



STATE OF WASHINGTON

VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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**Meeting Minutes
November 28, 2007
Aberdeen, Washington**

PRESENT:

Chairman Dick Whipple, VFW
Vice Chair Phil Ruhmshottel, Marine Corps League
Deryl McCarty, MOAA
Lloyd Burroughs, NABVETS
Michele Colpaert, DAV
Rupert Markham, Washington Soldiers Home
Mike Serpa, Washington Veterans Home
COL Mary Forbes, At Large
Gary Pearson, PVA
Dan Gogerty, VLC Advisor
Dr. Les Burger, Advisor
J. F. Goffinet, Advisor

EXCUSED:

Barry Pfundt, AMVETS
Dennis Primoli, At Large
Roy Compton, AX-POWs
Dick Kirk, Advisor
Frank Cordero, Advisor
Oria Berndt, Advisor
George Edmundson, Advisor

ABSENT:

Gary Yeager, MOPH

Chair, Dick Whipple called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Lloyd Burroughs offered the invocation. Roll call was taken.

Dick introduced a new member to the committee, COL Mary Forbes of the Washington National Guard. She is filling an At Large position on the VAAC. COL Forbes has twenty-four years of military service and appreciates the work of the committee and is honored to be a member.

Minutes:

A motion was made by Lloyd Burroughs and seconded by Deryl McCarty to accept the minutes of the last meeting as written. The motion was passed unanimously.

Michael Reagan, Artist:

Mr. Reagan shared the story of his commitment to draw, free of charge, the pictures of the soldiers lost in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. He has drawn over 900 pictures, including placing a never-seen child in the picture with the dad this child will never meet. He would like the committee to get the word out that he does this from the heart and does not accept payment for his services. Please let anyone you know who has lost a family member in the war about his work and ask them to contact him. Mike can be reached at mikier@comcast.net and his work and the story of his passion can be viewed at fallenheroesproject.org.

He will be speaking at the Paralyzed Veterans of American conference in September and at the Oregon American Legion conference in July.

Veterans Family Fund Update:

The Veterans Family Fund currently has thirteen banks signed up. This program will mean millions of dollars for veterans and their families. The program was officially announced in Clark County and the kick off event for Pierce County is December 4th. Log on to veteransfamilyfund.org for more information.

WDVA Town Halls:

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs is conducting town halls around the state, mostly away from the larger cities. The first event was Tuesday, November 27th in Oak Harbor. Seventy-five citizens attended. Employment Security and other partners will attend to provide benefits information, blood pressure checks and other services. John Lee asked the VAAC to support these events in their neighborhoods.

First Gentleman, Mike Gregoire:

The First Gentleman attended another memorial service yesterday in Oak Harbor. He also attended the Veterans Day ceremony in Washington D.C. and visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Vietnam Memorial and attended the parade.

He thanked everyone for their support of our troops and veterans and said the Governor is very appreciative.

Warrior Transition Battalion:

This operation is part of a new project at Madigan Army Medical Center and has been in operation for two months. The unit is growing and they anticipate 800 soldiers will be moved into the barracks. WDVA staff are assisting with benefits and share the space with the federal VA claims officer to get claims filed, reviewed and adjudicated before the soldier leaves the military. This brings financial relief for the family. They also

assist family members with readjustment issues including finance, counseling and either returning to active duty, the reserves or being a private citizen.

Veterans Remembrance Flag:

A group is promoting a state flag to honor veterans. The VAAC recommended that the proposal be moved forward to the Joint Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs.

Veteran-Owned Business Registry:

Heidi Audette demonstrated the new online registry for veteran-owned businesses to sign up. This registry is available on the department's website allowing people to search for a business owned by a veteran if they want to do business with one. The registry has the Business name and phone number, type of business, city, and allows for email to the business or a direct connection to their website.

Comments made from the audience were favorable in that they said the site was easy to navigate and it was easy to sign up. Eighty-three businesses have signed up, thus far.

Good of the Order:

Phil Ruhmshottel offered the website for a group that alters donated clothing for returning soldiers to accommodate special needs: www.sewmuchcomfort.org. The clothing will be sent to Walter Reed Medical Center.

Dan Gogerty asked how many license plates have been sold. The number is approximately 8,300.

First Gentleman, Mike Gregoire applauded WDVA and John Lee for the great job they are doing.

COL Forbes said the 1st Brigade may deploy by the end of next summer. She is honored and humbled to be a member of the committee.

Deryl McCarty applauded John Lee for his quick response to a question he asked about increased traffic accidents by returning soldiers. There is no significant difference.

Gunny Goffinet suggested using posts or chapters for VAAC meetings.

Gary Pearson reported he was appointed by the Secretary for the VA to a team to inspect units around the country for disabled access. He appreciates becoming a new member of the VAAC.

Lloyd Burroughs told of a culinary arts program that will train veterans for employment opportunities in the food service field. They will provide physical and mental evaluations and serve the homeless first, then the incarcerated and finally youth. When they graduate from the program they will be looking at jobs that start at \$16 per hour with full benefits.

Bill Schrier reported on visiting places to garner support for veterans, he often follows WDVA and the First Gentleman. The Governor and First Mike deserve applause for putting Washington on the map for veterans.

Public Comment:

Fred Kogin, contract service officer in Aberdeen provided an update on contacts to his office. He said the WDVA Service Officer Training is the “greatest thing since sliced bread” and he is thankful to this administration and WDVA for it.

Bob Barbee, former Merchant Marine, expressed his appreciation to the Governor and WDVA for the work they have done to recognize Merchant Marines. He presented gold Merchant Marine pins to the First Gentleman for himself and the Governor and several to WDVA staff. This pin was awarded during WWII for Distinguished Service.

Doug Adams announced the Patriots Pride Foundation of Washington will hold its first annual golf tournament on June 9th next year.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30.