

**MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)**  
**MEETING**  
**SATURDAY, 12 APRIL 2025**  
**HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

The meeting was called to order by the **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1201**. She then led the Pledge of Allegiance and gave the Invocation.

**Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 11 of 14**

- **Regular Voting Members Present were:**

- AFA (Mary J. Mayer/Bill Tidd)
- American Legion (Tim Cowan)
- AUSA (Bill Crist)
- DAV (Kari Parisi)
- GSW (Nancy Menagh)
- KWVA (Mike Williamson)
- MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
- MOPH (Todd Swanson)
- NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
- PVA Tri-State Chapter (Don Hedlund)
- VFW (Anthony Barber)

- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**

- 40 + 8
- MCL
- VVA

- **Other Voting Members:**

- 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 (*Vacant*)
  - Second Vice Chair (*Vacant*)
  - Secretary (Marco Oswald)
  - Treasurer (Robert Haltiner)
  
- **Other Attendees were:**
  - Jamal T. Fox (ODVA Deputy Director)
  - Rex Emery (ODVA Chief Operating Officer)
  - Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Affairs Director; Zoom Host)
  - RJ Navarro (Oregon Veteran Legislative Caucus Coordinator)

**CHAIR'S COMMENTS:** The **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, welcomed all members and guests to the last 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 by the UVGO are key objectives for the upcoming program year.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT:**

The motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 11 Jan 2025 UVGO Meeting be approved; the motion was passed unanimously.

**TREASURER'S REPORT:**

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that the UVGO beginning balance as of 3 January 2025 was \$5,937.89. A total of \$110.00 in income from dues was collected. The Treasurer disbursed \$50.00 in expenses for the State of Oregon non-profit organization fee. The ending balance as of 28 March 2025 was \$5,997.89. Individuals can make independent contributions to the UVGO, but the contribution is not tax deductible.

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

- **Mr. Jamal T. Fox**, ODVA Deputy Director, provided a brief update. Jamal stated that the ODVA Director had presented a \$191M budget for the organization, which focused on the priority areas of Veterans' housing, behavioral health, and

education and career opportunities. The budget would increase staffing to 108 personnel. The budget in detail is posted on the ODVA website. ODVA is also excited to launch its home loan and re-finance program, which supplements VA programs. Internal rules are being developed to administer the ODVA home loan program, with public participation through comments and public hearings. The process is expected to be completed in July 2025, with actual loans available by the end of 2025. Jamal introduced Rex Emery, who is ODVA's new Chief Operating Officer (COO).

- **Mr. Rex Emery**, ODVA COO, introduced himself as a Navy Veteran and an employee of the State of Oregon for 25 years. The COO position in ODVA is newly created, and, as the “business manager,” Rex stated he supervises the business operations of the ODVA, with a view towards achieving the strategic vision of the organization.
- ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, **Mr. Jay DeFillipo**, stated that the rule making process for the ODVA home loan and re-finance program will have an on-line public hearing/comment period on 18 April. The entire rule-making process is slated for completion by July 2025. Jay turned to the current legislative session and noted that 9 April represented the half-way mark for the session. The date is significant as only those bills which have gone through a public hearing, work session, and referral to subsequent special committee/ chamber (first chamber deadline) remain active. The next significant date is 14 May when the revenue forecast is published. As many bills carry a “cost,” the revenue forecast is critical. The second chamber deadline is 23 May, further winnowing draft legislation. The legislative session will end NLT 29 June.
  - The ODVA Legislative Bill Digest/tracking database (<https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Legislation.aspx>) will only contain those bills “still alive.” The ODVA webpage (on the right hand side) now has links to the administrative rule-making hearings and proceedings (<https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/OARs.aspx>), which will alert you to upcoming events inviting public participation. ODVA, as an agency of the Governor, generally only advocates for those bills submitted as drafts by ODVA --- allowing the legislature to do its job. ODVA has four bills in play this session, ranging from an administrative fix to the “cremains bill” from last session to a more universal definition of a “Veteran.” In this session alone over 120 bills addressing Veterans were introduced. The Chairs of Veterans’ Committees (Senator Manning and Representative Tran) exercise substantial influence to determine which bills make it to public

hearing but the legislative process seeks to continually meld public sentiment and interest.

- PVA (**Don Hedlund**) asked where to direct PVA's advocacy efforts to obtain greater property tax relief for 100% disabled Veterans. Jay acknowledged that tax relief bills are complex because of foregone revenue and competing requests by other categories of property owners. The counties play a critical role as any additional relief to Veterans entails a certain "loss of revenue" to the counties, which will not be reimbursed by the State or any agency, absent some extraordinary measure.
- Jay recognized **RJ Navarro** who coordinates the work of the Veteran's Caucus in the state legislature. RJ stated that property tax relief bills targeting Veterans are especially problematic with a cascading effect as other categories of taxpayers (such as first responders or victims of violence) seek to obtain equivalent status and be recognized for tax relief. RJ stated that an incentive for this type of legislation is to emphasize the value (economic and community-building) Veterans bring to Oregon. RJ stated that the Veterans Caucus has been extremely active this session, with focus areas in Veterans' health, reduced costs of Veterans' license plates, and Rep Evans' "omnibus" bill dealing with a myriad of Veterans' issues.
- GSW (**Nancy Menagh**) stated that their organization has been very active this session advocating for Gold Star Wives and Veterans, but has found it to be an uphill battle, especially with strong opposition by the counties.
- UVGO Legislative Coordinator, **Marco Oswald**, gave an update (attached) on the two bills that, so far, the UVGO has collectively decided to advocate, stating that effective UVGO advocacy relies upon all our members to identify legislation in advance. The flash-to-bang notice of public hearing for draft legislation on the UVGO radar is extremely short – often less than a week --- requiring our fourteen member organizations to be agile to respond and provide input on short notice.

- **SB 225** underwent a critical amendment that provides a tax exemption of \$17,500 of retirement income for taxpayers who have attained the age of sixty-three or older. Largely because of the intervention of ODVA (Jay DeFilippo), SB 225 has a revenue impact statement that assesses the “cost” (foregone tax revenue) to the counties. The revenue forecast represents a significant advance over previous and nebulous efforts to exempt Veteran retired pay. The revenue impact is modest. SB 225 has gotten further in the process than previous attempts.
- **HB 2845**, the so-called “omnibus bill,” introduced by Representative Evans, is sweeping legislation that seeks to address many of the key focus areas that the UVGO has identified as priority, such as housing and suicide prevention. So far, the bill has undergone eleven amendments. A critical element will be the upcoming revenue impact assessment ---- the sprawling nature of the bill may carry a price tag that is simply too hard to swallow in an environment of expected diminished federal support.
- **SB 387** is the expanded property tax relief bill already discussed in this forum. UVGO has not yet formally advocated for this legislation but stay tuned. SB 387 provides a full exemption from property tax for 100% disabled Veterans, increased exemptions for Veterans disabled above the 40% threshold, and better inclusive measures for surviving spouses. In the Senate Veterans Committee public hearings, four of the twelve people testifying opposed the bill. The absence of a definitive fiscal impact analysis is not helpful.
- **Chair Mayer** solicited UVGO opinion on whether our organization should support SB 387, particularly if there is no risk of ODVA reimbursement to the counties. All of the members expressed broad support for Veteran property tax relief if, and only if, there is no adverse impact on ODVA funding. Chair Mayer emphasized that the credibility and weight of UVGO advocacy overall is best realized when we focus our advocacy on a limited set of legislative issues. However, individual member organizations are always free to advocate in support of their own legislative priorities, complimentary to UVGO advocacy.
- Both **Jay and RJ** identified the lack of current revenue analysis as a weakness of SB 387, which will make its advancement a significant

challenge. In addition, the collection of definitive data will be difficult as no single agency is in possession of all the facts predicate to a fiscal impact statement.

**CHAIR MAYER: UNFINISHED/NEW BUSINESS:**

- **Chair Mayer** stated that UVGO membership is comprised of nationally-established organizations. Officer positions are due for designation for the next biennium (2025-2027) at the next meeting in July. The First and Second Vice Chairs of the UVGO are currently vacant, as well as our Chaplain. The following candidates are offered for the next UVGO biennium:
  - **Chair: Mary J. Mayer (AFA)**
  - **First Vice Chair: Anthony Barber (VFW)***(subject to commander approval)*
  - **Second Vice Chair: Todd Swanson (MOPH)**
  - **Secretary: Marco Oswald (MOAA)**
  - **Treasurer: Robert Haltiner (NCOA)**
  
  - **Chaplain: Anthony Barber (VFW)**
  - **Legislative Committee: Marco Oswald (Coordinator)**
    - **Tom Majchrowski (MOAA)**
    - **Todd Swanson (MOPH)**
    - **Tim Cowan (American Legion)**
    - **Don Hedlund (PVA TSC)**
- Voting on the officer candidates and appointment of the Chaplain and Legislative Committee will happen at the 12 July meeting. There will be an opportunity for nominations from the floor for officers at the July meeting.
- Membership is asked to offer suggestions for guest speakers.
- Since UVGO does not have a website or official logo, Chair Mayer asked the membership if they would be interested in establishing both. Chair Mayer volunteered to solicit a proposal for an official logo and the establishment and maintenance costs of a new UVGO website, as well as the nominal fees to

preserve UVGO.org as a domain name. The initiative was approved unanimously.

**FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:**

- **VFW** (Anthony Barber) stated that the VFW is advocating for SB 150 (the so-called “claim shark” bill), which seeks to regulate predatory practices by persons representing Veterans in the filing of claims. Anthony asked that the UVGO and its collective members review the draft bill and provide support.
- **MOAA** (Tom Majchrowski) asked that UVGO explore advocacy in support of the expansion of Veterans Courts, currently available in only five Oregon counties. A study to articulate the cost of expansion of Veterans Court to all Oregon counties must be undertaken to advance the issue.
- **Chair Mayer** stated that the **VVA** is promoting a national exhibition of the Vietnam War entitled “The Wall that Heals.” The exhibition is going to thirty communities, one of which is Independence, Oregon (18-21 September).
- **MOPH** (Todd Swanson) will present leadership awards to the ROTC at the University of Portland on 22 April, along with **AUSA**, **MOAA**, and **AFA**.
- **PVA TSC** (Don Hedlund) stated that its Oregon district office will have an open house on June 14 in its new office in Silverton. PVA’s medical equipment donation program is open for business.
- **DAVA** (Karen Haltiner) will present leadership awards to the JROTC at Oregon City High School.
- **AUSA** (Bill Crist) stated his organization is presenting leadership awards at the University of Portland, Oregon State University, and Oregon City High School in late April.
- **DAV** (Kari Parisi) stated the DAV department convention is to be held on 17-18 May 2025 in Medford.

**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 July 2025** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1434**.

Respectfully submitted,

**MARCO OSWALD**  
UVGO Secretary

Reviewed by:

**MARY J. MAYER**  
UVGO Chair

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