

## *MINUTES*

# **GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON VETERANS' SERVICES FULL COMMITTEE**

Date: May 1, 2008

Place: Oregon Military Department, Room

Time: 3:12 p.m.

Chair Paul Evans began by welcoming everyone and then explained why the change of location was needed and that the group will meet at the current Military Department location for this meeting and the next two (May 8th and the 15th). There will not be a meeting May 22nd and the location for the meeting on May 29th is unknown. He thanked the Military Dept. for its hospitality, especially on such short notice. Then he asked to go around the table and everyone introduced himself or herself before beginning the presentation for today. (Education)

Karissa Caldwell, Mike Caldwell, Jim Willis, Scott McCrae, Jack Heims, Kevin O'Reilly, Jerry Lorang, Paula Brown, Jim Keller, Mike Burton, Richard Matthews, Jim Booker, Martha Schrader, Dan Estes, Jeanne Arana, Sasha Pollack.

Chair Evans then turned the floor over to Mike Burton who gave some introductory information about Portland State University (PSU) and the student body, including veterans. He explained how it came to be that PSU was able to have a Veteran Service Officer on campus this year as a pilot program. He introduced the VSO assigned to PSU through Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA), Frank Van Meter. Mike stated that PSU works with many other Community Colleges and Frank has gone and performed outreach at other Community Colleges in the area. He then referred to the packet of printed materials that they brought and provided to the committee.

Frank Van Meter's presentation contained these key points –

- Most veterans are eligible and are in need of more than just educational benefits. If they were aware of these and were to qualify to receive them then likely more could be successful in completing their education or training.
- As it is now, the outreach is more Frank seeking out veteran students rather than them coming and finding him.
- Veteran students want a one-stop veteran resource center that is a comfortable and social environment where they can hangout and feel welcome.

Some ideas Frank shared from his perspective that could prove helpful for improving things in the future were –

- Establish a Quality Assurance Officer or the like to ensure that all VSO's are providing accurate information and quality service to the veterans they serve.
- Standardize the VSO accreditation credentials for the state and create a shared sense of mission and purpose.
- Utilize the veteran students on the campus to be U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) work-studies doing outreach through the student veteran associations at colleges. They would need to work through the VA to establish eligibility to work independently in this role.
- Embed VSOs in with military units as they prepare to be deployed and then they can remain their service provider (for families etc.) through deployment, returning and demobilization, and then the reintegration process and after.
- 18-24 year-olds are a group in Oregon that are at a higher risk for suicides and these are the average age of students and the schools needs to recognize the veterans who are going through readjustment and reintegration back into a civilian life.

Mike Burton added a few more items included in the handouts and also pointed out that at PSU the issue for creating a Veterans Resource Center is more about a location and space than it is an issue about money. Another issue is housing for students and perhaps the idea of specified housing for veteran students that is less costly might need to be explored also.

Scott McCrae raised a question about whether there are grants that may be available to colleges for some of these items. Burton stated that he would rather that this issue be worked through ODVA and the existing CVSO funding. Jim Willis provided information that approximately 7.5 million state dollars per biennium are currently invested (in CVSOs) and the return (in vet pension and compensation) per biennium on this investment is approximately one billion federal dollars coming back into Oregon. But this does not take into account the student veterans who may be eligible because they are not aware of their benefits. Oregon is above the national average pension and national average compensation.

Martha Schrader noted that these high averages and positive numbers reflects the quality and does draw people to Oregon.

Paul then advised that the remainder of this conversation be taken up in the subgroups as a matter of saving time. He then asked for Karissa Caldwell to please proceed with her portion of the presentation.

Karissa Caldwell introduced guests in the room who were from Clackamas and Chemeketa Community Colleges, and Approving Agency. She then referred to the handouts that had been provided. She shared a variety of data, which included these listed below.

- Most Community Colleges already have tuition waivers or tuition policies in place for veterans. Not all the same.
- There are a number of technical programs available to earn degrees at institutions in Oregon.
- Some Community Colleges have veteran clubs that are forming or are formed on their campuses.
- Suggestions for Congressional or Legislative action –
  - Additional educational allotment for veterans to purchase books and supplies.
  - Creating training for faculty (so they are more aware and able to communicate better with veterans etc.)

Mrs. Caldwell then referred to Joann Truesdell who is a former Clackamas Community College student and is now President of the school. She shared some insight from her perspective and experience in how community colleges are working to accommodate the needs of veterans on their campuses.

1. Some success has been found in getting older veterans in the community to support the outreach and programs at the local communities.
2. Scholarships and Tuition waivers for veterans.
3. Some problems with how to identify veterans on campus. (Cost of software programs or systems was brought up by the group)
4. Working to form a model of a one-stop resource vet centers for all campuses. (Possibility for any appropriations from the federal government, applications were made)
5. Need to establish and maintain working partnerships with resources for veterans.

She then mentioned three asks she brought out were –

- Community Colleges be funded not strictly by just FTE but also by services for veterans (hours spent serving the veterans).
- Whatever can be done for all to join together and sign on to support appropriations for veterans' purposes.
- Regular discussion and dialogue at the table about veteran issues.

Paul Evans then sought some clarification of certain issues and wanted one point in particular clarified – it was that *if* the legislature were to direct all schools to ask if incoming students were veterans then there would be an increased awareness by schools of the money that is available and among the veteran students that there were benefits available. Ms. Truesdell responded that it would be better if it were not mandated by legislature but perhaps there was some other way. And then some brief discussion followed and it was agreed to look into this. May need to look into how schools share information and report data that is required such as veteran tuition waivers etc.

Could this work if funding was provided with the mandate?

At 4:23 p.m. Paul then brought the discussion to a close and stated that it was time to break out into groups due to time and that all would regroup at 5:00.

Jim Willis addressed the group just before they split; he wanted to thank all the education folks for coming to work with the task force.

Reconvened at 5:10. Scott McCrae announced that I5 south from Kuebler is at a standstill so folks might want to take an alternate route. Paul suggested via Monmouth.

Reports then given by the sub chairs -

Dan Estes – (Aging Veterans) discussed the asking of students and potential students if they are veterans, Benefits for incarcerated veterans prisons and county jails, discussed a five-page handout of recommendations that have surfaced in their group. Will be weeding through and finalizing which ones to move forward with.

Mike Burton – (Reintegration) discussion for a bit around the education presentation given today and other programs that would benefit besides colleges from actions identified as needing to be addressed and how to implement the ideas. Then discussed the importance along reintegration of preparing and establishing relationships prior to deployments, through demobilization and further. The group unanimously feels that looking into how to keep the returning troops active for additional weeks once back in the states is mandatory. More information needs to be gathered.

Discussion on this topic evolved for several minutes with some additional input. The extension of the active duty time for returning troops is a hot topic – nationwide. Keep this ball rolling is the mission of the whole committee.

Paul Evans – (Post Separation) follow on what we have discussed before about trying to expand the scope of support for college registrars etc. in getting service and performing outreach to student veterans. Need to identify factors involved and look to best ways for creating virtual vet centers, one-stop resources for veterans and students. Discussed the costs and differences for community colleges versus the University system.

Paul introduced Amber Hollister, Deputy Council to the Governor and then stated that he had briefly mentioned to her about why states are not able to receive monies from veterans who are incarcerated and are eligible for compensation or pension.

Couple of announcements – May 8th will be on housing, crisis and non-crisis situations. May 15th will also be here at this location and will be concentrated on workforce.

Meeting adjourned at 5: 28 p.m.