

MONTANA BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

- MEETING MINUTES -

June 1, 2017

The Montana Board of Veterans Affairs meeting was called to order by Chairman Bill Willing at 2 p.m., June 1, 2017 at Fort Harrison (near Helena), Montana. Board members and agency staff in attendance were:

Bill Willing, Chairman
Pete Olson, Vice-Chairman
Gary Sorenson, Member
Shawn Backbone, Member
Ron Milam, Member
Joren Underdahl, Member
Clancy Sivertsen, Member

Casey Jourdan, Member
MG Matthew Quinn, Member
Joe Foster, Administrator
Lee Ann Hall, Budget Analyst
Dick Juvik, Member
Bruce Knutson, Sen. Tester
Denny Lenoir, Sen Daines

Guests in attendance were:

Gary White-American Legion
Roger Hagen-American Legion

Chairman Willing opened and thanked everyone for being present, and asked all in attendance to introduce themselves. He then asked if there were any additions/deletions to last meeting's Minutes. With no changes to the Minutes, a motion to approve was made and seconded. The motion carried.

Recognition was given to Clancy Sivertsen, Maj. Gen Quinn and Jason Smith for their recent reappointment to the Board. Board members David Boyd, Gary Sorensen, Peter Olson, Dick Juvik, Shawn Backbone, and Bill Willing were confirmed by the Montana Senate during the 2017 Legislative Session.

Joe Foster stated that the division staff is at 100% personnel fill. He then explained the veteran services financial impact and claims production reports, comprised of statistics reporting veterans service office claims production and the financial impact of our veterans service officers' work effort. As of March 1, 2017, the financial impact totaled \$122,800,470, and claims production shows 1806 claim products were developed and submitted to the federal VA.

For the Legislative session, Joe worked up a financial impact sheet that shows two years of claims production and financial impact for the counties in Montana. Joe discussed the financial impact was \$330,381,671 for FY13/14 and \$344,478,830 for FY15/16. In the past six years, our veteran service officers have produced over \$1 billion in veteran/veteran family member financial impact.

As of May 1, 2017, there were 128 burials at the Western Montana State Veterans Cemetery (Missoula), 171 burials at the Montana State Veterans Cemetery (Fort Harrison), and 35 burials at the Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery (Miles City). The burial quantity at the Montana State Veterans

Cemetery already exceeds last fiscal year's total. Projects at the cemeteries include:

-Refurbishment of the Memorial Circle at the Montana State Veterans Cemetery complete, and current construction planning for a 24'x14' structure which will be used by the Honor Guard and cemetery equipment storage (separate areas).

-In the bid process is a project that will construct an earthen "spoils" facility at the Western Montana State Veterans Cemetery in Missoula. It will house and protect from the elements screened dirt, which is utilized for burial operations.

-Landscape project at the Memorial Plaza in the Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery in Miles City is complete, and supports our efforts for minimal grounds maintenance requirements.

Next on the agenda was discussion topics, in which Joe talked about the 2017 Legislative Session – specific to bills and issues impacting the agency and veterans benefits/issues. As during past Sessions, Joe participated in a weekly meeting with representatives from the state's major veterans service organizations to discuss bills and issues of mutual interest. The discussion typically resulted in the service organizations and/or agency positions and prospective testimony – either for or against the bills. Gary White and Roger Hagen, both of the American Legion, were specifically recognized by Joe for a job very well done representing veterans issues during the Session.

Next on the agenda was to be a briefing on the *Choice* program and the VA medical professionals staff shortage. Todd Dunlop (VA briefer) wasn't able to attend the Board meeting so Bruce Knutson (Sen. Tester) and Denny Lenoir (Sen. Daines) were asked to speak on the subject.

Maj. Gen. Quinn briefed that Governor Bullock, along with the Montana Broadcasters Association, will be conducting a year's worth of radio and television spots designed to combat veteran and youth suicide. Maj. Gen. Quinn also discussed the Veterans Assistance Program, whereby veterans/veterans family members/National Guard personnel can receive four counseling sessions per issue/topic. The goal is to get that veteran or Guard member past the crisis point and provide the spectrum of assistance needed.

Discussion then took place as to the next Board meeting. It was determined that the next Board meeting will held in Belgrade, at the Montana Army National Guard's Readiness Center, on Thursday, September 21, 2017 at 2 p.m.

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