

MONTANA BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

-MEETING MINUTES -

September 12, 2019

At 2:00 p.m. September 12, 2019, Vice-Chair Peter Olson called the Montana Board of Veterans Affairs meeting to order. All members stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Administrator Kelly Ackerman calls roll, the following members were present at this board meeting:

Peter Olson, Vice-Chairman

Joren Underdahl, Member

Ron Milam, Member

Marvin Weatherwax, Member

Gary Sorenson, Member

Anson Nygaard, Senator Tester
Representative

Casey Jourdan, Member

Denny Lenoir, Senator Daines
Representative

Mike Stone, Member

Dick Juvik, Member

Kelly Ackerman, Administrator

David Boyd, Member

Casey McInerney, Budget Analyst

Clancy Sivertsen, Member

Taryn Phillips, Administrative Support

Visitors present:

Todd Dunlap, VHA

Gary White, American Legion

Lawrence Rhone, Rhone's Warrior and Community Resources

Administrator Ackerman announces there is a quorum. Vice Chair Olson excuses himself from the meeting for the vote for Chairman of the board and turns over the meeting to Administrator Ackerman. Administrator Ackerman states one application was received for Chairman and asked if there was anyone else who would like to apply for

the position. Gary Sorenson moved to have the nominations closed, David Boyd seconded the motion. Administrator Ackerman declares Peter Olson as the Chairman for the Montana Board of Veteran Affairs and calls him back into the meeting.

Chairman Olson announces the vacancy of Vice Chairman position for which there were no applications. Gary Sorenson nominated Ron Milam as vice chairman, Ron respectfully declined the nomination. Clancy Sivertsen nominates himself as vice chairman. With no other candidates, Gary Sorensen motions for nominations to be closed. The motion is seconded, and Clancy Sivertsen is appointed the new Vice-Chairman.

Next, Chairman Olson asks the assembly if the members have reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting. After the members reviewed the minutes, the motion was made to approve the minutes. After the motion was seconded, Chairman Olson approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

After introductions of everyone present, Chairman Olson turns the meeting over to Administrator Kelly Ackerman. Administrator Ackerman introduces Todd Dunlap to discuss The Mission Act. Todd Dunlap explained what the Mission Act is and how it has and will improve care for veterans across Montana. At the conclusion of his presentation, board members discussed topics and possible concerns regarding the Mission Act.

Administrator Kelly Ackerman brings the meeting to the overview of division stats and activities. Administrator Ackerman asks everyone to look at the organizational chart. One of the recent changes to the organizational chart was the update of division employees' subtitles to be in accordance with the rest of the state. She then presents the Montana Veteran Affairs statistics. The charts and tables include the service office regions, broken down into cities and counties to show caseload and financial impact for each county. Montana Veteran Affairs reached record numbers in 2019 and brought in 233 million dollars from the federal V.A. to Montana Veterans.

Administrator Ackerman discusses the vacant positions in the division. There is one vacancy in Helena, a veteran service officer position in Helena will be opening soon. Cemetery Program Manager, Tom Hall, resigned in May and has been temporarily replaced by Curt Aasved in Missoula. Curt has been managing the cemetery program from Missoula. Three groundskeeper positions opened up since May, and two

groundskeeper positions have been filled. There is still one vacancy for a groundskeeper's position at Fort Harrison.

Administrator Ackerman moved onto the cemetery statistics. For fiscal year 2020, there have been 7 burials for Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery, 80 burials for Montana State Veterans Cemetery, and 63 burials in Western Montana State Veterans Cemetery. The cemeteries haven't been fully reimbursed from the federal V.A. and are owed approximately \$53,000, but payments are starting to come in. The Eastern Montana Veterans Cemetery received an expansion grant, and the cemetery program paid 10% down that will be reimbursed.

The cemetery has a 90-day temporary worker, and there is a lot of work for the groundskeepers. There have been complaints about the appearance of Montana State Veterans Cemetery. The new employees have worked hard to fix any and all problems. Once the last vacancy is filled, we expect the cemetery to be caught up and up to date.

Next, Administrator Ackerman discusses HJ23. HJ23 is a Joint Resolution study the VA and give recommendations on areas to improve. This includes staffing and revenue. The MVAD has been in communication with previous administrator, Joe Foster, and he agrees this is something to look forward to. With this resolution, the agency could increase the price for license plates and increase the revenue received.

Next to report on is the Governor's Challenge. Every 3 months, Administrator Ackerman meets with members for the Governors Challenge. Montana is 1 of the 7 pilot states involved in the Governor's Challenge. The Governors Challenge works with peer to peer training and going to American Legion and the VFW posts to train officers and members on suicide awareness and prevention. Member Mike Stone explained how the Governors Challenge works and about the classes. Any organization can request training for suicide awareness and prevention. Although there is an emphasis on veterans, that is not the focus. The focus is to help everyone in the community, and anyone and everyone are welcome to training.

After discussion of the Governors Challenge, Administrator Ackerman starts the discussion of the DMA Strategic Plan. The governor wants all agencies to provide a strategic plan, and MVAD's main goal was to increase veteran service in Eastern Montana. Veteran Service Officer Earl Edmonds from Miles City is doing more outreach now than the area has seen before. MVAD has also been working with Lawrence

Rhone in Scobey to network and help veterans in that part of the state. MVAD is working on increasing service in Eastern Montana.

Finally, Administrator Ackerman discusses the new pay plan. The department was given the opportunity to follow the 2018 Market Analysis, which was previously completed in 2012. MVAD adopted 80% of the 2018 Market Analysis and the Governor signed off on it. This will increase employee pay and affect most of the veteran service officers and bureau chiefs.

Administrator Ackerman turned the meeting back over to Chairman Olson.

Chairman Olson asked if members had Issues / Comments / Concerns regarding the board. Member Ron Milam asked if there could be handicapped accessible access to VSO offices and cemeteries. Administrator Ackerman said that is something she can look into.

Gary Sorensen commented that brand-new veteran ID cards will be coming in the future, and that most ID cards don't expire anymore.

Joren Underdahl announced the Southwest Montana Veterans' home in Butte is breaking ground and will be open next year. The veterans' home will have a 60 bed capacity, and details can be found on www.swmbh.mt.gov.

Guest from American Legion, Gary White, commented on the improvement of the appearance of the Montana State Veterans Cemetery. Gary said the cemetery was in poor condition over Memorial Day, but Montana State Veterans Cemetery is looking great now and the groundskeepers have been working hard.

Chairman Olson established the next Board meeting to be on January 23rd, 2020 at 2:00 pm as a teleconference.

Chairman Olson adjourned the meeting at 1550 hours.

Peter A. Olson 15-OCT-2019
Peter Olson, Chairman Date

Taryn Phillips Oct 21, 2019
Taryn Phillips, Record Date