

MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)
MEETING
SATURDAY, 12 October 2024
HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO TELECONFERENCE

Meeting called to order by **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1200**.

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 10 of 14

- **Regular Voting Members Present were:**
 - AFA (Mary J. Mayer/Bill Tidd)
 - AUSA (Bill Crist)
 - DAV (Kari Parisi)
 - GSW (Nancy Menagh)
 - KWVA (Dick Frey)
 - MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
 - MOPH (Todd Swanson)
 - NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
 - VFW (Greg Arnold)
 - VVA (Thom Weiss)

- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**
 - American Legion
 - Marine Corps League
 - PVA
 - 40 + 8

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

- **Associate (non-voting) Member Present:** DAV Auxiliary (Karen Haltiner)

- **Other Attendees were:**
 - Dr. Nakeia Daniels (ODVA Director)
 - Mr. Jamal T. Fox (ODVA Deputy Director)
 - Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Affairs Director; Zoom Host)
 - RJ Navarro (Veterans Caucus Coordinator)
- **UVGO Officers (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*)
 - 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 second regularly scheduled virtual UVGO Meeting of the 2024-2025 program year. The Chair affirmed that focusing on our strategic goals, expanding the membership, and active legislative participation of the UVGO were key objectives for the upcoming program year, which will involve a long session of the Oregon legislature.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

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

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that the UVGO beginning balance as of 11 October 2024 was \$5,525.39. A total of \$302.50 in income from dues was collected. No expenses. The ending balance as of 11 October 2024 was \$5,827.89. The Treasurer reiterated that the UVGO fiscal year runs from 1 July through 30 June; annual dues of \$55.00 are required by 1 July each year. Currently, eight member organizations owe dues. Robert stated that the new official mailing address of the UVGO Treasurer will be **Robert Haltiner, UVGO Treasurer, PO Box 411, Vernonia, OR, 97064.**

Thom Weiss (VVA) noted that according to Robert's Rules of Order, it is not necessary for the general membership to vote upon the approval of ordinary Treasurers' reports; only an extraordinary audit requires voting approval. Thom agreed to provide the Chair the references.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UPDATE:

- ODVA Director **Dr. Nakeia Daniels** introduced Mr. Jamal T. Fox, ODVA Deputy Director, who has recently assumed duties. Jamal briefly introduced himself and provided his background, which includes coming from a military family. Jamal's bio was included in the agenda materials.
- Dr. Daniels stated that a new Chief Operating Officer (COO) had joined the ODVA team, providing critical oversight of ODVA operations and staff.
- ODVA's current major focus is preparation for the upcoming Oregon government budget season, but are also keenly focused on maintaining momentum for the third Oregon Veterans' Home in Roseburg. We are ensuring all of the required documentation is received by the national VA in order for this project to be on the priority list for proportional 65% funding, which should be published in the Spring, 2025. We are also partnering with the Oregon Health authorities to focus on Veteran suicide prevention and Veterans in crisis remediation. This work is new to the ODVA, so it is a process. In light of the holiday season, which can be challenging for some Veterans in need, Dr. Daniels encouraged all of us to check-in with our "buddies" and colleagues, and their families.
- ODVA is working on a product ---- a guide, or a toolkit --- to contain comprehensive resources that responsible parties at the municipal, county and state level can access to combat Veteran Homelessness. In support, we are trying to better capture demographic data (which is often dated when published) in order to have more precise and real-time information on Veteran Homelessness. Chair Mayer welcomed the effort to better account for all Veterans in the state, self-identified or not, as it is an important demographic for resources and programmatic planning. Many prior service citizens of Oregon are confused by varying definitions of the term "Veteran," and hence are unaware of assistance and possible benefits available from ODVA.
- **Thom Weiss (VVA)** related specific issues concerning the spouse of a Veteran who died by suicide. Dr. Daniels welcomed feedback from the UVGO and individual members and said that ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, Mr. Jay DeFillipo, is the ODVA point of entry to ensure systemic issues are channeled to the appropriate office or ODVA official.
- **Nancy Menagh (GSW)** stated that a legislative focus for her organization was measures to better ensure that appropriate benefits are transferred to the surviving spouse in cases of suicide. In particular, if the Veteran has not formally applied for benefits, it is quite difficult for the spouse to receive them in a timely manner. More work needs to be done on causality, presumptive conditions, and escalation of disability to 100% for surviving family members of Veterans who fall by suicide.

- **Tom Majchrowski (MOAA)** asked if ODVA is notified of public events held by Oregon Members of Congress where Veterans' issues are discussed. Jay responded that almost always, ODVA is invited to attend and hence has awareness of these forums.
- **Wayne Harvey (UVGO Past Chair)** requested ODVA respond to two issues identified in the 13 July 2024 meeting (reserved lottery distribution and ODVA transportation funding). Chair Mayer responded that in an email to UVGO members on 11 September, she forwarded briefing slides from Jay DeFillipo responsive to the issues. Dr. Daniels stated that the issues touched upon very complex and multi-faceted layers, and that while ODVA attempted to answer the issues with the best available information, there may be some aspects that are not capable of being shared.
- Wayne detailed that his specific issue was with the accounting or auditing of lottery dollars disbursed to the counties that are specifically reserved for Veterans' programs. Wayne stated that he has received unofficial information that at least two counties were diverting some of these reserved funds to non-Veterans' programs. Dr. Daniels stated ODVA has statutory oversight, but it is limited and the counties have substantial autonomy. However, the allegation is troubling. And while ODVA partners and works closely with the counties, Dr. Daniels said, we must do so within the confines of our statutory authority. We cannot direct performance and execution of issues within the discretion of the counties.
- Wayne stated that at the genesis of the Oregon lottery bill, the UVGO advocated strongly and successfully to have 2% of the lottery proceeds statutorily reserved for Veterans' programs and issues. Wayne also expressed concern that lottery funding was not being used to support the DAV's Veteran transportation program, or not to the same effect as in the past. Dr. Daniels stated that investigation of inappropriate conduct by the counties is outside the scope of the ODVA charter. However, if there is a specific allegation of impropriety with respect to a ODVA Transportation Grant, there is a specific process by which the complaint can be received and addressed. The UVGO meeting is not the appropriate forum for ODVA to process an unattributed allegation of misconduct, we need to use correct procedure and jurisdiction (such as the Secretary of State, or the Governors' Office) to be fair to all parties. ODVA's Strategic Partnership division manages the grant programs, and a specific allegation of impropriety regarding the transportation grant should be addressed to them, Dr. Daniels said. Dr. Daniels assured the UVGO that ODVA listens to and is respectful of Veterans' concerns expressed in the meeting, but we cannot transform the meeting into investigatory proceedings. The materials shared to UVGO are responsive to the inquiry and represent the limit of what the ODVA can share with outside parties.

- Jay added that the ODVA receives quarterly reports from the counties regarding spending and execution of funding allocated for Veterans. Jay said that each county is different and executes Veterans programs within their jurisdiction differently, but in general, counties augment the lottery funding apportioned to them by ODVA with their own county funds. Within his experience, counties are very judicious to utilize lottery funding allocated at the state level strictly for Veterans' purposes. However, it is not unheard of that some county-origin funding augmenting state programming for Veterans' gets reallocated or reshuffled to another county priority. A question pertaining to such action by a county is better addressed to the county itself, Jay said.
- Wayne asked how might the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) be invoked to obtain additional information. Dr. Daniels stated that concerned citizens may make public record requests, using its procedures. But Dr. Daniels requested that ODVA pointing to the use of appropriate mechanisms to request information not be confused as any form of reluctance to share information in a transparent way----- quite the contrary, the ODVA and UVGO partnership is strong, positive and mutually benefits Veterans.
- UVGO Chair Mayer thanked Dr. Daniels and Jay for their support and partnership, and stated she will resend the ODVA materials responsive to the 13 July 2024 meeting issues *[Secretary's note – this email was sent to the UVGO on 13 October 2024]*.
- ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, **Mr. Jay DeFillipo**, stated that as indicated by Dr. Daniels, the agency is deeply involved in preparing the two-year (biennium) budget, to include grants, staffing, and programs. The process results in a budget proposal that goes to the governor's office. The final budget is expected to be released in December. There has been a lot of new energy pumped into ODVA across the state. Governor Kotek has energized her team to focus on Veteran suicide, homelessness, and taking care of Veterans in a holistic way. Once the budget is released, the ODVA portion will be posted to the ODVA website, which should be before the next UVGO meeting in January 2025. We also gearing up for the upcoming legislative days on 10-11-12 December, which should see a preview of the bills (legislative concepts) and proposals intended to be introduced when the legislature convenes in mid-January.
- Jay also recognized **RJ Navarro** on the UVGO Zoom call. RJ coordinates the work of the Veteran's Caucus in the state legislature. ODVA is also doing a lot of engagement with Veterans' legislative committees and individual members, with the goal of synchronizing efforts and ensure the agency's messaging is known.
- Jay said he wanted to provide additional information regarding the previous discussion which was directed to the Veterans Rural Health Care Transportation grant, which provides funding to recipients to provide transportation to Veterans to receive health

care at VA clinics and facilities. This funding is provided by lottery dollars reserved for Veterans --- ODVA does not even manage the funding, it is “pass-through funding” going through ODVA to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). ODOT manages the funding and executes the Veterans Rural Health Care Transportation program, and has oversight how those program funds are spent. Jay said that at the end of the last meeting, he forwarded UVGO concerns to ODOT regarding the potential detrimental impacts to the DAV. I have heard ODOT is working on the issue, Jay said, and he can forward along another request for information.

- **Todd Swanson (MOPH)** reminded the group that he now lives in Salem and is available to attend legislative meeting or carry messages as needed. Jay said that the UVGO’s active intervention before the committees on the “cremains bill” during the last long legislative session was critical and helped ensure passage of a very “tough” bill. Jay encouraged the UVGO or its constituent members to actively participate before the legislative committees ----- either by live testimony before them or by written submission into the record. The OLIS website publishes all Veteran committee activities and upcoming events. Jay further encouraged members to sign up for his Legislative Update, via the ODVA website:

https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/ORDVA/subscriber/new?topic_id=ORDVA_30

Jay expects the first digest report will be mid-January 2025

- Thom asked Jay whether “Purple Heart” benefits are executed through “pass through” lottery funding goes to the Department of Education for. Jay said he would research and provide information to the UVGO Chair for distribution on this issue and 100% disabled educational funding.

UVGO LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:

- Legislative Committee Vice-Chair **Marco Oswald** thanked Jay and emphasized the critical importance of subscribing to and reviewing his Legislative Bill Digest.
- Marco presented information (attached) on sources available concerning statistical data on Veterans. Statistical data is critical for advocacy but to achieve maximum impact the data must be current and consistent. Two sources of statistical data on Veterans that are useful for our advocacy are:
 - 1) Information brief by the ODVA Director to the Oregon legislature, the most current of which can be found at <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/mediaplayer/?clientID=4879615486&eventID=2024091034> (briefing begins at 01:39:02). This data is the most current and cutting-edge information.

- 2) Veterans Data Central, collected by the NGO Housing Assistance Council (which is sponsored by Home Depot). It can be accessed at: www.veteransdata.info. While this data is very comprehensive, and provides a comparative view of Oregon's situation with respect to the other 50 states, a downside of the product is that it is based on Federal data which is often 2-3 years old.
- Marco stated that RJ Navarro, the Veterans Caucus Coordinator, had to depart our meeting earlier. We will try to reschedule him for the January meeting to speak about the Veterans Caucus in the state legislature and the projects/bills they are working on for the upcoming session.
 - Jay added that the Veterans Caucus has taken on new energy and organization under the leadership of Representative Thuy Tran (D-District 45). Not a standing committee, the Veterans Caucus is an informal alliance of 10-15 legislators grouped around the common thread of Veterans advocacy. There are two co-chairs (Rep Tran and Senator Mark Meeks (D-District 20)). Jay stated that currently there are 12 Veterans who participate, but even some members of the Veterans Caucus are not themselves members. The Veterans Caucus promotes legislation aimed at Veterans with letters of support to the committees and the governor, and were quite instrumental in the Roseburg third Veterans' home. Rep Tran is the interim chair of the House Veterans' committee and Senator Manning is both the chair of the Senate Veterans' Committee and a member of the caucus. As an agency, ODVA is invited to the Veterans Caucus meetings, which Jay attends.
 - Chair Mayer stated that the UVGO would attempt to secure the chairs of the House and Senate Veterans Committees as guest speakers for the next meeting on 11 January 2025 (presuming that permanent leadership assignments to committees have been made).
 - Chair Mayer stated that should circumstances warrant, the UVGO can always meet in advance of the next regular meeting.

GUEST SPEAKER: ANDREW HOLBERT

- Dr. Daniels introduced the guest speaker, Andrew Holbert, a Marine Veteran and passionate advocate for Veterans' issues. Andrew is the Director of Courtney Place, a unique housing development for Veterans, and presented an informational brief regarding the facility (attached).
- Courtney Place is an affordable 34-unit housing facility expressly reserved for Veterans. Veteran-tenants pay rent (it is not a homeless shelter or rescue facility), but rents are at subsidized housing rates as established by HUD. Rents are adjustable, but have remained stable since opening last year. There is a property manager and staff to

supervise the facility. Because of our location next to public schools, tenants have to undergo criminal background checks. Housing is pet-friendly and there are several ADA supported units.

- Tenants pay utilities; however, the units are extremely energy-efficient and costs are quite low. The facility is supported by one 14-pax van that is used for transportation for groceries and for field trips. We do not provide transportation to VA or other medical facilities.
- We advocate “more than just housing,” and are supported by volunteer tutors for educational programs, social services, and pro-bono legal assistance. We actively operate a peer-support program in our community room.
- Based upon the Courtney Place model, concepts are being drawn for an additional facility to help meet the deficit in housing for Veterans in need.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:

- November 22 Vietnam Veterans Memorial Phase I dedication, Salem. Fundraising continues for Phase II.
- Jennifer Ellis, POC for AVVA, may be a candidate for UVGO membership.

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, 11 January 2025** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1431**.

Respectfully submitted,
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Reviewed by:
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2 Attachments