

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs Minutes
01 December 2017
VA Regional Office, Director's Conference Room
155 Van Gordon Street
Lakewood, CO 80228

Members and Guests

Members Present:

Duane Dailey, Chair
Jack Rudder, Vice Chair
Hollie Caldwell, Secretary
Lacey Golonka, Member
Pat Hammon, Member
Robby Robinson, Member
Norm Steen, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

Mickey Hunt, DMVA Deputy Executive Director
Ben Mestas, CDVA Director
Gail Hoagland, DMVA Grant Administrator
Carissa Snyder, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Guests Present:

Ivan Brooks, VFW Post 12063, Westcliffe
Katie Claussen, Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager, Denver VARO
Sara Elton, Chief of Operations-Continental District, National Cemetery Administration
Teddy Kulkoski, Change Management Agent, Denver VARO, via conference call
Tiffany Morgan, Cohen Veterans Network
Theresa Rudder, Colorado Federation of Women's Clubs, Jack's wife

Opening

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Dailey at 0903 hours. Proceedings began with a recitation of the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence for POWs, MIAs, and troops overseas. Mr. Dailey then invited introductions from around the room.

Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Ms. Hammon and seconded by Mr. Robinson to accept the November minutes as submitted. The motion carried.

Board Member Comments

Ms. Caldwell said she enjoyed attending the Denver Stand Down in November and complimented the efforts of the VA staff members who supported and worked at the event.

Ms. Hammon said that Eagle County had 20 school programs in November in recognition of Veterans Day. More than 5,000 students participated in the weeklong awareness event that acknowledged veterans from World War II through the present. The community continues its support of the western

slope veterans one stop and is working on outreach to local nonprofits in anticipation of a 2019 opening. A new veterans resource center has opened in Glenwood Springs and is entirely staffed by volunteers.

Ms. Golonka said that unemployment rates in Colorado continue to be lower than the national average, including unemployment among veterans. She said she has some suggestions to submit for nonprofits which might be interested in the western slop one stop.

Mr. Robinson said he attended the Joint Budget Committee hearing on 27 November. The new one stop was discussed but the committee did not need any information from CBVA at that time. He said SVCLCs may receive an exemption from state personnel rules regarding salary ranges, which is anticipated to help with recruitment and retention of staff.

Mr. Rudder said he also attended the Denver Stand Down and remarked on the number of both homeless veterans and service providers in attendance. In the San Luis Valley, Mr. Rudder spoke in recognition of Veterans Day at a school in Homelake, where both the superintendent and some of teachers are his former students. A representative of the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System come to Alamosa monthly to assist and advise on health care difficulties in rural parts of Colorado. Mr. Rudder continues to receive frequent complaints about the Choice program.

Mr. Dailey said he also attended the Denver Stand Down, which he has attended several times. He said it is interesting to arrive early and see how many veterans have camped out from the night before in anticipation of the event. He said that in his experience in the mountains of Colorado, many veterans who can be categorized as homeless deliberately try to live off the grid, which is dissimilar from the homeless populations he sees in urban areas. He complimented the staff and volunteers who helped with the Stand Down. Northwestern Colorado recognized Veterans Day with events in multiple locations including Craig, Granby, Hayden, Maybell, Meeker, and Steamboat Springs. The event at Snow Mountain Ranch in Granby had more than 400 attendees. He said he appreciate the opportunity to work in conjunction with the Denver VARO because for many veterans in Colorado, CDVA and its VSOs are considered the face of the VA. He said that although the agencies are not connected there is common goal.

Mr. Steen said that on 21 November Congressman Doug Lamborn introduced HR 4457, the Veterans Empowerment Act. This would replace the Choice Act by creating a new nonprofit entity that would function as a single payer so veterans might have a wider selection of medical providers. Congressman Lamborn published an op-ed about the bill on 28 November and it is available on his web site.

Public Comments

Ms. Kulkoski told the group that she is the contact for Denver VARO regarding Decision Ready Claims (DRC) and questions and issues about the process should come to her. She explained DRC as similar to the FDC program, with the difference being that with DRC claim developments is complete before the claim is submitted to the VA, and with this the VA can render a decision in 30 days or less. DRC is currently available for claims for increase only. Ms. Hammon inquired about the submission process. Ms. Kulkoski said go the direct upload on the 360 portal and to select the DRC option. Mr. Mestas said that training would be available at the Division's annual training conference. Ms. Kulkoski added that online training is also available and said to email her at theodora.kulkoski@va.gov with any questions.

Ms. Morgan introduced the Cohen Veterans Network, which provides free mental health care for veterans and their families. The network plans to open a new clinic in Colorado in February or March of

2018. The network clinics provide a spectrum of care, including psychiatric care, medication management, individuals and family therapy, and case management. No clinical services are available prior to the opening, but in the meantime veterans' advocates can contact Tiffany at 303-704-9419 and she can provide referrals.

Mr. Brooks reported that as administrator of the Veterans Trust Fund Grant for VFW Post 12063, the post has served more than 90 veterans using VTF funds. He agreed that mental health care is an unmet need for many veterans. One program that has been well utilized in Custer County is Outdoor Buddies, which is an all-volunteer nonprofit that pairs volunteers with disabled individuals to access Colorado's natural resources. It is not limited to veterans but is accessed by many, as per census approximately 25%-40% of the county's residents are veterans. He said one of the reasons the VTF funds have been so well expended is the partnership he has with the CVSO. He said that other rural counties have trouble accessing their CVSOs and inquired whether that could be addressed. Mr. Mestas said that CVSOs are employees of their respective counties and many work part time. Over the past two years the state has greatly increased its financial support to Colorado veterans service offices, one goal being to improve accessibility.

Ms. Elton said that the National Cemetery Administration provides burial benefits for veteran v=buried or interred in either a national cemetery or a private one. It is the smallest branch of the VA, operating 21 cemeteries in nine states. When burial in a national cemetery is requested, the funeral home contacts the national scheduling office in St Louis and arranges the date and time. Burial benefit payments are done by reimbursement only. The national cemetery benefit includes the opening and closing of the grave, the concrete vault, perpetual care of the grave site, the gravestone, and military honors. National cemeteries in Colorado are currently at Fort Logan and Fort Lyon, with plans underway to develop another one in Colorado Springs. Burials not in a national cemetery are provided with a headstone or with a medallion for a private stone. Memorial headstones are also available for service members who are MIA. Forms and information are available at va.gov or questions can be directed to Ms. Elton at sara.elton@va.gov.

Ms. Claussen said she several years of history with the VA, having worked as a VSR in Nebraska, Washington, DC, and Florida before locating to Colorado. She reported than in Fiscal Year 2017 the Denver VARO completed 23,900 claims and 3,200 appeals, held 130 BVA Travel Board hearings, and held more than 500 BVA video hearings. There are currently 84 Travel Board hearings and more than 400 video hearings scheduled for Fiscal Year 2018. She introduced the Rapid Appeals Modification Program (RAMP), which takes the oldest pending appeals in date order and offers the veteran a higher level review in the hope of resolving the appeal more quickly. They sent out 500 RAMP letters early in the last quarter of 2017 and have just sent out 5,000 more. The goal is to speed of the processing of appeals, which still pend for a long time. There Denver VARO approximately 5,000 appeals at the NOD stage pending and they take an average of 400 days to be worked. There are approximately 1,300 appeals at the Form 9 stage and those wait approximately 600 days to be worked. The VARO recommends that if a claim is denied but the veteran has new evidence or submitted evidence was overlooked to request reconsideration rather than file an appeal. She suggested that if Colorado preference letters are not being sent in a timely manner that veterans can send an IRIS request from va.gov, as those messages must be responded to within 48 hours. Mr. Dailey and Mr. Rudder both asked for clarification on the PIV card process, which Ms. Claussen said she would research.

Recess

Mr. Dailey here called a recess at 10:50 a.m. Order resumed at 11:01 a.m.

Reports

Mr. Hunt said the new Board members will be confirmed by the legislature in January. He said there were some complications at the Denver Stand Down between the VA and the National Guard, and a proposed solution is to not use the armory for future Stand Downs but to seek a more central location. He was in Grand Junction on 29 November for the charette for the new one stop, which the community has termed a one source. He also attended the Joint Budget Committee hearing on 27 November where there was extensive discussion about the one source, with many questions for the department. A SMART Act briefing is schedule for 04 January and the Board is encouraged to attend. Suggestions for upcoming legislation should be given to Mr. Hunt no later than 21 December. The National Western Stock Show will host Military and Veterans Night on 16 January and recognize Viet Nam veterans.

Mr. Mestas said that Stand Down numbers are available in his submitted report. These have been tracked since 2008. Mr. Steen asked if is known whether attendees are unique or returning. Mr. Mestas says that information is not tracked. Planning is underway for the Board to tour the new VAMC at Fitzsimons.

Ms. Hoagland said she has no additions to her report except to thank Mr. Brooks for attending. Mr. Brooks also thanks Ms. Hoagland for her assistance.

Upcoming Meetings

Ms. Golonka said that her drill duties conflict with scheduled Board meetings in April, May, June and September and inquired if there was any decision regarding call-in attendance. Mr. Hunt said that according to the Director of the Governor's Office of Boards and Commissions it is not prohibited. In discussion, the consensus was that the Board would like to keep the meeting schedule on the first Fridays of each month but no member had objection to call-in attendance. The upcoming meetings are scheduled as follows:

January 05, 2018	Longmont, American Legion Post 32. The strategic plan will be reviewed.
February 02, 2018	Alamosa
March 02, 2018	Denver
April 06, 2018	Aurora – VTF vote
May 04, 2017	Jefferson County

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Rudder made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Mr. Steen. The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.