



STATE OF WASHINGTON

VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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**Meeting Minutes
July 24, 2008
Lummi Nation Community Center
Bellingham, Washington**

PRESENT:

Dick Whipple, Chair & VFW
Phil Ruhmshottel, Vice Chair & Marine Corps League
Bill Nickerson, Washington Veterans' Home
Roy Compton, EX-POWs
Dennis Primoli, At Large
Gary Yeager, MOPH
Deryl McCarty, MOAA
Lloyd Burroughs, NABVets
Bill Schrier, American Legion
Frank Cordero, Advisor
Dan Gogerty, Advisor
George Edmundson, Advisor
First Gentleman, Mike Gregoire
John Lee, WDVA Director
April Harris, WDVA Executive Assistant
Dick Kirk, Advisor
Oria Berndt, Advisor

EXCUSED:

Deryl McCarty, MOAA
COL Mary Forbes, At Large
Gary Pearson, PVA
Michele Colpaert, DAV
Roy Compton, AX-POWs
Dr. Les Burger, Advisor
Rafael Ojeda, American G.I. Forum

Chairman, Dick Whipple, called the meeting to order. Lloyd Burroughs offered the invocation and Dick led the pledge of allegiance. Richard Marshall, of the Lummi Tribe, played the Star Spangled Banner on his violin.

Henry Cagey, Chairman of the Lummi Nation, told the history of the tribe and Jewel James explained the wood carvings around the building. John Lee presented Henry with a certificate of appreciation for their hosting the VAAC. In addition to the use of the facility, the Lummi Tribe provided a continental breakfast with homemade scones and lunch after the meeting.

MINUTES:

Gary Yeager made a motion to accept the minutes from the last meeting, Roy Compton seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.

BARRY PFUNDT:

Barry Pfundt, representative for American Veterans (AMVETS) had asked not to be reappointed to his position due to the need to focus on his law degree. Barry is attending Gonzaga University and committed to helping veterans with legal issues after he passes the Bar. Chair, Dick Whipple, and First Mike presented him with a plaque and thanked him for his service on the committee.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION:

Seth Kirby, from the Human Rights Commission provided information about veterans' civil rights. The bulk of their work is related to disability issues and employment. Family members have questions regarding employment and housing at a rate of about five inquiries per month. An individual has six months to file a complaint regarding employment and one year to file a complaint regarding housing.

The investigation process is neutral and objective.

Some pointers:

- Read the self-assessment guide
- Try to resolve internally first
- Consider applying for funds from the Veterans Innovations Program while the matter is being resolved, if you qualify (a veteran from the recent conflicts).

The punitive action for the employer/house owner is a fine up to \$20,000 plus training and postings at the site.

As for employment, the Department of Labor has worked with ESGR folks and they have been able to resolve all issues they have received, at the lowest level. Only four in the entire state have gone to the federal Department of Labor.

Contact the Human Rights Commission with questions. They will be happy to assist.

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER:

Mike Maryanski gave a presentation on the concept and committee working on the performing arts center at Tahoma High School, which is adjacent to Tahoma Cemetery. Mr. Maryanski showed the concept design and briefed on the types of events the center could provide, including funeral and memorial services. They are looking into naming the center for Bob Bush, a Washington State Medal of Honor recipient; and also naming rooms at the center for prominent veterans.

Phil Ruhmshottel will participate on the planning committee representing the VAAC.

FIRST MIKE:

The First Gentleman briefed on the events he has attended in the last few months and commended Director, John Lee, for his leadership.

81ST HEAVY COMBAT BRIGADE DEPLOYMENT:

Tom Riggs, from the Washington National Guard, briefed on the upcoming state-wide events to honor the deploying brigade that includes almost 3000 National Guard members. Help is needed at several of the sites and he asked the service organizations to contact him to help out.

WDVA STRATEGIC PLAN:

John Lee reminded the committee he had sent copies of the agency's strategic plan for 2008-2013 and asked if anyone had any questions. Operation Rupert's Room, the therapy dog program at Retsil and then Orting are key initiatives for the next few years.

John thanked everyone for their input at the last meeting.

HEALING POLE REQUEST:

Veterans Home representative, Bill Nickerson, asked for funding from the Emblem Fund for a plaque at the base of the healing pole located in Retsil Square. He will work with the agency to draft a proposal and bring it back to the committee.

GOOD OF THE ORDER:

Dennis Primoli: The VLC passed more bills under Governor Gregoire than the last twenty years. Forty-seven have been signed. This is in response to her promise to support veterans. The VLC Legislative Reception will be January 12, 2009.

Lloyd Burroughs: Reminder of the recognition at Ft. Lawton to remember the forty-three black soldiers who were wrongly court-martialed for rioting and lynching. In 1944.

Barry Pfundt: Expressed appreciation for his time on the committee and stated that veterans have one of their strongest advocates in Governor Gregoire. She is truly exceptional.

Gunny Goffinet: Supports the raising of funds for the framing of Michael Reagan's drawings of fallen soldiers. He will talk to groups in the Spokane area.

Dick Kirk: Supports the activity park for disabled veterans, similar to the one in Canada.

Oria Berndt: Announced Skip Dreps, from PVA, is leaving to become a teacher.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Skip Dreps: Gary Pearson is at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and will participate with "Rollin' Down the River" next year's games in Spokane which is July 13-18, 2009.

Chuck Karczewski, former VAAC member and chair, laid his final wreath at the Korean War Memorial on Saturday. He is moving to Florida to live near family.

Gully Collier: She is a veteran living at the Washington Soldiers Home. She has applied to become the home's VAAC representative and wanted to attend and experience a meeting. She is a twenty-one year Navy veteran.

Community veteran asked for help regarding the rule for veterans' credit toward retirement. The current law states you do not get any credit unless you have 25 years of service at the time you retire.

Meeting adjourned.