

MONTANA BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

- MEETING MINUTES -

May 13, 2010

The Montana Board of Veterans Affairs was called to order by Chairman Don Kettner at 2 p.m., May 13, 2010. This Board meeting was a video teleconference with the following individuals present in four locations – Billings, Great Falls, Helena and Missoula:

Don Kettner, Chairman
Sylvia Beals, Member
Byron Erickson, Member
Keith Heavyrunner, Member
Charlie Crookshanks, Member

Lloyd Jackson, Member
Bruce Knutson, Senator Tester
Lindsay Bell, Senator Baucus
Joe Foster, Administrator
Lee Ann Hall, Administrative Spec.

Chairman Kettner 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 last meeting's Minutes was so moved and seconded. The motion carried.

As determined through roll call, the board meeting was designated "informational" since only five voting board members were present – six voting members are necessary to have a quorum.

For the division's operational update, Joe Foster briefed the veterans services financial report. The handout shows that as of May 1, 2010, the division's veteran service officers' work effort brought in \$122,181,174 federal VA dollars for veterans and family members. Also, to date, there have been 3797 claim products generated and submitted to the VA Regional Office at Fort Harrison by division veterans service officers. Of that quantity, 2438 were disability compensation claims.

Resultant of discussions from the last Board meeting, Joe prepared two letters. One was sent to Montana's Congressional Delegations (signed by Chairman Kettner) regarding the board's support for the "Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Care Improvement Act of 2010." The other letter was to the state's County Treasurers which provided guidance and points of contact regarding utilizing the DD Form 214 as proof of military service when a person applies for a "Veteran" license plate.

Regarding the state veterans cemeteries, there were no significant developments or issues that were briefed. Memorial Day ceremonies will be conducted at each cemetery; the Montana State Veterans Cemetery at Fort Harrison's will be held at noon, May 30, and the ceremonies at both the Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery (Miles City) and Western Montana State Veterans Cemetery (Missoula) will be held at noon, May 31.

Joe Foster briefed the mandated 5% cut to the division's Fiscal Year 2011 budget. To accomplish this, the Wolf Point veterans service office will be closed effective June 30, 2010. This will save the division approximately \$17,000, and comply with Governor Schweitzer's initiative to reduce the quantity of leased state office space and leased state vehicles. The Wolf Point veterans service office's expenses in these two categories are the highest of any of the division's leased office space (cost per square foot) and leased vehicles. The full-time position in Wolf Point will be moved to the Miles City veterans service office and filled at a half-time employment basis.

Joe then briefed the expected division budget reduction of 9%, which is expected for the upcoming biennium – Fiscal Years 2012-13, which includes a mandatory 4% reduction for personnel services. The plan for this 9% reduction is drafted and being submitted to the Department of Military Affairs. A full briefing of the approved plan will be conducted during the next Board meeting.

The Governor's office is reducing the quantity of Advisory Councils that support State agencies; of which, we have two. The Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery Advisory Council will expire August 31, 2010, and the Montana State Veterans Cemetery Advisory Council will expire August 31, 2011. Joe sent all council members and the veterans service organizations a letter explaining the action, and encouraged the councils to continue meeting with cemetery leadership; albeit in an informal status.

The Gold Star Family license plate design review process is complete and a ceremony introducing the plate will be held May 27 at 11 a.m. in the Capitol Rotunda. We have already received five requests for the plate, all qualify.

Joe met with Cherry Creek Radio to discuss recording a 30-second public service announcement (PSA) regarding the division's veterans services. The request was well received and currently the PSA is airing in Helena. The Montana National Guard's public affairs office is dubbing 60 compact discs of the PSA for the division. Upon receipt, they will be mailed to 50 radio station business managers who operate in 26 different Montana cities, airing 113 stations.

Discussion took place regarding the poor quality teleconference performance in the Great Falls and Missoula locations. This problem must be remedied or the teleconference format will be discontinued.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3 p.m. The next board meeting is scheduled for July 22, 2010 at 1:00 p.m. in Bozeman.