

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
The Regular Quarterly Meeting of the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs Meeting
Wednesday, April 4, 2018 - 10:00 a.m.
Malloy Leisure Resource Center
Iowa Veterans Home
Marshalltown, Iowa 50158

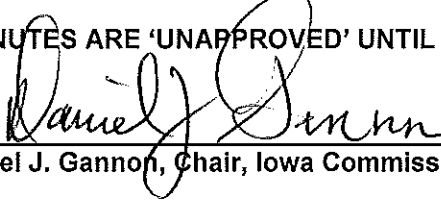
Present: Daniel J. Gannon, Chairperson
George Goebel, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs
Steve Hyde, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs
John Kost, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs
Elizabeth Ledvina, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs
Mary Van Horn, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs
Gary Wattnem, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs

Absent: Monica Brouse, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs
Kate Myers, Member, Commission of Veterans Affairs

Staff: Timon M. Oujiri, Commandant, Iowa Veterans Home
Steve Lukan, Executive Director, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs
Mike Hines, Executive Assistant, Iowa Veterans Home – Meeting Secretary

**Guests/
Presenters:** Gail Graham, Director, Des Moines VA CIHCS
Kristi Catrenich, Public Affairs Officer, Des Moines VA CIHCS
Kevin Hall, Communications Director, Iowa Secretary of State's Office
Jason Kemp, Home Base Iowa
Wayne Marek, Des Moines Vet Center
Roger Elliott, Vietnam Veterans of America
Jerry Hansen, County Veterans Association
Ron DeVoll, Chief, Voluntary Services, Iowa City VAMC
Dean Brand, Coordinator, Iowa Army National Guard Funeral Honors Program
Chuck Connors, Iowa National Guard
Sue Jehlem, Rock Island National Cemetery, National Cemetery Administration
Dave Albertson, Nebraska Veterans Home
Judy Johnson-Mekota, Director, Iowa City VAMC
Brenda Safranski from Senator Ernst Office, Des Moines
Jon Schneider, President, Paralyzed Veterans of Iowa
Ryan Dickson, Public Affairs for Des Moines VA Regional Office
Rod Derringer, Des Moines VA Regional Office
Bruce Voigt, Director, Des Moines VA Regional Office

NOTE: THESE MINUTES ARE 'UNAPPROVED' UNTIL ACCEPTED BY THE COMMISSION AT THE NEXT MEETING.

APPROVED:  Date: 7/11/2018
Daniel J. Gannon, Chair, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs

Call to Order:

Meeting Chairperson Gannon called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence:

Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairperson Gannon followed by a moment of silence for our departed veterans, POWs, those missing in action (MIAs) and those on active duty at this time.

Roll Call:

Chairperson Gannon took roll call. Commissioners Brouse, Myers and Van Horn were absent. Van Horn entered after the meeting began. A quorum was present.

Welcome/Introduction of Guests:

Chairperson Gannon welcomed everyone in attendance. A round table of introductions was held.

Presentations:

Honor A Veteran Program:

Paul Pate, Secretary of State, gave a presentation on their Honor a Veteran program. This program honors veterans for their sacrifices they have made throughout history to protect our freedoms and our sacred right to vote. The website is: www.honorofvet.net where you can fill out a form to honor a veteran. The veteran and the person nominating the veteran will each receive a pin. Outside the Secretary of State's office at the Capitol there is a display set up to give tribute to those who lost their lives.

Last year another program was initiated to reach out to veterans with disabilities, letting them know what options they have available to them, whether it be absentee balloting, assistance in the voting booth or curb side voting. Mr. Pate gave out handouts to make available to groups. The handout is also on their website.

Iowa Veterans Home Update:

Commandant Oujiri presented the Iowa Veterans Home Update:

Current population is 488 residents. We have:

WWII: 45
Korea: 57
Vietnam: 231
Gulf: 6
Peacetime: 80.

Oldest resident: 102. Youngest resident: 33.

Construction update: Last May the Sheeler roof blew off during a storm. Replacement of the roof is now completed. We are now tuck pointing the rest of the building. Work is

continuing on the new laundry facility. New equipment will be arriving the end of April and it should be completed by the end of May or first part of June.

Upcoming events: Agent Orange Symposium will be this Saturday, April 7, in the Malloy LRC. It is open to the public and there will be two sessions.

Governor Reynolds will tour IVH on April 24.

Resident and staff surveys were sent out. We did well overall. Ninety-eight percent of the residents are very satisfied with how they are cared for, their privacy and how they are respected at IVH. They were only 82 percent satisfied with the food, so we will be rolling out some new menus next month. Staff survey was also good with over 50 percent saying they plan on still being employed at IVH in the next 5 to 10 years.

Commandant briefed attendees on an LPN who works at IVH, Jamie Miller, who saved a 5 year old girl who was unresponsive in a swimming pool at the Casino. She got the heart rate back by the time the EMT got there. She was sent to Marshalltown hospital where they life flighted her to Iowa City.

Presentations:

State Honor Guard:

Dean Brand, retired from the Army National Guard, is the State Honor Guard Coordinator and gave a report to the Commission on the Iowa Army National Guard Funeral Honors Program.

There were 1,564 services during FY17 which ended September 30, 2017. They have done 810 services through the end of March, which is 135 services per month this year and 130 for last year. We are 40 services ahead of the same period a year ago.

We do have funding for AP3 payments to veteran service organizations that are wanting to partner with us in conducting Army services. The unit does need to be registered as a government contractor. If units aren't doing at least 20 services a year, it's probably not worth the time and energy to enroll in this because the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs program is much easier to work with.

There are six soldiers working full time for us, two in Cedar Rapids garrison and four at Camp Dodge. We've closed the office in Sioux City because our NCO there took a technician position and the numbers weren't that large in western Iowa, so we are covering that area from Camp Dodge as far as coordination and/or personnel go.

We have done a number of events around Veterans Day. We had a display on Veterans Day at the Capitol in January to meet folks who attended and to answer questions about honors. In February we partnered with the Iowa Highway Patrol and the Air Guard to provide color guards and a cordon for the Kosovo Prime Minister, his

wife and travel party as they visited Des Moines. They toured Iowa National Guard facilities and visited Governor Reynolds and state legislators. We presented a class in military honors to the Mortuary Class from Des Moines Area Community College at Camp Dodge, so they are better acquainted with what to expect from the military when they have veterans or active service members who pass away.

The 2018 funding is a little short and is still a work-in-progress. Hopefully we'll get a plus up so we can be able to conduct some training classes this year as well as make sure we have enough to cover the funeral missions.

There are a great group of dedicated soldiers full and "part" time (30-40 core soldiers) that support this mission and a great group of veteran service organizations that we work with. They are present regardless of the weather and of course a lot of days it's not fun when it's cold, snowing or raining. We are not there to push out any veteran organization, but to combine forces to honor the deceased veteran and the family and friends.

In FY17, we did 209 services out of our total of 1,564 and through the end of March this year we have 75 out of the 810 services at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery. They continue to be busy and the schedule is full many days.

We can be contacted at our office at 515-252-4421 or by e-mail, Robert.d.brand4ctr@mail.mil.

VA Regional Office Update:

Bruce Voigt, Director of the VA Regional Office, introduced himself. He is the new Director of the VA Regional Office, being installed February 6. He feels very fortunate to be in Iowa heading up some of the best men and women in Iowa at the Regional Office.

He attended a new directors' orientation in Washington D.C. last week.

Nationally, our backlog as of this morning is down to 75,000 claims. Inventory this morning is 325,000 claims.

At the Des Moines Regional Office, our time and cue goal is 30 days. That is the number of days that a claim stays in a cycle in our regional office. Last month we were at 1.9, so we are moving claims out. Timeliness is important to veterans and those filing claims. Our rating accuracy was 97.7 percent throughout this year. The Regional Office completed 1,159 claims. We are under 200 days for our local appeal claims. The standard is 400.

Bruce talked about the decision ready claims and outreach. There are four outreach events in April. Hope to complete approximately 20 events this year.

VA Medical Center – Iowa City Update:

Judy Johnson-Mekota, Director, Iowa City VA Medical Center, gave a brief update to the Commission.

There are no leadership vacancies in the Iowa City VA Healthcare System. Our team is very dedicated and committed to our mission.

In terms of our budget, we are experiencing about a \$2.5 million deficit currently, so we are monitoring that closely and we will keep you updated.

Due to some contractors working on our sprinkler and HVAC systems in our OR, it flooded. We had major water damage and had to close the OR for two weeks. It was approximately \$3 million to replace all supplies and equipment.

Our outreach focus this year is on enrollment.

Judy explained the opioid safety initiative, how they monitor veterans on chronic opioids. We do not have a lot of veterans on high dose narcotics and we also partner with the state prescription monitoring program.

In looking at the preliminary numbers, it looks like the number of homeless in Iowa doubled this year, not all of them are veterans. We are looking at how homeless veterans get the services they need, is it easy to get those services and did they feel like a valued customer.

Construction is under way to build a new clinic on Locust Street in Davenport to replace the Bettendorf clinic. We will be adding some specialty services. Then there will be a site selection for the new clinic in Dubuque. Expected completion date is the summer of 2019.

Upcoming events: Tele-Town Hall will be held April 18 from 6 to 7 p.m. focusing on Decorah, Dubuque and Waterloo.

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

April is also Volunteer Appreciation Month. Judy introduced Ron DeVoll, Chief, Voluntary Services in Iowa City. Ron briefed attendees that there are just over 600 volunteers who interact with veterans on a daily basis, including working with our community partners and identify various resources that would benefit our patients.

Last fiscal year volunteers attributed just over 65,000 hours of services at the Iowa City VA, outpatient clinics as well as the main facility. Ron explained about the voluntary transportation network—volunteers who drive veteran patients from out in the community to VA appointments. Several veteran county offices have partnered with us to help coordinate from their county and community. Iowa City has just over 200 drivers

and just over 30 vehicles. If you know of anyone that might be interested in being a volunteer driver, especially in Dubuque, Linn County and Quad City area, you can call 319-338-0581, ext. 6270.

Ron also announced a new specialist on board in Voluntary Services, Heidi Brown, who is working with the Transportation Coordinators and the oncoming drivers.

VA Central Iowa Health Care System – Des Moines Update:

Gail Graham, Director, gave an update on the Des Moines VA CIHCS. Gail thanked those who attended the ceremony they hosted with the Veterans Benefit Administration on Friday in the auditorium at their facility. Dan Gannon was our guest speaker. We pinned over 160 veterans.

The Veterans Suicide Prevention Team has expanded to four personnel, as a part of a national VA effort to combat suicide prevention. We have added a position to support the CBOCs and the rural areas and another position to conduct community outreach.

New Psychiatry Residency Program—we are in partnership with Broadlawns and Unity Point in Des Moines, VA CIHCS will be starting a new Psychiatry Residency Program in July 2018, which will produce four new psychiatrists each year. Additionally, we will also be entering a partnership with Mercy in Des Moines for a similar program, adding another 4 new psychiatrists to the Iowa workforce each year. Iowa ranks 48th in mental health professionals per capita.

In partnership with the Disabled American Veterans, to combat hunger and homelessness, we are working with a local community group to host a mobile food pantry based near our community resource center near the Methodist Hospital in Des Moines. We are looking at ways to address food and security of our veterans and doing outreach both at the main facility and the CBOCs.

Advocating for veterans—VA CIHCS recently met with Dan Gannon and an interested veteran to discuss the possibility of a Veteran Court in Polk County. While Polk County would need to take ownership of this endeavor, the interested veteran had done significant research and VA CIHCS was able to provide additional information and contacts to move this forward.

VA CIHCS will be hosting the National Veteran Creative Arts Festival in Des Moines from October 29 through November 4, 2018. Co-hosting with the American Legion Auxiliary, the VA will be hosting 125 national winners in all art and stage show categories, along with their families for a week-long workshop and culminating art and stage show. We will need your help as we start looking at donations and volunteers for the event, and especially supportive fans at the large shows on Sunday, November 4.

Construction will be starting this spring on the parking garage. It is located off 30th Street exit in the ravine near the Emergency Department. No existing parking places will

be lost/affected. The parking ramp will add approximately 255 spaces with the ability to add layers if needed in the future. Connecting canopy to be added by a future project.

Design for the layout of the Primary Care Annex is underway. Construction work is slated to begin in late 2019 with move-in one year after that. The Annex will be located within 10 miles of the VA Medical Center. The Annex will be approximately 36,000 square feet and will house four PACT teams.

CLC Cottage for Palliative Care will be located just west of the CLC building, with an enclosed walkway from the cottage entrance to the west stairwell in CLC. The cottage will be a 12-bed facility. Construction will start in early 2019 with the anticipated opening in fall of 2020.

The new warehouse will be located next to the kitchen dock and will connect to the facility via a service elevator. The design is underway for the layout of the warehouse. Construction is planned for FY19.

Gail then gave the update for the Sioux Fall VA Health Care System on behalf of Director Darwin Goodspeed.

Projects nearing completion are the oncology and specialty care buildings in the front of the medical center. Open house and benefits fair are being planned for May 17 and you will all be invited.

Renovation of the chapel is in progress and is expected to be completed by early fall. In addition, the Sioux City and Spirit Lake CBOCs will be moving to new, larger buildings in 2018.

Planned projects include a new outpatient mental health building, a renovated and enlarged Emergency Department, renovation of the fifth floor for minor surgery, new space for Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and Sterile Processing Service as well as smaller projects to freshen the front foyer and connecting corridor.

VA's top priority is suicide prevention. The new suicide prevention coordinator for Sioux Falls is social worker Jenifer Schramm. She and the suicide prevention team are available to visit any community groups. They have a wide variety of materials available and provide free gun locks for veterans. In addition, we encourage you to help veterans by referring them here for care. Out of the 20 veterans who commit suicide each day, 16 of those are not enrolled with VA and are missing out on the support and first-class care offered by our mental health team.

Veterans in Sioux Falls area have access to expanded telehealth services. New is VA Video Connect, which will again improve access for veterans as well as prevent lengthy trips to and from the medical center. This is just one of the technology advances over the last year, and we encourage veterans to visit with their health care team about MyHealthVet and other advances in using technology to enhance their health care.

We appreciate the continued collaboration and advocacy of Iowa County Veterans Directors and Commissioners, congressional representatives, and other veteran advocates in Iowa. Thank You!

Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Update:

Executive Director Steve Lukan briefed the Commission on IDVA.

(Secretary's Note: Tape stopped. It was started back up after the break.)

Approval of Commission Minutes:

Commissioner Goebel made a motion to approve Commission minutes of January 3, 2018, quarterly meeting. Second by Commissioner Van Horn. Motion carried; approved unanimously.

Trust Fund Applications:

Commissioner Wattnem made a motion to approve minutes of Trust Fund conference call of January 4, 2018. Second by Commissioner Ledvina. Motion carried; approved unanimously.

Commissioner Goebel made a motion to approve minutes of Trust Fund conference call of February 1, 2018. Second by Commissioner Wattnem. Motion carried; approved unanimously.

Commissioner Van Horn made a motion to approve minutes of Trust Fund conference call of March 1, 2018. Second by Commissioner Hyde. Motion carried; approved unanimously.

Old Business:

Legislative Updates:

Chairperson Gannon passed out the "Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs 2018 Legislative Initiatives" and reviewed the 11 initiatives.

1. We support the protection of the financial integrity of the following agencies and programs: Iowa Veterans Home; Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs; Iowa Veterans Cemetery; Iowa Veterans Trust Fund; County Allocation Funds; Military Home Ownership Program; and Injured Veteran Grant Program.

This bill is ongoing.

2. We support changes to the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund that will allow more assistance to veterans and their families (no appropriation required).

This bill added Homeless Assistance and increasing our spending amount (principal) from \$300,000 to \$500,000 (from \$2.5 million).

3. We support long-term funding of the Iowa Veterans Cemetery.

This was part of the Department bill but the language on perpetual care funding was taken out. Out of the \$2,500,000 that was to go to the Trust Fund, \$1,000,000 was to go to the Cemetery. The Commission did not support that and the full \$2,500,000 will go to the Trust Fund.

4. We support adding two members to the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs: Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and Iowa Association of County Commissioners and Veteran Service Officers (IACCVSO).

This bill is still moving forward, which is part of the Department bill with this language unchanged at this time.

5. We support legislation that would direct all state agencies in all locations to fly the POW/MIA flag directly below the United States flag and above the Iowa State flag, at least on the following federally mandated holidays: POW/MIA Day, Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day.

This bill is dead.

6. We support an increase of the Military Property Tax Exemption from \$1,852 to \$3,700 up to \$5,000.

This bill is dead.

7. We request that the Iowa Legislature enact legislation that would instill Americanism and Patriotism in grades K thru 12.

This bill is still in process and the legislature is working on it to require Iowa High School students to pass the Citizenship test.

8. We request that the Iowa Legislature enact legislation to allow veterans who have been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart medals to receive a free license plate with their medal emblem on it.

This bill is dead.

9. We support any and all legislation pertaining to Mental Health for our Disabled Veterans, their families and all Iowans suffering from this life taking disease.

The debate on this bill is still going on.

10. We support and encourage the Iowa Legislature to establish and expand Veterans Treatment Courts.

We are still working on this initiative.

11. We support Licensure and Certification of Service Members and Veterans. We support efforts to eliminate employment barriers that impede the timely and successful transfer of military job skills to the civilian labor market.

This initiative is already taken care of by Home Base Iowa. No action needed.

Veterans Trust Fund:

A subcommittee of the Commission met and reviewed the Administrative Rules for the Veterans Trust Fund. Chairperson Gannon reviewed the changes in the Administrative Rules and changes to the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund Assistance Request form. After short discussion, it was indicated they will add to the checklist a letter from Social Security listing the reason the individual cannot work.

Commissioner Goebel made a motion to approve changes to the Administrative Rules and the Assistance Request form. Second by Chairperson Wattnem. Motion carried; approved unanimously.

New Business:

There was no new business.

Comments:

Chairperson Gannon announced the 11th Annual Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day Ceremony will be held on Monday, May 7, 2018, at 11:00 a.m. at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial located south of the Iowa State Capitol building in Des Moines. This year's 50th Commemorative Ceremony will honor all those who have served in the Vietnam War era. Our keynote speaker will be John Rowan, Vietnam Veterans of America National President.

The Iowa Veterans Home will host Agent Orange Toxic Exposure Town Hall Meeting for Vietnam Veterans and families. The event will be held at the Iowa Veterans Home on Saturday, April 7 in the Malloy LRC. There will be two sessions, one from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. The second session will be from 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Public Comment:

Jason Kemp thanked the Commission for coming on board with Home Based Iowa.

Someone from the audience commented the Iowa City VA and the Dubuque CBOC do a tremendous job.

Another member from the audience announced the Story County Chapter DAV 1102 donates a survival bag filled with quilts, jackets, winter gloves, stocking caps, all the necessities for winter to veterans at the Des Moines Veterans Hospital.

Someone announced people are receiving phone calls from Veterans of America asking for donations. There is no such organization. There is also a group called Disabled Veterans of America. Again, there is no such organization.

Next Commission Meeting:

The next quarterly meeting will be held at the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum at Camp Dodge on Wednesday, July 11, 2018, beginning at 10:00 a.m.

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 12:38 p.m.