

## La Grande Town Hall Meeting Notes

Veterans questioned Dr. Tuchschnidt regarding Fee Basis system and why they cannot be authorized to use local doctors for service-connected care. Dr. Tuchschnidt told them that the VA spends quite a bit of money on fee basis care. The veterans stressed the rural and remote nature of their community and the problem of getting to a VA facility for hospitalization and specialty care, especially during the winter when the weather closes down roads.

A veteran asked about the state and federal rules for the 5-point preference in hiring, and noted the 15-year limitation and how that affects vets who are past that time frame. The veteran wanted the limitation for using the preference eliminated.

A widow discussed her widow's benefits and the problems she had receiving them. Widow also had problems with Tricare. Nothing really could be done about her issues – her husband did not sign up for SBP; she is receiving DIC. Due to some financial issues, she only received \$600 this month; ODVA requested emergency grant for woman. She was connected with emergency grant program.

Veterans wanted a DAV van for Walla Walla. Transportation is a significant issue. However, something called Community Connections does provide veteran transportation for Walla Walla, according to veterans.

Veteran was denied getting into VHA system due to income. Discussed category 8 and being sure to sign up for that even if not provided benefits.

Some veterans discouraged with current CVSO.

Veteran asked why they have to share their private insurance information with VAMC. Dr. Tuchschnidt explained system and that VA bills for non-service connected medical care.

Veteran asked about new GI Bill. She was referred to VA.gov for GI Bill brochure and provided explanation regarding details of bill.

A veteran asked which was better, new GI Bill or Tuition Assistance Program. Described both programs so veteran could make informed choice.

Female veteran asked about woman combat vets with PTSD – was concerned that there is little information on it. Explained current situation with female veterans and will refer veteran to Val Conley at ODVA.

A veteran asked if we had an idea what type of legislation the Task Force would be forwarding. Provided general information regarding legislative concepts.

Veterans noted that there are not enough mental health services in region, particularly for PTSD. This echoes morning meeting with new La Grande CBOC, during which incentives for mental health providers was requested.

Veterans also discussed providing incentives to businesses that hired veterans.

**NOTE:** Several veterans provided Task Force with questions on 3x5 cards. As of July 23, all veterans had been contacted and their questions answered.