

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

Call to Order at 9:30 a.m.

Invocation

Pledge of Allegiance

Announcements: Jerry Kyser expressed thanks to the approximately 400 people who came out to welcome home his eighth Honor Flight on Saturday. Also, thanks to the VA for the use of 66 wheelchairs. October 6, 2012 is the next Honor Flight. There are 300 on the waiting list.

1. State Agencies and MN Veterans Assistance Organizations

MN Department of Veterans Affairs - Deputy Commissioner Mike Gallucci: They will take possession of the new building on May 9 with staff moving in shortly thereafter. Dennis DeCosta has been hired as the new administrator of the Minneapolis Veterans Home. They are looking at some expansion plans in Hastings.

MN Veterans 2012 Legislative Info - Mike McElhiney: The big items in the Legislature are the tax bill, the stadium bill, and the bonding bill. Relative to MNDVA, in the Senate bill everything remains that they proposed to the Governor. This includes central pharmacy funding, funding to complete Bldg 17 South (Phase 3 of the Mpls Veterans Home improvements), as well as asset preservation of about \$3 million. They believe strongly they will get those things. Supplemental budgets are also important to the MNDVA. There are parts of what they asked for in several bills. Mr. McElhiney is under the impression that if the Governor gets his bonding bills, the MNDVA will get what it asked for in the supplemental appropriations. The Governor did sign SF 1814, which allows for payment to the Honor Guards immediately upon submission of the paperwork. USERRA passed, which allows individuals to sue the state in federal court. This piggybacks on some of the other veteran protections that are out there. There are only about 4 veterans issues within the tax omnibus bill, which is still being debated. The big part of what's in there right now, which everyone agreed to, is providing a tax incentive to employers who employ veterans. If a veteran is employed for one year by a company which meets certain criteria, that company receives a \$3,000 tax credit, up to \$50,000 per company. A bill passed where if a veteran works for a government entity and they are dismissed for cause, there is a provision which says the vet now has 60 days to identify who they want on a three-person panel (the company also chooses one and there's a neutral party). Another bill that passed essentially says if you are a veteran rated 30 percent or more and a state-level government entity knows you are looking for a job, that agency now has the ability to hire that veteran on the spot, bypassing the customary hiring practice. The bill passed whereby if you are a veteran-owned business you will get a 6 percent preference in bidding for DOT contracts.

MN Military Affairs - Lt. Col Sandy Best: The MN National Guard had one minor state bill which has been approved effective August 1. This bill modifies some language regarding MN state awards. Currently, those awards may only be given to members of the MN National Guard, so people who partner with them for state disasters, etc., go unrecognized. This bill modifies that. Their highlight has been the return of the Red

Bulls with the final group returning home this coming weekend. There are 3,075 MN National Guard members currently deployed. Handouts were available about hiring veterans. Veterans can go to www.PositivelyMinnesota.com/Veterans where they will be connected to a clear three-step process. This site also lists all future job fairs. A three-step process for employers was listed on the second handout. This starts with www.MinnesotaWorks.net, which is an online database where employers can post job openings. With the Red Bulls coming home, they will be very involved with reintegration events. In partnership with Yellow Ribbon entities, HR professionals will be at those events doing interview preparation and resume reviews to help employ vets. There are currently 85 cities, 10 counties, and 21 companies which have been proclaimed Beyond the Yellow Ribbon entities. The next Yellow Ribbon proclamation will be on May 17 in St. Paul at the Saints home opener. On June 1 will be the Faribault proclamation. August 28 will be the second annual Military Appreciation Day at the MN State Fair.

MN Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) - Jimmy Collier: Yesterday, the first Legal Clinic in Rochester was held and they saw 25 veterans. August 1 and 2 is the metro Stand Down at the Boy Scout Base Camp at Ft. Snelling. June 2 is the American Legion Riders event with proceeds going to MACV. VFW Post 5555 is providing the food and doing the cooking. On Memorial Day, a fundraiser will be held at the Fine Line Music Cafe. Iraqi vet Matthew Griswald will be performing with proceeds going to MACV. They will be closing on the St. Paul house next month which will eventually be used as transitional housing for female veterans. They hope to have occupants by October 1.

Military Action Group (MAG) - Jerry Kyser: HF 1821 and SF 1597 passed. These veterans preference bills include not only heavy construction but also the professional and technical aspects of the projects, enabling veteran-owned businesses to be able to apply for the set aside. The next MAG meeting will be Friday at 9 a.m. in Room 300 South. Mr. Kyser introduced Mark Cooper.

Mark Cooper, Procurement Technical Assistance Center: PTAC is a national organization funded by the DOD. Their purpose is to help businesses navigate the maze of government contracting. They have teamed with Al Duff and were awarded a MN/DOT contract in response to pressure to give veteran-owned businesses their fair share of contracts. They are going to do outreach to have businesses come in to get verified by the Department of Veterans Affairs so they can do business with MN/DOT. They want to work with established businesses that can hit the ground running. PTAC can help businesses navigate this process to get contracts with not only MN/DOT but other government entities as well. An audience question was asked about GSA schedules. The Answer: According to law, the VA is supposed to use service-disabled veterans first, then vet-owned business, then GSA schedule. The GAO has cited the VA for breaking the law several times but they do continue to use GSA schedule first at times. PTAC is telling veteran-owned businesses to challenge that, but it never hurts to get on a GSA schedule. PTAC has a three-day class for \$200 about obtaining a GSA schedule for your business. Upon completion, you should be ready to submit your GSA schedule.

Barb O'Reilly, Director of Women Veterans Programs for MNDVA: Ms. O'Reilly asked the next speakers, Ms. Gewirtz and Mr. Shunkwiler, to come to the meeting to discuss their project that supports veterans and their children. About 40 percent of women veterans today are mothers.

Abigail Gewirtz: Her project is called ADAPT, After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools. This is a project that's funded by the National Institutes of Health. It is the first project in the nation to examine parenting among deployed service members, with particular focus on National Guard and Reserve personnel. The study will recruit 400 Minnesota families. The project is based on the idea that strong families make strong service members. So far, over 130 families have been recruited and they need your help to reach out to the community in Minnesota.

Chad Shunkwiler - ADAPT: Last week, Mr. Shunkwiler welcomed back one of the MN groups at Fort Hood. Some of the main concerns soldiers have when coming home are employment and family reintegration. He fully stands behind this ADAPT program which gives parents and veterans essential resources and tools to help them as parents. This program is designed to address the specific needs of a veteran and their families after a deployment. Those who have participated thus far have found the program very rewarding and you are encouraged to get the word out about this program. There is really no other program like this in the nation. The project is open to anyone who is a parent who is deployed who has a child between the ages of 5 and 12.

Vicki Lokken-Paverud - BBB: She is the coordinator for the Military Program Outreach for the Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota. After 30 years of working with the military, including being in uniform and working for the Dept of the Air Force, she joined forces with the BBB, which started in this state 100 years ago. The BBB is business owners dedicated to determining that there is a better way, and that is above what the law tells them. It's what they know is right. In 2004, Holly Patraeus was the first BBB director to develop a program that illuminated the terrible things that were happening to military personnel in the business arena. They are targeted for ID theft, predatory loan rates and the like. When our military personnel are targeted in this manner, it ultimately affects the security of our nation as it affects their ability to be mission ready. This month, the BBB rolls out its Military Line Program here in this bureau, along with 25 other bureaus across the nation. This program will provide information, as Ms. Lokken-Paverud is doing today, as well as working with the military, letting military personnel know their rights in the marketplace and the assistance the BBB can provide. They also want to educate, bringing the financial literacy rate up among this population. The BBB also provides dispute resolution. They have certified counselors who can help solve problems between a business and a customer. They are willing to go anywhere at any time and their services are free.

Military Liaison, Courage Center - Paul Keck: Not present

2. Federal Agencies

VA Regional Office - Director Antione Waller: Not present

VISN 23 - Director Janet Murphy: Last week they did their major budget briefing with Secretary Shinseki. They are on track to manage within their FY12 budget. The Secretary's focus remains that of preventing veteran homelessness. There was a lot of discussion in that meeting about comp and pen targets and how they are doing with that, as well as supporting rural veterans and women veterans. Women vets tend to use the education and health care benefits less, which may be an indication that proper outreach is not being accomplished. Continued access to good mental health services, with special emphasis on veterans from the current conflict, was also seen as a priority. To that end, the Secretary, with the support of Congress, has authorized an additional 1,900 positions across the country for mental health support, with 90 of those positions coming to this network. Two new areas the Secretary asked them to discuss were facility security and safety and whether or not they were paying their bills on time. Due to some problems at VA facilities, the police chiefs are assessing safety-equipment needs. They'd like to accomplish these safety measures without an increase in FTE (such as central monitoring) and without giving their appearance of being in lockdown. This VISN ranks third in the country in terms of timely bill payment to contractors and community providers. In the first quarter, they met their goal to reduce health disparity for women veterans. They were focusing on women vets with heart disease and diabetes. Perry Nouis asked a question regarding a constituent's travel pay. This vet lives in Aitken and he had an appointment at the Minneapolis VA. He was only authorized pay for the distance from his home to the Brainerd CBOC, the closest VA facility, and only one way. The answer Ms. Murphy provided is that yes, you can only get travel reimbursement to the nearest VA facility. However, if this veteran was coming to Minneapolis for a specialty visit, he should have been authorized his full travel. Mr. Nouis also commented he's heard complaints about travel pay being electronic-funds transfers only, no cash, which can take up to two weeks to receive. The response given, this time by Mr. Barry Sharp, is that there are some limited exceptions for veterans who do not have bank accounts. Mr. Nouis also asked a question about the outsourcing of optometry care in the Duluth area. He was told by an optometrist in the area the VA no longer outsources that care in Duluth, that veterans in that area have to come down to the Minneapolis VA for eye care. Ms. Murphy's response is that this is an issue they will need to investigate. Mr. Nouis will provide the names of the above veterans to Ms. Murphy for ease in dealing with these individual cases. Mark Browne mentioned on May 1 travel pay was supposed to be direct-deposit only but due to the fact only 1/4 of veterans in the U.S. signed up for direct deposit, this policy was canceled. There is confusion among veterans and Mr. Browne wanted to know when this policy will be implemented. Secondly, Mr. Browne indicated there was a letter on the travel pay desk this morning indicating they would only take one travel pay slip a day because of a backlog. Messrs. Sharp and Browne will "sort that out later" once Mr. Browne gets that letter to Mr. Sharp. Jerry Nalipinski asked if there is a backlog for some medical services at the Minneapolis VA. He knows a veteran who has waited three months for back surgery and has been told he needs to wait four more months. If this veteran is willing to share his name and last four, they will contact him. Todd Kubinski mentioned if you have specific issues at the VA, contact your CVSO. They can often get issues resolved or at least get an answer for you.

Minneapolis VA HCS - Acting Director Barry Sharp: Mr. Sharp mentioned again that as regards the Starbucks issue, they did not involve the people up front they should have and he apologized. He again stated the entrance the Starbucks will be in is not going to be the primary entrance once the parking ramp is complete. The main entrance will be down at the other end, which will be reconfigured. The parking ramp is still set to break ground this fall. Mr. Sharp was at the Ex-Pow state convention in St. Cloud yesterday and found it to be a great experience. 1207 Harmon Place in Minneapolis is the address for the homeless veterans drop-in center that will be coming on line this fall. The Tele-ICU is up and running. This Minneapolis-based unit provides eyes to all the ICU units within VISN 23. It's also expanded to Spokane, Washington on a pilot basis. The Minneapolis Director position is still being recruited for. There have been phone interviews conducted for the Associate Director position and they are weening that group down to bring in for face-to-face interviews. Dr. Stephanie Boyle (sp) has been hired as the Spinal Cord Injury Unit Director. Interviews were held this week for the Chief of Imaging Service and next week interviews will be conducted for the Chief of Prosthetics. A Marine Muster will be held in June. About 600 Marines will be in attendance. Also in June, the MN National Guard will be coming back in full force. This Friday, in partnership with the Department of Commerce, they are having about 25 health care executives from Eurasia (former Soviet Union) coming to visit. It's the only VA they will be visiting during their stay in the U.S.

St. Cloud VA HCS - Barb Oemeke: An invitation was extended to the UVLC to hold its July meeting in St. Cloud. They recently received the first of two vans from Central Office related to the transportation service. They work closely with veteran organizations to integrate these vans into the transportation network which is already available. On May 17, St. Cloud will be hosting a depression seminar. On May 18, a law clinic will be held in Montevideo. Cheryl Thieschafer has been appointed the new Associate Director effective April 8. Rose Blesener is retiring effective May 3. They have started negotiations regarding requirements for the BURR building. This is the new homeless building with approximately 35 units on the St. Cloud VA campus. The wind turbine is currently not working. They are waiting for parts. They are working to see if there is some way they can get that either fixed or replaced as it has been a problem. The following construction is underway in St. Cloud: Building 49, the extended-care community living center; construction of a small building which will house emergency generators; geothermal fields; as well as expansions in audiology, pharmacy and dental. The audiology van has been going to the Brainerd and Montevideo CBOCs. They have gotten very positive veteran feedback on this. St. Cloud hosted their annual POW recognition ceremony on April 6. The guest speaker was a former Marine held hostage in the Iranian Embassy from 1979 to 1981.

Ft. Snelling Cemetery - Brad Butler: Last month, 405 veterans were interred, five of whom were female vets. Total interments to date: 199,260, so the 200,000 mark will be surpassed probably late June or early July. The Rifle Squad performed 206 services last month. There is now a three-way stop sign on the main road at the Cemetery at the second intersection on LaBelle Road. Some trees were cleared near Shelter 6 to make

way for a memorial wall. That construction is scheduled to be completed by July or August, depending on the weather. They are soliciting bids for the rebuilding of Shelter 4. During the renovation project that ended in 2008, two new shelters were built, 3 and 6, and 2 was reconstructed. The other three shelters will be done over time so that they are all the same. Hopefully, a new Assistant Director will be in place next month. Everything is looking good for Memorial Day. The ceremony will be held at 10 a.m. and they expect 4,000 to 5,000 visitors.

Vets Employment & Training Service (VETS) - Director Scott Mills: Mr. Mills is recently retired after 26 years with the U.S. Army. In his role as Director, he has been asked to "Help build collaboration and unity of effort with the local federal agencies in the state of Minnesota," especially when it comes to veterans employment. Working together, rather than reinventing the wheel. VRAP, Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, is about to launch. It is a joint effort of the Dept of Labor, DoD, and the VA. It will begin on July 1. Applications will be taken starting May 15. This program offers 12 months of training and assistance for 99,000 unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 and 60. They will be paid the Montgomery GI Bill rate of \$1,473 for 12 months to help their employment issues. The application can be found at va.gov/benefits/education/training.

Vet Center - Chuck Sporer: Mr. Sporer is the team leader at the New Brighton Veterans Center. They have a visibility so he comes to the UVLC meetings when he can and asks for referrals. They are located at 35W and County Road D. They have plenty of free parking. Their services are free for life for combat veterans and their families. Most of the people who work there are veterans. Two of the three counselors are veterans. Mr. Sporer is a Vietnam vet. Veterans generally want to talk to other veterans. On May 21 a family therapist will come on board. She's about to get her Ph.D. They do not get the opportunity to hire someone with these credentials very often. She can work with veterans and their families and the issues they have with sometimes multiple deployments. Mr. Sporer's phone no. is: 651-644-4022. Please spread the word about their services. This may even mean taking the veteran to the Vet Center. If you can't do that, call them, they will come out. They don't leave anybody behind.

Senior Advisor to the CEO for Wounded Warrior, Veteran and Military Family Initiatives at CNCS - Koby Langley: Mr. Langley did two tours in Iraq, getting out in 2006. He has been working with veterans issues since that time. CNCS (Corporation for National and Community Service) is a federal organization. They run Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Vista. Erin Dahlen (sp), Deputy Chief Program Officer from D.C., as well as Minnesota State Director Sam Schuth, were also in attendance. Mr. Langley mentioned the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program is being replicated around the country and Minnesota is known for its efforts on behalf of veterans. Mr. Langley talked about what AmeriCorps members do, which includes going to your organizations and assisting you in "building out your capacity" to reach veterans. They've been doing it since 1960. AmeriCorps Vista has a body of knowledge about how to reach and activate communities around social issues. An AmeriCorps Vista member works 1,700 volunteer hours per year. That's a full-time person. On average, a volunteer in America works about 30 hours per year. An idea is to recruit veterans to become AmeriCorps members and work in providing services to other veterans. Mr.

Langley told a story about an Iraq War veteran named Mike from Colorado. He went back home to Colorado in 2006 and spent three years trying to find a job. He never found a full-time job due, in part, to his PTSD and TBI. With his wife's prompting, he went to AmeriCorps. He eventually got hired and led a team of seven other veterans doing fire work in Colorado and a year later he got a job with the Forestry Service. His team members also got jobs. That's the power of AmeriCorps. Right now, there's only one AmeriCorps project in Minnesota and that's the Veterans for Veterans Justice Project. This is a project that engages vets who have potential legal problems and provides access to legal services. This project came as a result of a demand that was present after the 2008 legislation that allowed veterans who were involved in minor legal issues to present the challenges they faced in service as a defense. AmeriCorps members counsel veterans about their rights and how to access benefits and services. You may contact Mr. Langley at Klangley@cns.gov.

3. Federal Congressional Representatives and Senators

Senator Amy Klobuchar - Tim Cossalter: Senator Klobuchar is working on the PDMRA issue, as well as Congressman Kline. The challenge on the Senate side is it looks like it may take legislation and in order to have legislation to pay those soldiers for the time off, there needs to be a bill payer. To keep an active duty person on active duty, it doesn't cost anything because it's in the budget. These extra days are not in the budget so they need to look for money to pay an offset. Senator Klobuchar was happy Secretary Panetta announced some additional sexual assault prevention measures to support legislation that minimizes sexual assault in the military. This goes along with the Senator's legislation on preserving records of sexual assault victims and perpetrators in the military, where at one time they would have been destroyed. Based on negative feedback the Senator got from several CVSOs about the streamlined Rating Decision letters, she wrote a letter to the VA about these veteran complaints and is continuing to pursue that. It's a model the VA wanted to use around the country, so the VA is taking another look at that. Hopefully they will come up with a better solution. Regarding veterans preference for construction contracts, that's been an interest item within their office; however, they are having a challenge getting specific cases of individuals who have issues with contracting. If you have specific information, please provide it to Mr. Cossalter, call the office, or go online to their website. They are looking for hard data to validate some concerns they have with that process.

Senator Al Franken - Nate Arch: Not present

7th District Representative Collin Peterson - Al Loehr: Not present

1st District Representative Tim Walz - Shawn Schloesser: Not present

2nd District Representative John Kline - Chaz Johnson: Congressman Kline had Secretary Panetta in front of him at the House Armed Services Committee and had a conversation with him regarding the PDMRA issue. Kline is optimistic this will get resolved, especially on the House side. The PDMRA, as well as the Honor Squad rifle

issue, should all be handled next week. On May 14, Congressman Kline is hosting a job fair at the Eagan Community Center. There will be a veteran-specific breakout session from 10 to 11:30 a.m. At last count, roughly 90 employers will be present that have positions they are hiring for.

3rd District Representative Eric Paulson - John Paul Yates: Not present

4th District Representative Betty McCollum - Connie Haddeland: A list of the current bills Congresswoman McCollum is cosponsoring was available. A couple of them are the result of a meeting with IAVA (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America) which related to some practices relating to educational benefits for returning veterans. In conjunction with that is the President's recent executive order regarding access to information about success rates of different programs at different institutions of higher learning. "It will help them make informed educational decisions and protect them from aggressive and deceptive targeting practices by certain institutions." Some of the things in the executive order would help them with the financial aid shopping sheet, Know Before you Owe, put an end to some fraudulent and aggressive recruiting techniques which occur on installations, and create a centralized complaint system. Ms. Haddeland read an e-mail she just received, a DoD announcement. "Announces the availability of approximately \$12 million in grants through the Veterans Work Force Investment Program." So the Department of Labor continues in their efforts. Their office recently hosted a Service Academy Information Night. It was standing room only with 150 attendees. There were 61 students who registered and students from six congressional districts in attendance.

5th District Representative Keith Ellison - Mike Siebenaler: Not present

6th District Representative Michele Bachmann - Nicole Severson: Congresswoman Bachmann recently returned from Afghanistan. They have been meeting with veterans in the district. Their case work is up. Various veterans groups have been stopping by the D.C. office. Bachmann will be meeting with the Academy nominees that are going on to the Academy in the summertime.

8th District Representative Chip Cravaack - Perry Nouis: A joint job fair was recently held in Superior, Wisconsin at the U of Wisconsin-Superior. He teamed up with Congressman Duffy. The first hour of that job fair was reserved for veterans. August 7 there will be a job fair in Brainerd. That will be a joint effort with the Work Force Center in Brainerd. Brainerd has 14.2 percent unemployment. Mr. Nouis mentioned he realizes this is not the place to bring individual cases but feels they may be reflective of what some other veterans may be encountering. He thinks it's important to get some feedback to the senior folks in the room who are making policy decisions and make sure they understand how some of those decisions impact veterans in the rural communities. Jerry Kyser mentioned 80 percent of the business that comes into the State of Minnesota is federal and veterans are not included in the transportation bill as a disadvantaged business enterprise. They want to get a bill so veterans can be the same as the disadvantaged business enterprises, which would open up 80 percent more

projects veterans can be involved with. Mr. Nouis said he will take that back to the Congressman.

Meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m., followed by a short recess

Business meeting commenced at 11:48 a.m.

Old Business

Treasurer's Report: Balance as of April 1: \$5,419.42. Deposits: \$250. Expenses: \$144.75. Balance as of May 1, \$5,524.67. There are four organizations that have not paid their dues yet: Jewish War Veterans, MN Air Guard Museum, Tiger Base, LLC, and Women Marines. That represents 87 percent paid up for the year.

Old Business

Ralph Donais mentioned the MAG meeting is Friday, May 4 at 9 a.m., 3rd Floor.

New Business:

Ralph Donais mentioned the **UVLC has been invited to meet in St. Cloud for its July meeting. This will be held on July 11 as the first Wednesday falls on July 4, a holiday. It will be at the usual time, 9:30 a.m.**

Jerry Kyser mentioned they will diligently go forth to finish up what's happening at the Legislature. It was apparent this year they did not get a lot of support from the Commanders Task Force and having their folks show up. That was disappointing. Mr. Kyser hopes working with the Commissioner and Mike and the new group of commanders that they will not have the same problem next session.

Motion to adjourn by Jerry Nalipinski. Second by Don Rask. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 11:54 a.m.

Next UVLC meeting will be Wednesday, June 6 at 9:30 a.m., Building 9