

# Ontario Leadership Meeting Minutes

## Participants

Bill Thomson CVSO  
Susann Mills City Council  
Dan K. Cummings City Council  
Joe Dominick Mayor  
Bruce Tuttle  
Ronald Verini City Council  
John Gaskill City Council  
Dan Joyce  
Bruce Buchanan OHCS  
State Representative Cliff Beutz  
Henry Lawrence  
Lewie Allen City Council

Jim Willis provided an overview of the Task Force, its history and process.

The first issue raised immediately after the introduction was a request for the VA to pay for local doctors and hospitals to treat veterans. Due to its remote location, transporting veterans to VA facilities is difficult. The community would like the VA to contract more services locally to help veterans receive the health care they need. Jack Heims responded, explaining the fee basis process, how contracting works, and that the problem is one of limited resources because local care outside the VA system is much more expensive than care within the VA system.

A participant noted that the Veterans' Home in The Dalles only has 151 beds and the VA states we need 800 beds. What is being done to build more veterans' homes? Jim Willis responded, explaining the process for building new homes and the Department's activities to build a second veterans' home.

The Task Force was asked if the area is overlooked by the VA because it is in the Boise VA area of responsibility. Task Force members did not feel Ontario was overlooked due to its location. Jack Heims explained that VA facilities are placed based on veteran population and that Ontario currently does not have the veteran population base to warrant a CBOC or Vet Center.

Local leaders indicated that there are two DAV vans and the local Senior and Aging Council has wheelchair accessible vans for doctor appointments locally.

The leaders asked if there was a way to build a VA CBOC in Fruitland, stating the closest they have currently is Caldwell.

Participants noted that outreach to veterans is a concern and they did not feel as if veterans were getting all the information they needed. The Task Force agreed that outreach is a major concern and issue.

In discussing the homeless issue, most felt there was not a significant homeless population in Ontario; however, there is a need for transitional housing to help veterans move from substance addiction and mental health issue to independence.

There was a general discussion led by Jack Heims regarding PTSD and TBI screening and how the process works from the time the soldier out processes from the combat zone to his or her enrollment in the VA health care system.

Representative Beutz asked what legislative concepts the Task Force is considering. Paul Evans noted the following ideas:

Funds for veteran transportation  
Funds for workforce development  
DAV volunteer van driver incentives  
Housing (loans, rent subsidies, transitional, dorms)  
Health Care (fix the Tri-Care bill, provide incentives for mental health in rural areas)

Paul Evans further explained that a work group of the Task Force has been working with Chambers of Commerce regarding veteran employment issues. One idea is to use a veteran to fill a vacancy of a deployed soldier during the duration of the deployment. This way the veteran gets work and experience, the employer gets a solid employee during the deployment, and the soldier gets his/her job back upon returning home.

The Council asked what the City could do to help the Task Force. Paul Evans noted the following:

1. Ask anyone who applies for any city service if they are a veteran. If so, pass that information along to the CVSO or ODVA for follow up.
2. Help facilitate bringing groups together to partner to support veterans.
3. Communicate to veterans to contact their CVSO or ODVA.
4. Train emergency responders in mental health (specifically PTSD)