



Washington State Legislature

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Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs

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Meeting Minutes

September 17, 2013, Olympia, WA

Members present: Bailey, Conway, Green, Hayes, Klippert, Muri, Orwall, Rolfes

Members absent: Becker, Braun, Hobbs, MacEwen, McCoy, Morrell, Roach, Shin

The meeting was called to order at 2:33 p.m. by co-chair Conway.

The committee delayed voting to approve the minutes of the October 3, 2012 and November 27, 2012 meetings until a quorum is reached. The committee delayed election of a new executive committee until a quorum is reached.

2013 Legislative Session Summary

Sam Brown, Senate Committee Services, briefed the committee on legislation related to veterans and military affairs that was introduced during the 2013 legislative session. In total, 11 bills and 2 joint memorials were passed.

James Kettel, Office of Program Research, briefed the committee on appropriations in the 2013-15 operating and capital budgets related to veterans and military affairs. \$6.7 million were appropriated for operating expenses of the Walla Walla Veterans Home. \$600,000 was appropriated to provide ongoing funding for the Veterans Innovations Program. \$100.3 million was appropriated for capital projects, including operations readiness at JBLM, and several local community projects.

Stakeholder Presentations

The committee heard presentations from three separate stakeholder panels. The first panel consisted of:

- Dick Marcelynas, Vice Chair, Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee;
- Jim Sims, Chair, Veterans Legislative Coalition; and
- Gary Condra, Deputy Director, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Marcelynas briefed the committee on the activities of the Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee (VAAC). The VAAC has 17 members, representing veterans and their families in the state. Each area of the state has different priorities. In Vancouver, the priority is jobs and employment. In Walla Walla, the priority is information on how to qualify for VA benefits. Spokane has two priorities:

employment, and military sexual trauma issues. VAAC does not evaluate legislation when it is introduced, but will heavily concentrate on employment issues.

Mr. Sims briefed the committee on the activities of the Veterans Legislative Coalition (VLC). The VLC is made up of representatives of 15 different veterans' service organizations, which look at proposed legislation to see if it benefits veterans and if they should support it. The VLC will be supporting introduction of legislation to enable DOL to issue multiple free license plates to a Medal of Honor winner. Currently, DOL can only provide one free license plate.

Mr. Condra briefed the committee on the activities of the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). WDVA's vision is connecting all veterans and families with the services and benefits they've earned. The state veterans' cemetery was dedicated in 2010, and WDVA is getting an expansion grant for additional column and burial walls. WDVA operates three state veterans' homes, in Orting, Retsil, and Spokane. A fourth veterans' home is opening in Walla Walla. WDVA started the first Veterans' Corps in the nation, with 50 members funded through AmeriCorps grants providing guidance for veterans going back to school.

The second panel consisted of the following presenters:

- Travis Alley, Veterans Outreach Specialist, Washington Attorney General's Office;
- Col. Mike Weitzel, Director, Washington National Guard Installation Management Team;
- Lt. Col. Adam Iwasuk, Deputy Director, Washington National Guard Installation Management Team; and
- Mark San Souci, Northwest Regional State Liaison, Department of Defense.

Mr. Alley briefed the committee on the Attorney General's Office (AGO)'s focus on veterans and their families. Major issues include enforcement the Consumer Protection Act and laws protecting veterans' employment rights. The AGO has begun tracking whether persons contacting the office are veterans, and has created veteran-specific employment opportunities. The AGO has also produced a guide for veterans and their families detailing veteran-specific legal protections. The FTC has issued a consumer alert about pension poaching, and the AGO brought a case against several companies doing that earlier this year.

Col. Weitzel and Lt. Col Iwasuk briefed the committee on the state of National Guard installations in the state. Money has been secured to begin construction on readiness centers in Pierce and Thurston counties. Facilities average 47 years old. The top future priority is replacement of the Bellingham center. Groundbreaking will begin on the JBLM readiness center in October. Another major initiative is divestiture from the Seattle armory to a facility at Paine Field. It is necessary to have land secured to compete for federal funds. The also requires state matching funds for new construction, which are limited.

Mr. San Souci briefed the committee on issues of importance to the Department of Defense (DOD). Four carryover bills from the 2013 are DOD priorities: SB 5318, HB 1858, HB 1859, and HB 1107. The

DOD would also like to see that military members are excluded from short-term lending products like those offered in SB 5312. DOD is also trying to determine how many children of service members are in schools to better track outcomes. Another issue of importance is a change to residency rules so military families can receive Medicare waivers for things TriCare won't cover when the family moves to a new state.

The third panel consisted of the following presenters:

- John Lane, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor's Policy Office; and
- Andi Smith, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor's Policy Office.

Mr. Lane briefed the committee on the activities of the Governor's Office relating to military issues. The Washington Military Alliance (WMA) was established in August 2012 and is composed of the Governor, members of the state's Congressional delegation, community groups, and some legislators. A report, "Retaining and Expanding Military Missions: Increasing Defense Spending and Investment," has been prepared, and is available on the Committee's website. One of the report's recommendations was for the Governor to hire a full-time military affairs director, to be located in the Department of Commerce. The Governor's Office is hoping to hire the military affairs director by October. The director will also staff the WMA.

Ms. Smith briefed the committee on the activities of the Governor's Office relating to veterans issues. The Governor issued an executive order on May 12 at JBLM detailing five planks of the Governor's veterans' policy: 50% of all state contracts going to veteran-owned businesses; state agencies thinking and planning together; establishment of a veterans' employee resource group; data sharing between WDVA and cabinet-level agencies; and formalizing state participation in the Washington Veterans Transition Council. The goal is for Washington to have the lowest unemployment and highest wages in the nation for veterans.

The committee then discussed possible agenda items for the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 4:38 p.m.