

# Minutes for Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission

## July 14, 2021

### Hybrid In-Person & Virtually

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#### Call to Order

Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held on Wednesday, July 14, 2021, in the Main Conference Room of the Central Support Office of the Idaho Division of Veterans Services (located at 351 Collins Road Boise, ID) and virtually via Microsoft Teams. It began at 8:30 a.m. and was presided over by Chairman **Patrick Grace**.

#### Attendees

Commission Members in attendance: **Patrick Grace, Jinny Cash, Art Gimpel, Josh Callihan** (virtually).

IDVS Staff Members in attendance included: IDVS Chief Administrator **Mark Tschampl**, IDVS Deputy Chief Administrator **Tracy Schaner**, IDVS Business Support Services Bureau Chief **Paul Spannkebel** (virtually), IDVS Financial Officer **Debbie Spence**, ISVH-Boise Administrator **Rick Holloway**, ISVH-Lewiston Administrator **Mark High**, ISVH-Pocatello Administrator **Josiah Dahlstrom** (virtually), OVA Bureau Chief **Bill Heyob**, Cemetery Bureau Chief **James Earp**, Blackfoot Cemetery Business Operations Specialist **Mark Weaver** (virtually), and Management Assistant **Kevin Wallior**.

Number of Citizens in attendance: 0

#### Announcements

Chairman **Patrick Grace** and the other Commissioners welcomed newly appointed Chief Administrator Mark Tschampl.

#### Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on April 14, 2021, was made by Commissioner **Jinny Cash** at 8:33 AM. Commissioner **Art Gimpel** seconded. Minutes were unanimously approved.

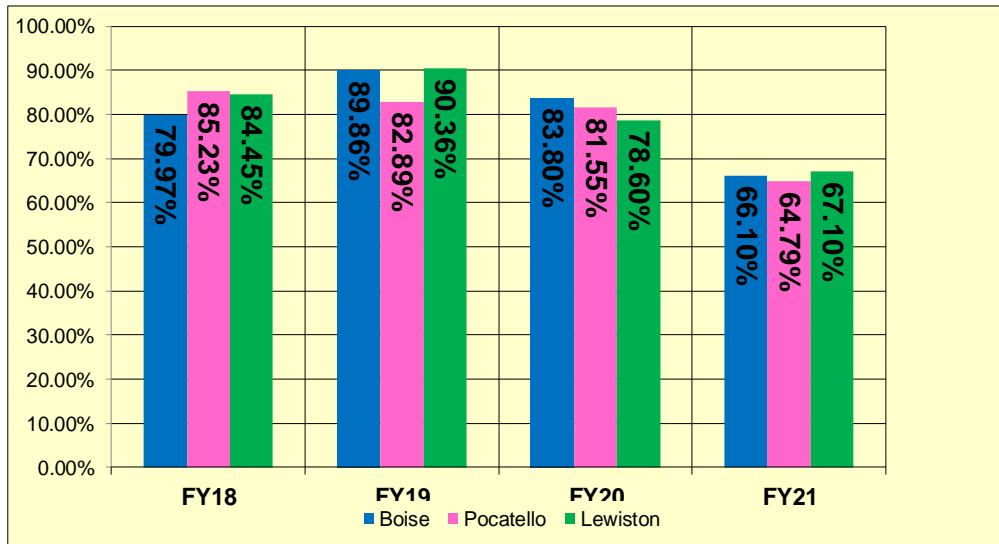
#### Division Bureau Reports

##### Financial Report presented by **Debbie Spence**

1. 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY21 Average Cost Per Resident Per Day
  - a. Boise Home - \$515.85
  - b. Pocatello Home - \$604.83
  - c. Lewiston Home - \$558.78
2. 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY21 Quarterly Occupancy
  - a. IDVS Dom/Res Care – 37%
  - b. IDVS Nursing – 66%
  - c. Nursing Goal – 88%
3. FY21 Year-to-Date Nursing Occupancy Rate
  - a. ISVH Average – 66%
    - i. Boise Home – 66.1%
    - ii. Pocatello Home – 64.8%
    - iii. Lewiston Home – 67.1%
  - b. Idaho Nursing Home average – 61%

4. Average Census YTD Comparisons

a. COVID-19 continues to negatively impact our Homes Census.

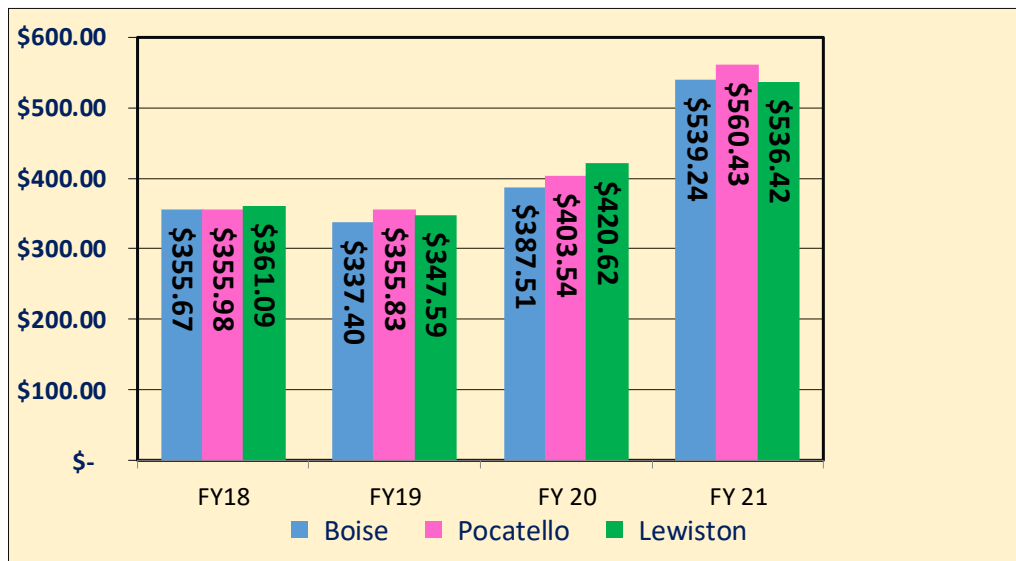


5. FY2021 Average Cost per Resident Day

- a. Nursing – \$543.90
- b. Dom/Residential – \$221.61

6. Nursing Yearly Costs Comparison Per Resident Day

a. COVID-19 funding covered some of the increased costs.

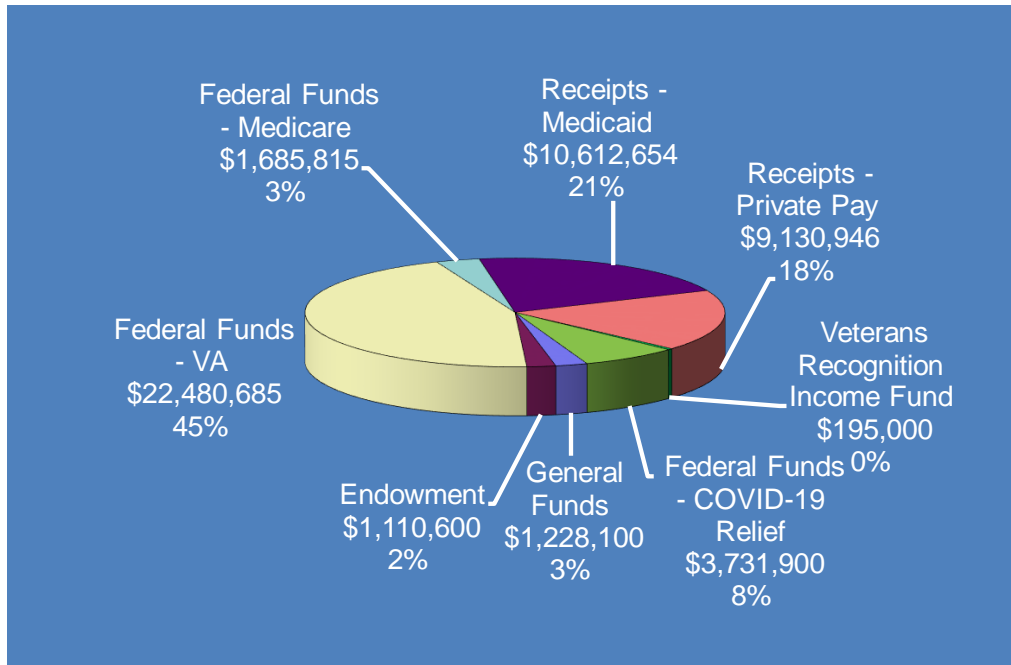


7. FY2021 Year-End Fiscal Status (Preliminary Report includes COVID-19)

- a. Total Appropriation – \$97,854,172
- b. Expenditures – \$48,356,480
- c. Remaining Appropriation – \$49,497,692
  - i. Less 2<sup>nd</sup> Cemetery – \$2,121,700
  - ii. Less 4<sup>th</sup> Veterans Home – \$40,464,900
  - iii. Less encumbrance requests – \$378,817
- d. Actual Remaining Appropriation – \$6,532,275

8. Year-End Closing Packages

- a. Being prepared for the State's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report
- 9. Audit & Review Findings
  - a. 2017, 2018, & 2019 Legislative Services Office Management Review – No findings!
  - b. FY2020 Single Audit – No findings!
- 10. FY 2022 Appropriation
  - a. \$50,175,700



- b. General Fund Percentage of Appropriation by Fiscal year



- c. FY2022 Appropriation Includes:
  - i. \$162,400 Change in Benefit Costs
  - ii. \$379,200 Inflationary Adjustments
  - iii. \$1,084,400 Replacement Items
  - iv. \$41,400 Statewide Cost Allocation
  - v. \$71,000 Annualizations – Cemetery Blackfoot
  - vi. \$435,100 Change in Employee Compensation

- Early implementation of CEC in the final 2 pay periods of FY2021.
- vii. \$66,400 New Leases & Capital Outlay
- viii. \$1,000,000 Medicaid Reimbursement Change
- ix. \$1,389,800 Construction Grant – Pocatello & Lewiston Life Safety Projects
- x. \$790,200 Veterans Cemetery Boise Expansion
- xi. \$1,915,900 COVID-19 Construction Grant – Post Falls
- xii. \$195,000 Veterans Recognition Fund – Allocation Plan \$75,000
- xiii. \$3,731,900 COVID Relief Act – State Veterans Homes
- xiv. \$80,000 Idaho Suicide Hotline (on-going)
- xv. \$3,132,400 Reappropriation Authority - Second Veterans Cemetery
- xvi. \$42,918,900 Reappropriation Authority – Fourth Veterans Home

#### 11. FY2023 Budge Preparation

- a. Starting the FY 23 budget request process.
- b. All bureaus have submitted their budget request to Central Support.
- c. Central Support is reviewing the bureau requests with the Bureau Chiefs and will compile the Division budget request.
- d. Chief Administrator met with DFM to discuss necessity of request items.
- e. Division Budget will include:
  - i. The Veterans Recognition Fund Allocation Plan
    - While the FY2023 Budget will include an appropriation for this, in April it was decided by the Commissioners not to allocate funds during FY2023 due to the fund being depleted.
    - Normally, applications for Recognition Fund Grants would be deliberated upon during a July Veterans Recognition Fund Committee Meeting.
    - The Committee will meet in April 2022 to discuss whether the account has replenished enough to allow for grants to be allocated in FY2024.
  - ii. Our plan for operating if there is a reduction of 10% or more in federal funds that we receive per Governor’s Executive Order #2014-03
  - iii. FY22 Supplemental Request for \$2.3M ARPA fund received directly
  - iv. FY22 Supplemental Request for COVID-19 VA Construction Grants
  - v. Funding Realignment to General Funds from Other Funds (OVA, Education, CSO & Cemetery Blackfoot)
  - vi. Veterans Contact List
  - vii. Reappropriation for All Construction Grants
  - viii. FY22 Supplemental Request for COVID-19 VA Construction Grants
  - ix. Funding Realignment to General Funds from Other Funds (OVA, Education, CSO & Cemetery Blackfoot)
  - x. Veterans Contact List
  - xi. Reappropriation for All Construction Grants

#### 12. ARPA Funds Wishlist

- a. Matching funds for State Veterans Home Construction Grants:
  - i. replacement for the aging Boise Veterans Home
  - ii. expansion of the Pocatello Veterans Home
  - iii. expansion of the Lewiston Veterans Home

- b. Increase in Cemetery Personnel compensation.

Questions from the Commissioners:

Chairman **Grace** inquired about how smoothly ITS implementation has gone for IDVS.

Answer: It is still a work in progress. Costs have been high, and service has not been as responsive or convenient as when IT support was in house. ITS leadership is very receptive to working with us to reduce the hiccups. Additionally, we had a significant expenditure associated with replacing our aging server. This was necessary as the previous one was very old and no longer serviceable.

Commissioner **Gimpel** asked for clarification regarding the Loan Forgiveness line item.

Answer: This program is specifically targeted toward our nursing staff. It is intended to reduce turnover in our Veterans Homes and help us better compete for necessary staff with other medical providers in the state.

### **Boise Veterans Home Report** presented by **Rick Holloway**

1. Average daily census for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of FY21 was 79 nursing care residents – 65% occupancy. Occupancy has begun to improve, possibly 88 residents by the end of the week.
  - a. The Boise VAMC has gone to full divert status a few times in the past few months, due to lack of staff rather than a lack of space.
  - b. If we don't have census, we don't have funds. Very important that we increase our census.
2. Food costs are higher, but we are feeding staff one meal a day to minimize staff entering and exiting the facility repeatedly.
3. Agency hours are consistent.
  - a. Staffing agencies are struggling with turnover, too.
  - b. Currently Boise has 17 CAN positions open, but no one applying.
4. Major Maintenance/DPW Projects
  - a. In April, Replaced Hot Water Mixing Valve for West side of facility.
  - b. In April, Elevator 4 Modernization begins.
  - c. In May, Heating and Cooling lines were replaced in the tunnel.
  - d. In June, pot feeders were installed in the basement, 2 sets one for hot and one for cold.
  - e. In June, the screening shed was converted into PPE storage and moved to the back of the building.
5. Activities have begun again.
  - a. Vietnam Veteran pinning ceremonies were conducted.
6. Completed an academic paper on the remdesivir study for publication.
7. Submitted data into NHSN per federal requirements on the domiciliary (skilled reporting has been done since December).
8. 76% of staff and 60% of contractors have received the COVID-19 Vaccine.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No questions or comments.

### **Pocatello Veterans Home Report** presented **Josiah Dahlstrom**

1. Census for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of FY21 averaged 64%, by the end of the week anticipating 44 of the 66 available beds being filled.
  - a. Targeting 70% by the end of July.
2. No major concerns with receipts.
3. Volunteer hours are creeping upwards.
4. The Idaho State Ombudsman asked the Pocatello Home to contribute a post for their Facebook. The

Pocatello Veterans Home is one of only 4 facilities in the state to avoid a COVID outbreak.

5. Played a video presentation showcasing Activities, human interest stories, and morale in the Pocatello Home was screened for the Commissioners.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No questions or comments.

**Lewiston Veterans Home Report** presented by **Mark High**

1. Census for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of FY21 averaged 70%. Current census is 52 (78%) with one scheduled admission tomorrow 53 (80.5%) of the 64 available beds.
2. The COVID Wing has been converted back to normal operation status.
3. 90% of residents and mid-60% of staff have received the COVID Vaccine.
4. Food costs
  - a. Continuing to feed staff one meal a day to minimize staff entering and exiting the facility repeatedly.
  - b. Added à la carte options for residents
5. DPW Projects
  - a. Lighting upgrade project is scheduled to begin. Will convert all interior and exterior lighting to energy efficient LEDs.
  - b. Flooring is slated to be renovated.
  - c. Dining expansion project was awarded.
  - d. Security door project was awarded.
6. One step closer to normal.
  - a. Coordinating with the local health district.
  - b. Live Memorial Day Ceremony was conducted, which was very uplifting for the community.
7. Surveys
  - a. Deficiency free Life & Safety survey.
  - b. VA Survey – 8 Deficiencies
    - Plan of correction accepted
    - Fully certified.
    - Next VA Survey will likely be conducted by Walla Walla rather than Spokane.
8. Personnel
  - a. Chaplain retired, a replacement has been hired and will begin in mid-July.
  - b. 2 RN, Senior Openings
  - c. 5 CNA openings
  - d. Last 3 hires have been re-hires!
9. Played a video presentation showcasing Activities, human interest stories, and morale in the Lewiston Home was screened for the Commissioners.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No questions or comments.

*10-minute Break (9:56 AM MT)*



Heritage Girls to support the Avenue of Flags for Independence Day.

6. DPW Projects

- a. DPW 20-606 – Boise Veterans Cemetery Expansion
  - Project presented to PBFAC as of January 5, 2020.
  - Project is submitted as a VA Construction Grant Expansion Project, requires annual review for selection and funding approval.
  - Completed project will add additional Columbarium Walls, surveyed plots for urn burials, and a new Memorial Wall courtyard.
  - Estimated project completion and opening – TBD. VCGP
  - Total project budget \$840,000
  - Total construction budget \$646,000
- b. DPW 21-600 – ISVC-Boise Outdoor stair replacement
  - Project is near completion. The new stairs have been installed and require the installation of the handrails and final landscaping.
  - Estimated project completion – EOM, May 2021
  - Total project budget \$65,000. (\$45K PBF, \$20K Cem)
- c. DPW 21-605 – ISVC-Blackfoot Project
  - Design input has been added for the project as of March, 2021.
  - The completed project will add a 30x60 ft storage building, expanded maintenance bay, conference room addition, and public restrooms.
  - An additional request has been made to add an employee breakroom.
  - Estimated project completion of the 30x60 ft covered storage building – Fall of 2021
  - Total project budget \$900,000 est.
- d. DPW 17-603/ID-13-05 – Southeast Idaho State Veterans Cemetery
  - Partial Substantial Completion has established as of November 16, 2020.
  - Handover of the main facilities included the administrative building and maintenance areas. Committal Shelter and burial plots for caskets, urn burial, and columbarium allowed for burials to start on December 7th,
  - Finalizing VA approved equipment purchases for reimbursements.
  - Updated network capabilities were completed, and substantial work has been completed in placement of sod and hydroseeding of open areas.
  - Total project budget \$7,371,817
  - Total construction budget \$5,741,171

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No questions or comments.



**Office of Veterans Advocacy Report** presented by **Bill Heyob**

1. OVA Statistics comparing YTD FY2021 Totals to YTD FY2020 Totals

	<u>2021 YTD</u>	<u>2020 YTD</u>	<u>Increase/Decrease</u>
Interviews YTD	5,173	6,611	- 1,438
Phone Interviews	42,003	45,512	- 3,509
POAs Filed YTD	4,504	4,708	- 204
Claims Filed YTD	7,087	8,038	- 951
Correspondence	4,735	7,265	- 2,530
Appeals YTD	383	369	+ 14
Home Visits	154	188	- 34
Veterans Seen by			
OVA in Vet Courts	577	675	- 98
State Emergency			
Grants Approved	5	4	+ 1

a. Notable changes from 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2021 and 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2020:

- 4th Qtr 2021 had (732) more office interviews, (2,778) more phone interviews and (435) more claims submitted compared to 4th Qtr 2020. **\*\* Huge Increases from the same time last year!**

2. Noteworthy Issues currently happening with the VA

- Construction continues with the addition of a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Boise VARO- to be used for VAMC Telehealth.
- May 27, 2021, the Secretary of the VA gave authorization to adjudicate the claims for the new herbicide presumptive conditions granted under the January 1, 2021, the William M Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act – Bladder Cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism or Parkinson-like symptoms.
- The same Secretary News Release announces that he supported initiation of rulemaking to address the role of particulate matter pollution for chronic respiratory conditions which may include asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis for Veterans who served in SW Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War and/or after September 11, 2001, or in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.
- VA is conducting a Nehmer Review of potential herbicide presumptive claims and sending development letters to Veterans/Surviving Spouses that may be eligible.
- VA's Debt Management Center has continued suspension of VA debts until September 30, 2021.
- The National Personnel Records Center has expanded operations but still requests to hold off administrative requests for correcting records, requests for DD-214s and replacement medals.
- VAMC is now offering Covid vaccinations to all age groups along with spouses and caregivers of VAMC enrolled Veterans.
- FEMA has begun accepting applications for financial assistance for Covid-19 related funeral expenses incurred after January 20, 2020, which can go as high as \$9,000.
- Effective April 1, 2021, VA will no longer count the use of Veterans Readiness & Employment benefits (chapter 31) against the 48-month limit on GI Bill education benefits such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill. However, please be aware that the use of GI Bill education benefits will

continue to count against the 48-month limit on VR&E benefits.

- j. There will be two separate Legacy Appeal Travel Boards from the Board of Veterans Appeals at the Boise VA Regional Office this year – 08/02-08/05 and 08/23-08/25.
  - k. PTSD Claims due to MST are being consolidated at (5) specific VAROs with the goal of consolidating them to (1) VARO by October 1, 2021.
  - l. VBA currently has approximately 560,000 disability claims pending with 37% considered as back-logged (over 125 days old)
  - m. Dependency Indemnity Compensation claims are being completed within 1 week and Pension claims are being completed in as quick as a month.
3. Significant Event with OVA
- a. Lonnie Stephens, Administrative Assistant with our Post Falls OVA Team, left us on June 11th. Job interviews were conducted in Post Falls on June 23rd (39 applicants) and we hired Amy Birge, who's 1st day was Monday, July 12th.
  - b. The VFW's Virtual Proficiency Training Course was held from May 3-11. Along with myself, three OVA Team Members were submitted to attend – Shay Henry, Darrel Homer, & Robert Smith.
  - c. Outreaches being conducted in all counties across the State.
  - d. The 2021 Annual County and Post Service Officer Training is being cancelled due to ongoing Covid-19 concerns.
  - e. VFW will be conducting in-person training in Annapolis, MD this fall for the Advanced, Intermediate and Basic Skills levels.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Commissioner **Grace** asked for an update on the Veterans Education program

Answer: due to a communications mix-up during the re-organization that placed the Education Program under Bill's jurisdiction Tonya was unavailable to present the Education brief.

Commissioner **Grace** also asked about the 560,000 claims backlog at the VA, concerned about the size of the backlog.

Answer: This backlog represents a considerable improvement for the VA. The backlog used to be in the millions. Barriers still exist in the National PRC due to COVID restrictions and shutdowns.

### **Business Support Services Report** presented by **Paul Spannkebel**

- 1. HR Modernization (similar concept to the IT Modernization that resulted in ITS)
  - a. In discussion with DHR and the State
  - b. Intention is to keep HR staff embedded in the agency.
  - c. Still to be answered:
    - i. Costs
    - ii. Chain of command
    - iii. What the relationship will look like
- 2. HR staff Changes
  - a. Stephanie in Lewiston resigned. She is relocating out of the state.
  - b. Bert Hartz will be temporarily relocating to Luma to assist with the transition and implementation of the new system.
    - i. Dwayne Davis is our new HR Specialist, Senior
    - ii. Bert's responsibilities will be shared and spread amongst our remaining HR staff.

- iii. Luma Phase I and Phase II will be implemented in tandem with a targeted January 2023 completion date.
- 3. HR has reworked the Employee Satisfaction Survey
  - a. Questions are phrased in a way to be relevant to all IDVS staff. Previous survey was more narrowly focused on home staff.
  - b. Goal is increased participation from staff.
  - c. This is part of an overall strategy to ensure we are being responsive to the needs of our staff and reducing turnover. We want our staff to be satisfied with their job so they can continue to be motivated to serve our Veterans community.
- 4. The CEC Matrix was reviewed and discussed.
  - a. 0.5% was added to any staff with over 5 years of state employment.
- 5. Recruitment
  - a. Actively recruiting nursing staff
    - i. LPN and RN/RN, Seniors – we are barely competitive in the market.
    - ii. CNA – we aren’t competitive. Two thirds of our CNAs are agency staff, approximately 100 out of 140 positions.
    - iii. Working with DHR and internally to formulate a plan of action to overcome those barriers.
- 6. Purchasing
  - a. Maintained our delegated authority of up to \$500,000.
- 7. Loan Forgiveness
  - a. Working on developing a loan forgiveness program targeted towards our nursing staff.
  - b. Similar to what is outlined in the Statute governing Health and Welfare's program.
  - c. \$50,000 per year budgeted, breakdown:
    - i. 10 nurses
    - ii. \$5,000 per year, up to \$25,000 total
  - d. MOU would be signed with each participating nurse outlining the requirements and restrictions.
  - e. Working with our DAG to determine if we require a change in statute or if we can implement under our existing statutory authority.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No questions or comments.

**Central Support Office Updates**

**2021 Legislative Update and New Website** presented by **Kevin Wallior**

1. Successful Veterans Legislation in the 2021 Idaho Legislature

Bill Number	Description
<a href="#">H0389</a>	PROPERTY TAXES – Amends, repeals, and adds to existing law to revise provisions regarding the homeowner exemption, the circuit breaker tax reduction, the disabled veterans tax reduction, the property tax deferral program, and the taxation of personal property.
<a href="#">H0120</a>	VETERANS – Amends existing law to provide for the ability of certain disabled veterans to transfer their veteran’s property tax reduction and homestead exemption upon a change of homestead.

<a href="#">H0048</a>	SERVICE MEMBERS – Repeals existing law relating to the authorization of males 18 years of age or older to contract under the G.I. Bill of Rights.
<a href="#">H0085</a>	TRANSPORTATION – Amends existing law to allow for the placement of Purple Heart license plates on more than one vehicle or motorcycle owned by a qualifying person.
<a href="#">S1083</a>	OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING – Amends existing law to provide for a more streamlined licensure by endorsement process for military members, veterans, and spouses.
<a href="#">H0132</a>	TRANSPORTATION – Amends existing law to establish the POW/MIA Memorial Highway in Idaho.
<a href="#">H0047</a>	VETERANS MEMORIALS – Repeals existing law relating to appropriations for veterans memorials.
<a href="#">SJM101</a>	MEDAL OF HONOR – States findings of the Legislature and supports a state funeral to honor the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient from World War II.
<a href="#">S1140</a>	APPROPRIATIONS – DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES – Relates to the appropriation to the Division of Veterans Services for fiscal year 2022.

2. IDVS launched a brand-new webpage.
  - a. Worked with [Access Idaho](#) over the past year to design and launch.
  - b. You can visit the new site at <https://veterans.idaho.gov/>

At this point, the new website was viewed and presented to the Commission.

**Central Support Office Updates** presented by **Tracy Schaner**

1. Post Falls construction is back on track.
  - a. Winter construction would have cost approximately \$600,000 more and would not have significantly impacted the timeline.
  - b. The topping off ceremony is tentatively scheduled for August 26, 2021.
    - The governor will be in attendance.
    - The Jacklin Family will be in attendance.
    - Depending on COVID restriction in place it will be a public event.

**Chief Administrator Remarks** presented by **Mark Tschamp**

1. Opened with thank you remarks to the Commission for referring him to the Governor for appointment. Appreciates the opportunity to serve Idaho's Veterans Community and to work with the IDVS team.
2. Outlined his Top 3 Priorities (equally weighted)
  - a. Balanced Budget
    - i. Realistic revenue estimates

- ii. Cognizant of the impact of the Veterans Home census on revenue.
- iii. Capitalize on available Grant opportunities to the greatest extent possible
  - VA
  - ARPA
  - COVID Relief
- b. Focused Outreach
  - i. Coalition building with other Veterans organizations, government agencies, and non-profits.
  - ii. Avoid duplicative work
  - iii. Combine efforts where possible, increase efficiency whenever possible.
  - iv. Create a community outreach coordinator position, to have a central point of contact that can better coordinate efforts between partners.
  - v. Create a Idaho Veterans contact list
    - Contract to use data harvesting to identify existing Veterans in the state of Idaho.
    - For example, Idaho Health & Welfare contracted with the credit bureau Trans Union to identify people eligible for services.
- c. Improve what is already great in IDVS with increased continuity and consistency across the agency and craft a more comprehensive strategy.
  - i. Identify ways to streamline and improve our ability to execute our mission priorities.

## New Business

Chief Administrator Tschampl directed to the Veterans Affairs Commission: would you like to see any changes to the structure of the IVAC meetings? Are there any specific questions you would like answered not covered already?

Chairman **Grace**: how prevalent was telecommuting during the height of the pandemic?

Answer: a significant number of our administrative, HR and business staff telecommuted, but most have returned to in-person.

Chairman **Grace**: How can we as commissioners better assist IDVS with engaging the Public?

Answer: Discussed ways to share information from IDVS from our social media sites, websites, and outreach events.

Commissioner **Cash**: Brought up a request related to flexibility for visitation days and the number of visitors in visitation rooms, as allowable by CMS and VA regulations. Asked that our Home staff keep a ground-level perspective and consider restrictions from family standpoint when possible.

Answer: Our Home administrators acknowledged those concerns and informed the commission that our new re-opening guidelines allow for more flexibility.

Commissioner **Cash**: commended the Lewiston Veterans Home for their Butterfly room and their celestial discharge ceremonies. She highlighted how emotionally impactful it was and appreciated the

great care and sensitivity displayed.

Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, October 20, 2021. Possibly in person.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:11 PM MT

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Kevin R. Wallior  
Management Assistant  
Idaho Division of Veteran Services