

Minutes for Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission

October 20, 2021

Hybrid In-Person & Virtually

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 9:00 a.m.

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**, 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

Mark Tschampl announced the creation of a Community Resource Coordinator. Mitzi Cheldelin was hired into that role. She thanked Mark Tschampl for the foresight of creating the position and Paul Spannkebel and his HR team for helping gain approval for the position from the Idaho Division of Human Resources.

Mitzi provided an overview of her actions since transitioning to her new role as the Community Resource Coordinator.

She attended the Topping Out Ceremony for the Post Falls Veterans Home. There were 250 citizens in attendance to sign the beam and witness it hoisted up. VIPs who attended included the Governor, the Jacklin Family who donated the land for the new Veterans Home, and a number of local politicians.

The Blackfoot Ceremony dedication is on October 29th. The Governor will be attending that event, as well. So too will be state and local officials from eastern Idaho.

Joining Forces for Treasure Valley Veterans has been a long-time successful collaboration between government entities, non-profits, businesses, and private citizens to serve Treasure Valley Veterans. A version has been created in the Magic Valley, and Mitzi is working to spread that model to other communities in the state.

The USS Idaho Commission Committee invited Mitzi up to outreach events in North Idaho which provided networking opportunities to coalition build for the betterment of Idaho Veterans in the region.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on July 14, 2021, was made by Commissioner **Art Gimpel** at 9:07 AM. Commissioner **Jinny Cash** seconded. Minutes were unanimously approved.

Division Bureau Reports

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

1. Average daily census for the 1st quarter of FY22 was 86 nursing care residents – 71% occupancy.
 - a. Biggest challenge is lack of capacity due to staffing challenges. Cannot go above 90 currently.
 - b. 25 of 50 CNA positions are vacant.
 - c. Working with CSO to implement a market equity increase for staff.
 - d. PPD running at 4 nursing hours per patient day.
 - e. If we don't have census, we don't have funds. Very important that we increase our census. A decrease in census reduces revenue which in turn negatively impacts spending.
2. Major Maintenance/DPW Projects
 - a. Rebuilding west side elevators, expected completion date of January 2022.
3. COVID Update
 - a. 100% of residents are Vaccinated against COVID. 82% of staff have received the COVID-19 Vaccine.
 - b. In August, 3 residents tested positive and 6 staff. Unfortunately, one resident passed away.
 - c. Staff are still wearing N95s. The Home is monitoring and managing visitation.
4. September
 - a. The Home Administrator and Activities staff participated in a seminar on Creative Aging along with representative from the other State Veterans Homes.
 - b. This is a collaboration with Idaho Commission on the Arts who were awarded a grant to implement a Creative Aging program in Idaho for Veterans who are seniors.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No questions or comments.

Pocatello Veterans Home Report presented **Josiah Dahlstrom**

1. Pocatello is in an active COVID outbreak status.
 - a. The situation is improving
 - b. Unfortunately, the Pocatello Home did lose 5 residents to COVID.
2. Census for the 1st quarter of FY22
 - a. Averaging 41, currently at 36 residents
 - b. Unable to admit during the active outbreak but have a list of Veterans who want to be admitted when admissions resume.
3. COVID Update
 - a. 90% of residents are vaccinated, and 68% of staff.
 - b. Of the 5 residents who passed away due to COVID, 3 had received the booster and 2 were unvaccinated.
 - c. Physical distancing is still key to prevent transmission.
 - d. Hoping to be able to shut down the COVID unit next week and resume trying to increase the census.
4. August 17th the state conducted a complaint survey.
 - a. The complaint was not substantiated.

- b. A minor citation was issued for a non-related issue. This was corrected promptly.
5. Josiah played a video presentation created by his Activities Staff.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

No questions or comments.

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

1. Census for the 1st quarter of FY22 averaged 78%. Current census is 52 (78%).
2. COVID Update
 - a. August 17th the community transmission rate was in the green, within a month it was in the red.
 - b. Impacted census and resulted in positive in the home. Fortunately, all positives recovered.
 - c. 77% of staff are vaccinated, 96% of residents are vaccinated.
3. VA
 - a. On October 1st, the Lewiston Veterans Homes affiliation switched from the Spokane VAMC to the Walla Walla VAMC.
 - b. Lewiston had a good working relationship with Spokane and will need to build relationships with Walla Walla to ensure a smooth transition.
4. DPW Projects
 - a. Lighting upgrade project has advanced. Currently paused due to supply chain issues, waiting on lights to proceed. Should result in 66% savings on electricity.
 - b. The new lighting has exposed minor blemishes to the paint. Maintenance has been addressing those blemishes with a fresh coat of paint.
 - c. The Dining Room Expansion project should be completed by the end of the year depending on cooperative weather.
5. VA Construction Grant
 - a. In the early stages of planning a facility expansion.
 - b. Intend on applying for a VA Construction Grant to fund the expansion.
6. Surveys
 - a. 5 complaint Surveys conducted
 - Only 1 was substantiated and the plan of correction was accepted by IDHW.
7. Personnel
 - a. New HR staff member was hired in the Lewiston Home
 - b. New Social Worker started. Has a MSW and was previously at IDOC. Husband is a Veteran.
 - c. New financial tech hired.
 - d. Two new nurses accepted positions with the Lewiston Home
8. Played a video presentation showcasing Activities, human interest stories, and morale in the Lewiston Home.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Chairman Patrick Grace commented on how perpetually impressed he is by the Homes' ability to meet our residents' needs. You and your teams are a credit to Idaho's Veterans.

Veterans Cemetery Report presented by **James Earp**

1. ISVC 1st Quarter FY2022 YTD Interments
 - a. Boise – 303
 - 189 Veterans
 - 114 Dependents
 - b. Blackfoot – 21
 - 18 Veterans

- 3 Dependents
- 2. Interment Revenue 1st Quarter FY2022 YTD Revenue
 - a. Boise – \$256,778
 - b. Blackfoot – \$11,210
- 3. ISVC Volunteer Hours 1st Quarter FY2022 YTD
 - a. 749 hours
 - b. 2 Volunteers were nominated for Idaho Spirit of Freedom Awards
- 4. Notable Events
 - a. Arborists throughout the valley donated their services as part of Saluting Branches. The group donated a full day of their services to provide much needed care and maintenance to the trees at our cemetery in Boise.
 - b. VA Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence award was awarded to IDVS for the Veterans Ceremonial Urn project. Handmade by local artist John Sword has donated these urn covers to many National and State Veterans Cemeteries



- c. The ceremony for the National Day of Remembrance and Wreaths Across America will be Saturday Dec. 18th. Please make donations to ensure each gravesite has a wreath.
- d. Planning and preparations are being established for the official dedication ceremony of the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery in Blackfoot on Saturday, October 29th at 11 a.m.
- e. Idaho's Veterans Cemeteries are now active on the Veterans Legacy Memorial website. This interactive experience allows users to post a tribute, photos, and historical information.
vlm@va.gov

5. DPW Projects

a. DPW 21-600 – ISVC-Boise Outdoor stair replacement

- Project is complete.
- Total project budget \$65,000. (\$45K PBF, \$20K Cem)



b. DPW 20-606 – Boise Veterans Cemetery Expansion

- Project is currently Priority Group 1, #15 on the VCGP list.
- 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 \$1,005,479



c. DPW 17-603/ID-13-05 – Southeast Idaho State Veterans Cemetery

- Final Substantial Completion preformed as of August 2021.
- Project reported deficiencies will be addressed and remain work to be completed to finish the Memorial Wall
- Finalizing remaining VA reimbursements. Total project budget \$7,371,817
- Total construction budget \$5,741,171

d. 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.

- No significant action started on the project.
- Estimated project completion of the 30x60 ft covered storage building – TBD
- Total project budget \$900,000 est.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

1. Chairman Grace: With 12 projects funded and Idaho being #15 on the Grant Priority List, what is the timeline for these projects look like for Idaho?

James: likely next year. If we don't get approved, we may have to pause some services until approved.

2. Mark Tschapl: James was selected to sit on the advisory committee for cemeteries and memorials. This national committee reports directly to the undersecretary of the VA

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

1. OVA Statistics comparing 1st Quarter FY2022 Totals to 1st Quarter FY2021 Totals

	<u>2022 YTD</u>	<u>2021 YTD</u>	<u>Increase/Decrease</u>
Interviews YTD	1,748	994	+ 754
Phone Interviews	11,277	9,598	+ 1,679
POAs Filed YTD	1,430	1,093	+ 337
Claims Filed YTD	2,256	1,372	+ 884
Correspondence	1,473	980	+ 493
Appeals YTD	108	102	+ 6
Home Visits	43	46	- 3
Veterans Seen by OVA in Vet Courts	149	167	- 18
State Emergency Grants Approved	1	1	0

- a. Notable changes from 1st Quarter FY2022 and FY2020 (Pre-Covid):

- FY-2020 was our busiest year to date with business beginning to resume pre-Covid levels. 1st Qtr 2022 had (98) fewer office interviews, (2,781) fewer phone interviews, (352) more claims submitted and (241) more POAs submitted compared to 1st Qtr 2020. ** Huge Increases from the same time last year!

2. Noteworthy Issues currently happening with the VA

- a. Construction continues on the 2nd floor addition of the Boise VARO- to be used for VAMC Telehealth.
- b. The VA has approved new presumptive conditions related to particulate matter, environmental exposure (Burn Pits) for chronic respiratory conditions which 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. Condition must have manifested within 10 years of leaving the theater of operations. Boise VARO is in the process of hiring 22 new employees within the service center for expected increase of claims for additional SW Asia presumptive conditions.
- c. VA's Debt Management Center has resumed collection of VA debts (to include VA Medical Co-Pays) on October 1, 2021.
- d. The National Personnel Records Center has reduced operations to 10% staffing levels due to Covid-19 and requests to hold off administrative requests for correcting records, requests for

DD-214s and replacement medals.

- e. VAMCs now offering Covid vaccinations to all age groups along with spouses and caregivers of VAMCenrolled Veterans.
- f. FEMA continues to accept applications for financial assistance for Covid-19 related funeral expenses incurred after January 20, 2020, which can go as high as \$9,000.
- g. Our VSOs continue to try to educate the Veteran community concerning Veteran Covid-19 Deaths and to have service-connected issues listed as contributing causes of death on the Death Certificates for surviving spouses to be entitled to DIC benefits and service-connected burial benefits.
- h. 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. Mike Salazar (Pocatello Office) resigned on September 3rd. Job interviews were conducted on September 8th and we hired Dan Arzola as our newest Service Officer. Dan officially retires from the Idaho Army National Guard on October 31 for 20 years active duty/AGR and had two deployments to Iraq.
- b. The VFW held its Advanced Skill Level Service Officer Training at Annapolis, MD on September 19-23rd which (7) of our VSOs attended. The remainder will be attending the Intermediate Skill Level Training in Annapolis which is scheduled for November 14-19th.
- c. Outreaches being conducted in all counties across the State.
- d. Due to the Executive Order mandating Covid Vaccinations for all VBA Employees (fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021), our OVA Office has been included within this Federal Mandate since we occupy office space within the VARO. Our employees have all been informed of this requirement.

Questions and comments from the Commissioners:

Commissioner **Callihan** asked if the Boise VAMC is failing to list the service-connected as a contributing factor on death certificates.

Answer: The primary issues are with St. Luke's, St. Alphonsus, and hospice services not listing contributing factors and comorbidities.

Commissioner **Grace** also asked about the claims backlog at the VA, a follow up from the previous IVAC meeting in July.

Answer: The Backlog has been significantly reduced. The VA is mostly meeting their goal to process claims within 120 days of receipt. Blue water navy claims and Military Sexual Trauma claims are the only claims that still cause problems with meeting that deadline and that is due to the complexity of those types of cases.

Business Support Services Report presented by **Paul Spannknobel**

Financial Report

- 1. 1st Quarter FY22 Average Cost Per Resident Per Day
 - a. Boise Home - \$445.67
 - b. Pocatello Home - \$483.84
 - c. Lewiston Home - \$381.03
- 2. 1st Quarter FY22 Quarterly Occupancy
 - a. IDVS Dom/Res Care – 48%
 - b. IDVS Nursing – 71%
 - c. Nursing Goal – 88%

3. FY22 Year-to-Date Nursing Occupancy Rate
 - a. ISVH Average – 71%
 - i. Boise Home – 71%
 - ii. Pocatello Home – 63%
 - iii. Lewiston Home – 78%
4. FY2022 Appropriation
 - a. Total Appropriation – \$50,175,700
 - b. General Funds 2.5% (funds are in personnel, operating or trustee & benefits)
 - c. Closely watching cash flow
 - d. Utilizing CARES Act funds for any qualifying personnel costs.
5. FY 2023 Budget Request
 - a. Supplemental Requests for FY22:
 - i. Legislative Reappropriation for Post Falls and Cemetery Blackfoot Construction Projects - \$42,586,600
 - ii. CARES Act & Consolidated Act Funds Received Directly - \$681,000
 - iii. ARPA Funds Received Directly - \$2,317,300
 - iv. ARAP Funds From State Fiscal Recovery Fund - \$1,000,000
 - v. Veterans Contact List - \$35,000
 - vi. Veterans Cemetery Blackfoot Funding Realignment - \$0
 - vii. Veterans Home Post Falls COVID-19 Project – \$2,290,100
 - viii. Veterans Cemetery Boise Expansion - \$215,300
 - b. FY2023 new requests:
 - i. 1 FTP Reduction to Advance Governor’s HR Modernization Initiative (no funding reduction)
 - ii. Change in Variable Benefit Costs <\$71,700>
 - iii. General Inflation \$482,300 (average 5.4%)
 - iv. Medical Inflation \$251,500 (average 5.4%)
 - v. Contract Inflation \$4,800 (built into one contract)
 - vi. Replacement Items \$296,400
 - vii. Statewide Cost Allocation Plan <\$22,880>
 - viii. Office of Information Technology Services Fees - \$176,400
 - ix. Change in Employee Compensation - \$222,800
 - x. IT Equipment - \$473,600
 - xi. Loan Repayment/Tuition Assistance - \$90,000
 - xii. Additional Staff – \$59,150
 - xiii. New Equipment - \$43,000
 - xiv. Idaho State Veterans Home – Post Falls Operations Prorated - \$7,161,800
 - xv. ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Fund - \$0
 - xvi. Reappropriation Authority for several projects
 - c. Reserve Cash Balances will decrease if all appropriation is spent
 - d. FY2023 DPW Projects
 - i. Renovate & Convert Resident Rooms into Private Dwellings – Lewiston - \$50,000,000
 - ii. Expand Dining Room – Pocatello - \$795,000
 - iii. Replace Chillers – Pocatello - \$308,000

- iv. Roadwork & Erosion Control – Cemetery-Blackfoot – \$125,000
- v. Reseal Parking Lot & Fire Lane – Lewiston - \$120,000
- vi. Replace Concrete Sidewalks – Lewiston - \$75,000
- vii. Replace Water-Softener – Lewiston - \$43,000
- viii. Remodel Business Office – Pocatello - \$150,000
- ix. Remodel IT Room – Central Support – \$130,000
- x. Restroom Renovations – Cemetery-Boise - \$150,000
- xi. ADA Automatic Doors – Cemetery-Blackfoot - \$45,000
- xii. (OVA, Education, CSO & Cemetery Blackfoot)
- xiii. Veterans Contact List
- xiv. Reappropriation for All Construction Grants

HR Report

1. An IDVS Engagement Survey was conducted in July. It is an updated version of the Pinnacle Surveys that have been sent out in previous years, although this one is more germane to IDVS has a whole rather than focused on the Homes.
 - a. There was a 74% participation rate.
 - b. Average score was 3.9 out of 5.
 - c. Areas IDVS is succeeding:
 - i. Our staff feel their talents are utilized effectively
 - ii. Most enjoy the work they do
 - iii. Most feel they are provided the necessary tools to be successful
 - d. Areas that IDVS needs to improve
 - i. Communication
 - ii. Accountability
 - iii. Supervisory Training
2. HR Modernization
 - a. There are two Phases to Luma and Modernization
 - i. Phase 1 – Fiscal, Budget and Procurement pieces are live.
 - ii. Phase 2 – is the HR piece.
 - HR Modernization is really centralization.
 - HR staff will remain on-site, but their responsibility and reporting chain will be through the Idaho Division of Human Resources.
 - This HR consolidation will be very similar to the IT consolidation that resulted in the creation of ITS.
3. CMS Vaccine Mandate
 - a. Waiting for an announcement from CMS that will mandate COVID vaccines. IDVS will likely be the first state agency to need clarification regarding vaccine mandates.
 - b. Some concern that this could negatively impact turnover.

Questions from the Commissioners:

Chairman **Grace** commented about how interesting it is that the federal government has reached down to require vaccines.

Central Support Office Updates

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

1. Post Falls is on track to open in Fall of 2022.
 - a. The topping off ceremony was held on August 26, 2021.

- The governor attended.
- The Jacklin Family attended.
- Photos of the event were posted on the website.

Chief Administrator Remarks presented by **Mark Tschampl**

1. Follow up on his Top Priorities from July
 - a. Worked with DHR to get Market Equity Increases to ensure proper staffing in our Homes.
 - i. Staffing is key to our revenue.
 - ii. Trend shows an impending crisis. A perfect storm of health workers leaving the industry without an adequate number of new entrants into the career field.
 - iii. 10% increase in pay for key positions; can also hire at 10% higher.
 - iv. Approved for recruitment bonuses.
 - v. We have waiting lists for all three of our homes but are unable to admit due to lack of adequate staffing.
 - vi. We do have high employee satisfaction though, so we believe if we can hire that we can retain.
 - vii. In addition to the Market Equity Increase, we are looking at if we can gain approval from DHR for pay line exceptions. This would be in addition to the market equity increases and bonuses.
 - viii. Even with all of these requests we are keeping our eye on the budget to ensure it remains balanced and doesn't drift into the red.
 - b. Focused Outreach
 - i. Coalition building with other Veterans organizations, government agencies, and non-profits continues.
 - ii. Mitzi, our community outreach coordinator is leading these efforts.
 - iii. Working to bid out for an Idaho Veterans contact list
 - We have a list of 30-40,000 Veterans
 - The VA estimates there are 125,000 in Idaho.
 - We want to reconcile that and be able to reach out and contact them about their benefits.
 - 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

Recruiting is ongoing for the Vacant Commissioner spot.

Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, January 12, 2022.

Commissioner Callihan Motion to adjourn at 11:51 AM. Commissioner Gimpel seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:51 PM MT

Kevin R. Wallior
Management Assistant
Idaho Division of Veteran Services