



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

The meeting was called to order by the **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1203** . The Chair then led the Pledge of Allegiance and gave the Invocation.

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 10 of 14

- **Regular Voting Members Present were:**

- AFA (Mary J. Mayer and Bill Tidd)
- American Legion (Mike Surrect and Tim Cowan)
- AUSA (Bill Crist)
- DAV (Kari Parisi)
- GSW (Nancy Menagh)
- KWVA (Dick Frey)
- MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
- MOPH (Todd Swanson)
- NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
- VFW (Anthony Barber and Andrea Summerlin)

- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**

- 40 + 8
- MCL
- VVA

- PVA Tri-State Chapter
- **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 (Andrea Summerlin)
 - Second Vice Chair (Todd Swanson)
 - Secretary (Marco Oswald)
 - Treasurer (Robert Haltiner)
- **Other Attendees were:**
 - Jamal T. Fox (ODVA Deputy Director)
 - Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Affairs Director)
 - RJ Navarro (Oregon Veteran Legislative Caucus Coordinator)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS: The **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, welcomed all members and guests to the first regularly scheduled virtual UVGO meeting of the 2025-2026 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. The Chair emphasized that individuals appearing on behalf of their member organization represent the entire member organization in the State of Oregon and are presumed to be duly deputized and authorized to speak for and vote for their member organization.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

The motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 12 Apr 2025 UVGO Meeting be approved; the motion passed unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that the UVGO beginning balance as of 29 March 2025 was \$5,997.89. A total of \$165 in income from three annual member dues was deposited. The Treasurer disbursed no expenses. The ending balance as of 2 July 2025 was \$6,162.89. A number of member organizations should bring their membership dues current.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UPDATE:

- **Mr. Jamal T. Fox**, ODVA Deputy Director, provided a brief update. Jamal stated that the ODVA had good success in the legislative session that just ended a week ago. A number of the Governor's initiatives, introduced by ODVA, were adopted. ODVA is busy implementing those legislative initiatives which have been signed by the Governor, and ODVA expects the remainder of adopted legislation to receive the signature of the Governor. Last month the Oregon ODVA celebrated its 80th anniversary, which was recognized during the ODVA Expo at the Salem Armory last week. Over 600 Veterans and attendees participated in the event, the first Expo held since the pandemic. ODVA continues to partner with the USDVA to advance the 3rd Veterans' Home Initiative. Finally, during this current weekend, ODVA is participating in the Veterans' Powwow at Grand Rhonde, a three-day event to advance the Veteran interests of all of the tribes in Oregon.
- ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, **Mr. Jay DeFillipo**, added that ODVA had recently completed a formal agreement of Veterans' collaboration with the Confederated Tribe of the Siletz Indians. It is the sixth agreement executed between ODVA and the individual Tribes in Oregon.
- The 2024-2025 long session of the Oregon Legislature just ended. The pivotal event during this session was the May revenue forecast, which sharply reduced previous revenue expectations and significantly affected the Governor's proposed budget. All Oregon agencies have scrambled to propose cuts and reductions in their allocations in line with the reduced revenue forecast. It has been a tough job, as the State of Oregon has not faced such a large revenue shortfall for many years. Despite the regrettable budget forecast, which placed a damper on many new proposals, some very good policy legislation was enacted.
- The Governor has signed many bills, but the ODVA budget remains unsigned, although not expected to be an issue. HB3058 is the ODVA budget. The

Governor's administration is wrestling with the transportation bill, which failed to pass at the end of the session.

- The ODVA Legislative Digest is a very current and valuable resource; you can sign up to automatically receive the digest via the ODVA website. The final report is forthcoming shortly. Go to (<https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Legislation.aspx>)
- At the beginning of a long legislative session, an agency such as ODVA can submit "legislative concepts," precursors to draft bills, which are mainly focused on policy aspects. ODVA submitted four legislative concepts, all four bills passed, and the Governor has signed all four. One of particular import is HB2559, which allows a Veteran to use the "statement of benefits" issued by the VA in lieu of a DD214. We updated the process by which names are added to the Oregon WWII Memorial and updated our communication process with Veterans by email. The last bill addressed fixes to the "cremains" bill from the last long session.
- Of particular note, SB150 passed, the "claim shark" bill to discourage predatory practices by third parties in the filing of VA claims. Tony Barber of the VFW, here today, was a fierce and effective advocate.
- Veteran motorcycle license plates are now available because of another bill enacted.
- The newest DoD component, Space Force, was officially added to the roster of recognized Veterans.
- Enacted HB3920 allows Veterans who are 100% service-connected to utilize state educational benefits for their children until age 31, versus the previous cut-off of age 23.
- Regrettably, the tax relief bills, both addressing retirement pay and property tax, were not enacted.
- ODVA is now in the "rulemaking" season ---- in particular, we are revising the rules associated with home loans.
- Jay stated that it is unlikely that any Veteran issues will be addressed during the expected extraordinary legislative session the Governor may shortly convene to address the funding gaps in state transportation.

UVGO LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:

- UVGO Legislative Coordinator, **Marco Oswald**, focused upon the legislative priorities, specifically approved by UVGO membership, that the UVGO submitted for this long session. UVGO formally intervened on three draft Veterans' bill, and one administrative measure. Disappointingly, we ended up 0-4, so Marco suggested the UVGO legislative coordinator be fired.
- The chaos over the transportation bill at the end of the session consumed all of the legislature's bandwidth. The resulting discord doomed our target bills, which were literally at the goal line, and could otherwise be approved. In addition, as a result of the unforeseen and disappointing state revenue forecast, bills that carried an increased budgetary cost were in a perfect storm of nearly insurmountable odds.
- Specifically, UVGO supported HB2845, the big "omnibus" bill of Representative Evans, which underwent 12 revisions. HB2845 predictably carried a substantial price tag, as it proposed many new ODVA personnel positions and other broad measures. But precisely because the bill had an undefined revenue impact at the end of the legislative session, it had a tough road to hoe.
- SB1094, also formally endorsed by the UVGO, nearly crossed the goal line. The bill proposed reforms to the current system of property tax relief for Veterans in sake of clarity and precision, all to the benefit of Veterans. Remarkably, the bill was introduced and supported by county tax commissioners and was essentially revenue neutral as far as fiscal impact.
- SB225, which would exempt the first \$17,500 of military retirement income from state income for Veterans age 63 and older, ran strong up to the end but ultimately did not pass. SB225 carried only a minor revenue impact and was strongly endorsed by Senator Manning, a champion of Veterans.
- Lastly, the UVGO intervened in an administrative measure that would have authorized the institutional hire of a part-time coordinator to support the work of the legislative Veterans' Caucus. The UVGO rolled in heavy with letters to each of the chairs and co-chairs of the Caucus in support of the measure, and noted specifically the stellar work of our colleague, RJ Navarro, who has performed the role this session. Regrettably, that measure was not adopted.
- Marco specifically requested UVGO approval for the Legislative Committee to actively continue to pursue the four measures in future draft bills developed for submission in the next upcoming legislative sessions. He stated it is clear from the vote of confidence UVGO membership previously gave to the Legislative Committee that the themes of these four measures are important to the UVGO and are in sync with the results of our previous survey. Marco asked the UVGO Chair to entertain the idea of a motion for membership authorizing the Legislative Committee to pursue the four measures. There are positive steps

the UVGO can take in the intervening period until the next legislative session to influence the positive trajectory of those measures.

- Tim Cowan (American Legion) asked what steps individual UVGO members could take in the intervening time between legislative sessions to further the objectives of the UVGO. For example, Tim stated, the American Legion led delegations of Boys and Girls State to the state capitol. The visit generated immense exposure to legislators and could serve as a platform for advocacy.
- Marco expressed appreciation for stalwart UVGO members like Tim Cowan (American Legion), Todd Swanson (MOPH), Tom Majchrowski (MOAA), Don Hedlind (PVA Tri-State Chapter), and Tony Barber (VFW), who have volunteered to be on the UVGO Legislative Committee. The legislative direction of the UVGO does not supplant the individual member's organizational advocacy. UVGO advocacy is complementary and supports these efforts.
- Tom Majchrowski (MOAA) obtained clarification from the UVGO Chair that individual member legislative advocacy is not just limited to the four measures.
- The UVGO Chair stated that, because the four measures are completely in line with the priorities identified in the earlier UVGO survey, absent any member objection, the Legislative Committee is directed to pursue advocacy in the interim that supports the four measures. The Legislative Committee should meet independently to formulate a strategy. However, these four measures are not exclusive ---- should the UVGO collectively decide upon other future initiatives, the Legislative Committee will incorporate those into a cohesive strategy.

VETERANS LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS UPDATE:

- Veteran Caucus Coordinator **RJ Navarro** expressed his gratitude to the UVGO for strongly supporting key Caucus initiatives benefiting Veterans. Notwithstanding collaboration among diverse parties to formulate SB1084 (Veteran property tax reform), the controversy surrounding the transportation bill simply consumed all of the final energy, and the popular bill didn't cross the finish line. We will continue the good progress made on this measure.
- SB225 (Veteran state income tax relief) benefitted from strong UVGO support and helped that bill stand out among a series of competing tax relief bills. It too made it to the final stretch but did not pass. RJ believes the Veteran Caucus will coalesce around this version to support Veteran tax relief in the future.
- HB2845, Representative Evans' omnibus bill, received significant consideration, resulting in multiple amendments to fine tune the bill as it

progressed. While the bill did not pass, Representative Evans has initiated an informal working group to refine the bill in anticipation of the upcoming short legislative session and has asked for a UVGO representative to be a part of the working group.

- Representative Tran (Chair, House Veterans' Committee) submitted a bill expanding dental health services for Veterans. The bill encountered substantial resistance from another Oregon agency and ultimately did not pass. However, the bill's discussion engendered changes in the accounting and reporting of state funds earmarked for the service.
- Representative Lewis sponsored a bill to provide ancillary services and equipment for disabled Veterans. It too did not pass, but the process enables critical revisions, and the concept is expected to be reintroduced.
- RJ stated he was personally very appreciative of the UVGO's support for an institutional Veterans Caucus Coordinator position, and UVGO endorsement of him personally. RJ said he will continue to be active in Veteran Caucus advocacy, probably in an intern capacity.
- The Veterans Caucus will continue to advocate for the third Veterans' home in Roseburg. The cascading cuts of federal funding are daunting, but planning continues while Oregon pursues strategies to get the VA to place the facility priority above the funding cut line.
- UVGO Chair Mayer stated the UVGO will support Representative Evans' summer committee to refine the omnibus bill and charged the UVGO Legislative Committee to engage upon that effort. Chair Mayer reaffirmed UVGO support for an institutional position to coordinate the efforts of the Veterans Caucus.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

- Chair Mayer stated that the Zoom meeting format for UVGO meetings was working well and would continue. Chair Mayer encouraged membership to identify any other Veterans group in Oregon for candidacy in the UVGO, should they meet all qualifications, as well as identifying potential guest speakers.

NEW BUSINESS:

- Chair Mayer introduced the candidates for UVGO leadership positions for the 2025-2027 program (two-year term):
 - Chair: Mary J. Mayer (AFA)
 - 1st Vice Chair: Andrea Summerlin (VFW)
 - 2nd Vice Chair: Todd Swanson (MOPH)
 - Secretary: Marco Oswald (MOAA)
 - Treasurer: Robert Haltiner (NCOA)
 - Immediate Past Chair: Wayne Harvey (confirmed, no vote required)

- The slate of candidates was moved upon and seconded among the membership and were confirmed unanimously.

- Chair Mayer announced the proposed slate of Chaplain and committee members, whom the Chair can summarily appoint. However, the Chair requested that membership affirms her approval of candidates.
 - Chaplain: Anthony Barber (VFW)
 - Legislative Committee:
 - Marco Oswald (MOAA) – Coordinator
 - Todd Swanson (MOPH)
 - Don Hedlind (PVA Tri-State Chapter)
 - Tom Majchrowski (MOAA)
 - Tim Cowan (American Legion)
 - Anthony Barber (VFW)
 - Governance Committee: Mary J. Mayer (AFA)

- The slate of candidates above was moved upon and seconded among the membership and were approved unanimously.

- Meeting dates for the 2025-2026 program year are: 11 October 2025; 10 January 2026; and 11 April 2026. Please mark your calendar now.
- Chair Mayer stated that the UVGO needs to update its organizational branding. Chair Mayer introduced the new proposed logo for the UVGO. Significantly, the logo seeks to emphasize three primary themes of the UVGO: a handshake to represent the collaborative ethos of the UVGO, the state of Oregon that we serve; and our mission of legislative advocacy represented by the State Capitol Building.
- The logo as presented was moved upon and seconded among the membership and was approved unanimously.
- Chair Mayer stated that the UVGO website is inadequate and outdated. Market survey establishes that the cost of a new website and registration of the UVGO domain (www.UVGO.org) would be an initial expense of approximately \$400 and yearly maintenance fee of \$160. Each member organized is invited to submit material to personalize the content of their membership in the UVGO.
- The proposed new website and website expenditures were moved upon and seconded among the membership and were approved unanimously.
- Chair Mayer reported that the next biennial ODVA Oregon Women Veterans' Conference will be held 27 September 2025 at The Riverhouse Lodge in Bend, Oregon. Admission to the conference is free for all women Veterans of Oregon. UVGO will have a representational presence. A motion that the UVGO donate \$500 in support of the conference was moved upon and seconded among the membership and was approved unanimously.
- The Vietnam Veterans of America rep reported that the "Wall that Heals" travelling national exhibition will be in Independence, Oregon from 18-21 September (<https://www.ci.independence.or.us/thewallthatheals2025/>)

- The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee announced that the Phase I completion of the project on the Oregon State Capitol grounds in Salem will reflect the final accomplishment of the project aims, and that planned future phases are terminated.

MEETING RECORD: UVGO Meetings are recorded on Zoom. Membership may request an emailed copy of the recorded meeting by contacting the UVGO Secretary, Marco Oswald, at: viaboeca17@gmail.com

The next **UVGO Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, 11 October 2025** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1337**.

Respectfully submitted,

MARCO OSWALD

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Reviewed by:

MARY J. MAYER

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