



STATE OF WASHINGTON
VETERANS AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
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Meeting Minutes

Meeting attended by (VAAC Member)	Charles Wharton, Bob Wallace, Michele Love, and Robert Garrison
Date	March 21, 2019
Time	6 p.m. – 7:40 p.m.
Location	American Legion Post 8, 1101 E. Craig Avenue, Ellensburg, WA
Call to Order	Meeting called to order by Charles Wharton Invocation by Bob Wallace Pledge of Allegiance led by Charles Wharton
Welcome & Introductions:	Welcome and Introduction – Charles Wharton <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informed the guests of the role of the VAAC and introduced
Presentations	Community Leader Update – Bruce Tabb, Mayor of Ellensburg <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thanked the VAAC for being here.• Wants to hear about the impacts to find affordable housing for Veterans. WDVA Update – Alfie <ul style="list-style-type: none">• YesVets Program: YesVets is an ongoing statewide campaign to hire Veterans. YesVets is a simple program that acknowledges Washington State employers of all sizes and types for their commitment to making Veterans part of their workforce. YesVets is a positive, no-cost initiative that acknowledges companies that recognize the skills, training, and experience Veterans bring to the job market. It allows employers to visibly and proudly proclaim their support for Veteran hiring. As of March 2018, more than 931 employers have registered and hired more than 3,605 Veterans.• Legislative Update: Informed group of the listing of current legislative bills that are moving through the legislature. Current listing can be found here: http://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva/legislative-updates.• WDVA priorities over the next year:• Emotional Wellness: Concentration on reducing Veteran suicide.

- **Focus on the Homeless:** Homeless numbers are dramatically increasing in WA state due to lack of housing and housing affordability. Many older vets are on a fixed income and can no longer afford to pay their rent. The state has set aside half a billion dollars to combat this issue.
- **Outreach:** DVA wants to connect Veterans to their benefits and are currently focused on Vietnam Veterans. As a Veteran, if you, or someone you know has not registered with the VA, please do so.
- **Statewide Services:** WDVA is focused on those living in Eastern WA. We have recently opened our Walla Walla Veterans Home and have another Eastern Washington Veterans Home located in Spokane. Our Washington State Veterans Cemetery is located in Medical Lake (outside of Spokane) and we are looking at creating another Veterans Cemetery in the Tri Cities or Yakima area. We just opened a Veteran's Center in Spokane complete with five Veteran Service Officers available to assist local area Veterans.
- **Korean War Veterans:** We are looking for Korean War Veterans. If you served in Korean War, you may be eligible for the Korean Ambassador for Peace Medal. This commemorative medal is an expression of appreciation from the Korean government to American service men and women who served in the Korean War. The Ambassador for Peace Medal was first presented to Veterans as a special memento for those of who returned to South Korea through the 'Revisit Program'. The honor has since expanded to Veterans who cannot travel long journey to Korea. The Ambassador for Peace Medal and Certificate will be presented to all eligible Veterans as an expression of appreciation from the Korean government to American service men and women. To be eligible, Veterans must have served during the Korean War from June 25, 1950 to July 27, 1953. It is also available for the Veterans who participated in UN peacekeeping operations until the end of 1955. If you or someone you know qualifies for this recognition please contact Heidi Audette, WDVA's Communication Director, at 360 725-2154 or email her at heidia@dva.wa.gov.

Veterans Cemetery – Rudy Lopez, DVA Cemetery Director

- The State Veterans Cemetery is located in Medical Lake, 3 miles west of Fairchild Air Force Base and is grant funded by the VA. Our cemetery conducts over 800 burials a year.
- This forum allows for a ten-minute presentation and ten minutes cannot cover everything that is connected to the State Veterans Cemetery. If anyone would like me to come to this area for an in depth presentation on the Veterans Cemetery, please contact me at 509 299-6280.
- Veteran burial benefits are for eligible Veterans, spouses and at times dependents.
- We need a DD214 to verify Veteran service. If a DD214 is not available, we will work with you to find it by working with the VA. We need the DD

214 to verify the character of service. Please note that Dishonorable Discharged Veterans are not eligible for burial at a Veterans cemetery. In addition, if the Veteran committed a capital crime (murder, prison time etc.) this would disqualify them for burial at our cemetery.

- For those considering burial at the State Veterans Cemetery, I encourage you to pre-register for burial services. There is no commitment to the cemetery when you pre-register.
- Burial Benefits: For the Veteran: a plot, a vault for caskets, a headstone, and care of the grounds all at no cost. For the spouse and children: burial cost is currently \$300 (costs can increase over time).
- All Veterans should register with the VA to ensure they will qualify for burial benefits. If not registered, funds for burial may not be available.
- One source of funding of the cemetery comes from the WA State Veteran License Plate Program: \$28 from the purchase and renewal of each plate is directed to the Veterans Stewardship Account. The Veterans Stewardship Account is used for activities that benefit Veterans, such as maintaining the State Veterans Cemetery.

Peer to Peer Program – Peter Schmidt, DVA Director of Counseling and Wellness

- Peter Schmidt oversees the Peer to Peer program however Bryan Bales is the coordinator.
- A Veteran Peer Corps member is a Veteran or a family member who receives training and certification and then serves a peer mentor by facilitating meetings and activities.
- If there is a volunteer opportunity in your area, please contact Bryan Bales at bryan.bales@dva.wa.gov or 360-725-2237 for mentoring training. There is no cost for this training and spouses are eligible to receive this training.

Behavioral Health – Peter Schmidt, DVA Director of Counseling and Wellness

- Personal Counseling: WDVA's counseling program was created initially to help Veterans with PTSD but over time has expanded to assist Veterans and their families with other counseling needs.
- There is no cost to the Veteran or family member for the counseling services provided.
- This program works well for Veterans who do not want to use Federal VA services.

- There are 48 providers statewide and you can find a provider at the following link:

http://www.dva.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Combined%20Provider%20List%202019_0.pdf

- The 4th Annual Serving Those Who Served Conference will be held in Richland on July 17 and 18. Registration is free and can be done using the following registration link:

<https://stws2019.eventbrite.com>

Suicide Prevention & Awareness – Brett Bass, Safer Homes Suicide Aware

- The Safer Homes Coalition came together around a common goal: reducing suicide in Washington State. Partners include firearms retailers, the Second Amendment Foundation and the NRA, health care and mental health providers, suicide prevention experts and more. Washington's legislature created the basis for the Safer Homes Coalition by passing bills in 2016 & 2017.
- Our Strategies:
- Customized trainings that ensure individuals who prescribe or sell potential lethal means (commonly used in suicide) are prepared to be proactive about prevention.
- Coupling an action oriented public safety message about locking and limiting access to medications and firearms with the distribution of safe storage devices.
- Innovative suicide prevention training that creates a relevant message for every single person, not just those who are currently concerned about someone close who might be considering suicide.
- The suicide rate in Washington State has significantly increased; it is a very serious problem.
- We need your help: If you have no plans over Memorial Day Weekend, the largest gun show in Washington is being held in Republic. Ten to twenty thousand attendees are expected. We will have a booth at this event and are in dire need of volunteers to assist. Please contact Brett Bass at 206 221-3259 or email him at bassb@uw.edu if interested.

Employment – Clint Hede, Work Source Yakima

- Is the local Veteran representative covering three counties in the Ellensburg area.
- Operate under the Jobs for Veterans Program. We are Veterans helping Veterans.

- Focus on employment training and establishing a career path for transitioning Veterans and an advocate for the YesVets program.
- Events: Annual Veteran Stand Down: Oct 19 and Veterans Job Fair at the Howard Johnson in Yakima on May 22 from 12-5.

WDVA Veterans Services Division – Steve Gill, DVA Veteran Services Administrator

- WDVA's Veterans Services Team provides services to Veterans and families statewide.
- Have established partnerships with VFW, American Legion and other Veteran organizations to have Veteran Service Officers available to assist Veterans with claims and benefit eligibility.
- On average, Veterans receive \$1,400 per month in Veteran benefits.
- **Veterans Estate Management Program:** Representative payee services for Veterans who are unable to manage their own finances. This is really more of a homeless prevention program with 300 Veterans statewide registered with this program.
- **Transitional Housing Program:** This program has expanded due to increase in lack of affordable housing. The program has grown from 60 beds to 100 beds on two campuses located at the Washington Soldiers Home in Orting and the Washington Veterans Home in Port Orchard.
- Spokane Veterans Service Center in Spokane recently opened and there are multiple Veteran Service Officers there to assist.
- **Veterans Innovation Program:** Is a need based financial grant program focused primarily on Post 9/11 Veterans. It is a short-term financial assistance program to help them get on their feet. Work Source is also a partner with this program.

Education – Ruben Cardenas, CWU Director Veterans Center

- The Forever GI Bill eliminates the 15 year limitation under the Post 9/11 GI Bill Program.
- CWU students using the GI Bill receive a book stipend, tuition, and housing allowance (at the E5 Wwithout Dependents BAH Rrate).
- More information on this program can be found at the following link:

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/FGIBSummaries.asp>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The VA's Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (Chapter 35) program provides education and training opportunities to eligible dependents and survivors of certain Veterans.• Basic Eligibility: The Veteran's death was caused by the service-connected disability The Veteran is rated for total and permanent service-connected disability The Servicemember is Missing in Action (MIA) The Servicemember is captured in the line of duty The Servicemember is forcibly detained for longer than 90 days The Servicemember who VA determines has a service-connected permanent and total disability that will result in a discharge from military service Participants include a dependent child between the ages of 14 to 31 and a spouse, or surviving spouse, who qualifies for the benefit• Please use the below link for more information on the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program. https://www.benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/Dep_Edu_Assist_Chapter_35.asp