

VETERANS SERVICE-MEMBERS & FAMILIES COORDINATION COUNCIL/MYVA COMMUNITY/COMMUNITY VETERANS ENGAGEMENT BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 16, 2018

In Attendance:

David Brasuell, Co-Chairman, Idaho Division of Veterans Services
Representative James Holtzclaw, Idaho State Legislature
Kathy Malin, Director, Boise VARO (VBA rep)
David Wood, Director, Boise VAMC (VHA rep)
Joshua Callihan, Boise VAMC (USMC Veteran Representative)
Terry Tippery, Boise Vet Center
Pamela Langley, US Department of Labor VETS
Brent Ferro, US Department of Labor VETS
Bill Reed, Idaho Department of Labor
LTC Doug Uphoff, Idaho National Guard
CMSgt Tisha Larson, Idaho Air National Guard
Mindy Pruit, Idaho Air National Guard
Kristie Harrison, Idaho Air National Guard Family Programs
Ross Edmunds, Department Health & Welfare
Bryan Madden, Mission43
Tony Torres, Mission43 & Hire Heroes USA, Idaho Region
Sheila Warner, Mission 43 & Hire Heroes USA, Idaho Region
Christina Iverson, Idaho Supreme Court Veterans Treatment Courts
Daniel McQuesten, Air Force Reserve Representative
Tracy Schaner, Deputy Administrator, Idaho Division of Veterans Services
Kevin Wallior, Idaho Division of Veterans Services, Exec Assistant

Next meeting: TBD/Spring 2018

Meeting called to order at 9:30 AM

I. WELCOME – INTRODUCTIONS – ANNOUNCEMENTS

- One by one, all attendees identified themselves and their organizations.

II. BRIEFINGS

David Brasuell – IDVS

- Idaho leads the nation in electronic claims submitted to the Veterans Benefits Administration.
- The Basque Museum & Cultural Center opened a new exhibit honoring Basque military and veterans.
 - The Basque Museum and Cultural Center's newest exhibit, Abertzaleak: Sacrifice and Honor, honors Basques and their military service in not only the U.S. military, but also the Basque, Spanish and French militaries. It showcases unique stories of prisoners of war, victory and loss, women's unique roles, home front support, and more.
- The Idaho Veterans Memorial Project officially launched since the last meeting.
 - Utilizing HistoryPin.org the Idaho Division of Veterans Services has digitized and brought into the 21st century an old Memorials & Monuments booklet that Idaho originally published in the 1990s.
 - This project is ongoing and collaborative. It utilizes the support of the community to compile all the many ways Idahoans honor veterans and military service.
 - There are currently 51 pins and the project has been viewed more than 500 times.
 - The Governor released a press release about the project in conjunction with Memorial Day.
 - IDVS was given an opportunity to speak about the project on Doug Petcash's Sunday Morning program *Viewpoint*. The interview is available here <http://www.ktvb.com/news/local/viewpoint/viewpoint-greenbelt-damage-memorials-and-monuments-project-/452242285>
 - You can learn more about the project at <http://veterans.idaho.gov/memorials> or visit the collection at <https://www.historypin.org/en/idaho-veterans-memorials/>

- The FY19 Budget is a maintenance budget. May need to request funding for additional service officers in a future budget.
- The Idaho National Guard has a new adjutant general Brigadier General Michael J. Garshak
 - Change of Command was conducted on November 5th.
 - He is Idaho's 25th adjutant general.
- Beginning Veterans Day, the Exchange, the Department of Defense's oldest and largest military retailer, extended to all honorably discharged Veterans a lifelong online military exchange shopping benefit.
 - Information about this new benefit can be accessed at <https://www.shopmyexchange.com/veterans>.
- Legacy Corps for Veterans and Military Families is seeking volunteers.
 - Legacy Corps is a volunteer-powered program supporting family caregivers, with an emphasis on the unique needs of veteran and military families. Highly trained, vetted and committed volunteers provide companionship respite, caregiver education and networking opportunities, and linkages to community and veteran resources.
 - Applications accepted through November 13th for New Volunteer Orientation beginning November 15-17, 2017
 - Applications accepted through January 16th for New Volunteer Orientation beginning January 24-26, 2018
 - To volunteer visit <http://www.jannus.org/program/legacy-corps/>.
- The Idaho State Veterans Home demographics are shifting from World War II and Korean War era veterans to Vietnam War era veterans.
- Statutory change to reflect the addition of a new State Veterans Cemetery.
 - Provide Proper Nomenclature to Any State Veterans Cemetery
- Technical Corrections to Idaho Code Sections: 54-1144, 65-107, 65-108, 65-202, and 65-204.

Christina Iverson – Idaho Supreme Court Veterans Treatment Courts

- There are Veterans Treatment Courts located in six of seven Judicial Districts in Idaho.
- Continue to seek peer mentors.
- Trauma and mental health services provided to individuals in the Veterans Treatment Court program.
- First week of December conducting a meeting with all Sheriff's Departments around the state.
 - Seeking to standardize collection of information for veterans.
 - Connect them with service officers in their counties to better serve veterans going through the legal process.

Ross Edmunds – Department of Health & Welfare

- Crisis Centers currently located in Northern, Eastern, and South-Central Idaho. Goal is to have them located in each region.
- These are 23-hour facilities, but if a patient who checks in needs additional time the facilities will check them out and then recheck them in to restart the 23-hour clock for care.
- Approximately 15-25 percent of patients are veterans.
- State Hospital South in Blackfoot provides psychiatric inpatient treatment and skilled nursing care for Idaho's adult and adolescent citizens with the most serious and persistent mental illnesses.
 - Seeking to increase resources available to treat adolescent psychiatric patients.

Pamela Langley and Brent Ferro – US Department of Labor VETS

- Historically low unemployment, but particularly among Veterans.
- HIRE Vets Medallion Program
 - The Honoring Investments in Recruiting and Employing American Military Veterans Act of 2017 was signed on May 5, 2017.

- Requires the Secretary of Labor to establish a program, by rule, that recognizes employer efforts to recruit, employ, and retain veterans.
- Different awards for large employers (500+ employees), medium employers (51-499 employees), and small employers (50 or fewer employees).
- Two award tiers: Gold and Platinum.
- This award program is separate from the ESGR Employer Award (<https://www.esgr.mil/Employers/Employer-Awards>).
- More information regarding the HIRE Vets Medallion program can be found at <https://www.dol.gov/vets/hirevets/>

Bill Reed – Idaho Department of Labor

- Veterans Unemployment is 2.7% compared to the National Unemployment rate of 4.1%
- Idaho's Veteran Unemployment rate is 2.5% and overall unemployment is 2.8%
- Four Veterans Job Fairs were conducted across the state prior to Veterans Day.
 - Goal of 100 veterans hired.
 - 100 employers participated
 - 175 veterans attended
- Idaho approved for three additional Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER)
 - Waiting on national budget to implement.
 - One each will be placed in Boise, North Idaho, and Southeastern Idaho.

David Wood – VA Medical Center

- Secretary Shulkin's Priorities
 - Choice Program
 - Modernize Systems

- Focus Resources, shift 5% from lesser priorities to focus areas.
- 6 Initiatives for Boise
 - Pain Program
 - New comprehensive pain program to cover all aspects of pain management and work with Veterans addicted to opiates
 - Primary Care
 - Currently 14 staff vacancies (mostly nurses), Boise VAMC is focusing on filling those staffing holes.
 - Surgery
 - Will open a fourth Operating Room once they acquire the staff to support it.
 - Suicide Prevention
 - Expanding suicide prevention program.
 - Choice Program and Community Care
 - 32% administrative fee for TriWest to schedule patients.
 - Working on improving community care and reducing administrative costs by having Boise VAMC employees schedule appointments out in town for Veterans and work billing issues instead of Veterans having to work with contractors for the Choice Program.
 - Mental Health
 - Nationally VA is hiring 1000 additional mental health providers.
 - Locally an increase of 5.9 additional mental health positions in the Behavioral Health Clinic.
- Construction of the new Boise VAMC parking garage is ongoing
 - Digging finished in November
 - Garage expected completion date late 2018.

- Cardiac Cath Lab under construction
 - Slated to open in March 2018
- Twin Falls Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) renovated.
- Smoke Shacks located on the Boise VAMC have been relocated to less obtrusive locations for non-smokers.
- Plans to move the Gastrointestinal Care clinic in 2018.
- Psychiatric Care underwent renovation.
- Boise VAMC received a 6.5% increase to its budget.
- The Caldwell CBOC is the fastest growing clinic affiliated with the Boise VAMC.
 - Working to double the facility to size to serve increased usage.

Kathy Malin – VARO

- Currently, the average days to complete a Disability Comp Claim is 92.6 days
- Average days for first development of a compensation claim once submitted to the National Work Queue is 7 days
- Automated Dependency Claims and Correspondence other than Decision Letters.
- Boise VARO increased timeliness without a reduction in quality.
 - Currently 25-30% of all work performed at the Boise VARO is for Idaho Veterans
 - This year was the most productive year that the Boise VARO has ever had in the number of claims rated
- Boise VARO hired 10 new claims processors.
- Boise VARO has been selected to be one of the test sites for Centralized Printing.
 - Boise VARO will not print decision letters or development letters, instead they will be sent electronically elsewhere to be printed and mailed.

- Staffing increases at VA Call Centers have significantly reduced phone issues.
 - The previous 59% blocked call rate was reduced to a 0% blocked call rate.
 - Duration of call waiting was reduced to approximately 39 seconds.
- New Appeal Legislation
 - new process is expected to shorten the average wait time for final appeal decisions.
 - There will be three lanes
 - Local Higher-Level Review Lane - where a new VA supervisor reviews the same evidence considered by the original claims processor.
 - New Evidence Lane - where the veteran submits new evidence for review and has a hearing.
 - Board Lane - where the appeal transfers immediately to the Board of Veterans Appeals

Lieutenant Colonel Doug Uphoff – Idaho National Guard

- Located Citizen Soldier for Life counselors in Idaho Falls and Post Falls.
 - The Army National Guard - Citizen Soldier for Life (CSFL) program prepares and connects service members with financial and employment services, to enhance readiness and boost resilience. The program focuses on Initial Entry Training (IET) populations through the Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP) in addition to offering services to all National Guard members and their Immediate Families who may be seeking civilian employment and financial assistance.

Chief Master Sergeant Tisha Larson – Idaho Air National Guard

- The largest single deployment ever for the Air National Guard returned.
 - Those individuals have or will seek benefits for which they are now eligible for, likely from some of the offices represented at this meeting.
- The Idaho National Guard has a new adjutant general Brigadier General Michael J. Garshak

- Change of Command was conducted on November 5th.
- Major General Gary Sayler will be missed. He was a great leader and asset to the state of Idaho.
- The 2016 National Defense Authorization Act, required 20 percent of all Title 32 status military technicians, working for the state in uniform and available for mobilization, be converted to Title 5 status, making them federal civilian employees and no longer accessible to the adjutant general.

Note: The following is from further research following the VSMF Meeting

Excerpt from *Conversion of Title 32 Technicians to Title 5 Civilian Employees Background and Concerns* from the National Governors Association regarding the impact of this policy

<https://meetings.nga.org/files/live/sites/meetings/files/resources/CoG/MiltechBackgroundPaper.pdf>

- Degraded state control of its full-time force
 - Section 1053 changes the statutory role of the adjutants general as the sole agent and final appeal authority for certain personnel actions affecting all Title 32 military technicians.
 - Hiring authorities for Title 5 civilian employees fall outside the purview of the state which will cause undue duplication of resources and substantial delays in filling critical positions.
 - Section 1053 increases federal costs and makes adverse personnel actions more complicated due to Title 5 regulations and increased appeal rights under the Merit Systems Protection Board.
- Increased costs
 - The additional management burden of this new population of Title 5 federal employees drives up costs. Unlike federal technicians, Title 5 employees also have the option of receiving overtime pay and certain retention bonuses.
- Reduced National Guard readiness and unit cohesion.
 - Section 1053 eliminates key developmental positions for military members, reducing adjutants' general flexibility in managing a blended full-time/part-time force and potentially driving stagnation in critical positions encumbered by Title 5 federal employees.

- The 0300 occupational series (i.e. general administrative, clerical and office support) is used throughout the Guard for critical leadership and program management positions such as wing commanders, directors, aircraft maintenance officers, brigade and battalion administrative officers, and logistics management specialists.
 - Changing the legal status and oversight of these positions would interrupt the continuity and knowledge flow between the weekday and weekend National Guard force due to the loss of synergy from the military affiliation of DS technicians.
 - It would also disrupt DS technicians' support of their military compatible functions that enable seamless continuity to units when mobilized and deployed.
- Decreased state emergency response capacity
 - Title 5 civilian employees cannot be used in state emergency responses. State emergency response capabilities will therefore be severely degraded by diminishing the number of DS technicians governors can order to State Active Duty in times of domestic crisis.

Kristie Harrison – Idaho Air National Guard Family Programs

- Yellow Ribbon Program to bring all resources to returning deployed Guard & Reserve members.
 - Five events planned from January through August
- Another National Guard deployment is upcoming.
 - More Yellow Ribbon program events will be scheduled following the return of that deployment.

Terry Tippery – Boise Vet Center

- Vet Centers in the region sent 11 staff members to Las Vegas following the tragic shooting at the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival on October 1, 2017.
 - Mobile Vet Centers were also sent down to assist in counseling and support services for the victims and their families.
- Mobile Vet Centers continue to travel to communities around the state to provide services otherwise unavailable to veterans.
- Met 99.33% of the expected/projected need.

- Homeless Veterans Stand Down scheduled in Nampa for Spring 2018.
- Vet Center launched an independent study into suicide prevention.
- Expansion of Vet Center services to non-combat veterans who:
 - Experienced a military sexual trauma;
 - Provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services, while serving on active military duty, to the casualties of war, or;
 - Served as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility.

Tony Torres –Mission 43, Hire Heroes

- 1700 Members signed up
- Two biggest concerns of veterans signed up is unemployment and under-employment.
- Mission 43 will operate an office in the Caldwell Veteran Memorial Hall.
- Initial 3-year Goal
 - 300 veterans and spouses hired, average annual salary approximately \$45,000
 - In 18 months of operating in Idaho:
 - 243 veterans and spouses hired
 - Average approximately \$53,000 annual salary
 - Hired across 26 industries
 - Only 3% hired out of state.
- 5 upcoming workshops
 - 2 veteran specific workshops
 - 1 spouse specific workshop
 - 1 federal employment specific workshop

- Looking for veteran volunteers to mentor and assist as needed with the Hire Heroes mission.

Representative Holtzclaw – Legislative Update

- Wants Idaho to embrace April as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month
- Continues to work and build support for tax reduction for military retirees and disabled veterans. There are not enough votes yet to successfully pass legislation regarding taxation on military retirement pay.
- Representative Holtzclaw was curious about how military retirement pay and VA disability pay are related? How do they impact a veteran eligible for both?
 - Enacted under the National Defense Authorization Act for 2003; select veterans who are retired from military service and have service connected disabilities are entitled to both retirement pay and VA disability compensation.
 - Concurrent Retirement and VA Disability Pay (CRDP)
 - Eligibility for CRDP:
 - Active Duty retiree with a VA disability rating of 50% or more,
 - Reserve retiree with 20 qualifying years of service with a VA disability rating of 50% or more
 - Retired under the Temporary Early Retirement Act (TERA) and have a VA disability rating of 50% or more
 - Disability retiree who earned entitlement to retired pay under any provision of law other than solely by disability and have a VA disability rating of 50% or more
 - Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) applies specifically to military retirees who have a service-connected disability rating of at least 10% that was directly related to a combat incident. Combat related injuries include:

- Veterans must apply for CRSC, it is not automatically granted and each service has its own application process.