

# Minutes

April 3, 2008

Department of Humans Serves Building, Room 257

## **Veterans' Services Task Force** *Reintegration Subcommittee*

**In attendance:** Mike Burton, *Chair*; Dr. Jim Tuchs Schmidt; Tino Ornelas; Scott McCrae; Peggy Boquist; Diane Gooding; Jeanne Arana; Ann Malosh; Martha Schrader; Oregon State Police; Tom Mann; Christopher Dauterman; other guests

Meeting commenced at 3:45 p.m.

Discussion begins about intent to determine what kind of resources and background information needed to support building first 36 months getting out of service or with a break in service.

Col. McCrae states that for three years Oregon National Guard Reintegration Team has been providing help for soldiers coming home. By mandate, they could not see the soldiers for first 60-90 days. So soldiers were disconnected from what benefits are available. Soldiers, Sailors, Airman, Marines, Guardsman and Families and the overarching help for healthcare, jobs and education. Legal and housing are also part of the resources. Three years ago they started having summits inviting everyone who could provide information about benefits. Created Job Fairs – Veterans Career and Benefits Days bringing everyone together. This began with Clackamas Community College with Commissioner Schrader. These take place every six months to help any veteran, of any service.

Chair Burton clarifies that they help any veteran of any service and Col. McCrae confirms.

McCrae identifies that the system is like a big help desk. Referrals go to VA, Coalition of Troops Support, Jobs, or whatever the need is. These happen at armories, Community Colleges (inaudible) in the community. These are done where commands have needs. Toll free number and website tools meeting 24 needs.

Dianne Gooding identifies that she has worked primarily on family program of the Oregon National Guard for about 6 years. This program handles all phases of deployment. Mandated by headquarters of National Guard bureau that program takes all military families.

J.D. Baucom Oregon National Guard Career Transition Assistance Program. Works in conjunction, and in cooperation with, Oregon Employment Department LVER's and DVOP's. Also partnered with Oregon Joint Apprenticeship Council, Coordinate with Local and County Governments. Emphasizing working with local communities because of realization, that state is not going to reintegrate its servicemembers. Coordination of coming up with template and method of making reintegration happen at the local level.

Jack Himes from the Portland VA. Full partners with Col. McCrae. Co-Chair of summit and involvement with Tri-County Summit. Outreach whenever and wherever asked. One example is working with State Police for four years with training. New cadet training for how to deal with adrenaline issues and citizens who suffer from PTSD. Helping them understand how to work with community and family squabbles.

Jeanne Arana of Economic and Community Development discussed legislation that would create a small business assistance program. Parameters are within the first 12 months after deployment. Small fund that has been untested. Will be a service coming available in the next year.

Commissioner Martha Schrader explains the incubation of Hire Vets First program from Clackamas County. Provided access to every Veteran Service Officer in the region. Community Colleges train on how to use iMatch, Resume Building, and Interview Skills Training. Collaboration with Clackamas Community College for education for veterans and their families. Business in Clackamas County, Miles Fiberglass, a key donor and member of the Pacific Northwest Defense Coalition started an education endowment. Dept. of Labor grant for program Working for Independence.

Tino Ornelas of the Oregon Dept. of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee identifies that his generation did not have this level of support. Does not understand why signups are lower. If all of these programs are there, something is wrong. Cites that disconnect may be with veterans themselves if all these programs are there, but signups are low.

Chair Burton identifies that there is a gap somewhere and cited that out of 25,000 students, 500 are veterans as identified by financial aid department. PSU is not able to identify the veteran students. Sees an opportunity to contact that vets and say welcome home.

States that subcommittee will report to main taskforce group. Job is to recommend to the Governor and to the Legislature things that we feel would help improve the area we are in, support the things we are already doing well, and fix things that are not working.

- 1) Focus on what is working and make sure it is working well,
- 2) What can be improved and how we can improve it,
- 3) What is not working, where are the gaps and the problems

Once report is made, that is not the end of the task. All who have concern will and should be asked to lobby the legislature on these issues. This is not the purvey of the taskforce. Report should have significant impact on legislative members.

Chair Burton states that the most difficult part will be to identify knowledge and laying the groundwork. What we really want to have is information that helps group speak and talk from the same page. Clarification may be needed for topics to explore, for example, workforce versus employment. Many of the topics may apply to the reintegration area.

Representative from Woodburn Career Center, region three covering Marion, Polk, Yamhill county Workforce Department works closely with Veterans from Clackamas County. Cites

Employment Department LVER's and DVOP's are knowledgeable, however they are not everywhere, and funding is short. This is spread out through some part-time and full-time people. Workforce needs beefed up to tie into reintegration.

Navy and Marine Reserves have recently contacted J.D. Baucom for Phase 3 briefing. Offering all reserve components Phase 3 briefing and all veterans for Veterans Career and Benefits Fairs. Now also reaching out for initial Phase 3 briefing for first briefing when returning to country that is state-specific briefing.

Chair Burton restates that effort to try to integrate all of the reintegration efforts. Clarifies if everyone is familiar with and understands all of the various service components so everyone understands. Subcommittee agrees that they understand all of the service components, but not everyone is familiar with all state and federal veteran benefits. Urges subcommittee to become familiar with all veteran benefits.

Jack Himes identifies that abridged version is available on the website and that all branches of service are flocking to that website.

Tom Mann from ODVA states that all returning soldiers get a Welcome Home packet and information cannot be shared due to HIPPA issues, etc. Mann cites that all Federal Benefits must be applied for and this is where Service Officers come. Service Officers acting in quasi-attorney fashion are accredited by the Federal government to represent the veteran under power of attorney for preparation of VA claims work. Service Officers are to represent these veterans. Part of this is to integrate all programs.

Tino Ornelas states there is another big problem. That various counties are performing work in different ways and that County Veteran Service Officers are housed in different departments. That phone numbers are very difficult to find because of this. Christopher Dauterman states that in 2006 this information was made available through the ODVA website for each county, the same way that each state is linked up through the VA. Tino Ornelas states that not all veterans have computers although more probably do.

Chair Burton would like to know what is needed in existing policies. Everyone has operational procedures and does everyone know what they are and how they coordinate with each other.

Oregon State Police recruiter talks about how OSP became involved because of the value of the reintegration of the career fairs. This was based on how good they were and how it energized and inspired them to support participation. OSP has taken it a step farther to look for other things to do that are in the forefront for employers looking for veterans and letting them know that they are valuable and they value their service. Sees that this is an area with a need, not simply for Oregon State police, but for the State of Oregon, not only for the soldiers, but for the citizens.

Chair Burton would like to know if their OSP has a stated policy document that could be transferable to all 36 counties. This policy document/template could help connect how this is being done. Oregon State Police website has connection through their new recruiting website and the GI Bill which is linked through ODVA and Employment. Chair Burton states that once

people move on and knowledge leaves, there is nothing for veterans to follow so this needs to be codified. Commissioner Shrader talks about a difference between policy shift or champion of issues. Unknown person talks about trying to plan out path and determine budget for unknown trail. Commissioner Shrader talks about institutionalizing after championing.

J.D. Baucom recommends that it should be institutionalized because the state level to local level. This is because there are groups throughout doing things differently with various levels of city and county government. Recommends a modular manner with city template that lists how county fit in and how does the state support it. Chair Burton identifies that community colleges are great gathering places and are supportive in initial education benefits as a good place to start.

Chair Burton would like to identify information or existing policies and protocols that are available to go through and get subcommittee educated on figuring out how to proceed.

Jeanne Arana asks for clarification definition of employment and workforce. Talks about servicemembers will not get hired if they list they load bombs. Commissioner Martha Schrader talked about companies developing new technologies that are eager to have that. OSP also has a need for people who know how to take bombs apart.

Col. McCrae says that they Reintegration Team has been down some of this road and guarantees that they have tripped over them. McCrae cites Memorandum of Understanding involving Adjutant General, USDVA, Dept of Labor, Oregon Employment Department, Dept of Human Services for codifying directive. Col. McCrae states that policies and procedures were requested and have been loaded onto their website. Shared website address.

Dr. Tuchschnidt states that what has happened in Oregon is a model for every other state. Spending some time at next meeting [learning about this process] as a group to figure out how to create a replication at a smaller level throughout the state on a regional basis, it would be a huge advantage. Between the two ends of the spectrum, what is being done at the state level pulling together people is a model of every other state to follow and Oregon should be very proud of that.

Chair Burton says that the subcommittee should spend some time with those documents. Cites question for Paul Evans about when reintegration ends at 36 months. Disability benefits go way beyond 36 months and at some point, there is a handoff here.

Dr. Tuchschnidt offers to bring information about veterans coming back, health care services they are using, what illnesses are being seen, where does the VA have assets to help people through hospitals, clinics and Vet Centers.

Col. McCrae states that we have no turf. We don't care where the veteran gets their health from, how they get it, who gets it to them. Our interest is in just getting them connected with that assistance. Dr. Tuchschnidt states that VA has redefined time period through legislation from 2 year to 5 years. Dr. Tuchschnidt recommends rethinking the 36-month reintegration window.

Chair Burton cites that access to information is used differently especially through websites. Access to websites and how user-friendly are those websites. Dr. Tuchschtmidt identifies that some of the vets coming back from Iraq are in their seventies. Chair Burton answers question about information sharing for subcommittee support. Chair Burton begins discussion of disability benefits as far as reintegration goes.

Chair Burton asks subcommittee what they need to know about that. Tino Ornelas states that if a veteran is already disabled when they get out, they know all this. Inaudible discussion. Chair Burton asks for examples. Unknown subcommittee member requests more clarity about what VSO's do.

Col. McCrae states that VSO is point of entry into most of the VA world. They have the best contact, best information, most up to date. They know whether to get them into the VA for health care or for jobs. Chair Burton believes a briefing about VSO's and their role. Tom Mann explains hierarchy of National, State and County Veteran Service Officers.

Unknown subcommittee member questions if VSO's throughout the state are equal with regards to employee capacity and knowledge. Col. McCrae identifies ODVA as having VSO's at state level and responsibility of training of County Veteran Service Officers. Linda Christie talks the Coalition of Troop Support and emergency funds for soldiers and families. Linda Christie talks about the red tape that between the times of identifying a problem.

Unknown subcommittee member expresses wanting to know what the red tape is. Christopher Dauterman of ODVA states that the VA cannot prosecute claims against itself and that a veteran needs a Service Officer to help them file a claim. States that if a veteran tries to prosecute a claim by themselves, they will be shot down almost immediately. Tino Ornelas states that County Veteran Service Officers have a different agenda than the state. So there are politics involved.

Chair Burton states that an organizational chart will help layout how all of the pieces fit. Tino Ornelas states that ODVA would have that information and ODVA could come up with that to identify the gaps that Chair Burton states may exist.

Dr. Tuchschtmidt states there is no question there are a lot of assets out there that are trying to do pieces of this and believes that part of the problem is the coordination of that which is why the early integration model is such an important and powerful tool to think about. Poses the question of what the state bring to the table in terms of disability benefits in the 36 month period being discussed. Suggests a PowerPoint presentation to what the state brings to the table (i.e.; Employment, Education, Disability benefits) that might be available.

Chair Burton asks for Pert chart, flow chart or organizational chart at the minimal to show who all the players are and to some extent how they relate. States that there must be some existing regulations/ordinances of how these things are done. Would like to see the subcommittee educated on how this works so we can identify if there are gaps, red tapes, more resources needed, etc. Restates Paul's argument of how much is being spent on fighting in the war effort versus those who went over and fought for us.

Chair Burton states subcommittee should not be afraid to say we need to say to put more resources back in to that, weather it is the actual benefit itself, or to getting people to those benefits. Questions if they are adequate for us, and cites a part of the problem is that people can't get to those benefits. Knowledge or working structure to get to those benefits may not be working right, or maybe it is.

Chair Burton says one thing that must be on the chart is area for families. States new state education legislation that is available to surviving spouses and dependents. Linda Christie states that families are dealing with their own battles and this impacts divorce rates. Col. McCrae explains how family pre-deployment and during deployment briefings are not well attended.

Col. McCrae states three years ago when reintegration started, counties were only funded at 2/10ths of a person by the Oregon state legislature. So state legislature funds the County Veteran Service Officers, the County hires them. Some counties were funded for no Service Officers. Now funded for at least one veteran service officer for every county. This should be looked at for improving the system.

Chair Burton states new legislation that recently passed for tax benefit to doctors who will take Tricare. Col. McCrae states that there are counties that have no doctors that take Tricare. Linda Christy asks to see how Wounded Warriors are how they are being handled and the care that they get. Getting them through the system and getting them rated by the VA.

Unknown subcommittee member talks about the great care the OIF and OEF war veterans are getting from the medical coordinators and patient transition advocate who walks them through. Chair Burton talks about medical care in remote areas of Oregon. Tino Ornelas states that there is a bus infrastructure for transportation from various areas in Oregon to VA Medical Centers. Col. McCrae states that war veterans with medical problems from previous conflicts should be considered in post-separation issues and subcommittee. Chair Burton states this could be linked back to war veterans in need of increased disability benefits. Dr. Tuchsmidt states that the need is very different need for veterans when they first come back. Tino Ornealas states that this may need to be revisited and go down on the list and figure out what need to be done.

Chair Burton states that things need to be wrapped up so the subcommittee can meet back with larger taskforce for closing session. Discusses and states that next meeting will be spent educating everyone with flow chart, PERT chart or Organizational chart that shows all the partners and how they relate with each other. Then subcommittee can sort out where gaps and problems exist.