

## **Albany Town Hall Minutes**

Jim Willis and Mike Burton opened the meeting, explaining the role of the Task Force, its mandate, and the type of issues the Task Force has discussed in the previous 20 cities it has visited. The floor was then opened for issues the participants wanted to discuss.

The wife of a veteran detailed how she had applied for educational benefits for their dependent daughter and she was told it would take a year to adjudicate the claim. Jerry Lorang responded that a year is unacceptable and to talk with him off line about checking on the claim.

Veteran Victor Kuhns said that although Task Force member says it takes only 30 days to get an appointment with the VA once approved, his experience is it is taking four to six months to get certain medical appointments. Further, he related his experience that the Portland VAMC will not allow ambulances to bring veterans to the facility. He also noted that the Benton County CVSOS is making veterans fill out their own paperwork and bring them back before he files them.

The wife of a veteran noted that several calls were made to a doctor at the VAMC regarding her husband's adverse reaction to new medication and the doctor never called back. When they finally saw the doctor, she said she really wasn't an expert on the issue, which is why she did not call back. The wife felt that this service was really bad and that doctors should not be given patients with conditions the doctors were not prepared to treat.

A local chiropractor noted that although congress has passed legislation allowing the VA to prescribe chiropractic care, the VA primary care doctors are not prescribing the care. He felt this is intentional and does not appropriately implement the law. He spoke with Jack Heims off line.

Veteran Roy Poppleton said that after he told the VA he wanted to get most of his care through the Portland VAMC, the VA revoked his Fee Basis card.

Mr. Kuhns noted that once you pick a clinic, you're stuck there and must go through your PCP to get specialty care.

A number of veterans were concerned about the lost records at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis due to the 1973 fire. One veteran stated that a second set of all military records were held in Maine; Jerry Lorang corrected the veterans, explaining that no such records exist. Frank Van Cleave of Cong. Peter DeFazio's office said that there are some limited records from the Army circa 1943-1944 that are available, but not all military records.

A retired Navy Captain (0-6) asked that the Task Force work diligently to make sure servicemembers leaving service now get all the information they need. He explained that as a senior officer, he was provided all the information, but junior enlisted and young

officers don't get the same information and the Task Force should be sure that this new generation of veterans is provided the information it needs to obtain its benefits.

One veteran noted that HIPPA is an issue in terms of sharing health care information.

A local World War II veteran stated that he heard that there was not enough money for veterans and that is why they are committing suicide. Jim Willis and Jack Heims address the suicide issue and the VA budget issue.

This same World War II veteran said his Social Security was going to be garnished for not paying his VA co-pays. CVSO Kim Grooms had met the veteran previously, but the veteran did not return for his follow up meeting. The two would meet off line.

Several veterans noted that their VA health care was very good. At the end of the meeting, Jim Willis confirmed with the audience that they felt the health care was good, but accessing it was their issue. The participants agreed.

The mother of an Air Guard airman noted that the family outreach was really good.

Linn-Benton Community College made a short presentation on its plans to create a veteran center on campus that would be a one-stop shop for veterans and a comfortable place for veterans to congregate. Linn-Benton is reaching out and will be meeting with the CVSO and others to determine what type of services could be offered of campus to student veterans. Linn-Benton is intent on providing pre-deployment and reintegration services. It also is providing tuition free education to Gold Star families, and has in the past provided tuition waivers to bridge the gap between when a servicemember returns and when their GI Bill kicked in. Linn-Benton says it is committed to helping reintegrate servicemembers via its education opportunities.

A veteran asked if Oregon would allow spouses of veterans to utilize the VA system as other places do. Jack Heims and Frank Van Cleave explained that in this VA region, that will not be the case. In other regions, the VA has open beds and because of under utilization, spouses can be allowed to use the system, such as in San Francisco. However, there has to be excess capacity in the system to do so.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m. after which many veterans met privately with the CVSO, employment specialist, and Task Force members.