

# Minutes

April 3, 2008

Department of Humans Serves Building, Room 255

## **Veterans' Services Task Force** *Post-Separation Subcommittee*

**In attendance:** Mic Alexander, *Chair*; James Booker; Krissa Caldwell; Mike Caldwell; Paul Evans; Amy Goodall; Debbie Koreski; Michelle Nelson; Mac MacDonald; Val Conley; Dan Long; 3 guests (unknown).

Meeting commenced at 3:50 p.m.

Paul Evans noted that he has seven placeholders in the legislature for bills and seven others for memorials.

General discussion – Veterans are not being asked about their veteran status by service providers when seeking services.

MacDonald discussed the need to prioritize needs of veterans. If not the legislature has no guide as to what veterans need.

Chair asked about the Oregon veteran home loan program and whether it is still going. Conley confirmed, with details regarding 30-year limit to use loan, and the \$417,000 amount you can borrow. Discussion ensued regarding funds available for loans and bonds used to fund loans and the need to explore more funding for loans.

Chair asked about a one-stop brochure or literature regarding available educational benefits to veterans. Caldwell M. responded regarding the VA website has a lot of information available. Chair asked if the state had educational benefits and Conley confirmed but noted they don't work in conjunction with the Federal benefits.

General discussion regarding educational benefit differences between National Guard and the regular military. MacDonald commented that one of the problems is how Congress changes the rules regarding educational programs every four years.

Chair stated he felt combat veterans should have an "open checkbook" regarding educational benefits.

Caldwell noted how the needs and experiences are different for each veteran as some of those deployed work in essentially offices whereas other are on cliffs and being shot at with huge ranges of experiences. Most all OR National Guard members have been deployed at least once, some as many as four times.

MacDonald noted that military members don't have a choice as to their job function while deployed, so all veterans should be treated the same. Evans pointed out how even some Cold War veterans may have had more difficult experiences but due to gag orders, are unable to talk about what they did.

Chair stated he would like to see quality healthcare for all veterans, and comparative statistics for veterans of all eras and types on educational and healthcare benefits. Caldwell stated that information should be available between the military department, ODVA and the Department of Human Services. Chair stated he would like to see the information in a one-stop resource.

General discussion ensued regarding healthcare benefits of programs like TRICARE and normal coverage. Discussing how doctors and billed amounts vary by location as well as type of healthcare.

Koreski asked for the challenges facing the task force sub committee on post separation.

Evans answered we are trying to figure out how a veteran would find what programs are out there to help with retirement, senior care, end of life and working career areas. What is available for the person who comes back, reintegrates, and works hard for ten years, and then finds he or she is having problems with divorce, alcohol dependency, etc. or needs related to education or job skills.

General discussion – What tax benefits are being offered as an incentive to hire veterans. Is Federal money needed? Booker responded he is aware of only one, the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, being offered.

Evans emphasized utilizing whatever resources needed from State, County and City government to help answer the questions on how best to serve veterans. Then the Governor can take that information to the 09 Legislature and say, "This is what I want."

Caldwell stated roughly 60% of National Guardsmen are either unemployed or underemployed.

MacDonald recommended checking the top five veteran related bills from all other states, and use their research and expertise to help determine what needs we have and what we could use.

General discussion on employer's incentives and preferences for hiring veterans.

Topic for the April 10 meeting: Healthcare and healthcare related issues.

Tentative topics for the April 17 meeting: Tax-related issues.

Tentative topics for the April 24 meeting: Employment/Education.

Meeting adjourned: 5:00 p.m.