

# **MONTANA BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS - MEETING MINUTES -**

July 19, 2011

The Montana Board of Veterans Affairs was called to order by Chairman Bob Pavlovich at 2 p.m., July 19, 2011 at the Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls. Board members and Montana Veterans Affairs Division staff in attendance were:

Bob Pavlovich, Chairman  
Sylvia Beals, Co-Chair  
Byron Erickson, Member  
Lloyd Jackson, Member  
Larry Jent, Member  
Mary Creech, Member  
Bernie Jacobs, Member

Charlie Crookshanks, Member  
Joe Foster, Administrator  
Bruce Knutson, Senator Tester  
Evin Wilson, Rep. Rehberg  
Keith Heavyrunner, Member  
Kelly Ackerman, Senior VSO  
Lee Ann Hall, Budget Analyst

Also in attendance were: Bob Beals, Curtis Bunton – American Legion; Mike Bennett, Ed Croucher – VFW; Dianna Bennett, Ladies Auxiliary, VFW, Stephen Combs, Joren Underdahl – Montana State Veterans Home.

Chairman Pavlovich opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance and thanked everyone for being present. He then asked if there were any additions or deletions to last meeting's Minutes; and if none, that a motion be made to approve the Minutes, as written. With no changes discussed or made, the motion to approve was so moved and seconded. The motion carried.

Joe Foster first thanked Joren Underdahl and his staff for their great hospitality and for the tour of the nursing home. Joe then introduced Kelly Ackerman as the new Senior Veterans Service Officer.

For the operations report, Joe announced that the division had quite a big turnover this past year. Four employees retired, 3 employees left to take other job opportunities, 1 was fired and 4 others moved within the division. Nine new employees were hired last year and 8 are still with us. The positive side to all of this is that we have a new group of young service officers to compliment our senior service officers. The only problem with the turnover is that we don't have a completed yearend financial report. Three of the offices have not submitted their report so with that being said our financial impact for 2011 to date is \$142,126,497. Once all reports are in we expect the total to hit \$150M and the total claims production will go from 3519 to around 4000. We will have the final figures at the next Board meeting.

Wayne Carlson, Cemetery Program Manager is retiring with 20 years of state service. Tom Hall has been hired to replace Wayne. The only other vacant position is the VSO I in Great Falls. Interviews have been scheduled for July 25, 2011. Once the Great Falls position is hired we will be 100% staffed.

The State Veterans Cemeteries interment total for the fiscal year was 345 for the Montana State Veterans Cemetery at Ft. Harrison, 195 for the Western Montana State Veterans Cemetery in Missoula and 45 for the Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery in Miles City. The only construction plan in progress is the expansion of columbarium's for the veterans cemetery in Missoula. We are hoping construction will start in the Spring of 2012.

For the Legislative update, Joe explained that our division faced numerous budget challenges. The only one that made it through the session was the mandated 5% by the Governors budget which was the reason for closing our Wolf Point office. Joe then briefed the Board on the other veteran related legislative bills.

HB156. An act increasing the allowance to be paid by the county of residence for the interment and the shipping and raising of a headstone for a veteran. The interment fee went from \$250 to \$500 and the raising of a veteran headstone went from \$70 to \$100.

HB 255. Provide that every March 30 is Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day

SB 326 Provide for a Veterans Home Loan Program with funds coming from the Permanent Coal Tax Trust Fund.

Board member Byron Erickson talked about the Tribal Nations DVOP Pilot Program whereas there would be a part-time employment specialist on all 7 reservations. He further went on to report that there are over 1 million veterans out of work in the US. The breakdown is as follows:

271,000	Vietnam Veterans
290,000	Cold War Era Veterans
174,000	Persian Gulf War Veterans
260,000	Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans

Overall, there are 14.1 million Americans out of work. That comes to an unemployment rate of 9.6, nationally.

Chairman Pavlovich gave the Board an update on the Montana State Veterans Home scheduled to be built in Butte. The \$8.5M budget passed. A&E is ready with the preliminary plans and is just waiting for the money to be released. Chairman Pavlovich said they may use the cigarette tax money for ground breaking.

Jaren Underdahl gave an update on the Columbia Falls Veterans Home. Jaren stated that the proposed legislative budget reduction of \$3.2 million didn't make it out of committee and the budget was restored. Co-Chair Sylvia Beals asked Jaren if he is getting his budget information together as this will surely come up again next legislature. It was mentioned that the Board of Veterans Affairs and all the veteran service organizations need to band together to keep the Veterans Home up and running with their current budget in tack.

Mr. Bennett and Mr. Croucher with the Veterans of Foreign Wars talked to the Board about the VFW Service Officers program losing their funding and they have asked the Board for help. Chairman Pavlovich mentioned tapping into the cigarette tax monies. A VFW license plate was also mentioned.

Board officer elections were held as Chairman Pavlovich's term is up. Vice-Chairman Silvia Beals was elected as the new Chairman; and Keith Heavyrunner was elected as the new Vice-Chairman.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m. Next Board meeting is scheduled for September 29, 2011 at 2:00 in Great Falls.

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Bob Pavlovich, Chairman

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Lee Ann Hall, Recorder