

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

March 10, 2011

The Montana Board of Veterans Affairs was called to order by Chairman Bob Pavlovich at 2 p.m., March 10, 2011 at the National Guard Armory in Helena. Board members and Montana Veterans Affairs Division staff in attendance were:

Bob Pavlovich, Chairman  
Sylvia Beals, Co-Chair  
Byron Erickson, Member  
Lloyd Jackson, Member  
Joe Tropila, Member  
Lesa Evers, Member  
Bernie Jacobs, Member

Lee Ann Hall, Budget Analyst  
Joe Foster, Administrator  
Lindsay Bell, Senator Baucus  
Will Selph, Rep. Rehberg  
Elizabeth Larson, VSO II  
Andy Haegele, VSO I

Also in attendance were: Gary White, Bob Beals and David Driver – American Legion; Larry Longfellow – VFW; Michael Clouse – DAV; George Morales and Delmar Davis – VVA; Joren Underdahl – Montana State Veterans Home; and Anna Whiting-Sorrell – Director of the Dept. of Public Health and Human Services.

This Board meeting was called as a result of legislative issues of major importance and impact to both the division and veterans served by the Montana State Veterans Home in Columbia Falls, and the need to provide time-critical information to both Board members and veterans service organization leadership. As such, this Board meeting supplants the originally scheduled meeting which was to take place May 19, 2011, via teleconference.

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 briefed the Board that the Legislatively-mandated 5% reductions to our General Fund and Special Revenue budgets have been restored. Joe then stated that we have two priority Legislative issues to discuss. First is House Bill 375, which would reduce our special revenue budget by 10%, which would significantly impact both our veterans services and veterans cemetery programs. The resultant budget reduction would total \$145,275. With these cuts, we would have to prospectively discontinue our outreach program and incur staff reductions. Joe stated that he would be leaving the Board meeting early as he was notified yesterday that HB 375 is scheduled for Executive Action at 3:30 p.m.

He then provided an overview of the prospective privatization of the State of Montana's veterans home located at Columbia Falls. Upon completion, Mr. Underdahl – administrator of the Montana State Veterans Home – stated his concerns regarding degradation of services to the facility's clients if the current budget reduction of \$3.2 million is ultimately passed by the legislature.

Ms. Anna Whiting-Sorrell, director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services, then gave her presentation regarding the proposed \$3.2 million cut from the Montana State Veterans Home; including the process by which this initiative came about and the proposed options, which are based upon a study conducted by the Legislative Fiscal Division. Both Mr. Underdahl and Ms. Whiting-Sorrell answered numerous questions regarding the closure issue from both Board members and the attendees. Of particular significance was the mandated request for proposal (RFP) process, time frames, and anticipated problems. This RFP question and the accompanying issues were then addressed in regards to the Butte-located Southwest Montana State Veterans Home, which is in the process of being funded. Chairman Pavlovich was informed that the expectation is that an RFP for privatized service provision would be initiated, with prospective bidding expected from hospitals located in both Butte and Anaconda.

The next discussion issue was when the Board's next meeting would take place. Decided was that a meeting date and location would be determined once the Legislative Session was completed. At that time, a meeting would be scheduled to address the legislative outcomes, be they positive or negative.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

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Bob Pavlovich, Chairman

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Lee Ann Hall, Recorder