



**MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)
MEETING
SATURDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2025
HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

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

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 10 of 14

• Regular Voting Members Present were:

- AFA (Mary J. Mayer and Bill Tidd)
- AUSA (Bill Crist)
- GSW (Valerie Morey)
- KWVA (Mike Williamson)
- MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
- MOPH (Todd Swanson)
- NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
- PVA TSC (Don Hedlind)
- VFW (Anthony Barber and Andrea Summerlin)
- VVA (Tom Weiss)

• Regular Voting Members Absent were:

- American Legion
- DAV
- 40 + 8
- MCL

- **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; Zoom Host)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS: The Chair, Mary J. Mayer welcomed all members and guests to the second regularly scheduled virtual UVGO meeting of the 2025-2026 program year. The Chair affirmed that focusing on our strategic goals, expanding the membership, increasing the visibility of the UVGO brand, and active legislative participation by the UVGO are key objectives for the upcoming program year. The Chair stated that immediately preceding this regular UVGO meeting, the Chair hosted a legislative strategy session with members of the UVGO Legislative Committee and UVGO leadership. The meeting helped focus the issues for discussion today.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

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

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that the UVGO beginning balance as of 2 July 2025 was \$6,162.89. A total of \$82.50 in income from dues was collected. The Treasurer disbursed \$500 as the UVGO contribution towards the 2025 ODVA Women Veterans Conference. ODVA gratefully acknowledged the contribution. The ending balance as of 1 October 2025 was

\$5,745.39. A number of member organizations should bring their membership dues current (American Legion, AUSA, 40+8, MCL, and VFW).

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS (ODVA) UPDATE:

- **Jamal T. Fox**, ODVA Deputy Director, provided a brief update. Jamal thanked the UVGO for their investment in the 2025 ODVA Women Veterans Conference. The conference was well-received and benefitted from the strong influence exerted by Chair **Mary J. Mayer** in stimulating participation. Jamal continued, stating that ODVA was focused on ensuring continuity of services during the current budget stand-off and shutdown of Federal services. Lastly, Jamal stated ODVA is focusing upon the agency budget in light of suggestions that lower than anticipated tax revenue may require revision of forecasted operations.
- ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, **Jay DeFillipo**, also thanked UVGO for its continued financial support and leadership encouragement for the 2025 ODVA Women Veterans Conference. It was a great event. Jay stated that the ODVA Director and he had recently travelled to Washington DC to speak to Oregon's Congressional delegation on Veterans' issues, particularly the 3rd Veterans Home slated for Roseburg. They both also attended the annual Conference of State Directors of Veterans' Affairs this year in Wyoming. The meeting centered around best practices and legislative synergy.
 - Regarding Roseburg, Jay stated that after a long process, the national VA has accepted Roseburg into the "priority one" category of its Veterans home improvement program. Qualification as a VA priority one signifies the VA will fund the project ---- the tough part is "when." The current priority one project list has over 80 accepted projects totaling \$1.3B dollars (including seven entirely new Veterans homes). Against this demand, the allocations for the program during the last three years are running \$150-170M annually. Despite the current retrenchment in the Federal budget, there is energy on both sides of the aisle to clear the home improvement list for Veterans. Roseburg is at the forefront of the ODVA Director's priorities.
- The ODVA Director recently provided an update to the Senate Veterans Committee of the Oregon legislature during the last legislative days. The next legislative days will be 17-19 November and the last one on 13-15 January 2026. On 2 February 2026 the short session of the Oregon State Legislature begins. As a reminder, Jay stated, the ODVA (and all other agencies) are not permitted to introduce new legislation during the short session. The short session is intended to fine-tune enacted bills, adjust Oregon's two-year budget programming, or correct issues identified with previously enacted legislation. As a caveat to the last, ODVA has been working with Representative Paul Evans [D-District 20 (Monmouth)] to refine an "omnibus bill" with at least 16 separate measures. Rep Evans has convened a work group of his staff, ODVA subject matter experts, and a UVGO representative (Marco Oswald) to fine tune the bill with an eye towards introducing the measure in the short session.

- Finally, ODVA has been engaged in implementing the legislation that passed in the last long session. Some of the implementation has been straight-forward, but other measures are complex and require detailed analysis.
- Jay concluded by discussing ODVA's Home Loan Refinance Program. The significant rule-making process (including the public hearing process) has ended, and draft rules implementing the program are ready to be published. Jay believes the implementation date will be finalized by the end of this year.
- All of these developments constitute "good news," Jay said, in an otherwise unsettled environment. In response to a question regarding the timeline for the Roseburg Veterans Home, Jay replied candidly that it is a "crystal ball" issue. The COVID pandemic served to significantly imbalance the priority list --- dozens of new projects were added while funding remained flat or constrained. At this time, both sides of the aisle recognize that this imbalance must be rectified. While in DC, the ODVA Director and Jay lobbied hard for Oregon's position and remain hopeful the project may be initiated in the next 2-3 years. However, unless serious efforts are made to address the priority list, the wait could extend. The Oregon state financial contribution currently remains secure, and Governor Kotek is committed to keeping it that way. However, if the project languishes on the list for years, those funds could be at risk.
- PVA TSC (**Don Hedlind**) stated that his organization is also very active lobbying for nation-wide priority one Veterans home improvement projects. The Buy America, Build America Act has resulted in unpredictable consequences, as some building components (e.g., special elevators and LED lighting) cannot be furnished by American suppliers. The VA has the authority to grant limited waivers and is currently exercising the discretion.

UVGO LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

- UVGO Legislative Coordinator, **Marco Oswald**, gave a "hats off" to Jay for shepherding him in the State Capitol during the last legislative days. Critically, Marco said, they were able to meet with the Chiefs of Staff of both Veterans committee chairs to obtain their sense of what to expect in the short session with respect to Veterans. The UVGO Legislative Committee is focused upon partnering with and increasing the knowledge of key entities regarding the UVGO and its state-wide representation. Marco stated that he serves as the UVGO rep (and only Veterans organization member) on Rep Evans' "omnibus bill working group." The purpose of the group is to refine former HB 4865 which was introduced, but not passed, in the last long session. HB 4865 was also strongly supported by the UVGO. The omnibus bill seeks to implement 16 different initiatives advancing Oregon Veterans interests in a bold, single massive bill (hence "omnibus"). At the conclusion of the last long session, Rep Evans concluded that the bill would benefit from fine tuning to help successfully navigate the time constraints and demands of the short session. His working group includes four major stakeholders --- ODVA, the association of Oregon counties, the Oregon judicial department, and Veterans at large (UVGO).

- Critically, HB 4865 addresses systemic agency staffing shortfalls and emergent trends that the UVGO itself has identified as priority issues --- specifically addressing high Veteran suicide rates; Veteran homelessness and enhancing programs to successfully transition Soldiers returning to civilian life and careers after military service. One of the initiatives that the UVGO played a significant part was refining the section to expand the number and reach of Veterans criminal courts in Oregon, called Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC). Currently, only about seven counties actively operate Veterans Treatment Courts; the goal is to expand the reach of these courts to all Oregon counties. UVGO suggested a form of “circuit rider” VTCs to serve far-flung Oregon counties with large geographic areas, smaller populations, and less resources.
- The objective is to refine former HB 4865 so it can be introduced again in the upcoming short session. It will be a challenge to navigate all the legislation stages (including the critical financial impact review) in the scant five weeks the legislature is in session.
- Elsewhere, Marco stated the UVGO Legislative Committee is doing active reconnaissance to determine what other Veterans interest bills are under consideration, particularly by the two Veterans legislative committees. The short session will present a challenge to the UVGO to be agile and react and pivot on short notice --- including convening extraordinary meetings to deliberate on UVGO support for specific bills. Marco voiced his appreciation for colleagues on the UVGO Legislative Committee for their dedication to advancing the interests of Oregon Veterans.
- Chair Mayer specifically recognized the work of the UVGO Legislative Committee --- **Todd Swanson** (MOPH), **Don Hedlind** (PVA-TSC), **Tom Majchrowski** (MOAA), **Tim Cowan** (American Legion), **Anthony Barber** (VFW), and **Marco Oswald** (MOAA).

CHAIR MAYER: UNFINISHED/NEW BUSINESS:

- **Chair Mayer** stated that the UVGO logo is approved and finalized, and the UVGO website (<https://www.uvgo.org>) is up and running. Suggestions and/or additions to enhance the website are welcome. The cost of the website is a one-time \$500 charge for design and \$160/yr maintenance fee. The UVGO Treasurer will receive the invoice in the Dec-Jan time frame each year.
- Our contributions supporting the 2025 ODVA Women Veterans Conference were specifically acknowledged by ODVA. The UVGO established an information table set up in the lobby. Bill Tidd (AFA) and Tom Majchrowski (MOAA) staffed the table and fielded participant questions. Approximately 300 women Veterans attended and over 40 vendors supported the conference. All of the Oregon county Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) were present, providing an extensive networking environment. Veteran suicide prevention was a dominant theme. There are approximately 26,000 women Veterans in Oregon ---- ODVA must work harder to connect more broadly with this demographic. **Tom Weiss** (VVA)

suggested that the UVGO could be a key player identifying and promoting a public service program to encourage more woman Veterans to self-identify and participate in Oregon Veterans activities. Chair Mayer agreed that the UVGO can be a positive influence, while ODVA is the principal responsible agency (with resources). The three women on the Advisory Committee to the ODVA are discussing separate initiatives. Challenges impacting outreach to Oregon's women Veterans are Privacy Act issues and the lack of any gender-specific database of Oregon Veterans.

- During our prior leadership meeting, Chair Mayer discussed UVGO associate membership. Currently, the DAV auxiliary --- DAVA (**Karen Haltiner**) --- is the only auxiliary officially affiliated with the UVGO. Many of our member organizations (for example the American Legion and MOPH) have nationally organized auxiliaries who are eligible for membership in the UVGO. Our UVGO is a big tent --- and we encourage our members to actively solicit their auxiliaries to seek membership in the UVGO. Annual dues are only \$27.50/yr. While an auxiliary cannot formally vote, they have influence and an enormous platform to advance their specific issues.
- Chair Mayer returned to the UVGO leadership consultation that preceded today's regular membership meeting. UVGO leaders discussed roles and responsibilities of elected officers and appointed roles, the importance of timely membership dues, maintaining our website relevant and current, and the importance of consistent membership representation. They also discussed other forms of associate membership (i.e., Veteran organizations that are not nationally chartered as required by the UVGO Articles of Agreement, but whose participation advances the cause of Veterans in Oregon. An example may be the Tribal Veterans organizations). Again, they would not be voting members, but inclusion in the UVGO provides a recognized platform for specific issues).
- We also discussed ways to promote and make known the UVGO "brand" -- such as information tables at relevant conferences and bracelets as suggested by **Don Hedlind** (PVA-TSC) that list our website and relevant data.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:

- KWWVA (**Mike Williamson**) shared that he was recently invited to return to Korea to participate in an international commemoration ceremony.
- PVA-TSC (**Don Hedlind**) volunteered to provide the UVGO with a QR code graphic that would link to the UVGO website.
- MOPH (**Todd Swanson**) stated that he was working to bring the National Purple Heart Tour of America to Oregon.
- DAV Aux (**Karen Haltiner**) volunteered to help promote the greater inclusion of women Veterans in Oregon, as well as other sister auxiliaries.

- VVA (**Tom Weiss**) stated his organization is concerned with our Vietnam Veterans who are aging, often at home isolated and unassisted. He solicited all members to consider this demographic, who are rapidly aging and in need of assistance.
- AUSA (**Bill Crist**) stated he recently visited both the University of Oregon and the University of Portland to participate in their Veteran job fairs and recognition ceremonies. AUSA scholarship programs are currently open for admission.
- VFW (**Andrea Summerlin**) attended a screening of an independent film in Florence addressing Veterans suicide; it was well-attended and is available for screening in other communities.
- GSW (**Valerie Morey**) said her organization continues with its memorial project at Willamette National Cemetery. The Oregon GSW chapter has challenges with membership and urged membership to help identify Gold Star Wives in Oregon.
- MOAA (**Tom Majchrowski**) relayed that it appears Congress may soon again vote on the Richard Star Act, involving concurrent receipt. He urged Oregon organizations to contact their Representatives and Senators to support the bill.
- PVA-TSC (**Don Hedlind**) related that his organization's experience with the Richard Star Act is that, while the bill is popular, the funding mechanism is problematic. His chapter is active in Silverton in a "pay if forward" inventory of medical equipment for paralyzed Veterans.
- **VFW** (Anthony Barber) stated that the Richard Star Act is the number one priority for the VFW. He urged other members to actively support the bill.

MEETING RECORD: UVGO Meetings are recorded on Zoom. To request an copy of the recorded meeting, please contact the UVGO Secretary, Marco Oswald, at:
viaboeca17@gmail.com

The next **UVGO Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, 10 January 2026** from **1200 to 1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1338**.

Respectfully submitted,

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Reviewed by:

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