

UNITED VETERANS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF MINNESOTA

Veterans Service Building
2nd Floor · 20 West 12th Street · St. Paul, MN 55155-2079

Army Air Force Marine Corps Coast Guard Merchant Marines Navy

“A Consortium of Veterans, Military, and Auxiliary Organizations to exchange information and support for issues relating to Entitlements for Veterans, Military Retirees, the National Guard and Military Reservists, their dependents and survivors.”

UVLC Website – www.mnuvlc.org

Report of UVLC Wednesday October 7, 2015 Meeting

Greetings: Recognition of Visitors and Guests

Announcements – Ralph Donais, Chairman – Jerry Kyser, Vice Chairman

*New assistant director for the Ft. Snelling Cemetery – Darrell Ryan.

*Pat McLaughlin with Vets for Music is present.

*Blue Star Mothers are present. Organization was formerly a part of the UVLC and is rejoining.

1. Federal Agencies

Senator Amy Klobuchar – General (RET) Tim Cossalter

*Not present.

Senator Al Franken – Reporting by Alex Schueller

*Veterans History Project Initiative launched during the State Fair. This is an ongoing project since 2000. There was not enough space at the regional VA for this project.

Q. The FAA is in the process of trying to allocate the second and first class physicals that we have to take in order to keep on flying. Is the senator on any of the committees that deal with the FAA?

A. Franken is on Transportation. Please send me an email with specifics.

1st District Representative – Tim Walz – Shawn Schoesser

*Not present.

2nd District Representative – John Kline – Reporting by Chaz Johnson

*Service academy information session was hosted in September. Around 100 people were in attendance. All the academies were represented, in addition to the Coast Guard.

*Senate is supposed to vote on the NDAA on October 7. It passed the house in bipartisan fashion.

*The congressman is seeking support for the VA Accountability Billing Act.

*We are monitoring the VAG report.

3rd District Representative – Eric Paulsen – Reporting by Margaret Cavanaugh

*Switch from John Paul Yates to Margaret Cavanaugh

Q. *I received an email about a veteran's organization [unintelligible]. Do you have the date on this?*

A. *A veteran's organization?*

Q. *A veteran's planning thing...is that this month?*

A. *I will send an email and ask.*

4th District Representative – Betty McCollum – Reporting by Connie Haddeland

*Switch from Ben Peterson to Connie Haddeland.

*The Paulsen campaign hosted a night for academy nomination information, which was followed by a Saturday event hosted by the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, West Point, and the Coast Guard at a hotel in Bloomington. Several hundred people attended for a day-long set of events.

*There is a lot of interest in applying to the United States Service Academies

*Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015, HR-17-69.

*National Defense Authorization Act passed the House of Representatives. It funds the department of defense through the Overseas Operations Contingency account, bypassing the Budget Control Act and sequestration, which is applied to all the federal agencies. The congresswoman feels that the Overseas Operations Contingency account was set up for emergencies and should not be used to fund the department of defense. She voted against it.

*UPS has a number of scholarship stipends for veterans.

5th District Representative – Keith Ellison – Mike Siebenaler Not Present

6th District Representative – Tom Emmer – Reporting by Andrew Matthews

*Congressmen Emmer and Congressman Walz went to the St. Cloud VA last week and met with management and employees there.

*Congressman will be monitoring federal mediation.

*Congressman has introduced a bill to require that all IG reports to be made public. Congressman Walz agreed to cosponsor.

7th District Representative – Collin Peterson Not Present

8th District Representative – Rick Nolan – Rick Olseen Not Present

2. State Agencies and MN Veteran Assistance Organizations

MN Department of Veteran Affairs – Reporting by Mike McElhiney

*CVSO Conference occurred in September.

*Gold Star Retreat occurred on the weekend of October 3, 2015.

*Planning for Veterans Day at Inver Grove Heights on November 11, 2015.

Looking into moving venues in the future.

*CTF training event is scheduled for October 15, 2015.

*Common Bonds had their grand opening on October 2, 2015. 56 of the 58 housing units are now full. The numbers for homeless veterans are going down.

*Silver Bay was recently surveyed for CMS Certification and passed.

*Documentary on women veterans recently won an Emmy.

*Preston Cemetery has a soft opening on Veterans Day, November 11, 2015.

Several veterans have already been selected for burial. The Grand Opening will be on Memorial Day.

*Progress is being made on the next cemetery for Duluth.

*Final state cemetery is being plotted in Redwood County.

*Agency has put initiatives forward for the next legislative session. Still in the process of gathering requests and information. In general, we are looking at legacy issues. Session opens March 8.

*In terms of bonding, looking at getting the bridge over at Minneapolis Home fixed. The project has gone through a process of evaluation, but the details concerning cost are still being finalized.

*Building 22 should be ready for occupation in late January.

Q. What kind of results are you getting on the veteran business certification?

A. 56 veteran businesses are registered at this time. The process has been figured out.

Q. How long is the session?

A. It ends around May 21st.

Q. Veterans Day on the Hill?

A. It is scheduled. We have requested the armory again for this year.

Q. Is it the second week of March?

A. I am not sure, I will find out.

Comissioner Larry Shellito

MN Veterans 2015 Legislative Info –

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MN Military Affairs –Reporting by LTC Joe Sharkey and Annette Kuyper

*On October 8, there will be 159 soldiers from the Wilmer Base 6-82nd Engineer Battalion will be mobilized and deployed on a one-year rotation in Kuwait. The deployment ceremony will start at 11:00 on October 8 at Senior High gymnasium.

*Effective October 19, Col. Frank Stokes, commander of the 148th Fighter Wing based out of Duluth, will be departing from MN Military Affairs. He recently accepted an assignment out at the National Guard bureau. He will be replaced by Col. John Safstrom, currently the vice-wing commander in Duluth.

*HR-17-35 the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 passed the house. We are tracking its process through the senate. If passed there will be significant implications for the Minnesota army and Air National Guard.

*A short term CR was reached which will fund our department through mid December.

*We have proclaimed the city of Montrose as the 214th Yellow Ribbon City. We will soon be proclaiming the Department of Corrections as our 48th Yellow Ribbon Company. We will be proclaiming the city of Big Lake on November 1, and the city of Northfield on 11th on their Veterans Day celebration. We will be proclaiming South-East Technical College in Redwing as our 48th Yellow Ribbon Company on November 10.

*There was a kick-off in Lionel Lakes on October 6.

*Annette Kuyper will be presenting the Beyond The Yellow Ribbon Program at the Association of the United States Army Conference in Washington DC next week.

*We are seen as the best community capacity building resources in the nation with Minnesota's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Program. We are getting more attention as the Department of Defense's resources are waning.

*Concerning the sustainment factor of the Yellow Ribbon Program We have. 96 networks in 214 communities across Minnesota. Each network is surrounded by key partners. There are 6 key partners to each network. The County Veterans Services officer, the Deed Veteran Employment Representative, the Local Employment Support of the Garden Representative, the Local Family Assistant Center Representative, the Local Family Readiness Support Assistance and the local unit representative. 61 of our 96 networks have a Minnesota National Guard Unit Rep assigned to that committee.

*Through the American Legion Auxiliary we have been able to obtain two grants for Americorp Vista.

*Introducing Samantha Hollis, who will help ensure that the networks have connected to every possible resource available to them. She will also be creating a mental health and financial literacy directory for the new Beyond the Yellow Ribbon website, scheduled to be opened in about six weeks. Dana Durkee is another intern.

*We are hoping to get three more Americorp Vista grants next year to reach out to greater Minnesota.

Q. Do counties become Yellow Ribbon certified? What about Ramsey County?

A. Yes, they can. Ramsey County is not certified, though. We have 26 so far.

Military Action Group (MAG) – Jerry Kyser

*Assistant Commissioner for the Department of Administration came to the MAG meeting on October 5, 2015.

*Participation of veteran owned businesses in the new stadium is about 1%. One of the larger contractors is a veteran owned business, though they are not registered.

*The UVLC purchased a brick on the stadium.

*October 17 flyover of the University of Minnesota honoring WWII and later women veterans. We are looking for National Guard to be honored there as well.

*The Medal of Honor annual convention will be here from October 2nd to the 8th of 2016.

3. Federal Agencies

VA Regional Office – Kim Graves –reporting by Ron Woolery

*VBA set a new record in cases worked locally, but I do not have those numbers today.

*St. Paul continues to lead the nation in production. Our employees are no longer on mandatory overtime.

*On October 19, St. Paul will be one of the initial eight stations to pilot the work queue program.

Q. Can you speak to the claims you are doing related to the C123 claims?

A. Right now we only have a few of those in. We expect that number to grow. I will get you more details.

VISN 23 – Janet Murphy – Director VISN 23 – Report by Jason Petti

*VA 101 training took place in Minneapolis and went over very well. It is being pushed out across the United States. VA 101 training is to create a common level of knowledge of all services and benefits that the VA offers across the department, and to help employees enhance the veteran experience at all VA medical centers and to all VA customers.

*It will be held again in this network on November 20th, in Iowa City.

*We did not get funded what we would typically get funded for fiscal year 2016. We will know more in December.

*We did well last fiscal year with the Hepatitis C treatment. Congress did allow us to re-appropriate some of the Choice funds.

*This fiscal year our Office of Rural Funding was cut, so we have five projects that will be sustained through VISN 23.

*Veterans Experience office will be opened in Minneapolis until a space can be constructed over at Ft. Snelling.

*There will be one SES individual as part of the My VA reorganization located in Chicago.

*Office of Public Affairs and Intergovernmental Agencies were being consolidated with the Chicago office.

*A regional council across the country is being consolidated as well.

*The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI) will be launched in 2016 here in Minneapolis.

*Through the My VA care, all of the VISNs have gone through some sort of realignment. VISN 23 will not be realigned with anyone. It did impact network 2, 3, 10, and 11.

*Out of the St. Cloud meeting is the understanding that there will be mediation between the AFG and facility leadership.

*Last year we awarded over \$90 million in projects in VISN 23 for construction.

*VISN 23 had a large amount of complaints about the difficulty of the Choice program.

*The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense are working together to celebrate the 50th Anniversary and Commemoration of the Vietnam Veterans of America. Something will be done for this in March of 2016.

Q. For the Veterans Experience office [...] is that going to shift our congressional liaison?

A. The Veterans Experience officer at the medical center is strictly for that, the veterans experience. The other group is going to be broken up into districts. I am not sure yet how they are going to work with our congressional constituents. I can get more information on this for you. If it's a facility issue, work with facilities. If it's a larger regional issue, then try and deal with Veterans Experience. It will depend on the situation.

Q. *The Veterans Choice. What amount of money does the VA pay? Is it the same as Medicare?*

A. *From a traditional standpoint, it was always 70% of what Medicare paid, except for administrative costs. I believe it is the same with the Choice program.*

Q. *What are you calling your community resource project?*

A. *The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI).*

Q. *[unintelligible]...this program has a seven year head start, so we probably need to connect with whoever's heading up that...are they bringing someone in or is someone working on it?*

A. *I don't know. It will be started in 2016. I am not sure how it will be administered. Call me at the office for more specific questions.*

Q. *Back to Veterans Choice, that contractor, how long is their contract?*

A. *There are two of them. One was due to expire either this month or last month and I do not know if they have renewed it for another year. I cannot tell you for sure.*

Q. *Are those contractors subcontracting some of the services?*

A. *I don't believe so.*

Q. *We have had issues at the VA with people insisting that they are speaking to a third party.*

A. *It's quite possible. I don't know how they operate their business. They were hired to coordinate care for us in the community, and we are having some issues with that.*

MPLS VA HCS – Director Patrick J. Kelly – Mike Rosecrans – Leg. Liaison

*Not present.

St. Cloud VA HCS – Director Barry Bahl – Reporting by Sharon Meschke

*Willing to participate in mediation action as a result of the meeting last week.

Our standard is that veterans will get quality and timely care. These are some of the things we are having challenges with. We are utilizing Choice programs and non-VA care in order to address them.

*Choice implementation has been a challenge. The biggest has been having the third party administrator scheduling the appointment in a timely manner, and then contacting the veteran to let them know when their appointment is.

*During September we had the opportunity to use our tradition non-VA care funds, and we had our internal staff schedule those. We were able to push out a massive amount of appointments. As of October 1, we were mandated to go back to the Choice program.

*Infusion Center was opened in St. Cloud.

*Construction continues at the Community Living Center.

*Veterans Day parade is scheduled for November 8th.

Q. *Question on that third party administrator. Are they having problems finding doctors that will accept Choice?*

A. *Yes. A vendor needs to opt into the Choice program.*

Ft. Snelling Cemetery – Robert Roser

*There were 481 August interments. 114 WWII veterans, 54 Korean veterans, 83 Vietnam veterans, 6 Persian Gulf veterans, 20 peacetime veterans, 1 active duty, and 203 dependents.

*441 September interments. 93 WWII veterans, 63 Korean veterans, 74 Vietnam veterans, 3 Persian Gulf veterans, 29 peacetime veterans, 0 active duty, and 177 dependents. That makes 5,182 for this year.

*Turf and renovation program is being wrapped up.

Vets Employment & Training Services [VETS] – Director, Scott Mills – Report by David Seay

*VETS testified before congress on several occasions discussing the results and best practices for the Transitional Assistance Program, homeless veterans, and simplifying the professional licensing and credentialing process for veterans. VETS has also implemented programs to help transitioning service members gain access to employment services in our job centers. Service members now have the opportunity to work with American job centers wherever they are stationed before they separate, and with the job centers where they plan to relocate after retirement. Transitioning service members and spouses are generally eligible for the same services as dislocated workers.

*The unemployment rate for veterans has fallen to a seven year low. It is currently at 4.2%.

4. Announcements

*HR companies looking at resumes do not understand what military jobs entail. We need to find a way to be clearer on this.

* Pat McLaughlin with Vets for Music is going to be part of the Vets Bluegrass Music festival at Harriet Island, 10AM-10PM. July 2, 2016. Will have one national act and ten local acts. St Paul hopes this will take the place of Taste of Minnesota. Festival link is: vetsfest.org

5. Meeting in Recess for five minutes

Next meeting November 4, 2015.

Treasurer's Report

*Balance as of September 1: \$4,178.81

*Deposits for September 2015: \$100.00

*Expenses for September 2015:

Parking: \$42.77

Transcription: \$120.00

Total: \$162.77

*Balance as of October 7, 2015: \$4,116.04

End of Report.