bedded care and contract care to better serve our Veterans. Improvement to access and quality of care is always a goal for the VA Medical Centers. The clinic in Wagner is putting out bids with a completion date sometime this summer. There are issues being worked on for the Watertown clinic.

AGENDA ITEM – VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS

Jim Huls represented the American Legion and reported Warren Aas has headed the Vet Forums across the state, his effort is greatly appreciated. The Mid-winter Conference is to be held at Cedar Shores, February 13-15, 2009.

Disabled American Veterans, Robert Hill, came forward and reported to the Commission, next week a meeting will be held in Washington, DC with Gene Murphy representing their organization. Four new vans for 2009 are on order, the 2009 DAV Department Convention is April 23-25, 2009, the mobile office will be in South Dakota, and the DAV Canaries Night is July 17th in Sioux Falls. Work continues on the Honor Flight.

There was no representative for the Paralyzed American Veterans.

Dick Pickering, Veterans of Foreign Wars, came forward to report their organization is retaining and recruiting its membership, they see an increase in female members. Youth and community service is a focus (youth baseball), military distance program/phone cards is an on going project, the legislative conference was held in Pierre, there are service officers at each post to help serve and encourage Veterans. SB 43 is a concern and they continue to provide the CVSO's with manuals.

Native American Indian Veterans, Inc. representative, Don Loudner, commented on the Codetalker Bill, the Congressional Medal of Honor, and the ceremony to be held this spring. Riverside, CA is the location for this year's annual conference, March 19-21, 2009 and it is the site for the proposed American Indian Memorial.

No representative present for TREA.

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.

Upcoming bills concerning Veterans, the procedure for selecting lobbyists for the Division, and how the Commission should proceed with bills to be brought forward, was discussed by the Commission. The Commission expressed concerns with which fund the money will end up in for HB1270. The following action was taken on HB 1270.

MOTION: Commissioner Evenson moved the Commission go on record as opposing HB 1270. Motion 2nd by Commissioner Murphy. Voting Yes – Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy; Voting No – Birnbaum, Locken. Motion passed 4-2.

It was suggested that a telephone meeting take place in early December for the Commission to address upcoming legislative issues and to meet the requirement to hold four meetings per year.

MOTION: Commissioner Loudner moved, when scheduling the winter Commission meeting in January or February, Legislative Issues only should be the make up of the agenda. 2nd by Commissioner Birnbaum, motion passed 4-1. Yes – Birnbaum, Hubbard, Loudner, Locken; No – Evenson; Not present – Murphy.

MOTION: Commissioner Hubbard moved to recess at 6:36PM. 2nd by Birnbaum. All voted yes – Birnbaum, Hubbard, Evenson, Loudner, Murphy, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

February 11, 2009 at 8:02AM, Chairman Locken called the meeting to order and led the group and attendees in saying the "Pledge of Allegiance". The Chair recognized past Commission Member, Don Clarke.

AGENDA ITEM – C/TVSO ORGANIZATION REPORT

Larry Goette, President of the Veterans Service Officer's Organization, was not able to attend, no report given or provided.

AGENDA ITEM – STATE VETERANS HOME REPORT

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

- Home is maintaining residents
- Exempt from hiring freeze for nursing staff
- Hoping for Life Safety Project funds in April
- Ambulance entry to be completed by fall
- Asking VA and Washington delegates not to require private contracting for inspections
 - CMS could red tag issues not normally tagged
 - CMS is an inspection team hired by the federal government
 - CMS does not look at issues on a whole
- Home was given \$5000.00 from the American Legion to help replace vehicle – DAV also gave some funds
- Long Term Health Care in final stages

MOTION: Commissioner Murphy moved the South Dakota Veterans Commission send a letter to the VA and Washington delegates opposing the CMS in conducting inspections. 2nd Evenson. Voting Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

June 16 & 17, 2009, in Sioux Falls, is the next date and location for the Commission Meeting. It was also suggested a tour for the Mental Health Facility

and a visit to the Sioux Falls Claims Office be set up. The September or October meeting date and location will be set once the CBOC Clinic in Wagner has issued a timeline. A telephone meeting in early December is being considered to address legislative issues. It was also suggested Dr. Petzel and Mr. Regynski be invited to address funding issues and a representative with the reservations be present to report on how/if the reservations are being affected or reached concerning Veterans' issues.

MOTION: Commissioner Murphy moved the South Dakota Veterans Commission support advance appropriation funding for VA Health Care, fixing disability compensation claims, improving mental health treatment (PTSD & TBI), implementing the new Post 9-11 GI Bill, and smoothing the transition from military to civilian life and request the Congressional Delegation to support and sponsor legislation to advance the above items. 2nd Hubbard. Voting Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

MOTION: Murphy moved the South Dakota Veterans Commission support South Dakota Honor Flight and encourages support of Veterans Organizations and citizens of South Dakota. Birnbaum 2nd the motion. All voted in favor, motion passed 6-0. Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken.

MOTION: Commissioner Hubbard move the Commission recess until after the legislative hearing. Commissioner Murphy 2nd the motion. Yes – Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

The meeting recessed at 8:47AM and reconvened at 1:04PM with all members present.

Items to Address were a topic of discussion – it was decided to add a **date printed** to the form. The Commission also discussed unresolved issues and concerns regarding the Division Directorship among each other and with the Veterans Organizations. Detailed notes were not taken, during this time, at the request of the Commission.

MOTION: It was moved to adjourn by Commissioner Birnbaum, 2nd by Commissioner Evenson. All voted in favor, Yes - Birnbaum, Evenson, Hubbard, Loudner, Murphy, Locken. Motion passed 6-0.

Meeting adjourned at 3:07PM.




