

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Call to Order at 9:33 a.m.

Invocation

Pledge of Allegiance

Greetings: Recognition of visitors and guests: James Lundell introduced the following individuals, some of whom were at the meeting to learn how the Minnesota UVLC is run in an effort to start a UVLC in Wisconsin. Major General Glenn Lesniak, Commanding General, 88th Regional Support Command, Ft. McCoy, WI; Lt. Colonel Rosanna Dolphin, Chief Legislative Liaison, 88th RSC; Randy Belden, Public Affairs Officer, 88th RSC; Gerald Meyer (sp), Army Reserve Ambassador; Dave Skavnak, Supervisor Staff Administrator, 372nd Engineer Brigade, Ft. Snelling.

Gil Acevedo was presented with a certificate of appreciation for his valuable contributions as Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Health Care 2007-2011. Mr. Acevedo mentioned that working together with the veterans of MN, their family members, the legislature, and the leadership was how he accomplished the task of turning around the state Veterans Homes. He said whenever he was at a legislative hearing, he always had the hats in the room and he knew the veterans community was there to back him up. He made special note of the auxiliaries' work.

1. Federal Agencies

VA Regional Office - Peter Panos, PAO: The VARO is currently in a big homeless outreach push, now in collaboration with the Minneapolis VA HCS. Their goal is to try to reach almost every homeless veteran in the state to get them the benefits, housing, jobs, etc., they need and deserve. Regarding eBenefits, there is an issue with the DEERS system. If they were a veteran before 1989, they are automatically in there. Unfortunately, some of the information inputted is incorrect, which is causing them a problem when trying to sign up for eBenefits. They are working with the DoD to fix this nationwide problem. Contact Mr. Panos's office if you or a vet you know is encountering problems. Mr. Panos was at a burial recently at the state veterans cemetery at Camp Ripley and remarked what a wonderful location it is and what a fine job they do up there. Nelson Boggs, long-time employee at the Mpls. VA HCS recently passed away. Jerry Kyser asked if there is any help the RO can give in assisting veterans with the veteran-owned-business certification process and Mr. Panos said, upon receipt of a follow-up e-mail from Jerry, he would look into the matter. Beginning next month, the UVLC will get quarterly updates at their meetings from the Transformation Coordinator regarding the expediting and fine-tuning of the claims process. Minnesota veterans receive \$142 million in monthly benefits, much of which is spent right here in MN which greatly helps the state out.

VISN 23 - Steve Julius, M.D.: The proposal for realignment of clinical services in Black Hills (Ft. Mead and Hot Springs), which has a declining veteran population in a highly rural area with an aging infrastructure, continues to take a lot of time and attention on the part of VISN 23. The VA is taking feedback at Town Hall Meetings, etc., through the end of April. VISN reps met with Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota recently about opening a new clinic in Devils Lake. After a process of negotiation, an agreement was reached to open a primary outpatient and tele-

health clinic there. This clinic will be open five days a week staffed by a full-time nurse. A physician will visit at least twice monthly. There will also be full-time tele-health access to other providers in Fargo locations. Tele-health is the wave of the future for veterans in highly rural areas. This eliminates the need for these vets to drive long distances to access care, especially specialists. The Tele-ICU clinic is now up and running from the Minneapolis VA HCS. Critical-care physicians can now monitor care at all ICU beds throughout the network and provide an additional set of eyes. Dr. Julius discussed a meeting he attended last week in D.C. regarding dementia care. One challenge the VA is faced with is inadequate infrastructure to meet this anticipated need as the population ages. Placement of these patients in a long-term care (aka nursing home) setting is not appropriate as patients may wander off, etc. Inpatient psychiatric hospitalization is also deemed inappropriate for these patients. The VA is looking at developing memory-care units to meet the needs of these vets. The recruitment process is underway for a new chief biomedical engineer to replace Kurte Finke, as well as the director of the Minneapolis VA HCS.

Minneapolis VA HCS - Barry Sharp, Acting Director: Mr. Sharp expressed thanks for including the Merchant Marines in the UVLC, giving them the respect they deserve. He is in charge of the search committee for the new director, which is anticipated to take several months. Associate director Marcy Milan (sp) was selected as the director in Omaha and recruiting is ongoing to fill that position as well. Also, the Chief of Prosthetics retired and interviews are being held to fill that position. The spinal cord injury unit director position is also in the process of being filled. The prosthetics clinic upgrade should open the third week of April. The square footage will go from roughly 6,000 to 14,000. The architectural drawings for the parking garage should be finalized by early next week. After solicitation and bids, construction should commence this year with completion anticipated in the next fiscal year. The Veterans Resource Outreach Center was discussed. This will be located at 1201 Harmon Place in downtown Minneapolis. It's 9,500 square feet. The services offered will include benefits counseling, some mental health rehabilitation, primary care, as well as laundry, showers, and a food pantry. VISN 23 was the recipient of the VA Secretary's Award for the progress they've made in ending homelessness among veterans. The Minneapolis VA was singled out as having the greatest decrease in VISN 23. In May over 2,900 Guard members will be returning. Tom Boland mentioned the Starbucks that is slated to go in at the outpatient entrance which will eliminate one-third to one-half of the seating in possibly one of the busiest waiting spaces within the VA. Mr. Sharp responded by saying the other waiting rooms in specific clinics should be able to accommodate that. After further discussion, including the fact that this was all accomplished before Mr. Sharp arrived on the scene, efforts will be made to try to figure out a way to remedy the anticipated problems of the lack of seating space for veterans in this area.

St. Cloud VA HCS - Barry Venable: Around mid-March, the process will begin of moving veterans who are currently in Building 49, Community Living Center, into the swing space created in Building 48. Half of Bldg 49 will be renovated while those veterans are in the other building and then the process will be swapped. Early February the Salute to Hospitalized Veterans events were held and there was great attendance. Copies of the St. Cloud VA HCS annual report were available on the back table. A conference will be held on March 29, in conjunction with St. Cloud Hospital, regarding hospice and palliative care. This is designed to promote cooperation among private hospice organizations as they encounter veterans in that

phase of their lives. On April 6 a Former POW Recognition Ceremony will be held. This begins at 10 a.m. in the auditorium. April 19 is the Volunteer Recognition Ceremony. There are approximately 600 volunteers who support the hospital each year. The turkey hunt will be held April 24 to 26. 43 veterans are signed up to participate in that hunt.

Ft. Snelling Cemetery - Brad Butler: They are preparing to get the grounds ready for Memorial Day. During February 2012 there were a total of 311 interments (156 casket, 120 cremations and 35 columbarium). Eight female veterans were interred during February 2012. The Rifle Squad performed 182 honors ceremonies.

Vets Employment and Training Service (VETS): Not present

Vet Center - Carl Sporer: Not present

2. Federal Congressional Representatives and Senators

Senator Amy Klobuchar - General (Ret) Tim Cossalter: The tax credit to hire veterans came out the first of this month. The credit is between \$6,000 and \$10,000 depending on whether it is a nonprofit or for-profit agency. Mr. Cossalter has received feedback from employers indicating there is too much federal paperwork; it isn't worth it. In his experience (his family had a small business) it is not cumbersome paperwork. If an employer is saying the paperwork is too cumbersome, have them call his office and he will walk them through it. It will only take about five minutes. There are only two easy forms. The Honor Act, dealing with the Ft. Snelling Rifle Squad rifle issue, is being worked on with Congressman Kline and is moving forward. Mr. Cossalter does not anticipate a problem with the Ft. Snelling Rifle Squad being able to maintain the weapons they need to do their services. The DAV gave Senator Klobuchar an award in appreciation for her legislation that dealt with the Sexual Assault Act that passed. The Veterans Access to Care bill provides more health care providers in the VA system by giving them incentives so more providers can be brought in to accommodate the increasing demand on the system by more returning vets. The Veterans One Source Act consolidates the services and information onto one website.

Senator Al Franken - Nate Arch: Senator Franken supports the new tax credit available to MN employers who hire veterans. Senator Franken introduced a bill to protect veterans and service members from unscrupulous for-profit colleges. A handout was available explaining this bill, which talks about the "90/10 rule" which requires for-profit colleges to receive at least 10 percent of their revenue from private sources rather than from federal student aid. Under current law, revenue a school receives from federal DoD and VA education programs is counted as private revenue. This creates an incentive for for-profit colleges to enroll as many vets or military students as possible. They also continue to work with the fee-basis issue as regards rural veterans, as well as veteran homelessness, with an emphasis on the growing number of homeless women vets.

7th District Representative Collin Peterson - Al Loehr: Not present (In DC with VFW delegation)

1st District Representative Tim Walz - Shawn Schloesser: Rep Walz's STOCK Act (HR

1148), which prohibits insider trading by members and employees of Congress and the executive branch, passed the House and Senate and is now in the joint committee. HR 3670 was also introduced by Rep Walz. This would require the TSA to comply with USERRA laws. Mr. Schloesser recently attended an employment task force in St. James and believes this could be a model for how to partner with community leaders, business owners, Chambers of Commerce, etc., to work to improve the employment situation with veterans. There were probably 8 to 10 federal and state agencies represented. A question was asked about the Disclose Act. Rep Walz feels part of the problem with the election/political process is where the money is coming from. Currently, corporations are able to move large sums of money without declaring where it comes from. This legislation would mandate disclosure of where funds are coming from.

2nd District Representative John Kline - Chaz Johnson: Rep Kline recently sent a letter to Secretary Panetta about Post Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) issues. Secy Panetta's response essentially "blew him off;" said there was no issue, they were taking care of it, there was no grandfathering. Rep Kline followed up by directing questions to Panetta while he was at the HASC hearing. Rep Kline will be introducing a bill to fix this problem in the near future since the DoD doesn't see a problem with it. The recent rule change, in the middle of the Minnesota Red Bulls' deployment, reduces the time soldiers can spend with their families before returning to their employers. This bill would ensure that returning National Guard members are grandfathered in with the PDMRA they have been promised and deserve. The Honors Act was briefly mentioned and that issue should be remedied with legislation. Mr. Johnson spent some time recently with the new American Legion Commander in Chaska. Finally, Rep Kline's office was able to help WWII vet Lou Damiani, whose house burned down last January in Rosemount, reacquire his medals lost in the blaze.

3rd District Representative Eric Paulson - John Paul Yates: They have 5 Academy nominations to West Point, 3 Air Force and 3 Navy. Rep Paulson met with the American Legion and the DAV, as well as the MN National Guard leadership and the Civil Air Patrol last week in D.C. This week he will meet with the VFW. Two weeks ago there was a roundtable with Lt. Col Best and Annette Kuyper from the National Guard, as well as leaders from the 934th Air Reserve Base. Rep Paulson has signed on to Rep Kline's PDMRA legislation, as well as the ceremonial rifle legislation.

4th District Representative Betty McCollum - Connie Haddeland: Yesterday the White House announced some housing relief for veterans and service members, which is part of the agreement that was reached by the Attorneys General across the country with the major banks. In short, these major servicers will conduct a review of every service member foreclosed upon since 2006, refund to service members money lost because they were wrongfully denied the opportunity to reduce their mortgage payments, provide relief for service members who are forced to sell their homes for less than the amount they owe due to a Permanent Change in Station, pay \$10 million into the Veterans Affairs fund that guarantees loans with favorable terms for veterans, and extend certain foreclosure protections afforded under the Service Member Civil Relief Act. On February 7, Rep McCollum was invited to a private breakfast with Secretary Shinseki, along with 6 or 7 other members of the House of Representatives. Secretary Shinseki will be testifying on March 21 before the subcommittee on House Appropriations on which Rep McCollum is a member. As regards the Academies, 3 people will be attending West Point, 1 who has to choose

between West Point and Navy, and 2 to Air Force. Rep McCollum is on Rep Kline's PDMRA bill. She has also gone on a bill that would require a Congressional nomination to now include the Coast Guard Academy in the process.

5th District Representative Keith Ellison - Mike Siebenaler: Not present (Due to illness)

6th District Representative Michele Bachmann: Nicole Severson (with Chase Kroll): Thanks was extended to the MN National Guard for hosting this morning's breakfast, which included a tour of the STARBASE. Ms. Severson helps with Academy nominations and often hears how important math, science, engineering, etc., are so she was enthusiastic to see the emphasis on these areas in a way that makes it exciting to learn. Ms. Severson has reached out to several Legions in the district. If you know of any veterans organizations in the 6th district she has not connected with, she would love to come and speak to them about what services their congressional office provides. Rep Bachmann visited the Ramsey CBOC on Friday and has been in the district quite a bit. They also participated in St. Cloud VA's Valentines for Veterans.

Chase Kroll: Mr. Kroll met with some Legion members recently and one thing they were prioritizing was HR 3662, which Ms. Bachmann has cosponsored. That bill would avert the sequestration that was a product of the Budget Control Act for one year and recoup those savings by attrition through other federal agencies. With three retirements, then the agency can hire on a new person. That's for all federal agencies. It's just for national security or for extraordinary emergencies. They are also in the final vetting process of the PDMRA bill. Finally, they are looking at figuring out a way of getting the veteran-owned businesses in the same category as the other special 6 percent set-aside for bidding for projects that have federal money.

8th District Representative Chip Cravaack - Brian Gordon: Rep Cravaack met in D.C. with a MN delegation of the DAV. On behalf of the 140th Fighter Wing, the Congressman sent a letter to the NORAD commander expressing his concern regarding the proposed DoD cuts. It looks as though they will be shutting down their 24-hour-alert mission along with other Fighter Wings in the US and he is concerned about the national security impact of that. Also, approximately 78 full-time jobs would be cut. When Rep Cravaack was in the district 2 weeks ago, he was able to meet with the 133rd Air Lift Wing.

Jerry Kyser asked about the status of the 934th losing all their aircraft. Lt. Colonel Best could not speak to the 934th but as regards the 133rd Airlift Wing there were recent announcements made about the "loss of iron" for the Air Force across the nation and it included that the 934th would lose their 8 C-130s in FY14. Yesterday's announced personnel cuts only addressed FY13 cuts.

3. State Agencies and MN Veteran Assistance Organizations

MN 2012 Legislative Info - Mike McElhiney: There are 63 bills of veteran interest circulating through the House and Senate. Nine are relative to capital investments and construction, there is a Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Bill, a few relative to the Honor Guards, four license plate bills, one education bill with another one slated to be introduced this week, three legal bills, seven tax bills, a couple relative to MDVA, five veteran preference, a couple bills recognizing different populations for their service relative to obtaining burial rights in state cemeteries, a game and

fish bill, as well as a National Guard bill. The 16th is the first deadline meaning any bills that are moving, if they haven't made it through either the House or the Senate, they will not move forward. So any bills you are concerned about, talk to the chairs and/or authors and try to get those on the calendar. Mr. McElhiney briefly spoke about the MDVA's three priorities on which they briefed the House and Senate. Mike Gallucci was recently hired as Deputy Commissioner for Veterans Health Care. A quick rundown of the Veterans Homes: They are working to secure funding for Bldg 17 South. Bldg 9 is currently under construction, the new 100-bed facility. Planning and pre-design is ongoing for Bldg 17 North. The new Adult Day Care is awaiting opening. They are waiting for some license issues to be resolved. Construction in Luverne and Fergus Falls were also mentioned.

MN Military Affairs - Lt. Col Sandy Best: A booklet was available, "Minnesota National Guard 2011 Annual Report and 2012 Objectives." 2012 objectives include a competent, ready force; optimal force structure; cyber security and response; a sustainable infrastructure; Beyond the Yellow Ribbon; and diversify the force. On the back cover lists the 2011 accomplishments. These were possible with the help of Congressional Staff, the UVLC and MAG. Don Kerr, state executive director, was introduced. Mr. Kerr would deal with questions you may have on state legislation while Lt. Col Best deals on the federal level. Two weekends ago a large Support Our Troops event was held at the St. Paul River City Center. It was a live broadcast with 2,700 deployed military members at four different locations. Over 4,000 family members were at the City Center and were fed a very nice meal provided by local businesses. Lt. Col Best emphasized the most important thing that can be done is to give returning service members jobs when they return from their deployment. A recent survey of the troops revealed 22 percent will be returning without employment. They recognize as the defense budget is being cut there are going to be cuts. The MN National Guard recognizes they will have to share in those losses. There has been a lot of activity by Congressional members, also the National Governors Association and the Adjutant Generals Association to make sure the Air Force active duty components and leaders are hearing the message that they want it to be a proportionate cut and not on the backs of the Reserve forces. Minnesota Veterans are encouraged to post resumes on www.positivelyminnesota.com/veterans or www.minnesotaworks.net and Minnesota employers are encouraged to post jobs on those same sites. Service members can post their resumes now, they do not need to wait until they are home. Since there is so much information on the internet, they would like to funnel all employers and vets/service members to these sites. On February 29 there was a roundtable with metro corporations and state and federal partners. It was called "Leaders in Veterans Employment." The object was to leave with at least 3 action items that companies could implement or the state partners could implement. They actually took away over 15 action items. From this, they will be developing task forces to help educate vets on what they need to do to translate their skills from military into civilian. Another task force will design curriculum for state agencies partners to help prepare the veterans. Similar meetings will be held in St. Cloud, Rochester and Duluth in the spring. Also, there will be a seminar at the James J. Hill Library regarding entrepreneurship in probably late April.

MN Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) - Kathy Vitalis: Legal Clinics were held in Bemidji, Grand Rapids and Virginia. A van with an attorney and law students travels to different areas and they set up local attorneys in the area to have these day clinics. The law students are paid for by the MN Justice Foundation. March 13 will be the next Legal Clinic in the Twin

Cities. It will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the VA Medical Center, Flag Atrium Balcony Room 2S 114. The Dancing with the Twin Cities Stars event was held a few weeks ago. Christine Clayburg, who danced for MACV, won! She received half of the proceeds from the silent auction, so MACV will get about \$3,000. On June 18 "Women Teeing It Up" will be held at The Wilds Golf Club in Prior Lake. Go to www.teeitupforthetroops.org if you are an interested female. Some of the proceeds will go to MACV. Ms. Vitalis mentioned she has a 90 percent chance of securing a transitional home for women veterans in St. Paul. There is another nonprofit that has a home they do not want and it may be available. The home needs at least \$25,000 to \$30,000 of work. It's a two-bedroom 1917 home and will be ideal for a transitional woman and her children or a couple of woman vets. Ms. Vitalis told the story of MACV helping a 20 percent disabled OIF vet receiving only \$243 a month who was bouncing around living situations to obtain shelter at the Union Gospel Mission. He was told he did not qualify for educational benefits and he just accepted that. At MACV's urging he asked to get a reason for the denial. One week later he was reviewed for Chapter 31 and a month later he was approved for benefits. He recently started an internship which will hopefully lead to full employment. He will also hopefully be able to use a HUD/VASH voucher to help with his rent until he is employed. Sometimes it's just about the case management and helping vets get through the system and get what they deserve. The Metro Stand Down is August 1 and 2. Go to www.mac-v.org for a list of the other stand downs in the state this year.

Military Action Group (MAG) - Jerry Kyser and Ralph Donais: Mr. Kyser complimented Mr. Donais on the work Ralph did while Jerry was in Japan. A bill veterans should take note of: Senator Carlson of Bemidji proposed legislation where if you are a 100 percent disabled veteran you would get a \$750 credit on your MN income tax. Senator Miller has a similar bill so they will combine those bills. Senator Ortman at the tax committee was very positive about making sure Minnesota's second-career military could come back and find employment in MN and have some incentives to do that. Another positive thing: MN/Dot hired Al Duff to do the marketing to find more veteran-owned businesses that can apply for the state jobs. The goal is to make sure veteran-owned business can bid on and get the same set-aside as Disadvantaged Business Enterprises, especially in light of the new bridge proposed to be constructed in Stillwater. There needs to be more hats in the room, not just Ralph and Jerry.

Mr. Donais mentioned they are working with Secretary of State Ritchie when you apply for a business in MN, there will be a box on the form that you can check to indicate if you are a veteran-owned business. The National Commander of the American Legion was in MN recently. One thing the Commander said that resonated with Ralph: We don't need to get these young men and women to join the veterans organizations; what we have to worry about is supporting them when they come back. If we support them when they return, they will join somewhere down the road because they will realize what we, as a veterans community, have done to support them and their families when they came back. Ralph also mentioned the legislators seem to be listening more than ever before at the Capitol so it's important to get the word out there. The MAG meeting that was supposed to happen on Friday will not happen as the veterans committees were invited by General Nash to come up to Camp Ripley. If there is a MAG meeting at all, it may be slid in at lunch or something at Ripley.

Mr. Kyser stated April 1 is Vietnam Veterans Day. It was passed through the legislature. The

woman who was instrumental in this is Diane Finnemann (sp). Her brother committed suicide after serving in Vietnam. There will be a Fifth Annual Vietnam Veterans Fellowship honoring SP4 Jack Palmer at the Forest Lake American Legion.

Nick Kakos mentioned how prepared Ralph Donais is when he gets up to speak at the Capitol. He's really done his research.

Meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m. followed by a short recess.

Business meeting commenced at 11:45 a.m.

Old Business:

Treasurer's Report: Mr. Donais gave the report in lieu of Treasurer Rask being absent. The Merchant Marines and Mr. Nick Kakos can be added to the list as being paid. Balance as of February 1, 2012 is \$5,630.45. Deposits of \$250 from dues. Expenses: Parking, \$29.75 and MAG Flyer Printing, \$286.53. That printing expense last year was \$400. Balance as of March 1, 2012 is \$5,564.17.

New Business:

Mr. Donais said he would like to see more hats at the Capitol. Most meetings happen Mondays and Wednesdays, but now that the Bills are out of the veterans committees they are going to Tuesdays and Thursdays and you just have to track the Bills to find out when and where they are going. You can e-mail Ralph for this info. You can also go to the MN legislature on the internet, pop up the House or Senate, click "Bills," and then go down to "Military" and "Veterans." It will list all the bills for the last two years.

Again, no MAG meeting this Friday due to the Camp Ripley trip.

March 16 is the deadline for Bills being introduced in the House or Senate and making it through the readings and back to the House or Senate for them to move forward.

Mike McElhiney mentioned that things happen daily at the Capitol. If no one is present at the meetings to know specifically where a Bill is going to go, then you may have to wait 24 hours or more to get audio or video, or perhaps locate a LA to get this information. You are now behind things. This is why it's important to attend as many meetings as possible, to have the most up-to-date information.

Mr. Donais mentioned some of the most important people at the Capitol are the LAs. Whoever your Senator or Rep is, get to know their LA. They have a lot of power to get you access that may otherwise be denied.

Mr. Kakos wanted to go on record to commend the secretary for the nice, detailed minutes she (I) provides.

Ms. Deirdre Conley mentioned she was contacted by the American Legion about the fact 300

high school girls will be visiting the State Capitol on June 15 and they are looking for volunteers because the girls would like to visit WWII memorials. She will provide Ralph with more details at a later date.

Mr. Donais said he will get a copy of the Bylaws out shortly to the folks who volunteered to review those.

Mr. Donais also mentioned looking at the budget next month, seeing where some of the funds should be spent, as there's a nice nest egg being built up.

A reminder: The July UVLC meeting will be in St. Cloud. As the first Wednesday in July is the 4th, the meeting will be pushed back to the second Wednesday, July 11.

Thanks was expressed to the VA for the coffee and cookies. They do a great job in a nice facility.

Mr. Donais mentioned the group of visitors from Wisconsin at the meeting today that was here to learn about how the MN UVLC functions. The General expressed how impressed he was to Ralph.

Mr. Donais mentioned he may add on the bottom of the minutes a calendar of upcoming events for the next month.

Motion to adjourn by Jerry Nalipinski, second by Lawrence Dean. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at noon.

Next UVLC meeting will be Wednesday, April 4 at 9:30 a.m.