

**MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)**  
**MEETING**  
**SATURDAY, 11 JANUARY 2025**  
**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 (Tim Cowan)
  - AUSA (Bill Crist)
  - DAV (Kari-Jo Parisi)
  - GSW (Nancy Menagh/Valerie Morey)
  - KWVA (Mike Williamson)
  - MCL (Flynn Phillips)
  - MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
  - MOPH (Todd Swanson)
  - NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
  - VFW (Gregory Arnold)
  - VVA (Thom Weiss)
- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**
  - 40 + 8
  - PVA Tri-State Chapter
- **Other Voting Member Present:**
  - UVGO Immediate Past Chair: Wayne Harvey (***Not present***)

- **Associate (non-voting) Member Present:** DAV Auxiliary (Karen Haltiner)
- **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)
- **Other Attendees were:**
  - Jamal T. Fox (ODVA Deputy Director)
  - Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Affairs Director; Zoom Host)
  - RJ Navarro (Oregon Veteran Legislative Caucus Coordinator)

**CHAIR'S COMMENTS:** Chair **Mary J. Mayer** welcomed all members and guests to the third 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 soon involve a long session of the Oregon legislature.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT:**

The motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 12 Oct 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 \$5,827.89. A total of \$110.00 in income from dues was collected. No expenses. The ending balance as of 10 January 2025 was \$5,937.89. Currently, four member organizations owe dues.

**OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UPDATE:**

- **Mr. Jamal T. Fox**, ODVA Deputy Director, provided a brief update. Jamal stated that the major ODVA focus was on the start of the 2025 long legislative session. Other areas of

priority include filling vacant leadership positions, a new suicide prevention awareness campaign, and forwarding more information on home loan and tax issues for Veterans. ODVA turns “80” this year, and some commemorative and awareness events are programmed. A new diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) committee within ODVA begins operating this month. The third Veterans Home continues to be a major focus.

- Jamal stated that a new Chief Operating Officer (COO), **Mr. Rex Emery**, had joined the ODVA team, providing critical oversight of ODVA operations and staff.
  - The programming of the Biennial Oregon Women Veterans Conference remains under consideration. UVGO is traditionally a financial sponsor.
- ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, **Mr. Jay DeFillipo**, stated that the current long legislative session begins 21 January 2025 and runs through 18 June 2025. The ODVA Veterans Bill Digest is now active, with weekly (Friday) updates, and Jay encouraged everyone interested to subscribe for the weekly email update: <https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Legislation.aspx>
  - Jay recognized **RJ Navarro** who coordinates the work of the Veteran’s Caucus in the state legislature. ODVA is deeply engaged with the Caucus, the Veterans’ legislative committees and with individual members, with the goal of synchronizing efforts and ensuring the agency’s messaging is known.
  - DVA and the Governor are championing three bills this year. One bill seeks to align the Oregon definition of a “Veteran” with the VA’s determination of a Veteran eligible for Veteran’s benefits. Another bill adds authority to add names to the Oregon World War II Memorial; and the final bill integrates sharing of information regarding Veteran’s status among state agencies, with the goal of identifying more Oregon Veterans who qualify for state benefits and assistance.
  - **Tim Cowan (American Legion)** asked that, as the legislative coordinator for his organization, how can he ensure his positions are in sync with ODVA? Jay stated because the ODVA works for the Governor, ODVA will support only those bills endorsed by the Governor. Administrative details of proposed legislative bills will indicate whether it is supported by ODVA. ODVA takes a neutral position on the vast majority of legislative proposals, in deference to the separation of powers between the state executive and legislature. At the end of the day, the ODVA executes legislation properly enacted under the Oregon Constitution.
- **Chair Mayer** emphasized that the UVGO advocates on legislation with the unanimous consent of all 14 members ---- individual member organizations are of course free to advocate their own positions on matters consistent with UVGO advocacy. And while the UVGO invariably aligns with ODVA positions, as an independent organization, the UVGO expresses the will of its membership. Chair Mayer said the UVGO deeply respects its privileged and special relationship with the ODVA, and, in particular, greatly values the collaboration with Jay and the ODVA staff.

## GUEST SPEAKER: RJ NAVARRO

- **RJ Navarro**, the coordinator for the state legislative Veterans Caucus, and himself a Veteran, provided his background. RJ stated that the bi-partisan 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, Representative Tran and Senator Mark Meeks (D-District 20). Jay stated that currently there are 13 legislators who actively participate and financially contribute to the administration of the Caucus. While in the past being a Veteran was a prerequisite, the current composition includes legislators who are affiliated indirectly with Veterans, but each member of the Caucus must be actively engaged in Veterans advocacy.
- The Veterans Caucus promotes legislation aimed at Veterans with letters of support to the committees and the governor, and were quite instrumental in securing state funding for the Roseburg third Veterans' Home and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Representative 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.
- As the Caucus coordinator, RJ stated that his mission is to support the organization and regular meetings of the Caucus, and to build consensus not unlike what occurs within the UVGO.
- RJ listed some of the Veterans Caucus legislative concept priorities for the current legislative session, some highlights:
  - Securing the fenced state funding for the third Veterans Home ---- currently, the state funding portion for the third Veterans Home must be revalidated each legislative session. The Governor, Veterans Caucus, and ODVA are collaborating to implement a mechanism preserving the state portion of the funding continually until the Federal funding portion is committed (admittedly, the longer pole in the tent). This remains a focus area for the UVGO.
  - Veterans Health Navigator.
  - Rep Evans "omnibus" bill to ensure long-term stability with provisions to increase ODVA staffing in key areas to reduce Veterans suicides and homelessness, among others.
  - Veterans Information Privacy Protections.
  - Anti "Claim Shark" legislation to protect Veterans.
  - Income and property tax relief proposals.

- Veterans Health Care Bill ---- providing Oregon Health Plan medical coverage for low-income and challenged Veterans.
- No-cost specific Veterans vanity license plates.

#### **FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:**

- Chair Mayer stated that, should circumstances warrant, the UVGO can always meet in advance of the next regular meeting on 12 April 2025, even by email consensus.
- Chair Mayer solicited nominations for the UVGO position of Chaplain (non-voting).
- Chair Mayer also solicited interested persons to become a part of the UVGO Legislative Committee working with **Marco Oswald**; she also noted that **Todd Swanson** had agreed to be available to represent the UVGO in Salem.
- Members are encouraged to nominate Oregon departments/chapters of national Veterans organizations for membership in the UVGO.
- Chair Mayer has been appointed by the Governor to be a member of the ODVA Advisory Committee for a 4-year term.
- **Bill Crist (AUSA)** said that available Minuteman ROTC Scholarships are fewer this year, but he is soliciting nominations for the program.
- **Tom Majchrowski (MOAA)** said the organization was preparing for its “advocacy in action” campaign at the national level, with the Richard Starr Act a priority.
- **Nancy Menagh (GSW)** stated she and **Valerie Morey, GSW Region President**, attended an advocacy event at Willamette National, which had disappointing sponsorship ---- a call to action for the future.
- UVGO Legislative Committee **Marco Oswald** stated that the OLIS website allows users to register for notifications by individual bill number, enabling real-time tracking of proposals as they move through the legislative process.
- ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs **Jay DeFillipo** stated that, when the UVGO appears before the legislature and testifies, it carries substantial weight because the UVGO represents so many diverse and numerous Veterans organization ---- Jay urged us to advocate strongly and wisely.

**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](mailto:viaboeca17@gmail.com)

The next **UVGO Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, 12 April 2025** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1336**.

Respectfully submitted,

**MARCO OSWALD**

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Reviewed by:

**MARY J. MAYER**

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