

MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)
MEETING
SATURDAY, 20 JANUARY 2024
HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO TELECONFERENCE

Meeting called to order by **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1201**.

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation was led by **UVGO Chaplain**, Toni Cordell.

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 10 of 13

- **Regular Voting Members Present were:**

- AFA (Mary J. Mayer/Bill Tidd)
- AUSA (Bill Crist, Kevin Dial)
- DAV (Henry Hamel)
- KWVA (Dick Frey)
- MCL (Flynn Phillips)
- MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
- MOPH (Todd Swanson)
- NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
- VFW (Ron Ballard)
- VVA (Thom Weiss)

- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**

- American Legion
- PVA Tri-State
- 40 + 8

- **Other Voting Member Present:**

- UVGO Past Chair (Wayne Harvey)

- **Associate (non-voting) Member Present:** DAV Auxiliary (Karen Haltiner)
- **Officers Present (non-voting, unless representing a regular member organization):**
 - Chair (Mary J. Mayer)
 - First Vice Chair (John Lee)
 - Second Vice Chair (Henry Hamel)
 - Secretary (Marco Oswald)
 - Treasurer (Robert Haltiner)
 - Chaplain (Toni Cordell)

Other Attendees were:

- Dr. Nakeia Council Daniels (ODVA Interim Director)
- Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Director)
- Nicole Hoeft (ODVA Strategic Communications Division Director; Zoom Host)
- Gabe Maestas (ODVA Houseless Veteran Coordinator)
- Michael Eschete (non-affiliated veteran from Beaverton)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS: Chair **Mary J. Mayer** welcomed all members and guests to the third regularly scheduled virtual UVGO Meeting of the 2023-2024 program year. Chair Mayer extended a particular welcome to Dr. Nakeia Council Daniels, recently appointed to be the Director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA), pending Senate confirmation. The Chair stated that the National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV) has requested to withdraw from the UVGO as the organization is facing difficulties at the state and national level. The UVGO has invited Tribal Veteran representatives to attend UVGO meetings and hopes that this will happen in the future. The Chair affirmed that expanding the membership and active legislative participation of the UVGO were paramount strategic objectives for the current program year. The Chair asked members to review the UVGO Strategic Goals for the 2023-2024 program year.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

The motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 14 October 2023 UVGO Meeting be approved; the motion was passed unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that three members were delinquent in the payment of annual dues (DAV, KWVA and VFW). The UVGO beginning balance as of 27 September 2023 was \$5,190.39. A total of \$110 in income from dues (from the American Legion and AUSA) was collected. No expenses were incurred. The ending balance as of 20 January 2024 is \$5,300.39. The Treasurer reiterated that the UVGO fiscal year runs from 1 July to 30 June; annual dues are required by 1 July each year. The motion was made and seconded to approve the Financial Report of the 20 January 2024 UVGO meeting; the motion passed unanimously.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UPDATE:

ODVA Interim Director **Dr. Nakeia Daniels** stated that since the last UVGO meeting the ODVA has been extremely busy on several fronts:

- The ODVA Veterans' Advisory Committee met in December. The minutes of the meeting are published on the ODVA website. We have vacancies in the Veterans' Advisory Committee, and Dr. Daniels encouraged UVGO members to review the website and apply for a position.
- The Senate confirmation hearing for Dr. Daniel's nomination as ODVA Director will meet on 6 February 2024.
- Governor Kotek toured the Oregon Veterans' Home in Lebanon. In particular, the visit focused attention on the acute needs of Veterans as we undergo a generational core transition from WWII to Korean and Vietnam War Veterans.
- Dr. Daniels represented Oregon at a White House event in November for Veterans.
- Dr. Daniels stated that ODVA has a lot of challenges ahead as Oregon has the highest suicide rate in the nation among Veterans and ranks in the top three of states in Veterans' homelessness. Both issues are the highest priority for ODVA.
- ODVA also hosted partners from the national Veterans' Administration (VA).
- ODVA is advocating for a faster resolution of the issues and inconvenience caused by the implementation of a new VA electronic record system.
- With Legislative Director Jay DeFillipo, she testified before the House Veterans' Committee regarding the long road towards realizing a third Veterans' Home in Roseburg. The Governor supports this project and there remains strong legislative support. In particular, the VA has offered to make available an older, historic building on the Roseburg campus. ODVA will conduct an assessment study to determine options for conversion vs. new construction. The conversion option will require substantial renovation to update the infrastructure for today's seismic code requirements, so the viability and cost study is a predicate to moving forward. The study should be done by Spring 2024. Responding to query, Dr. Daniels stated she is unaware of any formal initiative to close the Roseburg Medical Facility (VAMC), but she will inquire and report accordingly.
- ODVA Home Loan servicing software must be updated, and a project is ongoing.
- Dr. Daniels appreciates the liaison performed by the UVGO to communicate the concerns of many individual Veterans' organizations and its large number of Veterans represented.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

- ODVA Legislative Director **Jay DeFillipo**, stated that following the January legislative days discussed by Dr. Daniels, attention now focuses on the start of the 2024 Oregon Legislative short session (35 days), which starts 5 February 2024. The focus is on “catch-up” bills, adjusting the budget as necessary, and any emergency action. There will obviously be far fewer bills introduced, and we won't know what bills are introduced until only a few days before the opening session.
- Jay believes we may see initiatives regarding the third Veterans' Home in Roseburg, and perhaps for some fiscal measures regarding Veterans' issues. No indication so far of any large bills affecting the way we do business.
- Jay encouraged all to subscribe to the ODVA Veteran Bill Digest, which he creates every week of the active legislative session, by accessing: <https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Legislation.aspx> The hyperlink also provides access to all of the weekly legislative updates from the 2022-2023 long session, including the 30 June 2023 final closeout update. The digest will be updated weekly during the short legislative session.
- Jay stated that, immediately upon the conclusion of the 2024 short session, ODVA will transition to developing Legislative Concepts (LC), policy positions, and the biennial budget, all in anticipation for the 2025 long session of the legislature.
- Jay stated that combatting homelessness in Oregon is Governor Kotek's principal issue. Veterans' homelessness is a significant subset of the issue, and both conditions are on the rise, according to HUD annual survey. Acknowledging the contribution of PTSD and mental health issues to Veterans' homelessness involves an inter-agency approach for solutions. Both the Senate and House Veterans' committees are keenly involved. Dr. Daniels serves on the Governor's inter-agency task force for homelessness.
- The informal Veterans' caucus in the legislature still has a focus on various Veterans issues from previous sessions not carried into law ----- particularly initiatives involving tax relief for disabled Veterans (property tax) and military retirees (income tax).

UVGO LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:

- Legislative Committee Chair **John Lee** emphasized that the UVGO can only support legislation if there is unanimous consent among the voting UVGO membership ---- if just one organization objects, the UVGO cannot support the bill (but individual UVGO member organizations can). It is critical that, in our advocacy before the legislature, we advance those issues for which our organization really stands (unless we testify just for informational purposes). But we can only improve veteran's advocacy by judiciously “picking and choosing” our battles ---- to preserve our credibility.
- Remember, that in the upcoming short session, legislators may individually introduce only up to two bills (in the long session the limit is eight). John expects that, as in past short sessions, the House Veterans' Committee will submit an “omnibus bill” that bundles many of the proposed veteran's issues from the last session into a single draft bill. Expect very few, if any, veteran's bills to be passed in this short session, unless they

are commemorative. John expects to see bills involving the third Veterans' Home, modified exemptions for state property tax for disabled Veterans, and tax exemptions regarding military retirement pay. John stated that, in his experience, there is substantial individual Veteran opposition to such a proposal, and it would be difficult for the UVGO to support this. These Veterans are concerned that supporting such a measure would place other programs and benefits at risk in an effort to "pay" for tax relief. However, even if the UVGO is unable to unanimously support income tax exemptions for military retirees, individual organizations can advocate and testify before the committees in support of such initiatives.

- UVGO Past-Chair **Wayne Harvey** made a motion authorizing the UVGO Legislative Committee to support "in concept" any initiative which reasonably enhances the current property tax relief for disabled Veterans. The motion was seconded. After substantial discussion, the motion was **approved unanimously**.
- Legislative Committee Vice-Chair **Marco Oswald** stated that following a bipartisan press release on 29 November 2023 by Senators Thatcher and Solman, we can be virtually certain they will introduce legislation, similar to that seen in the last session, providing partial income tax relief to retired Veterans receiving a military pension. The bill is specifically designed to encourage military Veterans to retire in Oregon and has an age limit --- 62 years or younger. This targets today's generation of Veterans and those who served in our Forever Wars. It would provide an average reduction of \$1,500 in Oregon state tax for qualifying Veterans.
- UVGO Past-Chair **Wayne Harvey** made a motion authorizing the UVGO Legislative Committee to support this draft initiative to provide partial income tax relief to Veterans under the age of 63. The motion was seconded. After substantial discussion, the motion was **not approved [9 yea; 1 nay (MCL); 2 abstentions (VFW & KWVA)]**. The Chair emphasized that the UVGO would provide a copy of the draft bill, when available, and continue to monitor its progress.
- Marco apologized for the delay but indicated that a short survey to help ascertain member legislative priorities will be mailed out after this meeting with a requested response by 15 March 2024. The results from the survey will be discussed at the April 2024 UVGO meeting with a view to focusing our strategy and charting commonalities. How UVGO member organizations circulate and compile their responses to the survey is completely at the primary rep's discretion. Results and discussion from the survey will help the UVGO assign metrics to an area that is often hard to quantify.

MEETING RECORD: UVGO Meetings are recorded on Zoom. To request an emailed copy of the recorded meeting, please contact UVGO Secretary, Marco Oswald, at: viaboeca17@gmail.com

The next **UVGO Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, 13 April 2024** from **1200 to 1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1426**.

Respectfully submitted,

Reviewed by:

MARCO OSWALD

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