

MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)
MEETING
SATURDAY, 13 APRIL 2024
HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO TELECONFERENCE

Meeting called to order by **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1203**.

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 10 of 14

- **Regular Voting Members Present were:**
 - AFA (Mary J. Mayer/Bill Tidd)
 - American Legion (Kevin Owens)
 - AUSA (Bill Crist)
 - GSW (Nancy Menagh)
 - KWVA (Dick Frey)
 - MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
 - MOPH (Todd Swanson)
 - NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
 - PVA Tri-State (Don Hedlund)
 - VVA (Thom Weiss)

- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**
 - 40 + 8
 - DAV
 - MCL
 - VFW

- **Other Voting Member Present:**
 - UVGO Immediate Past Chair (Wayne Harvey)

- **Associate (non-voting) Member Present:** DAV Auxiliary (Karen Haltiner)
- **Other Attendees were:**
 - Nicole Hoeft (ODVA Strategic Communications Division Director; Zoom Host)
 - Joe Glover (ODVA Appeals and Special Advocacy Director)
- **Officers Present (non-voting, unless representing a regular member organization):**
 - Chair (Mary J. Mayer)
 - First Vice Chair (John Lee) (*Not present*)
 - Second Vice Chair (Henry Hamel)(*Not present*)
 - Secretary (Marco Oswald)
 - Treasurer (Robert Haltiner)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS: Chair **Mary J. Mayer** welcomed all members and guests to the final regularly scheduled virtual UVGO Meeting of the 2023-2024 program year. Chair Mayer extended a particular welcome to Nancy Menagh of the Gold Star Wives (GSW) of America, Inc, the UVGO's newest member. Nancy briefed the history, mission, and focus of the GSW. The Chair affirmed that expanding the membership and active legislative participation of the UVGO were paramount strategic objectives for the upcoming program year, which will involve a long session of the Oregon legislature. The Chair asked members to review the UVGO Strategic Goals for the 2024-2025 program year.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

The motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 20 January 2024 UVGO Meeting be approved; the motion was passed unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that only one member was delinquent in the payment of annual dues (VFW). The UVGO beginning balance as of 30 December 2023 was \$5,300.39. A total of \$165 in income from dues (from KWA, DAV, and GSW) was collected. One expense was the payment of the \$50 non-profit registration fee to the State of Oregon. The ending balance as of 13 April 2024 was \$5,415.39. The Treasurer reiterated that the UVGO fiscal year runs from 1 July through 30 June; annual dues are required by 1 July each year. Also, effective 8 May 2024, the official mailing address of the UVGO will be **Robert Haltiner, UVGO Treasurer, PO Box 411, Vernonia, OR, 97064**. The motion was made and seconded to approve the Financial Report of the 13 April 2024 UVGO meeting; the motion passed unanimously.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UPDATE:

ODVA Director for Appeals and Special Advocacy, **Mr. Joe Glover**, provided an informational brief of the ODVA's programs and initiatives to combat homelessness among Oregon's Veteran population. Joe is a Navy Veteran with two deployments to the Middle East. Slides for Joe's briefing are attached to these minutes. Briefing highlights:

- Oregon ranks fifth highest among states experiencing Veterans' homelessness, with approximately 1,575 Veterans experiencing some form of homelessness. Nation-wide, approximately 35,574 Veterans are homeless. Oregon accounts for 4.52% of that national population.
- Of Oregon's 1,575 homeless Veterans, 889 (56.4%) are **unsheltered** (e.g., sleeping on the streets) and the remainder are **sheltered** (e.g., couch surfing with a friend or relative). In the category of unsheltered Veterans, Oregon ranks #3 nationwide by percentage of unsheltered Veteran population.
- Oregon's overall homelessness population is estimated at 20,142; of which Veterans account for 7.82% while Veterans represent only 6.47% of the Oregon population. Regrettably, Oregon's Veterans are outpacing the general population in terms of homelessness, presenting a Call to Action.
- In alignment with Oregon Governor Kotek's priorities, ODVA established a specific program office with dedicated specialists to address Veterans' houseless.
- ODVA's houseless program integrates with ODVA, state, non-profit, and federal (e.g., the VA) programs and resources to apply a holistic approach to combatting Veteran homelessness.
- Emergency grants are the primary tool to timely address urgent Veteran houseless situations, including mortgage payment and rent assistance in the short term.
- ODVA networks community outreach to ensure that ODVA assistance and resources are known.
- ODVA Director of Veteran Houseless, **Mr. Gabe Maestas**, is available to all UVGO organizations for information and assistance; he can be reached at **GABE.MAESTAS@ODVA.Oregon.gov**
971-388-8219

ODVA Director of Strategic Communications, **Nicole Hoeft**, provided a leadership and legislative update for ODVA.

- Since the confirmation of Dr. Nakeia Daniels as the Director of ODVA, the organization has engaged in a six-month "deep-dive" operation to emphasize agency internal and external engagement and leadership stability, with an emphasis on recruiting and installing key leadership vacancies, such as the ODVA Deputy Director and Executive Assistant.

- In accordance with the Governor's priorities, ODVA is deeply engaged with 1) strategic planning and 2) DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) integration within ODVA's structure and operational mindset. An outside consultancy is helping ODVA analyze and integrate DEI principles and goals into its strategic plan for agency transformation for the future.
- ODVA, with funding from the Oregon legislature, has developed a new program of Veteran Suicide Prevention and Awareness messaging to broadcast through community and governmental partners.
- ODVA participated in the official groundbreaking of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
- VA Deputy Undersecretary Bradsher will return to Oregon to review VA Roseburg's implementation of the new medical records system for Veterans. ODVA Director Daniels will participate with ODVA in a supporting role.
- ODVA participated in the grand opening of a 34-unit veterans housing complex across the street from the YMCA in downtown Salem. The \$10 million dollar project is affiliated with the Family YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties.
- ODVA will honor Veterans this Memorial Day in a commemoration at the Oregon WWII Memorial on the grounds of the Capitol in Salem.
- On the legislative front, Nicole reminded members that, during the last short legislative session, Oregon formally committed \$35 million (or 35% of total projected costs) to construct a third Veterans home in Roseburg. The funding commitment allows the project to move to the VA's Priority One list of state Veterans' project eligible for VA funding. Currently, the VA Priority One funding list contains about \$1B in proposed projects; the VA's fiscal year program funding for these projects was approximately \$140M. Despite this wide gulf, Oregon's matching commitment represents the culmination of 10 years' worth of effort. When built, the third retirement home in Roseburg would add 154 beds to the inventory, which although still short in projected state requirements, adds significant capacity.
- ODVA is working internally to establish its submission for the next biennial budget submission, identifying new program and policy requirements, as well as legislative concepts.
- The ODVA Advisory Committee now has five vacancies (out of nine seats). ODVA has received many responses and is working to have a full slate on board in June.
- **Don Hedlund** stated that, even should the Roseburg retirement home become operational, the projected shortfall in retirement home requirements remains in the hundreds (citing the "Reed Report" projected requirements study, available online). ODVA and the UVGO should be strategically thinking about a fourth retirement home, given the long "flash-to-bang" timeline. A central Oregon location, such as La Pine or Klamath Falls, is currently underrepresented. The Governor should be engaged now to explore the land acquisition issue as a first step. We should be proactive now, given the known shortfall. Nicole stated that a movement towards a fourth retirement home

would require legislative authorization, and she encouraged the UVGO to engage with ODVA's Legislative Director, Jay DeFillipo.

UVGO LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:

- Legislative Committee Vice-Chair **Marco Oswald** stated that the success of the state commitment for 35% funding for the third retirement home was a welcome victory during a short legislative session that otherwise produced no significant legislation advancing Veterans' interests.
- Particularly disappointing was the fate of Senate Bill 1549, a bipartisan income tax relief proposal by Senators Thatcher and Solman, specifically designed to encourage military Veterans to retire in Oregon. The bill targets today's generation of Veterans (age limit --- 62 years or younger) and those who served in our Forever Wars. It would exempt up to the first \$17.5K of military pension income from taxation and provide an average reduction of \$1,500 in Oregon state tax for qualifying Veterans.
- The bill's trajectory illustrates the challenges we face as legislative advocates in Oregon's short session. The draft bill language was released to the public the Friday preceding the start of the legislative session's Monday opening. It was immediately assigned to the finance committee and scheduled for public hearing on Wednesday.
- Notwithstanding the short timeline, the bill garnered substantial written and oral public testimony, the majority of which was in opposition to the bill. Opponents argued the modest measure would not significantly affect retirement location outcomes and that funding associated with the measure might be more effective in other broader Veterans' programs. Missing in the record was an institutional voice ---- no Veterans' organizations presented written or oral testimony.
- Looking forward, Marco suggested that organizations who are interested in seeing this legislation reintroduced at the next legislative sessions (or some derivative form of Veterans' tax relief) write/advocate to Senators Thatcher, Solman and Weeks in support of the bills aims and to encourage their renewed efforts. Their contact information is attached to the minutes.
- A few individual honorific and licensing measures for Veterans were enacted.
- A challenge for the UVGO Legislative Committee will be to identify critical enablers and points of contact, at both state and nationally elected offices, that might influence the VA's priority consideration of our third retirement home among all other funding competitors. In addition, the UVGO must better anticipate priority legislative concerns (such as income and property tax relief proposals) at the upcoming long session and become more agile in responding.
- **Tom Majchrowski** stated that national MOAA is extremely interested in this issue and is engaging to coordinate state tax relief efforts. Recently, the state of New Mexico passed legislation exempting from taxation the first \$33K of military retired pay, and the state of Maryland is close to finalizing a similar measure.
- Marco stated that the UVGO survey to help ascertain member legislative priorities was previously provided to UVGO member organizations. About half of the responses have been received, so we will make a new push to get all survey responses filed. The results from the survey will be discussed at the 13 July 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.

- UVGO Immediate Past Chair **Wayne Harvey** stated that the UVGO was instrumental in the past in obtaining and preserving a specific financial set-aside for Veterans in Oregon's "lottery bill." However, the specifics of the implementation of the set-aside are elusive. For example, the lottery set-aside for Veterans was not intended to substitute for ODVA general budgetary funding. More perplexing is the belief that the set-aside is passed down to the counties by the ODVA and not expressly reserved for Veterans. Nicole stated the arrangement is a distribution to the counties based upon two elements ---- a set rate and a portion based upon the population. Counties must specifically account for the funding via quarterly reports. Wayne requested that an appropriate expert from ODVA provide an informational brief at our next UVGO meeting in July regarding the lottery set-aside and how it is distributed.

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 July 2024** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1422**.

Respectfully submitted,
MARCO OSWALD
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Reviewed by:
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2 Attachments