

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs Quarterly Meeting
Wednesday, July 5, 2023 10:00 a.m.
Freedom Center Classroom 23, Camp Dodge
Johnston, Iowa 50131

Commission of Veterans Affairs Members

Present: Elizabeth Ledvina, Chair, American Legion

Darlene McMartin, 1st Vice Chair, Public Member at Large

Gary Wattnem, 2nd Vice Chair, Reserve Organization of America (ROA)

Becky Dirks Haugsted, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

Scott Miller, Member, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)

George Mosby, Member, Iowa National Guard (ING)

Gregory Paulline, Member, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)

Robert Suesakul, Member, Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)

Todd Jacobus, Commandant, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA)

Absent: Joella Perry, Member, Iowa Association of County Commissioners and Veterans Service Officers (IACCVSO)

Mary Van Horn, Member, American Veterans (AMVETS)

No Commissioner, Disabled American Veterans (DAV)

Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Members Present:

Dylan Boles, IDVA Student Intern from University of Northern Iowa

Ben Dales, Veteran Service Officer, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs

Penny Cutler-Bermudez, Licensed Nursing Home Administrator, Iowa Veterans Home

Laurel Degelau, Volunteer Services Coordinator

Nathan Wilson, Operations Executive Administrator, IVH/IDVA

Karl Lettow, Public Information Officer, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs

Melissa Miller, Trust Fund Administrator, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs

Guests Present:

Adam Akers – Veteran Service Officer, Franklin County

Kristi Catrenich – Public Affairs Officer, Des Moines Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO)

Orene Cressler, Veteran Service Officer, Pocahontas County

Sean Goodwin, Administrative Officer for Medical Center Director, Veterans Affairs Iowa City Health Care System (VA ICHCS)

Tyler Hillman, Management Analyst, Des Moines VA Regional Office (VARO)

Amy Kennebeck – Acting Director, Veterans Affairs Central Iowa Health Care System (VA CIHCS)

Abbie Lukehart, Single Family Housing Program Director Rural Develop., U.S. Dept of Agriculture

Robert McMonagle, United States Marine Corps (Retired), Denton's Davis Brown Law Firm

Mike Mortensen, President, Iowa Association of County Commissioners & Veteran Service Officers (IACCVSO); Polk County

Mike Olson, Veterans Fellow for Senator Charles Grassley

Brent Pharis, Associate Director – Resources and Operations Veterans Affairs Central Iowa Health Care System (VA CIHCS)

Tracy Pinkston – Director, Des Moines United States Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO)

Brenda Safranski, Special Assistant for Veteran & Military Affairs for Senator Joni Ernst

Jenna Tennant – Loan Specialist & Outreach Coord Rural Devel, U.S. Dept of Agriculture
Carol Whitmore, Iowa Veterans of Foreign Wars, National VFW Junior Vice Commander 2023-24

NOTE: THESE MINUTES ARE UNAPPROVED UNTIL ACCEPTED BY THE COMMISSION AT THE NEXT MEETING.

APPROVED: _____ //original signed// _____ Date: **July 10, 2023**
Elizabeth Ledvina, Chair, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Ledvina called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairperson Ledvina followed by a moment of silence for our departed Veterans, POWs, those missing in action (MIAs) and those on active duty at this time.

3. Welcome

Chairperson Ledvina welcomed everyone. Guests introduced themselves.

4. Roll Call

We have 12 Commissioners. 9 were present for the meeting. 2 were absent. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) have not nominated candidates to fill their position on the Commission.

5. Comments from Tracie Pinkston – Director of the Des Moines VA Regional Office, Work: (515) 323-7506, tracie.pinkston@va.gov

a. Veterans have until August 9, 2023 to submit claims through the PACT Act. The VA Regional Office is doing a great deal of outreach to let people know that we are taking claims. Veterans can also submit an “intent to file”.

b. The Veterans Benefits Administration is doing a great deal of hiring in order to process claims associated with the PACT Act. There are opportunities for both claims processors and call center agents.

c. The VA Regional Office will be making considerable investment in outreach. We need to get out into communities throughout Iowa, engaging with stakeholders to see how we can assist and support Veterans, caregivers and survivors. Feel free to reach out to Tracy or her staff.

6. Comments from Sean Goodwin, Administrative Officer for Medical Center Director Veterans Affairs Iowa City Health Care System (VA ICHCS), Work: (319) 338-0581, sean.goodwin@va.gov

a. VA ICHCS Director/CEO Judy Johnson-Mekota apologizes for not being able to attend meeting today. Sean shared that the ICHCS continues to work to provide the very best in terms of care and support to Veterans, families, caregivers and survivors.

b. We continue to develop a very close partnership between the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration as we work to educate stakeholders and our community on the Pact Act.

c. There will be a ribbon cutting at the Waterloo Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), 4000 University Avenue, Waterloo, Iowa 50701, on July 20, 2023. Time to be determined. Immediately following the ribbon cutting there will be a “Vet Fest”, where Veterans will be provided with an opportunity to receive information, materials, and support.

d. Legislative and executive orders mandate that federal security use in-vehicle and body-worn cameras in order to ensure the safety of enforcement officers, staff, and the public. The VA ICHCS is implementing cameras in their Security Department.

e. There will be a job fair at the VA Iowa City Health Care System, 601 Highway 6 West, Iowa City, Iowa 52246, on August 29, 2023 from 2:00-6:00 pm. The ICHCS will promote a wide range of positions during this event.

f. United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough has made “investing in employees” his #1 priority at the VA. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is supporting more Veterans than in the history of the VA, so it is important to have the very best in terms of staff at our facilities.

g. The National Disabled Golf Clinic will take place at the Riverside Hotel and Golf Resort, 3184 IA-22, Riverside, Iowa 52327 on September 10-15, 2023. We already have 200+ registrants from 32 States with Veterans ranging in age from 30-107. Register online at <http://www.veteransgolfclinic.org/>. Point of contact for more information: Nick Beelner, Director, National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic at: nicholas.beelner@va.gov or; John Kleindienst, DAV Voluntary Services Director, (859) 442-2056, jkleindienst@dav.org.

h. The VA ICHCS is upgrading their infrastructure to be ready for a new electronic record management system, but they are not among the sites that is implementing the current system.

i. Steve Bryant, former Emergency Medical Services Chief, is now the Assistant Director of the VA ICHCS.

j. VA ICHCS Construction updates:

(1) Renovated 2nd Floor for Catheter Laboratory & Electro Physiology Lab. These facilities supplement the cardiology clinic in that location.

(2) Building of the new Women’s Clinic will begin in the Fall of 2023.

(3) Building new ambulance garage to be complete in Fall 2024.

(4) The Psychiatric Ward on the 9th Floor will be renovated in near future.

(5) Coralville CBOC will open in early August 2023.

(6) Galesburg (Illinois) CBOC is in design phase and will open during the Winter 2024.

(7) Decorah CBOC is in design phase and will open during the Winter 2024.

k. A 6-story apartment building in downtown Davenport collapsed on May 28, 2023, resulting in three deaths. There were 14 Veterans residing in the building. One Veteran died in the collapse. The VA ICHCS leadership team is proud of the social workers, and other staff, who worked hard to support all of the Veterans and their families after this event.

7. Comments from Amy Kennebeck, Interim Director for Veterans Affairs Central Health Care System (VA CIHCS), Office: (515) 699-5852, amy.kennebeck@va.gov

a. The Executive Leadership Team of the VA CIHCS has transitioned. Darwin Goodspeed retired in March 2023. Kurt Thielen was the Acting Director until June 30, 2023, and Amy Kennebeck became Interim Director on July 1, 2023 [Amy Kennebeck Bio](#).

b. Harold “Brent” Pharis joins the team after serving at the VA Portland Health Care System (VISN 20) [Brent Pharis Bio](#).

c. Dr. Vicki Callahan is the new Chief of Staff – joining us after serving at the VA Kansas City Health Care System [Dr. Vicki Callahan Bio](#).

d. Dan Kuester continues to serve as the Public Affairs Officer, daniel.kuester@va.gov, (515) 699-5588.

8. Comments from Brent Pharis, Associate Director – Resources & Operations for Veterans Affairs Central Health Care System (VA CIHCS), (515) 699-5999, harold.pharis@va.gov

a. The VA CIHCS team hosted the National Golden Age Games in Central Iowa on May 20-25, 2023. This was an outstanding event with a significant amount of coordination by the staff.

b. The VA CIHCS is focused on hiring to fill vacancies. The VA Central Office is supportive of getting personnel with specialties on-board. The VA CIHCS has changed the manner in which we on-board new employees, including appointment-based processing. The goal is to get people on-board, trained, and working more efficiently than we’ve ever done it before.

c. We continue with significant construction initiatives.

(1) By August 2023 we will have our new supply chain warehouse complete. This facility will be attached to the main facility – not down the hill where it is currently located. This will make operations much more efficient.

(2) Inside the main facility we have remodeled the Intensive Care Unit, which now has nine single-bed rooms. The ICU has moved to the 5th floor while the remodel is on-going.

(3) We are working on our emergency grid to ensure that we have emergency power.

(4) We did a groundbreaking ceremony for a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Marshalltown on June 5, 2023, and will take between 14-16 months to complete.

(5) The Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Carroll is located at St. Anthony’s Hospital. We are doing some enhancements to the facility there, including pharmacy, audiology, women’s health space, a hub space for teams. This project will be awarded by the end of September 2023, and will take between 14-16 months to complete.

(6) There will be a laboratory facility next to the main building. This will be complete by the end of September 2024.

(7) We had a mental health out-patient facility planned, but we will not be able to pursue this in the near term because bids came back too high. We are re-looking at the scope, etc.

(8) We want to renovate the Sterile Processing and Operating Room. This project also came back over-budget. This project is entered as a mid-major request for FY-2025.

(9) We will expand the Geriatric Patient Aligned Care Team (GeriPACT) and Oncology Clinics in the main building following the Primary Care Physician's move to the Des Moines CBOC location.

(10) Adam Akers, Franklin County Veteran Service Officer, told the VA CIHCS leadership team that there have been two retirements at the Mason City CBOC, which has caused significant delays in primary care for Veterans in this area, and asked what the timeline looks like to get those positions filled. Amy Kennebeck stated that these positions are not easy to fill, but that the VA CIHCS covers all requirements with tele-health options and with other staff.

9. Comments from Penny Cutler-Bermudez – Licensed Nursing Home Administrator for Iowa Veterans Home, Office: (641) 753-4352, penny.cutlerbermudez@ivh.state.ia.us

a. The Iowa Veterans Home has recently gone through three surveys – two from the Department of Inspection and Appeals and the other from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. from DIA and annual VA survey. All three were deficiency free surveys.

b. The Iowa Veterans Home has a strong team and is moving in a very positive direction. The VA survey looked at both Nursing level of care and Domiciliary level of care, and both were deficiency free. The VA survey team brought in six specialists from throughout the Nation. They evaluated a wide range of areas, including meals, quality of food, wounds, infection control processes, hand-washing, how we start IVs, how we deliver care to residents, looked at every building and maintenance of facilities, medical services and how medical professionals meet requirements, quality initiatives, how we improve on delivery of services. The comments from the VA Survey Team Leader during the team's out-briefing were significant. She stated that no members of this team have inspected a facility with employees and residents who are as pleasant and kind towards one another, with staff that has such an outstanding attitude, and where residents feel that caregivers are part of their family. Unfortunately, in the VA system, many of our Veterans don't have good family units. So, it was heartwarming for us to hear those comments from these surveyors.

c. The Department of Inspection and Appeals brought in 11 surveyors, and they also found us to be deficiency free. The Iowa Veterans is governed by a significant amount of regulations, so it is quite affirming to have 11 surveyors come to our facility, spend five days, and leave us with "no deficiencies noted". This team shared with our leadership team that they can tell when staff is competent, or when they are trying to meet requirements which they normally don't do on a day to day basis. The survey team was very complimentary towards the IVH staff.

d. The Iowa Veterans Home is asking the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs for your support in serving our bariatric residents by approving the purchase of 4 (ea) bariatric lifts at a cost of roughly \$9,960 per lift. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic we stopped admitting residents who were overweight. We established a cut-off of 400 pounds because it is high risk to our staff if we don't have proper equipment. More and more applicants are over the 300 pound mark, and we are considering what happens once they exceed weight limitations. We believe that all Veterans can receive the best in terms of care at the Iowa Veterans Home The senior team decided that residents could best be served here at the IVH. To help residents lose weight we started a program with the VA called "MOVE Clinic" – Motivating Overweight Veterans Everywhere. Nate Wolken, the IVH Psychologist, initiated a weight-loss

clinic. These residents did not want to be singled out in one residential unit. So we are left with the question of how do we best care for these residents and at the same time be cautious so that we don't injure our staff? We had a specialty team from the VA CIHCS come to the IVH and they shared some lessons learned. There are bariatric lifts that are \$9,960 each. They have been trialed for the last three months. It takes two staff to use the lift. We are using beds that are basically the size of a double bed, and we don't have to adjust residents further to the middle of the bed if we use the lift. Our staff wants this equipment. We have 22 residents who would benefit from using this equipment. We've added bariatric scales to allow overweight residents not to have to be weighed with laundry scales. We've purchased tables. These lifts are more than we can purchase. We are asking for four lifts to support our needs. We will continue to have our bariatric committee and support those in need. For many in this situation exercise is not an option, and our goal is to be able to support them.

e. Elizabeth Ledvina asked how has the MOVE program been accepted? Penny shared that we have seen success in some, and we've also seen those who continue to not be motivated to lose weight. One of our residents took the program very serious because he had a goal of moving from nursing level of care to residential level of care, he was successful, and he shares his story with anyone who will listen. We have 10 residents who are actively involved in bariatric committee.

10. Comments from Laurel Degelau – Volunteer Services Coordinator for Iowa Veterans Home, (641) 753-4406, laurel.degelau@ivh.state.ia.us

- a. The Volunteer Services team recruits volunteers to support programs for residents.
- b. We need people to volunteer – as individuals, as groups, or even as families.
- c. Laurel sends out a list of all activities each month. If an activity interests someone then please reach out to Laurel and let her know that you would like to volunteer to support that activity.
- d. If someone wants to create an additional activity then please reach out to Laurel. She would be happy to create an activity. Residents love new faces, and we would greatly appreciate anyone who joins us.
- e. We have Chapel Services on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays). We need volunteers to help our less mobile residents to get from their rooms to the Chapel.
- f. We have volunteer opportunities in the library and in the gift shop.
- g. We need volunteers to travel with our residents on recreational trips and to sporting events.
- h. Of course we have many needs for funding that individuals and organizations can donate to support.
 - (1) We need a dental chair (\$8,717) so that we can continue to provide dental services to residents on-campus and eliminate the requirement to transport to the VA Hospital. (We have a dental chair, but it is quite old and needs to be replaced.)
 - (2) We need a suction machine (\$5,600). Again, we have one, it is old and out-dated, and needs to be replaced.
- i. Veteran Service Organizations are encouraged to reach out to their membership and spread the word about our need for volunteers and donations.

j. Greg Pauline suggested that the dental chair and the suction machines would be good purchases using license plate funds. Elizabeth asked the Department to get the Trust Fund application filled out for these items so that we can procure them.

11. Comments from Robert B. McMonagle, Shareholder with Dentons Davis Brown Law Firm, (515) 288-2500, Robert.mcmonagle@dentons.com

a. Colonel Robert McMonagle, United States Marine Corps (RETIRED), shared with the Commission that he served for 30 years in the USMC – both on Active Duty and in the USMC Reserve.

b. There are no large scale mobilizations taking place now, so now is the time when we should be discussing how we mobilize our reserve, and the impact that it has on employees and employers.

c. The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) has provided great support employees who are called to active service by providing them protection when they return to the workplace.

d. Robert shared that he was (and is) a partner in a law firm, and as a result of his status as a partner, he is offered no protection by the USERRA, and was basically at the complete mercy of his partners in terms of job and salary protection. and you are at the complete mercy at the other partners. Robert used the example that if he as a partner was called to active duty for 6 months, then he could suggest to his partners that he would accept only 50% of his salary for that 6 month period. The partners on the other hand could tell him that they wanted only to pay him 25% of his salary for a 6 month period, and that does not seem just, although that action does not violate USERRA.

e. There are not as many partners as there are employees. Some say that there are not enough reservists serving as partners in organizations to make it worth the time invested to change USERRA.

f. Robert believes that individuals who are part of partnerships self-select out due to their employment status as partners offering no employment protection, and as a result our reserve component organizations lose talent.

g. Robert's premise is that organizations who punish employees who mobilize in support of our Nation's call to active duty should be punished. We can do things that are legal that are still wrong.

h. The federal government should consider the statute. We need to be a model example of how we support reservists and guardsmen. They may not like the results of where the conversation goes. To remove the incentive away from serving is a disservice. We should treat partnerships like we do professional corporations.

12. Comments from Jenna Tennant, USA Loan Specialist & Outreach Coordinator Rural Development, jenna.tennant@usda.gov | (515) 284-4724, & Abbey Lukehart, USDA Single Family Housing Program Director, abbey.lukehart@usda.gov | (515) 284-4462

a. Jenna Tennant distributed a hard copy of the 16 slides to all attendees.

b. The mission of the USDA rural development single family housing program is to provide decent, safe, sanitary and affordable housing to eligible applicants in eligible rural areas through the 502 Direct Home Loan Program OR 504 Home Repair Program.

c. The 502 Direct Home Loan Program Benefits include: 100% financing, no down payment required, no private mortgage insurance (PMI), fixed loan term: 33 or 38 years, Maximum mortgage limit of \$377,600 statewide, interest rates established monthly – currently 4.1255 through July, Payment assistance available and can reduce IR to as low as 1%, cannot exceed “low” income guidelines, not limited to first time homebuyers, must be borrower’s primary residence, allowed to partner with other funding sources, applicants apply directly through USDA – USDA is the lender.

d. 502 Direct Home Loan Eligible Purposes include: Construct or purchase a new or existing dwelling, repairs, relocation of dwelling, purchase and prepare site, special design features or necessary disability equipment. Property requirements: Existing home must be structurally sound and functionally adequate, Modest in size – site must not be large enough to be sub-divided, not located in a floodplain, cannot become income property, must have access to safe drinking water and public sewage disposal.

e. 502 Direct home Loan Applicant Eligibility: U.S. Citizen or qualified alien, income eligible (based on county and household size), acceptable credit history, able to show repayment ability, fall within ratio limits, not own another home at the time of closing, must agree to occupy the property as primary residence, not be suspended or debarred from participating in federal programs.

f. 504 Home Repair Program Overview:

(1) This program assists very low income homeowners make repairs to their home, make a dwelling decent, safe and sanitary; remove health and safety hazards; improve or modernize a home. The USDA is here to help people stay in their home! Helping to keep it in good repair helps families and communities throughout the entire state of Iowa!

(2) To qualify home must be located in an eligible rural area (eligible areas are typically focused on those areas of the state with a population of less than 20,000 people), applicant must be the homeowner, Home must be the applicant’s primary residence, Unable to obtain affordable credit elsewhere at reasonable rates and terms.

(3) Who qualifies and what are the terms? Adjusted household income must not exceed the **very low income limit** for the household size and county that the applicant currently resides in. Lack personal resources to pay for the needed repairs and have reliable income sufficient to allow repayment of a loan. Fixed interest rate of 1%. Standard loan term of 20 years. \$40,000 loan outstanding at one time. Amortized on a monthly basis. At least one applicant must be 62+ years of age. The grant must be used to remove a health and safety hazard and repair or modernize a dwelling to make it more accessible and usable for a household member with a disability. Adjusted household income must not exceed the grant income limit for the household size and county that the applicant currently resides in. \$10,000 lifetime maximum to any one household or dwelling. No minimum grant requirement. 100% forgiven after three years.

(4) How can 504 Funds be used? Insulation, adding ramps, handrails, walk-in tubs/showers, repair or replace things such as: roof, windows, electrical issues, furnace, air conditioner, water heater, storm doors, structural support, siding, steps, stoops, water and sewer systems, site prep and landscaping, decks (new and existing), driveways.

g. Details of the Application Process - 502 & 504 – Applicants apply directly through us and applications are processed in the order in which they were received. Applications are available and accepted all year-round as long as funding remains available. There is a \$25/\$50 credit report fee required for 502’s. There is no application fee; minimum or no closing costs involved in most cases for 504s. Our housing team is made up of 15 staff members. If you or someone you know would benefit from our SFH

programs, have them call us! We'd be happy to go through the application process with them in-person or over the phone.

IowaHomeLoas@usda.gov
Phone: 515-284-4444
Fax: 855-415-3562
210 Walnut Street #873
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

h. At the conclusion of the presentation, the Commission asked IACCVSOs President Mike Mortensen to please ensure that the County Veteran Service Officers receive the information discussed during this presentation, as

13. Comments from Major Ted Knust, Executive Officer, Iowa Army National Guard Recruiting & Retention Battalion, Cell: (641) 218-1556, theodore.j.knust.mil@army.mil

a. Major Joel Sage is the Recruiting & Retention Battalion Commander and regrets not being able to attend this meeting today himself.

b. It is great to see the level of engagement by the Veterans Community, which impacts the life of a service member after their tour of service. Let's talk for a little bit about what happens before and during military service.

c. The Iowa Air National Guard and Army National Guard is the Governor's bench – here to respond when needed. The Iowa National Guard has been involved in a wide range of emergency support operations. The National Guard responds to both the President (Title 10) and Governor (Title 32 / State Active Duty). The Iowa Army National Guard has 6,800 Soldiers – half of whom serve in the 2nd Brigade Combat Team 34th Infantry Division – and is stationed at 40 locations throughout the state of Iowa. A handful of armories have closed over the last 15 years. The 2-34 BCT has a very proud lineage of service, consists of Iowa and Minnesota Soldiers for the most part, and is considered the premier Army National Guard BCT in the National Guard Bureau.

d. The Iowa Army National Guard Recruiting & Retention Battalion consists of 60 full-time recruiters. These positions are not easy to fill, and we are constantly combing our organization to identify Non-Commissioned Officers that have the skill sets to thrive in this sales environment.

e. The RRB had a mission of 777 new accessions for 2023, which ends on September 30, 2023. We will be lucky to end the year with 600 new accessions. In 2019 we enlisted 1,000.

f. We are experiencing trouble. Why? the Department of Defense implemented "Military Health System (MHS) Genesis. This electronic health record basically accesses information about a Soldier from the time they were a small child. If a potential Soldier has ever taken certain kinds of drugs, had certain types of behaviors – even when they were a small child – then they may be eliminated from an opportunity to serve forever.

g. Propensity to serve seems to have changed – probably due to the great economy and the vast number of jobs available in the public and private sector right now. The most recent numbers show that between 8-9% of our young people have an interest in serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. There was a low point in 2006-07. Next low time was in 2006-07, and before that was just after 1973 when the draft ended.

h. Only 23% of military aged personnel meet the minimum requirements to qualify to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. So, we have only 8-9% of youth interested in serving and of those 8-9% only 23% will be eligible.

i. A typical recruiter has 1,000 high school juniors and seniors in their area of responsibility. Of 23% of those are eligible to serve, then their target market is now 230. If 9% of those have an interest in serving then we are looking at 20 out of 1,000 students who may join the U.S. Armed Forces.

j. Our Recruiters in the Iowa Army National Guard have an advantage over other services, as for the most part our Recruiters are from the areas where they recruit, have family in these areas, and are part of the community. Our sister services offer the recruiting assignment as a three year duty detail.

k. The Iowa Army National Guard has run the table on benefits. The State funds the Iowa National Guard service scholarship. However, we've learned that this scholarship is no longer an exclusive benefit, as there are many other jobs that offer this benefit.

l. Lastly, many people in our communities continue to look at service in the U.S. Armed Forces as something young people do as a last resort. We need to break this narrative, and those currently serving would appreciate the support of the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs and the Veteran Service Organizations that comprise the Commission in spreading that message!

m. Lieutenant Colonel George Mosby, who represents the Iowa National Guard on the ICVA, stated that the National Guard is no longer the National Guard of "Rambo First Blood". George started out as a Private and is now a Battalion Commander. We provide vast opportunities that people simply cannot get outside the military, outstanding training, and our service adds value to our communities. We no longer require the COVID-19 vaccination.

14. Comments from Karl Lettow, Public Affairs Officer for Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, Cell: (641) 750-8052, karl.lettow@iowa.gov

a. The Iowa State Fair Veterans Parade will take place on Monday, August 14, 2023. We will honor KOREAN WAR Veterans during this parade, as 2023 marks the 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement, which was signed on July 27, 1953, ceasing hostilities and bringing an end to the Korean War.

b. Herbert Spencer will serve as the Grand Marshal of the State Fair Veterans Parade. Herb enlisted in the U.S. Army on October 12, 1952, attended basic training and a leadership development course at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and then spent from April 1953 until September 1954 in Korea assigned to a combat engineer battalion, and was discharged as a Sergeant First Class. He has been active in several military organizations, including being a charter member of Taylor Morris Chapter of the Korean War Veterans, President of Tall Corn Chapter of Korean War Veterans, American Legion, Amvets, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Korea Defense Veterans. He and his wife have lived in Anamosa for 58 years.

c. We emailed out applications to a wide range of Veterans stakeholders, and have made the application available on our website. The parade application is available online at: <https://dva.iowa.gov/events>

d. We will begin marshalling in the parking lot at 7:30 am and the parade will begin at 11:00 am. Commissioners are encouraged to come to the parade and sit in front of the reviewing stand on Grand Avenue.

e. We have 40 applications for ISF Veterans Parade so far.

f. So far, four VIPs have RSVPd to participate: Lieutenant Governor Adam Gregg, Congressman Zach Nunn, VARO Director Tracie Pinkston, and Iowa Workforce Development Director Beth Townsend.

15. Comments from Todd Jacobus, Commandant of Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, Cell: (641) 750-9099, todd.jacobus@ivh.state.ia.us

a. During our April 2023 meeting I mentioned that there were three out-going Commissioners, including Orene Cressler (Iowa Association of County Commissioners & Veteran Service Officers, IACCVSO), Steve Hyde (Military Order of the Purple Heart, MOPH), Carol Whitmore (Veterans of Foreign Wars, VFW). Ken Lloyd (Paralyzed Veterans of America, PVA) also attended his last meeting as a Commissioner in April 2023. Thanks to each of these Commissioners for volunteering your time and talents to benefit Iowa Veterans, their caretakers, and survivors.

b. Outlined below is a current list of Commissioners on the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) has not yet submitted two names to the Governor's Office in order to fill their vacant position on the Commission. All phone numbers are mobile.

(1) Becky Dirks Haugsted, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), bkyhaugsted@gmail.com, (319) 361-2728

(2) Elizabeth Ledvina, American Legion, eledvina@tamacounty.org, (641) 751-9794

(3) Darlene McMartin, Public Member At Large, macmp75@gmail.com, (712) 249-5101

(4) Scott Miller, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), iowapvascott@yahoo.com, (641) 799-7943

(5) George Mosby, Iowa National Guard, george.t.mosby.mil@mail.mil, (515) 494-6228

(6) Gregory Paulline, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), ghpaulline@gmail.com, (563) 650-3055

(7) Joella Perry, IACCVSO Iowa Association of County Commissioners & Veteran Service Officers (IACCVSO), jperry@waynecountyia.org, (641) 223-2121

(8) Robert Seusakul, Military Order the Purple Heart (MOPH), seuspara@aol.com, (641) 820-0773

(9) Mary Van Horn, American Veterans (AMVETS), nid8ryan@msn.com, (515) 782-3217

(10) Gary Wattnem, Reserve Officers Association (ROA), gwattnem@gmail.com, (641) 420-8429

(11) Vacant, Disabled American Veterans (DAV)

c. 3. Iowa Veteran Demographics. According to "Veterans Data Central", Iowa has 174,514 Veterans, which represents 7.2% of Iowa's adult population:

(1) 4,886 (2.8%) served during WWII;

(2) 14,136 (8.1%) served during the Korean War;

(3) 63,697 (36.5%) served during the Vietnam War;

(4) 32,111 (18.4%) served during Gulf War I;

(5) 30,365 (17.4%) served during Iraq & Afghanistan;

(6) 41,011 (23.5%) served between conflicts.

<https://veteransdata.info/states/2190000/IOWA.pdf>

d. The Iowa Veterans Home census includes 393 residents as of July 2, 2023. We have 340 in nursing level care and 53 in residential level care.

(1) 4 (1%) served during WWII

(2) 38 (10%) served during the Korean War

(3) 198 (50%) served during the Vietnam War

(4) 15 (4%) served during Gulf War I & Iraq | Afghanistan

- (5) 79 (20%) served between conflicts
- (6) 59 (15%) – Non-resident Veterans

e. Inform – Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) Coverage of Iowa Veterans Trust Fund Grants Update:

(1) Governor Reynolds approved \$443,713 to cover a backlog of Iowa veterans trust fund transfer approved between March 3, 2021, and November 3, 2022, before the program was temporarily suspended due to insufficient funds.

(2) Governor Reynolds directed her staff to transfer these funds to the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs from Iowa's allocation of Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) through the American Rescue Plan Act.

(3) As of June 30, 2023, the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs has distributed checks totaling **\$206,470.90** to support trust fund grant applications that were approved by the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs prior to November 3, 2022.

(4) As of March 31, 2023, the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs has distributed checks totaling \$38,325 to Veteran Service Organizations who performed Military Funeral Honors between March 3, 2021, and November 3, 2022.

(5) As of June 30, 2023, the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs has distributed a TOTAL of **\$244,795.90 (55%)** of the \$443,713 allocated by I-Gov.

(6) Currently, the IDVA / Iowa Veterans Home Finance Bureau have approximately 22 applications for which we are awaiting invoices. All qualifying application invoices are being processed for payment as soon as the Department receives them.

f. Inform – Iowa Veterans Trust Fund Update. There is currently **\$596,695.51**. Those funds are available now to cover grant applications. Prior to July 2022, the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund received monthly interest payments of between \$2,000 and \$9,000. Since July 1, 2022, we have had substantially larger interest payments. Here are the most recent interest contributions to the Trust Fund: April 2023 – \$141,262.92 | May 2023 – \$141,724.42 | June 2023 – \$142,130.39.

g. Inform – Iowa Veterans Cemetery. The IVC has struggled with meeting the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) standards in placing headstones. NCA requires that headstones be placed within 30 days of the service. **We are currently 163 headstones behind schedule and are establishing a contract with a vendor to address this shortfall.** This contract will help us be in compliance within 60 days and in the future. The contract will provide allowance to support adjustments to existing headstones in order to ensure that they remain in compliance following the freeze – thaw cycle.

h. Inform – Iowa Veterans Home Cemetery. There are 3,171 Veterans interred on the grounds of the Iowa Veterans Home. There are currently 23 empty plots of which 18 are reserved and 5 available. We are aware that hundreds of markers at the IVH Cemetery need to be adjusted after decades of freeze-thaw cycles. We are working to determine a funding stream to make this happen. Kudos to Troop 308 Prairie Winds District Mid-Iowa Council Boy Scouts of America for decorating the 3,171 graves with an American Flag for Memorial Day. This troop has done many Eagle Scout and Service Projects in support of the Iowa Veterans Home.

i. Inform – Iowa Veterans Cemetery Expansion Project. The IDVA submitted a phase 2 upgrade application to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for \$2,600,000 in order add a columbarium wall,

upgrade the irrigation system, and address other infrastructure needs at the IVC. On July 3, 2023, the IDVA received an email that we received the first approval. This means that the IVC will need to seek legislative appropriation this coming legislative session to cover the \$2,600,000 project; upon completion the State of Iowa will be reimbursed 100% of the cost.

j. **Action – Veterans License Fee Fund.** Veterans who register for a specialty Veterans license plate pay a fee that contributes to the Veterans License Fee Fund. As of June 30, 2023, there is **\$405,715.25** in the license plate fund. We have received applications from three organizations to support events and hardware using resources from the license plate funds:

(1) **Tama Toledo Military Appreciation Day.** This event will take place on July 27, 2023 as part of the RAGBRAI overnight stay in the community. Barbara J. Jordan, 500 E. High Street, Toledo, Iowa 52342, kbjordan500@gmail.com, has requested **\$5,000** from the License Plate Fund to support a Veteran-specific support package during this event. Application is dated April 26, 2023. Melissa Miller emailed this application to Commissioners on June 5, 2023.

(2) **Veterans Casting Away Disabilities.** VCAD fishing outing will take place in September 2023. Kirt Sickels, President of VCAD Board of Directors, and Randy Brown, Vice President, PO Box 280, West Liberty, Iowa 52776, emtcandew@hotmail.com, have requested **\$30,000** from the License Plate Fund to support this event. Application is dated June 12, 2023. Melissa Miller emailed this application to Commissioners on June 20, 2023. Kirt Sickels provided the following breakdown of costs of this event:

- (1) Breakfast – 18.50 – times 130 = \$2405.00/day times 6 breakfast = \$14,430.00
- (2) Lunch - \$10.00 – times 130 = \$1300.00/day times 5 lunches = \$6500.00
- (3) Dinner - \$21.00 – times 130 = \$2730.00/day – times 2 dinners = \$5460.00
- (4) One day of food - \$4275.00
- (5) Bait for the event – \$2700.00 for the week
- (6) Gas for the boats - \$1500.00

(3) **Bariatric Lift for Iowa Veterans Home.** Todd Jacobus requests that the Commission approve the expenditure of **\$40,000** from the license plate fund to purchase of 4 (ea) bariatric lifts at a cost of \$10,000 per unit. These lifts will allow our direct-care staff to lift obese residents with fewer hands and with less risk of injury. We received a cost estimate from E-Z Way Lift Company, 710 Main Street, PO Box 89, Clarinda, Iowa 51632. There are 22 (ea) residents who weigh in excess of 300 pounds residing at IVH. These lifts would provide a more efficient way for our staff to move these residents, but it would also allow us to move them in a more caring and professional manner. The IVH policy has been to not accept application from individuals weighing in excess of 400 pounds, and to begin discharge proceedings for any resident who weighs in excess of 420 pounds. We want to change this policy, but in order to do so need to have the equipment to better handle these Veterans. Todd Jacobus emailed the details of this application to the Commission on June 14, 2023.

k. **Inform – Resident Forum & Resident Committees.** On Friday, May 26, 2023 the Senior Leadership Team held a Resident Forum where residents received an update from each leader and were provided an opportunity for questions and answers. In addition, we introduced an opportunity for residents to have input and become more involved in their resident community by joining one of four committees. We’ve asked staff to generate enthusiasm among residents in order to improve quality of life here at IVH. Committees include:

(1) Wellness Committee (what does wellness mean in long term care? What causes stress for the resident?);

(2) Welcoming Committee (determine ways in which new residents become connected and feel comfortable going to events, meals, etc);

(3) Sunshine Committee (determine ways to brighten others days through cards, etc.)

(4) Quality of Life Committee (are the activities and social events bringing quality of life?).

1. Inform – Psychiatry for Non-Psychiatrists Conference Coordination by Dr. Doug Steenblock (October 27, 2023). Dr. Doug Steenblock is the Chief of Mental Health Services at the Iowa Veterans Home. He is working with the Residency Program Director at Broadlawns / Unity Point / VA Psychiatry Residency Program in Des Moines and with Des Moines University to organize a NEW conference called “Psychiatry for Non-Psychiatrists”, or PNP. This conference will take place on October 27, 2023, will be one day in length, and the intended audience will be primary care physicians, nurses, and social workers. The plan at this time is to offer this training both in-person and virtually.

m. Inform – Department of Veterans Affairs Survey / Inspection of Iowa Veterans Home. On Monday, May 22, 2023, at 8:30 am, a five-member survey team from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office in Washington, D.C., reported for an unannounced survey / inspection of the Iowa Veterans Home. After being on campus for five straight days, the out-briefing took place on Friday, May 26, 2023, and we were informed that there were **NO deficiencies**.

(1) The survey team consisted of the following subject matter experts: Ms. Marilyn Klotz, RN, led the survey team, and surveyed the Dack Building. Ms. Audrey Shaw, MSN/RN, surveyed Ulery. Ms. Connie Danley, RN, surveyed infection control. Ms. Danielle Pearce, MSH/NHA, surveyed Finance Bureau and Human Resource Bureau. Ms. Natasha Cheatham surveyed Malloy Building & Food Service Bureau. Ms. Nakia Jackson surveyed Facilities Management Bureau and Life-Safety.

(2) The inspection / survey team evaluated the following areas: care program for residents with alzheimer’s / dementia, psychotropic medication management, pressure Ulcer care and management, excessive weight loss management, falls management, infection control operations, catheter management, caring for residents on dialysis, end of life care support, residents with transition-based precautions and infections, smoking management, Veterans with PTSD, research on three sentinel events, life-safety, finance operations, quality management operations, facilities operations, food service operations, and they conducted interviews with many residents.

(3) Surveys / inspections can be nerve-wracking. We are aware that the surveyors asked to observe our medical professionals performing routine bandage change-outs, changing of catheters, and other hands-on tasks that are expected to be performed to standard. The surveyors shared with us that in each case our professional health care providers provided care and attention that was done exactly in accordance with the requirements. Ms. Klotz, and the other surveyors, all commended our staff for being so proficient and confident in the delivery of services to our residents. Her final two comments to the IVH leadership team were:

(a) “It is highly unusual for a facility of this size to have no deficiencies. You should feel very good about this accomplishment.”

(b) “It was so enjoyable to walk about to the different work areas throughout the facility and listen to the manner in which staff communicates with each other and the way staff communicates with residents. It is quite apparent that people here ‘get along’.”

(c) “We spend our weeks traveling throughout the Country conducting surveys on facilities. The Iowa Veterans Home is the very best facility we have visited in years.”

(4) This is the third consecutive deficiency free survey.

(a) The Iowa Department of Inspection & Appeals conducted a survey at the Iowa Veterans Home on February 27-March 3, 2023; this was also a deficiency free survey.

(b) The Iowa Department of Inspection & Appeals conducted a survey at the Iowa Veterans Home in May 2021; this was also a deficiency free survey.

n. As of July 1, 2023, I no longer have two titles. My title is now, “Commandant, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs – which is a voice and advocate for Iowa Veterans, caregivers, and survivors – dedicated to ensuring they receive the full range of county, state, and federal benefits to which they are entitled. We treat our customers with compassion, dignity, integrity, and accountability.” I look forward to working with each of you to improve in our delivery of services. Please contact me at cell: (641) 750-9399 or todd.jacobus@ivh.state.ia.us.

16. Motion by Gary Wattnem to approve the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs meeting minutes dated April 5, 2023. Second by Darlene. Motion approved unanimously.

17. Motion by Gary Wattnem to approve the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund Conference Call meeting minutes dated June 1, 2023. Second by Greg Pauline. Motion approved unanimously.

18. Motion by George Mosby to approve the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund Conference Call meeting minutes dated May 4, 2023. Second by Darlene McMartin. Motion approved unanimously.

19. Motion by Darlene McMartin to approve the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund Conference Call meeting minutes dated April 6, 2023. Second by George Mosby. Motion approved unanimously.

20. Military Home Ownership Assistance Program. Elizabeth Ledvina provided an update under old business on the Military Home Ownership Program. During the 2023 Legislative Session, the State Legislature appropriated an additional \$200,000 for this program. The current available balance to support the Military Home Ownership Assistance Program is \$2,010,000.00. There is no application for this program. Iowa Finance Authority receives a loan application and discharge certificate (DD Form 214). IDVA verifies eligibility of the application by confirming that they meet the definition of a Veteran in Iowa Code 35-1. [IFA Military Homeownership Assistance Program](#)

21. Melissa Miller reported that the administrative rule impacting the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund would probably be implemented by the October 2023 timeframe. Nathan Wilson and Melissa Miller worked on making the rule adjustment and submitted that to the Administrative Rules Committee (ARC).

22. Motion by Gary Wattnem to approve \$5,000 from the License Plate Fund to purchase a set of Flags (American, Iowa, and Service Flags) and poles with a light, etc., to support Military Appreciation Event during RAGBRAI during the Tama-Toledo overnight. We want to have a plaque included that reads, “donated by the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs”. Second by Greg Pauline. Motion approved unanimously. Elizabeth Ledvina shared with the commissioners that after RAGBRAI these flags will go to the three schools so that people can see support for our Armed Forces. The Commission would like to see an after action review that shows the impact of this \$5,000 investment.

23. Motion by Darlene McMartin to approve up to \$40,000 from the License Plate Fund to purchase 4 (ea) bariatric lifts to support the Iowa Veterans Home. Second by Becky Dirks Haugsted. Motion approved unanimously.

24. Motion by Gary Wattnem to approve \$5,460.00 from the License Plate Fund to support the

Veterans Casting Away Disabilities fishing event. This event will support 2 (ea) dinners during the week-long fishing program. Second by George Mosby. Motion approved unanimously. The Commission asked Todd Jacobus to confirm with Kirt Sickels and Randy Brown how many Iowa Veterans attend the event.

25. There was a discussion about the Commission's committees – Iowa Veterans Trust Fund Committee, Education & Compliance Committee, Iowa Veterans Home Committee, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Committee, Iowa Veterans Cemetery Donations & Memorials Committee, Legislative Committee, Veterans Outreach and Marketing Committee, License Plate Fund Committee, Injured Veteran Grant Program Committee, and Administrative Rules Committee. Only the Trust Fund Committee is active.

26. The Commission held elections. Greg Pauline nominated Darlene McMartin to serve as Commission Chairperson. Second by Becky Dirks Haugsted. George Mosby nominated Elizabeth Ledvina to serve as Commission Chairperson. Second by Gary Wattnem. The vote was 4-4. At the conclusion of the vote, Becky Dirks Haugsted changed her vote to support Elizabeth Ledvina. **Elizabeth Ledvina will serve as Chairperson for July 5, 2023-July 3, 2024.**

27. Motion by Greg Pauline for Gary Wattnem to serve as 1st Vice Chair of the Commission. Second by Darlene McMartin. Motion approved unanimously.

28. Motion Becky Dirks Haugsted by for Darlene McMartin to serve as 2nd Vice Chair of the Commission. Second by Greg Pauline. Motion approved unanimously.

29. Dylan Boles reported that he and Robert Stavnes will be meeting with the IACCVSOs leadership to discuss the research he has been working on since January 2023 that will help us clarify county efficiency rating, claims density. We have the data collected and will work with the counties to determine how we refine the data and products.

30. Karl Lettow reminded Commissioners that everyone we should be able to make event entries onto the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs events page. Please make an effort to input dates into our calendar so that we have an idea of what is taking place around the State. <https://dva.iowa.gov/events>

31. Darlene McMartin asked that commissioners who representing the Commission at public events are authorized mileage reimbursement, and are asked to please provide feedback to the other commissioners about these events.

32. Motion by George Mosby to adjourn meeting at 1:10 pm. Second by Gary Wattnem. Motion approved unanimously.