

# Minutes for Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission

## January 11, 2024

### Hybrid In-Person & Virtually

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Call to Order – 8:30 AM MT

Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held on Thursday, January 11, 2024, at the Central Support Office (located at 351 N. Collins Road Boise, ID 83702) and virtually via Microsoft Teams.

#### Attendees

Commission Members in attendance: **Chairman Josh Callihan, Art Gimpel, Jinny Cash, Rockey Davis, Eugene Brown**

IDVS Staff Members in attendance included: IDVS Chief Administrator **Mark Tschampl**, IDVS Deputy Chief Administrator **Tracy Schaner**, ISVH-Boise Administrator **Rick Holloway**, ISVH-Lewiston Home Administrator **Mark High**, ISVH-Pocatello Administrator **Josiah Dahlstrom** (Virtual), ISVH-Post Falls Home Administrator **Amber Goodchild**, OVA Bureau Chief **Bill Heyob**, Idaho State Veterans Cemeteries Bureau Chief **Jacob Faulkner**, Business Support Bureau Chief **Paul Spannkebel**, Fiscal Officer **Debbie Spence**, HR Officer **Brianne Watkins** (Virtual), Community Resource Specialist **Mitzi Cheldelin**, Community Resource Admin Assistant **Marisa McCarter** (Virtual), and Management Assistant **Kevin Wallior**.

Number of Citizens in attendance: 0

#### Announcements

Amber Goodchild accepted the offer to remove the Interim tag and officially become the Post Falls Home Administrator.

Brianne Watkins was named the new Human Resource Officer for IDVS. Angie Hamilton remains in our organization as an HR Specialist Senior.

**Commissioner Davis** announced this will be his final meeting as an IVAC Commissioner.

#### Approval of Minutes

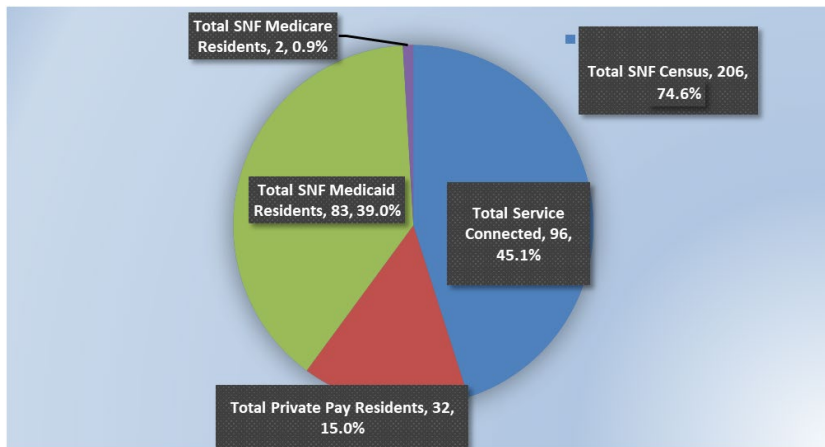
**Chairman Callihan** asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on October 26, 2023.

**Commissioner Brown** motioned for approval. **Commissioner Davis** seconded. The motion was approved with unanimous assent.

#### Division Bureau Reports

**Fiscal Report** presented by **Debbie Spence**

Census is solid. Idaho State Veterans Home Census is 74.6%, Idaho Skilled Nursing Facility average census is 61%.



PPD costs increasing.

YTD Per Diem (July '23 thru June '24)						
Nursing:	Costs	Census	Cost PPD*	Average Daily Census	Average YTD Occupancy Rate	
Boise	\$ 6,100,250.58	11,520	\$ 529.54	75.3	77.61%	
Pocatello	\$ 4,057,092.97	7,568	\$ 536.09	49.5	74.95%	
Lewiston	\$ 3,983,843.23	7,397	\$ 538.58	48.3	73.25%	
Post Falls*	\$ 3,077,344.38	3,329	\$ 924.41	21.8	34.00%	
	\$ 17,218,531.15	29,814	\$ 577.53	194.9	66.50%	

Cemetery costs increasing.

LUMA – continues to present challenges.

FY2025 Budget request was submitted. \$105 million budget request includes Boise and Lewiston Home projects.

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

	Census								
	Nursing Care			Medicare A		Residential/Domiciliary Care			
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	
October	2,396	77	97%	14	0.5	37	1	3%	
November	2,313	77	96%	24	0.8	0	0	0%	
December	2,409	78	97%	11	0.4	0	0	0%	
Total/Avg	7,118	77	63%	49	0.5	37	0	1%	

The last Domiciliary resident was discharged November 1. Currently in the process of relocating residents from the East Wing to the West Wing. Relocating the Secure Care Unit, as well.

Customer Satisfaction remains high despite the disruptions.

There were no DPW projects this past quarter, but major maintenance continues due to the aging building.

The annual American Legion food convoy raised \$35,000 worth of food and donations.

Residents are excited about the potential Boise Home rebuild, but the recurring theme is "they hope they live long enough to see its completion." The census is capped at 80 beds to accommodate the building schedule.

**Pocatello Veterans Home Report** presented by **Josiah Dahlstrom (virtually)**

Census up to 54, higher than the previous quarter average.

	Census				
	Nursing Care			Medicare A	
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
Oct	1,550	50	75%	5	0.2
Nov	1,530	51	77%	28	0.9
Dec	1,581	51	77%	41	1.3
<b>Total/Avg</b>	4,661	51	77%	74	0.8

Staffing continues to be a challenge but have had some great success with local clinicals and recruiting RN's and CNAs to join the Pocatello team. Openings are few (7 total in nursing but all others are full), in comparisons to quarters past.

Showcased a slideshow video of the various activities and events Veterans participated in during the previous quarter.

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

The Lewiston Census is consistent with previous quarters. 53 will be the capacity for Lewiston during the renovation project.

	Census				
	Nursing Care			Medicare A	
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
Oct	1,405	45	69%	17	0.5
Nov	1,424	47	72%	0	0.0
Dec	1,465	47	72%	0	0.0
<b>Total/Avg</b>	4,294	47	71%	17	0.2

Customer satisfaction remains high at the Lewiston Home.

Showcased a slideshow video of the various activities and events Veterans participated in during the previous quarter.

**Post Falls Veterans Home Report** presented by **Amber Goodchild**

Census increased from 24 in October to 31 by December.

Census					
Nursing Care			Medicare A		
Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	
Oct	737	24	36%	0	0.0
Nov	847	28	43%	0	0.0
Dec	950	31	46%	25	0.8
<b>Total/Avg</b>	<b>2,534</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>0.3</b>

Currently increasing staffing to open a 3<sup>rd</sup> neighborhood.

The VA conducted the recognition survey from November 7 – 9. Post Falls successfully passed and are officially VA certified. The surveyors praised the team for all the hard work, care, and dedication and expressed gratitude towards our veterans. They did identify a few issues but noted that they were already areas identified by us and that we have already implemented action plans.

January 22 – walkthrough scheduled for punch list to be fully, substantially complete, finally.

**BREAK 9:30 AM – 9:45 AM**

**OVA Report presented by Bill Heyob**

OVA statistics comparing 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter FY-2024 YTD totals to FY-2023:

	2024 YTD	2023 YTD	Increase/Decrease
Interviews YTD	4,733	4,007	+ 726
POAs Filed YTD	3,575	2,760	+ 815
Claims Filed YTD	6,916	5,651	+ 1,265
Appeals YTD	376	188	+ 188
BVA Hearings YTD	12	23	+ 11
 Veterans Seen by OVA in Vet Courts	 241	 232	 + 9
 State Emergency Grants Approved	 2	 4	 - 2

Notable changes from December 2024 and December 2023: December 2024 had 838 Office Interviews (+239), 935 Claims filed (+2) and 676 POAs filed (+225).

**Noteworthy Issues Currently Happening with the VA**

- 2024 Cost of Living Allowance Increase was 3.2%
- VA nationwide completed 1.97 million claims in 2023 with the goal of completing 2.4 million in 2024.
- Boise VARO currently staffed at 140 full time employees and approved to hire 32 additional.
- PACT Act presumptive claims make up nearly half of all pending claims within the VA (500,000). There are currently 1 million claims pending with 37% considered as backlogged.
- VA continues mandatory overtime for all VBA employees.

- VA has released official guidance to mortgage servicers calling for a pause on foreclosures on VA-backed loans. VA expects that any foreclosures filed since November 17, 2023 will be put on hold, along with any other in-process or upcoming foreclosures on VA-backed loans. The foreclosure process will be paused for these Veterans through May 31, 2024, giving additional time to these veterans to find solutions to stay in their homes. Veterans who are struggling with VA-backed mortgage payments can visit the VA Housing Assistance website <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/> or call VA at 877-827-3702 for assistance.
- Between 2011 and 2022, due to discrepancies in data matching, VA was unable to reliably verify the self-reported social security income of Veterans and survivors receiving pensions. When income verification resumed in July 2022, roughly 9,900 beneficiaries were determined to have higher income levels than self-reported. This resulted in VA pension overpayments which – in some cases – spanned many years. Recognizing the hardship and distress that these pension debts may cause, VA has paused the collection of all established pension debts and the establishment of new pension debts while we determine the path forward. Because this is a particularly vulnerable population of Veterans and survivors, VA is pursuing all available options to provide as much pension debt relief as possible. We will be reaching out directly to affected Veterans and survivors to let them know that pension debt collection has been paused while we pursue options for relief – and we will keep them updated throughout every step of this process. Additionally, to prevent issues like this from happening in the future, VA will be conducting a review to understand why the data discrepancies occurred and why it took so long to address.

### **Significant Events within the OVA**

- Personnel Changes- Jennel Binsky resigned October 5th and was replaced by Jessica Tegnell on November 27th.
- Darrel Homer (Pocatello) resigned on October 23rd and was replaced by Emberly Bertasso (was the Pocatello Administrative Assistant).
- Interviews conducted for new Pocatello Administrative Assistant on January 9, 2024.
- OVA created a new VSO position in the Boise VA Regional Office, and it was filled by Rodrigo Madrigal Vega. Rodrigo's 1st day was November 13, 2023.
- Currently working with IDVS HR to redesignate an unfilled position to create another VSO position within the Boise VARO.
- Rodrigo and Emberly will be attending the VFW Virtual Basic Training Course being held February 5-9, 2024.
- Outreaches being conducted in all counties across the State.

### **Veterans Cemetery Report presented by Jake Faulkner**

DPW or Major Maintenance:

#### DPW 20-606 Boise Cemetery Expansion

1. Memorial Wall-Stage 2 of concrete footings poured and stage 3 concrete forms in place.
2. Inground Urn Expansion-Realigning plots to match irrigation main line through field.
3. Space Force Seal- Matching stone and plaque have been ordered.

#### DPW 24-601 Boise Bathroom Renovation (6 Total)

1. Site assessment Completed.
2. ADA compliance assessment completed. Grab bars to be moved in all bathrooms.
3. Awaiting bid and schedule.

DPW 21-605 Blackfoot Maintenance Bldg., Public Bathroom/Conference Room, Memorial Wall

1. Shop is 95% completion.
2. Public bathroom/conference room plans are awaiting IDOPL/DBS approval.
  - a. Upon approval we will put the project out to bid.
3. Memorial Wall is 80% completed. Install of the frame and markers is complete. However, it does not achieve the desired appearance and are actively reviewing alternative designs.

DPW 24-600 Blackfoot Erosion Control

1. MOA signed with local farmer to farm additional 20 acres of unutilized land IDVS land.
  - a. This has been a huge success in both general appearance and operationally.
2. Developing landscaping plan for importation of mature trees, additional road access, flood mitigation.
3. Flood mitigation step 1, perimeter road graded to provide 1-2' berm and runoff channel.

Veteran Interments

Oct	Cemetery Boise: 47	Cemetery Blackfoot: 5	
Nov	Cemetery Boise: 43	Cemetery Blackfoot: 4	
Dec	Cemetery Boise: 39	Cemetery Blackfoot: 2	
<b>YTD</b>	<b>Cemetery Boise: 283</b>	<b>Cemetery Blackfoot: 37</b>	<b>Total Cemetery Bureau: 320</b>

Dependent Interments

Oct	Cemetery Boise: 21	Cemetery Blackfoot: 1	
Nov	Cemetery Boise: 20	Cemetery Blackfoot: 1	
Dec	Cemetery Boise: 16	Cemetery Blackfoot: 0	
<b>YTD</b>	<b>Cemetery Boise: 127</b>	<b>Cemetery Blackfoot: 6</b>	<b>Total Cemetery Bureau: 133</b>

Volunteer Hours

Oct	165
Nov	163
Dec	155
<b>YTD</b>	<b>1,134</b>
<b>2023 Total</b>	<b>2,673</b>

Other Important Events/Information

November – Veterans Cemetery – Boise held annual group honors ceremony.

December – Wreaths Across America ceremonies were held in both Boise and Blackfoot with great success. Wreaths Across America pickup will be held on January 20, 2024.

\$4 million requested in the Governor's budget to purchase 14 acres of land from Dry Creek Cemetery for future expansion.

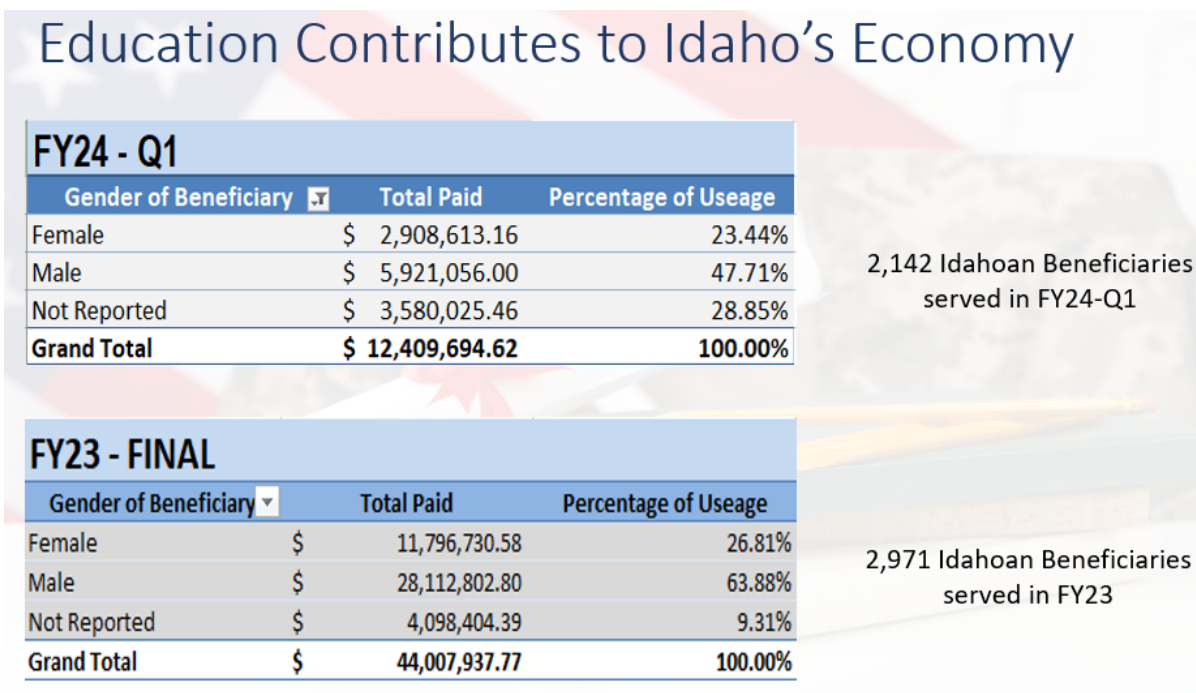
**Education Report** presented by **Paul Spannkebel**

Education Team are crushing it. Back to the foundation of credentialing.

Getting closer and closer to a full reimbursement from the VA.

Cooperative Contract Agreement with the VA:

1. FY24 Allocation:
  - a. A \$6,564.00 COLA adjustment accepted by the Idaho SAA and submitted to VA in December 2023 raising FY24’s allocation to \$211,692.00.
  - b. \$205,128.00 approved by VA in September 2023
2. FY23 Supplemental:
  - a. Submitted to VA on 12/4/2023, the Idaho SAA requested a \$76,149.62 supplemental for FY23.
  - b. This request is pending VA approval.



The Education Team oversees 387 facilities throughout the state of Idaho. Of the 387 facilities, each program approved by the Idaho’s SAA\* requires continuous oversight by the Education Team in way of:

- New program approvals.
- Annual program reapprovals.
- Program modifications.
- Program withdrawals.

Facility Type	Total Number of Idaho Facilities	Programs Approved	Net Change From Q4
IHL	20	674	54%
NCD plus Flight	41	165	-15%
Apprenticeships (APP)	179	24	96%
On-The-Job (OJT)**	137	0	0%
License/Certification & Prep-Courses	5	1	100%
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>340</b>		

\*\* No Change from previous quarters

\*State Approving Agency: AKA IDVS' Education Team

Recognition for the Education Team:

- The Idaho Veterans Chamber of Commerce recognized the Education Team as their Education Partner of 2023
- Received a Satisfactory Result from the from the Joint Peer Review Group (VA and NASAA) on 11/29/2023. This is the highest rate a state can achieve. Idaho is being used as an example nationwide on how to do things properly.

**Business Support** – presented by Paul Spannkebel

Brianne Watkins has been assigned as our new Human Resource Officer. Angie Hamilton will stay on as a HR Specialist, Senior with IDVS. Brianne is a full-time telecommuter located in St. Marie's, which sets her up in a prime position to serve the Lewiston and Post Falls Veterans Homes and OVA offices.

Blue Shield selected as the new Healthcare Provider for the state.

**Community Outreach** – presented by Mitzi Cheldelin

Events:

- Group Honors Ceremony: Hosted by the Cemetery, community partners come together to honor those laid to rest with deserved honors.
- Proclamations: World War II Veterans Recognition was read by Mitzi at the Warhawk Kilroy Coffee Klatch to a crowd of 250 veterans and 6 WWII Veterans present.

Engagement total 2023 calendar year:

- Veterans – 1,677
- Civilians – 251
- Mixed Events – 2,939
- Events – 44
- Counties Visited – 39/44



Highlighted Community Events this quarter:

- Boise Entrepreneur Week Veterans Track
- Homeless Veteran Stand Down
- Syracuse University Community of Practice
- Boise VA Women Veterans Health Fair
- Warhawk Air Museum GWOT Expansion
- Veterans Parade
- Eagle High Veterans Appreciation
- Marine Corps League Ball
- Mission43 Field House Ribbon Cutting
- Boise Police Department Crisis Intervention Training
- National Guard Yellow Ribbon Reintegration
- Wreaths Across America

Contributions through Outreach:

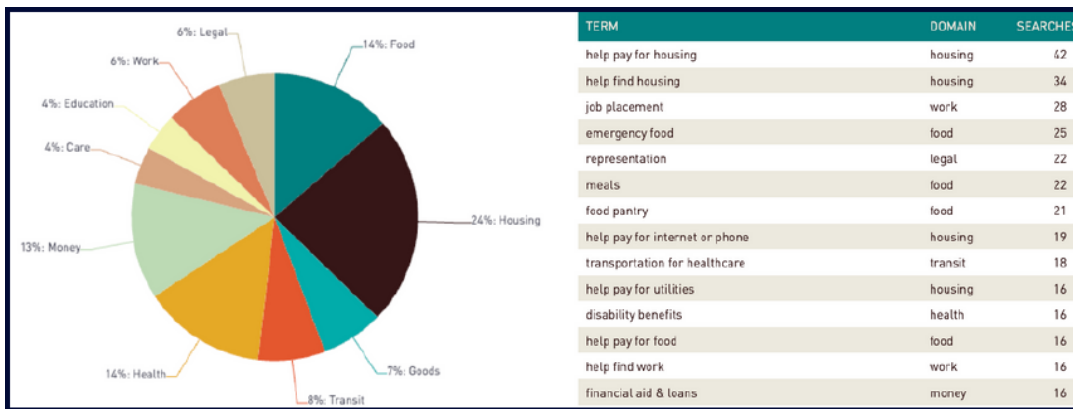
- Raised \$17,691.60 in direct Veterans Support thanks to Community Partners.
- A male veteran reached out in the Christmas program and asked for help staying in his home with 4 kids in place of presents. Between Vietnam Veterans of America and Operations Grateful Hearts, they were able to cover rent for the veteran and his family to stay in their home for Christmas while still making sure they had presents to open on Christmas. Not counted in this total is the incredible contribution of many organizations working together to make sure veterans in need had a complete Christmas and hot meals this holiday season.
- A female Navy reservist, who served 10 years, and was very proud of her service passed away but was ineligible for any VA burial benefits due to never being activated. Her family didn't have funds for an interment or burial marker. The Veterans community was able to raise \$4,000 to ensure she received a dignified burial and memorial marker in a private cemetery with her family.

Recognition:

- The Marine Corps League presented Mitzi with a medal for her contributions to Idaho's Veterans Community.
- The Boise Rescue Mission recognized and honored Mitzi for her contributions to Idaho's Veterans Community.

Ongoing Projects

- Governor's Challenge – Moving through year one of the Governor's Challenge setting up the framework for Suicide Prevention Initiatives in the state of Idaho. We seek to bring together existing support to reach all veterans in need with an all-encompassing approach to mental health.
- Idaho Veterans Guide – Report from October 1 – December 31, 2023
  - 58 Programs Added (4,204 Total)
  - 58 Programs Claimed (1,138 Total)
  - Programs by Area:
    - Local – 2,340 total
    - State – 952 total
    - National – 912 total
  - Top 5 Local Engaged Programs –IDVS, Office of Veterans Advocacy; Wyakin Foundation; Idaho Food Bank; St Vincent de Paul, Reentry Program; El Ada Community Action Partnership
  - Site Activity: 1,926 Searches, 817 Interactions
  - Site Search Trends:



- Joining Forces Idaho Expansion and Regionalization

## Joining Forces Idaho

[JFIdaho@veterans.idaho.gov](mailto:JFIdaho@veterans.idaho.gov)

- **Joining Forces Treasure Valley –**  
[JFTreasureValley@veterans.idaho.gov](mailto:JFTreasureValley@veterans.idaho.gov)  
 Ada, Canyon, Elmore, Owyhee
- **Joining Forces Central Idaho –**  
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 Butte, Custer, Lemhi
- **Joining Forces Eastern Idaho –**  
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 Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Bonneville, Caribou, Clark, Franklin, Fremont, Jefferson, Madison, Oneida, Power, Teton
- **Joining Forces North Central Idaho –**  
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 Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, Nez Perce
- **Joining Forces Panhandle –**  
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 Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai, Shoshone
- **Joining Forces South Central –**  
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 Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, Twin Falls
- **Joining Forces West Central Idaho –**  
[JFWestCentral@veterans.idaho.gov](mailto:JFWestCentral@veterans.idaho.gov)  
 Adams, Boise, Gem, Payette, Valley, Washington

## **Central Support Office Updates**

### **Deputy Chief Administrator Update** presented by **Tracy Schaner**

Amber was the interim Home Administrator at Post Falls since October. She was offered the permanent position in December and that will become effective this week, Sunday, January 14, 2024.

The Office of Geriatric Extended Care PACT Act Evaluations to determine health care gaps in skilled nursing, especially mental health care.

#### Veterans Home Projects

VA Home Construction Grant Deliverables – Only 55% of building materials needed for the project are made in America. This presents problems due to the constraints of the Build America, Buy America Act (BABAA).

- General waiver was suggested for budgets built prior to the passage of the BABAA.
- We were initially told that the Boise, Lewiston, and Pocatello projects would be waived under allowable provisions within BABAA. Now being told a waiver will not be approved.
- Still working through the waiver process. There is no more value engineering that can be done to the project. Without a waiver the Boise project is dead.
- Blanket waiver still possible for Boise by the February deliverables deadline for the grant.
- Partial waivers still possible for the Pocatello and Lewiston projects. Still intend to fight for full waivers for these projects, too.

Lewiston project nearing 100% design completion.

Pocatello project moving into design phase.

Lewiston and Pocatello are 8 and 9 on the priority list. Waiting to hear how much funding will be approved to determine potential timeline for projects.

#### NASVH Presidency

Attended the Veterans Day Ceremony in Washington, DC. Presented a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery. Attended a luncheon at the White House. As a part of this trip, met with the VA Under Secretary. They were very receptive to NASVH concerns. Progress made since the meeting. The VA Secretary will be attending the NASVH mid-winter Conference.

### **Chief Administrator's Remarks** presented by **Mark Tschamp**

#### Legislative Issues

Next budget we will likely need to request an increase of \$1-2 million in general funds. We've been using cash reserves in recent years but beginning next year we will no longer have the cash reserves for that to be an option. Inflationary costs are outpacing VA reimbursement.

#### IDVS Bills

Space Force being added to the definition of Armed Forces in Idaho Code. It will reflect the definition in Title 10 USC.

Unclaimed Property in Idaho Veterans Homes. This bill we ran last year but never made it through the full process before sine die. This will align our code to the Idaho Unclaimed Property Act. Specifically, about tangible property left in the Home as intangible property falls under existing provisions of the Unclaimed Property Act.

Rules Change to IDAPA 21.01.04, *Rules Governing Idaho State Veterans Cemeteries*. This is a fee-based rule change which will implement the Guard & Reserve Burial Equity Act. This will allow non-Veteran Guard and Reserves to be buried in the State Veterans Cemeteries. They will have to pay for the cost of burial which is equivalent to the VA burial benefit.

None of these bills or rules changes are controversial. Anticipate all will be approved.

Commissioners asked that we discuss with Idaho Fish and Game about limiting the Special Big Game tag program to disabled Idaho Veterans only.

## **New Business**

Commissioner Rockey Davis has decided not to renew his appointment. Please do outreach to any potential candidates that you think would be a good fit to join the Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission.

The next IVAC meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, April 10, 2024, in Boise.

Suggested the July IVAC meeting be held in Lewiston.

**Chairman Callihan** is open to a motion to adjourn. **Commissioner Brown** motioned to adjourn at 11:10 AM MT. **Commissioner Cash** seconded. The motion was approved with unanimous assent.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:30 AM MT

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Kevin R. Wallior  
Management Assistant  
Idaho Division of Veteran Services