

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

Meeting called to order by **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1202**.

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 12 of 14

- **Regular Voting Members Present were:**
 - AFA (Mary J. Mayer/Bill Tidd)
 - American Legion (John Lee)
 - AUSA (Bill Crist)
 - DAV (Wanda Janus)
 - 40 + 8 (Lou Neubecker)
 - GSW (Nancy Menagh)
 - KWVA (Dick Frey)
 - MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
 - MOPH (Todd Swanson)
 - NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
 - PVA Tri-State (Don Hedlind)
 - VVA (Steve Wiley)

- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**
 - MCL
 - VFW

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

- **Associate (non-voting) Member Present:** DAV Auxiliary (Karen Haltiner)
- **Other Attendees were:**
 - Gary Battles (Navy League of the United States)
 - Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Affairs Director; Zoom Host)
 - Michael Eschete (Retired E-8 in the Marine Corps)
- **UVGO Officers (non-voting, unless representing a regular member organization):**
 - Chair (Mary J. Mayer)
 - First Vice Chair (John Lee)
 - Second Vice Chair (Henry Hamel)(*Not present*)
 - UVGO Chaplain (Tony Cordell) (*Not present*)
 - Secretary (Marco Oswald)
 - Treasurer (Robert Haltiner)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS: Chair **Mary J. Mayer** welcomed all members and guests to the first regularly scheduled virtual UVGO Meeting of the 2024-2025 program year. Chair Mayer extended a particular welcome to Gary Battles of the Portland-Blueback Council of the Navy League of the United States, a potential new UVGO member. Gary briefed the history, mission, and focus of the Navy League. 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 stated her belief that the UVGO is becoming more strategic and focused with its Strategic Goals for the 2024-2025 program year.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

The motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 13 April 2024 UVGO Meeting be approved; the motion was passed unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that the UVGO beginning balance as of 8 March 2024 was \$5,415.39. A total of \$110 in income from dues (from NCOA and MOPH) was collected. No expenses. The ending balance as of 13 July 2024 was \$5,525.39. The Treasurer reiterated that the UVGO fiscal year runs from 1 July through 30 June; annual dues are required by 1 July each year. Robert stated that the new official mailing address of the UVGO Treasurer 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 July 2024 UVGO meeting; the motion passed unanimously.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UPDATE:

ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, **Mr. Jay DeFillipo**, provided an in-depth briefing of the "lottery dollars" impact upon Veterans' programs and a brief overview in the absence of ODVA Director, Dr. Nakeia Daniels. Jay's lottery briefing is attached to these minutes. Highlights:

- The Oregon Lottery is an important adjunct resource for the ODVA and many other state agencies.
- "Measure 96" was an Oregon Constitutional amendment that was approved by Oregon voters in 1996. 83.7% of voters approved the amendment which, among other points, allocated 1.5% of the net lottery proceeds for specifically enumerated Veterans' services (see briefing slides for details). This earmark provided a substantial boost to funding available for Veterans' programs.
- For example, in the 2023-2025 biennium, Measure 96 funding allocated approximately \$28.4M for Veteran services, the vast majority of which is either allocated directly to ODVA or passes through ODVA to the counties and Tribes. Other agencies are allocated funding within that amount for Veteran services under their direct jurisdiction, such as behavioral health, dental programs, specialty courts, and Veterans' outreach.
- The lottery dollar distribution within ODVA is at slide 3 of the briefing.
- Counties, Tribes, and national Veteran service organizations receive Measure 96 lottery funding to supplement their own Veteran Service Officer (VSO) programs.
- Occasionally, lottery funding goes to a special program; an example is the Courtney Place Veterans' Housing Project in Salem.
- Jay then dialed into each specific funding allocation to illustrate how the lottery funding is employed to support or supplement specific Veteran programs (see briefing slides).
- Past UVGO Chair Wayne Harvey expressed his concern regarding accountability for pass-through funding to the counties, asking what the "checks and balances" are to ensure that Measure 96 proceeds provided to the counties are in fact used for Veterans and are not diverted to other programs. Jay responded that ODVA absolutely imposes oversight on the counties as the Measure 96 implementing statute expressly dictates that the funding can only be used for specifically enumerated Veterans services. Counties account to ODVA on a monthly/quarterly basis, and ODVA monitors not only the funding destination but the expenditure "glide path" during the biennium.
- Wayne Harvey asked what the best method is to obtain audits or funding reports from the county in order to have oversight on how the Measure 96 allocations for Veteran services are actually being spent. Wayne expressed concerns that Oregon counties are

improperly diverting funds dedicated to Veterans' services. Jay said he would carry that issue back to ODVA for coordinated guidance in response. Counties have both a responsibility and a duty to use Veteran-allocated funding for only those mandated Veteran programs, Jay indicated. ODVA has various mechanisms (e.g., Veteran grant funding allocations) that require the counties to report back to ODVA on how the funding was spent and what are estimated impacts/results.

- 40 + 8 representative Lou Neubecker stated he has informally received similar reports of concern that counties may be diverting some funding from required Veteran services' programs.
- ACTION ITEM: Chair Mary J. Mayer requested that ODVA report at the next meeting the details of pass-through funding allocated to the counties, and what oversight mechanisms are employed to ensure counties are correctly applying funding allocated for Veteran services' programs. Jay stated that he would carry this request back to the ODVA Director and would also provide a link to a recent ODVA briefing provided to the legislature on this very issue.
- Jay reported that \$220K previously allocated for an externally contracted study of the fiscal implications of various tax relief proposals for Veterans is going to be returned to ODVA as it was determined that the Legislative Resource Office (LRO) has the capacity to do this in-house.
- Wayne also expressed his concern that, contrary to the original intent and understanding of the Veterans advocating for passage of Measure 96, the lottery dollar funding was intended to supplement and not substitute for regular ODVA agency funding.
- ACTION ITEM: DAV representative Wanda Janus expressed concern that certain ODVA programs ---- specifically the Veteran Transportation Grant ---- may operate inconsistently with DAV special missions to provide transportation to Veterans for medical and VSO needs. ODOT manages the grant funding (currently \$650K) to private companies and NSOs for Veterans transportation. Past Chair Wayne Harvey asked if ODVA could also report back at the next meeting the details of the Veteran Transportation Grant distributions to ensure that NSOs can inform Veterans of what specific transportation services are available and from which sources. Jay stated that he would consult with the ODOT grant manager responsible for the Veteran transportation program and see if an informational brief can be provided to the UVGO at the next meeting.
- AUSA representative Bill Crist stated it would be helpful if the feedback provided at the next meeting included a county-by-county accounting of state funding received for Veteran services and the number of Veterans serviced in that county.

- Jay reiterated that the Oregon legislature is the entity that allocates and manages the funding for Veteran services, and the ODVA is an executing agent. Jay stated that he sees a primary concern from the discussion today is the Veteran grant funding and oversight of the grant funding execution and results. Jay stated he would consult with the ODVA Director whether an informational brief can be provided at the next meeting that addresses these concerns.
- KWVA representative Dick Frey stated that county VSOs, who are employed by the counties, could be consulted as they would be in a good position to have knowledge of how pass-through funding is executed. Jay stated that the training of county VSOs is supervised by ODVA. Importantly, Jay reiterated that counties themselves provide internal funding for Veterans' services programs, and that lottery dollars pass-through by ODVA supplement county funding. State dollars earmarked for Veterans' services are expressly and strictly accounted for, while the accountability for internal county funding could be more problematic. Dick said he hoped that the subsequent briefing would help illuminate this issue.

Jay provided a short update on ODVA recent activity:

- The ODVA has operated at high ops-tempo since the arrival of Dr. Daniels, highlighting the success of securing the \$35M state funding guarantee for the 3rd Veterans' Home in Roseburg and the pivot to submitting a budget for the upcoming biennium. Agency budgets go to the Governor in August and become part of what is known as the Governor's Requested Budget (GRB).
- ODVA Director Daniels is fully engaged in strategic planning and agency outreach and engagement. In particular, ODVA has contracted with an outside consulting agency to help fully implement Diversity-Equity-Inclusion (DEI) goals.
- At the next UVGO session, Jay would be able to talk about some legislative concepts that ODVA is currently developing for the upcoming long session.
- PVA representative Don Hedlind remarked that VA funding execution for retirement homes is being hampered by national legislation that requires VA-funded homes to be sourced by made-in-America components and materials, absent a VA waiver (which has been problematic). For example, a VA retirement home project in execution in Idaho is sidelined by an inability to obtain a VA exemption for a foreign-sourced elevator shaft. Some components are simply not available in America or are several magnitudes more expensive than foreign competition. Don urged ODVA to get ahead of this issue. Jay stated that ODVA was well aware of the potential issue, and it is designing (and budgeting) the Roseburg home to avoid complications. In addition, federal legislative measures to minimize the impact of the restriction are underway.

UVGO LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:

- Legislative Committee Vice-Chair **Marco Oswald** thanked members for completing the UVGO Legislative Survey (14 organizations/voting members responded). He narrated a slide presentation (attached) that illustrated the results to each of the questions asked and which provided a clear path to discerning potential strategic objectives for the UVGO. According to survey responses, results indicated that the UVGO's highest legislative priorities should be directed to:
 1. Suicide reduction.
 2. Veteran homelessness.
 - 3A (same priority). Property and income tax exemptions.
 - 3B (same priority). Disabled and special needs.
 4. 3rd Veterans' home in Roseburg.
- Marco also noted that UVGO responders provided very cogent issues for further consideration which are enumerated in the last slide of the presentation.
- Chair Mary J. Mayer thanked members for their participation in the survey and expressed her belief that the survey results point to a clear way ahead.
- MOAA representative Tom Majchrowski remarked that at a recent meeting with national representatives of Oregon's Veteran committees, the highest priorities expressed were combatting Veteran suicide and homelessness, which appears to be a validation of the UVGO results.
- Chair Mayer stated that today's briefing slides (lottery dollars and survey results) will be sent out to members in advance of the normal mailings for the next meeting.
- Marco concluded with an update to Oregon Senator Thatcher's (R-District 11) legislative efforts to enact a bill providing income tax exemptions for Veterans. SB1549, which was not enacted in the last short session, will be reintroduced in similar fashion in the upcoming long session, including SBP beneficiaries and the previous limitations on age (63 and younger) may be removed entirely. The UVGO Legislative Committee will report further at the next meeting and encouraged individual UVGO organizations to be poised and prepared in advance of the next legislative session to express support for the measure. However, in the meantime, UVGO member organizations are encouraged to contact Senators Thatcher and Sollman, the sponsors of the bill, and Senator Mark Meeks (a Veteran himself), to encourage their support of the measure.
- MOAA representative Tom Majchrowski stated that national MOAA has a staff member actively tracking Oregon's progress on this tax issue and engaging with legislative representatives and staff.
- PVA representative Don Hedlind stated that, as Oregon moves into a state representative election cycle, we as Veterans should challenge candidates on this issue and other critical Veterans' issues.
- UVGO First Vice Chair John Lee reminded UVGO members of the necessity to show up and support Veterans' legislation during public comment periods, noting that, at the discussion of SB1549 in the last short session, not a single UVGO member organization made a public appearance and testified in support.

- Chair Mayer emphasized that all of us must become more nimble--to be better able to quickly respond to legislative opportunities to advocate for Veterans' issues.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:

- Linn County established a Gold Star display at the Albany Veterans' Memorial.
- The Korean War Memorial Interpretive Center opened in Wilsonville.
- PVA Tri-State Chapter headquarters relocated from Salem to Silverton.

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, 12 October 2024** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1411**.

Respectfully submitted,
MARCO OSWALD
 UVGO Secretary
 42154 N River Dr
 Sweet Home, OR 97386
 Cell Phone: 541-409-4146

Reviewed by:
MARY J. MAYER
 UVGO Chair
 P.O. Box 13408
 Portland, OR 97213-4004
 Cell Phone: 310-897-1902

2 Attachments