

Washington County Town Hall Meeting

Task Force Participants

Representative Jeff Barker
Jack Heims
Jerry Lorang
Bob Plame
Tino Ornelas
Tom Mann

Public Participation

About 25 people attended, including the Washington County Aging and Veterans Service Advisory Committee, Washington County CVSO, and the Washington County DAV Commander. Mike Hanley of Tri-West attended as did Julie Sullivan of the Oregonian.

Meeting Highlights

The meeting began with a question as to what exactly Executive Order 08-08 is. Jerry Lorang explained the content of the executive order. Prior to the meeting, Jerry handed out the memo to the public that defined the Task Force expectations.

Wayne Harvey of TREA wanted to know why only five or six members of the Task Force were there when there are 27 members. Jerry Lorang explained that not all the members travel everywhere. Wayne then wanted to know why there is not a list of Task Force members available to the public. Tom Mann explained that the list was provided with the release of Executive Order 08-08; that ODVA will work on the getting the list on its website; and that there is an intranet website for Task Force members that is not ready for public viewing due to the work-draft nature of Task Force. However, that website will be public when the work is completed so there will be complete transparency.

Wayne then said he had a problem with the issue of the Task Force putting forward only 5-15 bills. He asked if the Task Force had received UVGO's prioritized list of 20 bills it planned to submit. Jerry Lorang confirmed he had seen that list. (That list was forwarded to the Chair from Paula Brown about two weeks ago). Wayne was concerned that UVGO's list would not be considered by the Task Force. Tom Mann explained that the Task Force will have its bills. ODVA has its own bills that hopefully will dovetail with the Task Force. UVGO has its bills that we also hope will dovetail with the Task Force. Tino Ornelas said we need everyone to be on the same page and not fight in the legislature. He said all veteran groups should support the Task Force bills and not go around putting in their own bills that do not have the support of the entire veterans' community. Wayne responded negatively to that comment.

The Washington County Aging and Veterans Service Advisory Committee then noted it had passed out a position paper. The group's number one concern is maintaining

adequate and stable funding for its CVSO office. Other issues in their paper include recognizing the entire veteran populations and their unique demographic needs; the need to increase serving capacity for veterans; and should funding be increased their plan is to expand PTSD counseling in the county, provide a van to transport veterans to the VA CBOC, address homeless veteran issues.

Wayne Harvey said he had a problem with Washington County buying a van, believing it was a duplication of services with the DAV program. Washington County said the DAV van does not go county wide and their plan is for enhancing not duplicating. Wayne said he would like to know the issue so he could address it, because he believes the DAV system can work in Washington County without a duplication of service.

An Employment Department Regional Veterans Employment specialist asked Wayne if they pick up homeless veterans. Wayne explained the process for pick up. The Employment representative stated that there are many homeless veterans who cannot call for a ride because they have no means and that making their area a regular pick up area would be important to consider. He further noted that the Legislature had appropriated transportation funds at one point for homeless vets but those funds were not renewed.

The Employment representative then switched topics and noted that employment veteran specialists are being downsized while the number of veterans with needs increases. He asked that the Task Force consider telling Congress that they need more funding to maintain and increase veteran representatives. A Washington County DVOP agreed, saying that he is having to handle the overflow from the LVER program, thus short changing disabled veterans.

Dick Thornhill then was recognized who said he had a number of initiatives he would like the Task Force to consider, including the following:

1. Expand the Tuition Waiver (SB 1066) for widows and orphans of those killed in action after 9/11 and 100 percent disabled veteran dependents to all widows and orphans of KIA and all dependents of 100 percent disabled veterans regardless of era. Also, include Community Colleges in the law.
2. Expand the veteran preference law to include a preference for widows and orphans and dependents of 100 percent disabled veterans (10-pt preference)
3. He would like to see state agencies report on the percentage of veterans hired by the agencies.
4. He would like to see a resolution encouraging the targeting of veterans for employment both private sector and government.
5. He would like to see efforts made to provide pro bono legal services to veterans, especially in the area of USERA.
6. He would like Oregon to consider creating a veterans court after the Buffalo, NY model.

Tino Ornelas responded that the Task Force is working on many of the issues he mentioned. Dick stated that the Community Colleges promised to provide free tuition on

their own if they were not part of SB 1066 but have not done so. Task Force members noted that several community colleges are offering waivers. Wayne Harvey said that he's a 100 percent disabled veteran and that his daughter cannot go to school under the program. Is his daughter any less valuable than a veteran's who is eligible he asked rhetorically?

The Employment Department specialist noted that there is a 15-year limit to use a veterans' preference and asked why that is. Tom Mann explained that although an unpopular answer, the thought is after 15 years a veteran would be established, reintegrated, working and no longer need the preference. However, that assumes an old model of employment when people stayed at a job for 30 years and retired. Tom shared the figure he heard at another meeting that the Y Generation holds a job for an average of 13 months and moves on. Representative Barker said he would look into this issue. Representative Barker also enumerated a number of issues the legislature under his chairmanship has addressed.

Pat Maberry (an HR specialist) noted that one of the reasons there are employment problems for veterans is they simply do not have any skills when they leave service. They may have been a good soldier, but they don't have transferable skills that allow them to enter the work force. Dick Thornhill responded that that is why they need education. Maberry said that she would suggest the Task Force include HR directors in its meeting with CEOs. She explained that CEOs don't really know the laws and that HR directors are the ones who really are in charge of the hiring process, ensuring the candidate has the right skills for the position. Task Force members thought that was a good idea. Maberry also suggested not having such strict legislation that it ties HR managers hands.

DAV Commander James Burns then said he would like to see the Governor order doctors to accept Tri-Care. Mike Hanley responded, explaining that Tri-Care is a federal entitlement program and that the Governor really couldn't order doctors to take it. Mike further explained all the efforts going into raising the reimbursement rate for doctors, which is the lynchpin of expanding acceptance of the coverage.

Betty Pomeroy (former ODVA Advisory member and Washington County Aging and Veterans Service Committee member) said that widows are terribly neglected and that the VA widow's pension is dismal. Jerry Lorang responded, agreeing with her.

A participant asked how to deal with aging veterans who need nursing care. Jeff Hill, Director of Washington County's social services responded that there is Medicaid, Project Independence, Vets Home, and other programs. One of the areas Washington County is expanding is its partnerships to help provide services.

Wayne Harvey said the Task Force needs to implement the two more veterans' homes. Tom Mann explained that a grant has been submitted for a new veterans' home, and Tino Ornelas said plans were being developed for a third. This is an issue being worked.

Dr. David Nardon of the Washington County Aging and Veteran Service Advisory Committee said he would like to see a coherent package of veterans bills go to the legislature so that there is no confusion for legislators and asked everyone in the room to please collaborate.

The meeting was closed at 9 p.m.