



Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs Quarterly Meeting
Wednesday, July 9, 2025 10:00 am
Camp Dodge Freedom Center, Enhanced Classroom, 7105 NW 70th Ave, Johnston, Iowa

Commission of Veteran Affairs members:

Present: Todd Jacobus, Darlene McMartin, Joella Perry, Scott Miller, Robert Suesakul, Becky Dirks Haugsted, George Mosby, Reggie Richardson, Dennis Jones, David Grimm, Gregory Paulline

Absent: Elizabeth Ledvina

Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs staff members present: Nathan Wilson, Kellie Meyer, Karl Lettow, Ben Dales, Gavin Sandvig, Melissa Miller, Mike Olson.

Iowa Veterans Home staff members present: Kelley Oetker

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

APPROVED:

DATE: 10-1-2025

Darlene McMartin, Chair, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs

1. Call to Order: Chairperson McMartin called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.
2. Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence
3. Roll call
4. Welcome and Introduction of Guests
5. Heidi Rhodes, VA Regional (Director Pinkston not in attendance)
 - a. Backlog: In May, VA started a backlog initiative. Backlog is currently at 184,000 claims, down from 214,000 (14%) in May 2025, and high of over 400,000 (54%) in December 2023.
 - b. Veterans Service Center: Continue to see increased use of automation making it easier and faster for claims processors to process claims.
 - i. 11 Conditions graduated nationwide
 - ii. 24 Conditions in pilot/prototype testing.
 - c. Express 30 Pilot: completing 2,888 express claims and achieving the pilot's goals 51 days ahead of the target date
 - d. Public Contact Team: two large scale outreach events last quarter
 - i. Iowa City – 110 Veterans attended, exams scheduled for 32 Veterans and 38 contentions resolved on site.
 - ii. VEAC held in Quad Cities – 400 Veterans attended, 256 seen by the VA
 - e. Veterans Readiness Employment: VR&E processed 230 new applications during 3rd Quarter. Aging cases have been reduced by 25%. Claims are being brokered to our RO to help other stations reduce backlog, our counselors currently have an Active Caseload Percentage at the end of Q3 is 98.6%. Increased the number of outreach events attended by 25%

- f. Other Events Tracie Pinkston will be leaving the RO Shawn Bohn, from the Dakotas, will be the interim director.
- 6 Report from Steven Bryant on behalf of Director Judith Johnson-Mekota of VA Medical Center, Iowa City
 - a. Milestones/Awards
 - i April 28, 2025 was the ribbon cutting for the Decorah clinic
 - ii. June 5, 2025-Groundbreaking for the Burlington VA Clinic
 - b. Events
 - i. Claims Clinic in Iowa City (April 10-11, 2025) This event served over 100 Veterans, supported by staff of the ICVAHCS, state programs and community partners
 - ii. Quad Cities Veterans Experience Action Center (June 27-28, 2025). Held at Blackhawk College in East Moline, Illinois, the VEAC featured participation from 16 programs and services of the Iowa City Van and its affiliates, over 35 community partners, VSOs from counties in Iowa and Illinois, Regional office staff from Des Moines and Chicago, and 2 mobile medical units conducting on site Compensation and Pension exams. This event served over 415 Veterans
 - iii. Iowa City Homeless Team Outreach Surge Event
 - 1 Teams will visit encampments, cars and other non-habitable places
 - 2 Same day shelter and Services providing immediate accommodation and screenings/enrollment in permanent housing programs.
 - 3 Community Partnerships Collaborating with Shelter House, HACAP, Salvation Army, and others for a unified approach to ending homelessness.
 - 4 Stakeholder Meeting (August 7, 2025)
 - 5 National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic (September 7-12)
 - c Facility Updates
 - i Construction Projects.
 - 1. Ambulance Garage addition, expected to open for use August 2025.
 - 2. New IR/Cath labs, expected to open October 2025
 - 3 Building 50, adding two floors for new Specialty Clinics and Women's Clinic is ongoing with an expected completion date in early fall 2026
 - 4. Burlington CBOC expansion held a groundbreaking ceremony in June, expected completion summer 2026.
 - 5. Dialysis remodel will proceed with construction in 2026 and take about a year to complete
 - 6 Remodel of 9W acute inpatient mental health will proceed to construction in 2026 and take about a year to complete
 - 7 Fisher House land procurement efforts have started, land acquisition targeted to take place in 2026 and construction to begin in 2027
 - d ICVAHCS Center for Development and Civic Engagement Needs List
 - i. Gift cards, gas, food etc.

- ii. Can openers, sleeping bags, tents, MREs, nonperishable food items, bottled water, sun hats, cooling towels, hand warmers, mylar, Tracphones and phone cards, clothing, bath towels, shower kits
 - iii. Dedicated Fund 4484-Women's Clinic monetary donations
 - iv. Dedicated Fund 4457-Homeless outreach monetary donations
 - e. Suicide Prevention Initiatives
 - i. Veterans Crisis Line Update-Call volume has been down but there has been an increase in "urgent" or "emergent" response to calls received.
 - ii. Iowa Suicide Prevention Coalitions Summit is scheduled for August 14, 2025 at the FFA Enrichment Center on the DMACC Campus in Ankeny. The theme is "Life After Loss. A Community Response" and will feature Veteran and First Responder speakers during the day
 - iii. Quad Cities VET Center and Suicide Prevention Coordinator conducting Veteran days at local employers, to provide VA SAVE trainings and assist Veterans with enrolling in VA health care
 - iv. Standing up new collaborations with prevention services and the resiliency command at the Rock Island Arsenal
 - v. Committee work on the new harm reduction "vending machines" in Johnson County
 - vi. Coalition work in a NE Iowa county to film the local Sheriff doing a firearm safety video to promote lethal means safety in his community
 - f. ICVAHCS Homeless and Under-served Veterans Support
 - i. The Iowa City VA Homeless Programs are on target to meet the FY25 goals. May data for permanent housing placements (PHP) were at 66.1%, housing 160 of 242 goals.
 - ii. Hosting the "Outreach Surge Event" on July 23rd to engage unsheltered Veterans in Johnson and Washington counties.
 - iii. 228/250 HUD-VASH vouchers issued, 207 housed
 - iv. Homeless teams will also be participating in Point in Time counts on July 30th, in multiple locations throughout the Iowa City VA catchment area to find homeless Veterans and connect them to resources
 - g. CRRC Needs
 - i. Cedar Rapids and Davenport- Canned and boxed foods
- 7. Report from Eddie Gutierrez on behalf of Director Lisa Curnes of VA Medical Center, Central Iowa
 - a. Projects
 - i. New ICU opened on Feb 28, 2025
 - ii. 3W telemetry estimated completion in Mid FY 2026
 - iii. Steam and Chilled Water Piping Expansion
 - iv. Carroll CBOC has recently undergone renovations converting the standard exam rooms to meet the program requirements for two women's exam rooms and dedicated restrooms
 - v. Lab finishes were upgraded with access to streamline for adjoining restroom and expanded space for the audiology clinic
 - vi. Lab addition: planning for a 9830 square foot building expansion with basement and first floor. Modernized space for histology and molecular testing and microbiology and laboratory. Awarded FY26
 - vii. Community Living Center
 - b. Trust Scores: Staying around 90%.

- i. VA Central Iowa has outperformed the national benchmark 11 of the last 12 months. They have outperformed the average trust score in VISN23 counterparts 6 of the last 12 months.
 - ii. Areas of improvement
 - 1. Latino/Hispanic score is 2.3% lower than the national average
 - 2. Work to improve trust of female Veterans
 - iii. Voluntary Services
 - 1. Total number of volunteers for FY25:185
 - 2. Donations YTD (including in-kind donations): \$431, 604.80
 - 3. Total number of volunteer hours: 13,027
 - 4. Volunteer Assignments they are seeking: Office Assistants, Information desk, "No Veteran Dies Alone in Hospice" program volunteers, patient escorts. Veteran Transportation Network, Coffee Cart, Patient Visitor
 - 5. Special Events: Holiday gift giving, annual joint reviews, volunteer recognition, monthly catering of meals for in patient Veterans, National Salute to Veteran Patients, Stand Down, VSO sponsored bingo
 - c. Virtual Mobile Clinic
 - i. Resumed rural visits as of 3/3/25.
 - ii. Serves 15 rural counties and care for the CRC once a week
 - iii. Staffed with one RN, two Telehealth Clinical Technicians
 - d. Homeless Veteran Program
 - i. Nutrition and Food Service Homeless programs and the Center for Development and Engagement
 - 1. Extra food at the VA Medical Center, taken to the CRRC
 - 2. Implemented in 2024
 - ii. Women's Program
 - 1. 2025 has seen 2654 participants
 - 2. 3D Mammography numbers have dropped since 2020
 - 3. Cervical Screens: 93
- 8. Presentation by LTC Jamie Clasen, Veteran Flagpole Initiative
 - a. Giving back to Veterans by placing flagpoles in the yard of any Veteran cost free
 - b. Goal is to place one in every county by 2028. Installed over 134 flagpoles thus far
 - c. You can sponsor a Veteran or you can donate
 - d. 20-foot telescopic flag pole, with US and Iowa flag, solar lighting with installation
 - e. All products are US made
 - f. www.veteranflagpoles.org
 - g. Asking Commission to share with others and get their organization highlighted and to sign up to volunteer or donate!
 - h. Planning additional events through the year to include RAGBRAI, where they will transport materials by bike and install flagpoles along their route (FLAGBRAI)
 - i. Every dollar they receive goes into the fund.
- 9. Presentation by Paul Rupprecht and Tom Rupprecht, Iowa Homes for Heroes
 - a. R&R Realty Group
 - b. Started from a conversation with Governor Reynolds and their father about a group called Tunnels for Towers and how they could bring that to Iowa
 - c. Pilot Program that provides Veterans and First Responders that have a need for housing

- d. Committed to two homes. Two lots were donated from R&R and in conjunction with Jerry's Homes and the State of Iowa.
 - e. First candidate has been selected and building has begun.
 - f. Non-Profit that accepts donations and wants to expand funding to create more housing opportunities.
 - g. The goal is to make the home furnished and ready for the occupant.
10. Presentation by LTC George Mosby, Iowa National Guard (Deputy Chief of Staff)
- a. JRTC Update
 - i. 5000 Soldiers participated
 - ii. 14,000 pieces of equipment line hauled
 - iii. 900 pieces of equipment by rail
 - iv. All Soldiers have returned minus the 1800 Soldiers that are deploying straight from the Mobilization site.
 - v. In Support of Operation Inherent Resolve
 - b. OSACOM deployment of C12 pilot leaving beginning of August
11. Presentation by Olivia McBride, Irreverent Warriors
- a. 501c.3, that brings Veterans together using humor and camaraderie to improve mental health and prevent Veteran suicide.
 - b. Key Events: Silkies Hike, July 12. 130 Veterans signed up for ruck march of 8 miles.
 - c. VFW is a presenting national sponsor this year with a \$75,000 donation
 - d. Partner with Grunt Style foundation
 - e. Statistics associated with the Irreverent Warriors organization
 - i. 57% of Veterans reported that their suicidal ideations fully stopped or significantly improved after attending IW events
 - ii. 65% of Veterans saw their feelings of despair fully stop or significantly improve
 - iii. 41% of Veterans who previously struggled with substance use saw major improvement after joining IW
 - iv. 40.12% of IW participants are females
 - f. Large social networking resource
 - g. Community resources available and they are willing to push out other organizations to their members
 - h. www.irreverentwarriors.com
 - i. Watch "The Hike Back" on YouTube
 - j. (563) 422-8014 contact information
12. Presentation by Lori Stiles on behalf of John Thompson
- a. Suicide event, they work with family and funeral home to make sure that they received dignified services
 - b. Works with Gold Star Families
 - c. SalutetotheFallen.org
 - d. Salute to the Fallen has helped bury 46 Veterans
 - e. Most medications used to treat depression and PTSD include suicidal ideations as a potential side effect. Salute to the Fallen and TreatNow, work to find alternative treatments.
13. Presentation by Dr. Walker Porterfield, Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy
- a. Currently treats PTSD/TBI in office
 - b. HBOT treats two things
 - i. Wounds
 - ii. Inflammation

- c. Wounds and inflammation are the number one causes of chronic disease
 - d. Dr. Chris LoRang, Iowa HBOT
 - i. First Hyperbaric chamber in Iowa
 - ii. Post Stroke, Cancer patients, concussion, and off label utilization
 - iii. 15 FDA approved utilizations
 - iv. Growing body of research of off label usage success
 - v. Professional athletes using for recovery
 - vi. Side effects are minimal and most are reversible
 - e. www.treatnow.org
14. Presentation by Kristy Kelley, Dementia Friends, USA training program
- a. Retired Nursing Services Director at the Iowa Veterans Home in the Dementia care households
 - b. Dementia Champion that educates communities and clubs
 - c. IVH has made this training as part of the new employee orientation and IVH will reach 50% of staff trained and will be designated as a Dementia Friendly Facility
 - d. 80% of people living with dementia are living in our communities, only 20% are living in facilities
 - e. Family Support group in Ulery for families. Meets the fourth Thursday of every month at IVH
 - f. www.dementiafriendsusa.org
15. Presentation by Chris Ryan, Secure Sixty Senior Benefits
- a. Benefits for lower income Veterans
 - b. At 65, eligible for Medicare for Part A, and they need to sign up for Medicare B
 - c. If they have Part B, this makes them eligible for Medicare Advantage plan
 - d. Give back to the Veteran to include kick back on their Social Security check since they are getting their prescriptions through the VA, they can access an ER throughout the US with a lower co-pay.
 - e. Can use Medicare Advantage for a second opinion if desired
 - f. Dental coverage
 - g. Gym memberships
 - h. Max out of pocket is \$4-6K
 - i. Three major carriers that carry Veterans plans
 - j. Main enrollment period is October 15-December 7
16. Operational update, Patty Hamann, President, IACVS
- a. April School
 - i. 111 attendees over the three days, receiving 15.75 CEUs. At the end of this training, CVSOs only need 1 hour in ethics to be complaint with the Office of General Council
 - 1. Veteran Claims Agent, Amy Kretkowski presented on changes in federal law
 - 2. Group break outs on claims for a different way to look at things
 - ii. Federal Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures FY 22 and FY 23
 - 1. Iowa lost 4,718 Veterans, but increased total VA federal expenditures \$195,690. \$2.066 Billion to \$2.26 Billion with less Veterans.
 - iii. County Office hours
 - 1. Should be expanded full time. Expectations include obtaining and maintaining education, providing outreach, provide county, state and federal support of benefits and knowledge.
 - 2. 33 CVSOs that have less than 2 years experience

- 3. Assist in hiring qualified, dedicated employees
 - 4 Asking for support from the Commission during the next legislative session to change the law regarding support of hours for offices
- iv Next training events
 - 1 July 10, 2025. New CVSO training-Veteran Interview Process
 - 2 July 23, 2025. Single Subject Training-Appeals
- 17. Operational update by Gavin Sandvig, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, Benefits and Cemetery Bureaus
 - a. FY Close Out
 - i Cemetery
 - 1 Q4. 213 Interments
 - a. 43 Caskets/169 Cremains
 - 2 FY. 705 Interments
 - a 143 Caskets/557 Cremains
 - b. 75 more than last FY
 - c. Increase in Vietnam Veteran burials
 - 3 Staff Update
 - a. 2 Losses. Interviews have been conducted and offers made
 - ii. Benefits
 - 1. Q4. 45 Outreach events
 - 2 FY. 153 Outreach events
 - b. Upcoming Events
 - 1 Final Salute- Saturday, October 4, 2025 at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery
 - 2 FY26 Fall School-October 13 (Commissioner training), October 21-23 October (CVSO) at Stoney Creek in Johnston
 - 3. Iowa State Fair- August 11, 2025 Veterans Day at the Fair
- 18. Operational update by Mike Olson, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, Legislative Liaison
 - a Close of the Iowa Legislative Session
 - i Bills signed into law and took effect July 1, 2025
 - 1. HF250
 - 2. HF117
 - 3. HF118
 - 4. HF885
 - 5. HF901
 - 6. SF253
 - 7. SF275
 - ii. Federal Bill that IDVA is supporting
 - 1. HR1970
 - a Introduced by Representative Miller-Meeks, co-sponsored by Representative Nunn and Representative Feenstra
 - b Addresses the concern of underfunding of pharmaceuticals to residents in State Veteran Homes
 - 2 Administrative Rules Re-Write
 - a. 17 chapters that need reviewed and revised
 - b. Deadline is September 2026
- 19 Operational update by Commandant Todd Jacobus, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, Iowa Veterans Home

- a. **Iowa Deployments 2-34 BCT & 103rd ESC.** The environment in our communities today is much different than the 2000s and 2010s; gone are the significant community engagement, media attention, yellow ribbon displays, patriotic songs, etc. Let's work together to rally behind these deployed Soldiers and their families. We can lead this as a community of Veterans.
 - i. Iowa Army National Guard. Commissioner George Mosby covered this in detail.
 - ii. **U.S. Army Reserve.** The USAR's 103rd Sustainment Command, headquartered at Fort Des Moines, will conduct a sendoff ceremony for 250 Soldiers on Saturday, August 16, 2025 at 10:00 am at Valley Stadium, 4440 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines, Iowa 50265. These Soldiers will deploy in support of Operation Spartan Shield (OSS), which is a mission focused on building partner capacity in the Middle East and promoting regional self-reliance and increasing security.
- b. **Social Media Post Not Helpful for Deploying Soldiers.** On July 8, 2025, there was a social media post that made its way around Iowa which resulted in a firestorm of telephone calls and concerns regarding issues involving the 2nd Brigade Combat Team 34th Infantry Division at Fort Polk, Louisiana. A non-profit generated the post – seemingly with input from 23 Soldiers on the ground and 15 families – all of whom had concerns about Soldiers standing in the hot sun throughout the day with no water or food allowed, lack of food in the dining facilities, and unclean facilities. I can share with the Veterans community in Iowa that I have absolute trust, faith, and confidence in this brigade's leadership of the leadership team, and in The Adjutant General and his senior leadership team to address issues. These reports were exaggerated, misleading, and not helpful. There are supplies at Fort Polk for Soldiers to clean their barracks, there is plenty of food in the dining facility, Soldiers are not required to stand out in the sun all day, water is available / encouraged / even at times mandated. It is important for our Veterans community to know these things, so I share this publicly with the Commission and public. Thanks to American Legion leaders Randy Johnson and Dick Bries making me aware of this and for calling me to talk through this situation.
- c. **IDVA Newsletter to Stakeholders.** Thanks to Karl Lettow, IDVA Communications Director, for coordinating and publishing the monthly ListServ newsletter that is distributed to thousands of Iowa Veterans and stakeholders in our community. This newsletter is distributed on the 15th of each month. Keeping our community connected on events, activities, developments, and calls to action are a significant part of our responsibilities, and this newsletter does much to support that mission. If you want to be added to this ListServ then please email Karl at karl.lettow@iowa.gov. Thanks, Karl, for your great work on this!
- d. We are putting together the end of year reports, as the State fiscal year culminated on June 30, 2025. Outlined below are the end of year census numbers for residents living at the Iowa Veterans Home:
 - i. Service
 - 1. U.S. Army Veterans – 142
 - 2. U.S. Navy Veterans – 98
 - 3. U.S. Air Force Veterans – 67

4. U.S. Marine Corps Veterans – 39
5. Woman's Auxiliary Corps Veterans – 2
- ii. Era
 1. Vietnam – 209
 2. Peacetime – 89
 3. Korean War – 27
 4. Gulf War – 20
 5. World War II – 3
- e. The Iowa Veterans Home nursing staff responded to 31,652 call lights from residents during the month of May 2025. These professionals are engaged and committed to serving our residents/Iowa Veterans.
- f. **IVH In Need of RNs, LPNs, CNAs/RTWs.** We continue to have vacancies on the Iowa Veterans Home clinical team. Approximately 25% of our licensed staff positions are vacant. This impacts our operation in that we are not able to fill all of our 447 rooms due to staffing shortfalls. These positions offer a great opportunity to serve our community, State, Nation, and we could sure use the Veterans community help in connecting us with health care workers. Our leadership team is connected to nursing programs, we attend job fairs, and host many students doing clinicals at our facility in Marshalltown. If any of you know nurses who are considering a job change, or individuals considering a career change, please refer them to us for placement.
 - i. **Registered Nurses (RNs)** Authorized 36 Assigned 28 23% of authorized positions vacant
 - ii. **Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs)** Authorized: 52, Assigned 33, 37% of authorized positions vacant
 - iii. **Resident Treatment Workers (RTWs/CNAs)** Authorized 276, Assigned 214, 23% of authorized positions vacant
- g. Find current jobs at: <https://dva.iowa.gov/iowa-veterans-home/work-iowa-veterans-home> and then click on “Check our CURRENT OPENINGS to see where YOU fit” tab.
- h. **Communication Among Team.** I want to be transparent and open in the operation of the IDVA, and make great efforts to keep our leadership team and commissioners informed. How?
 - i. **Email Updates.** I provide email updates to Commissioners numerous times weekly. There are very few exceptions when I ask that the information be held closely due to privacy issues, but otherwise my communication to them is able to be passed along to the organizations they represent and beyond.
 - ii. **Monthly ListServ Newsletter to Veterans Community.** Beginning in March 2025, Karl Lettow began distributing a monthly newsletter to which anyone can subscribe. This provides information on activities, events, critical information, changes, etc. To subscribe and be added to the distribution list, please visit the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs website and click on “Subscribe” on the bottom right hand side of the Home page.
 - iii. **Monthly Newsletters to IDVA/IVH Staff.** The “IDVA Extra Monthly Leadership Update” provides a venue for each Bureau Chief to communicate developments and activities that impact our staff. This is sent out on the 1st of each month.

- iv **Insights / Comment Boxes.** There are comment boxes around the IVH campus in Marshalltown where staff and residents can provide suggestions, complaints and compliments anonymously I address these comments each month on a recorded video titled, "Commandant Insights".
- v **Quarterly Executive Rounding.** LNHA Kelley Oetker, who holds license and is responsible for adherence to CMS standards and overall operations, and Nathan Wilson, who is responsible for the non-clinical leadership of the IVH operation, provide staff with the opportunity to provide direct input to them regarding their work areas during quarterly rounding throughout the facility.
- vi **Quarterly Staff Town Hall Meetings.** We hold quarterly meetings with staff to provide a venue for staff from all areas to meet with the IDVA Senior Team and exchange thoughts, perspectives, and ideas
- vii **Quarterly Resident Town Hall Meetings.** We hold quarterly meetings with residents to provide a venue for residents to meet with the IDVA Senior team and exchange information.
- i. **IVH Key Staffing Update:** Kelley Oetker has been IVH's Provisional Licensed Nursing Home since January 2 when Penny Cutler-Bermudez retired. Kelley was hired to permanently fill that role, and assumed the role officially, on July 4th With this change IVH will **not** be back-filling her role at Quality Bureau Chief Kelley will maintain direct supervision of those staff. IVH did hire an additional LPN for the Quality Department to help with audits, the medical clinic and infection control We continue to look for ways to deliver quality services in a lean manner.
- j. **"The Nimitz Report": Veterans at the Forefront: Secretary Collins on the Future at the VA".** The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs passed along a link to a 2 hour and 41-minute testimony of U S Secretary of Veterans Affairs Doug Collins. I listened to the hearing when it was released. There is a lot of discussion about the number of VA staff members being terminated, a frustration with the lack of transparency and delivery on requests for information, inquiries about programs being eliminated, Veterans being impacted, etc I will reiterate to this group what Secretary Doug Collins shared with State Directors during our meeting with him on Wednesday, March 5, 2025, at the Midwinter Conference in Arlington, Virginia. Secretary Collins told us that Veterans benefits would not be impacted, the delivery of services at our VA Medical Facilities would not be diminished, and direct care staff would not be eliminated. The testimony begins at the 20:52 mark He is a list of the speakers:
 - a. 20:52 Senator Jerry Moran (R – Kansas) | b. 25:29 Senator Richard Blumenthal (D – Connecticut) | c. 37:11 Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Doug Collins | d. 58:14 – Senator Tuberville (R – Alabama) | e. 1:06:15 Senator Marsha Blackburn (R – Tennessee) | f. 1:12:02 Senator Mazie Hirono (D – Hawaii) | g. 1:18:34 – Senator Thom Tillis (R – North Carolina) | h. 1:23:54 Senator Hassan (D – New Hampshire) | i. 1:31:36 Senator Bill Cassidy (R – Louisiana) | j. 1:36:23 Senator Angus King (D – Maine) | k. 1:42:34 Senator John Boozman (R – Arkansas) | l. 1:48:06 Senator Bernie Sanders (D – Vermont) | m. 1:54:41 Senator Kevin Cramer (R – North Dakota) | n. 2:00:36 Senator Tammy Duckworth (D – Illinois) | o. 2:07:28 Senator Sullivan (R – Alaska) | p. 2:13:40 Senator Elissa Slotkin (D – Michigan) | q. 2:19:54 Senator Jim Banks (R – Indiana) | r. 2:25:53 Senator Blumenthal (D – Connecticut) | s. 2:36:03 Senator Jerry Moran (R – Kansas)

https://www.veterans.senate.gov/2025/5/veterans-at-the-forefront-secretary-collins-on-the-future-at-va?utm_source=thenimitzgroup.beehiiv.com&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=senate-showdown-with-secretary-collins

- k. **IDVA Schools for CVSOs.** The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) provides regular in-person training for County Veteran Service Officers, County Commissioners, and Board of Supervisors. All training is provided at no cost to participants. Spring and Fall dates will be the second full week of the month as follows:
 - i. 2025: CVSO Training October 21-23; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 13
 - ii. 2026: CVSO Training April 14-16 & October 13-15; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 12
 - iii. 2027: CVSO Training April 13-15 & October 12-14; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 11
 - iv. 2028: CVSO Training April 11-13 & October 10-12; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 9
 - v. 2029: CVSO Training April 10-12 & October 9-11; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 8
 - vi. 2030: CVSO Training April 9-11 & October 15-17; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 14
 - vii. Surveys of IDVA Since Last Quarterly Commission Meeting.
- l. **NCA Survey of IVC.** The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration (NCA) conducted a tri-annual survey of the Iowa Veterans Cemetery on May 6-8, 2025. I sent my detailed 6-page summary of this survey to each ICVA Commissioner on May 8 following the out-brief. Bottom Line Up Front: We have some work to do in order to be in better compliance with NCA. However, the Survey Team Chief clearly told us during the out-briefing that the work is getting done, that all public facing displays are outstanding - there just needs to be a better tracking system to document the standard operating procedures, processes, etc., so that we meet requirements. We'll get this done.
- m. **USDVA CO Survey of IVH.** . The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office (USDVA CO) conducted its annual survey of the Iowa Veterans Home on June 9-13, 2025. Five subject matter expert surveyors in nursing, operations, facilities, food service, and administration were on campus in Marshalltown. Summary of Survey: Laurie Martin, the VACO Survey Team Chief, shared the following statement as they concluded the survey out-briefing on Friday, June 13, **"the Iowa Veterans Home is a phenomenal facility. We can see how happy the Veterans living here are, how well taken care of they are, and that is something that every staff member should be very proud of. This survey team definitely sees that everywhere we went."** Outlined below are the key findings from the out-briefing.
 - i. There are two issues in the category of "Health Care":
 - 1. **Wound Care.** There was an issue with wound care involving Resident #14. At issue was the actual cleansing of the wound. Staff appropriately removed the dressing, then removed the packing from the wound, then disposed of the packing correctly, performed hand hygiene, put on new gloves, patted around the outside of the wound - - - **however there was no irrigation / cleaning of the wound.** There should have been some irrigation of the wound to

ensure that it was clean. The surveyor noted that the order was printed out and on the table.

2. **Pharmacy.** Could not locate a monthly medication review for the month of April for one of our residents; and there was one billing error in pharmacy for one resident. This has been corrected.
- ii. Life Safety Code – both items have already been addressed.
 1. There was a set of doors to the recycling room that were blocked resulting in those not being able to fully close in the Malloy Building 3rd & 4th floors.
 2. There were two unsecure oxygen cylinders / tanks in the Malloy Building 2nd & 4th Floors.
- iii. The IVH Licensed Nursing Home Administrator, Kelley Oetker, summarized as follows to our staff: “With hundreds of possible tags that could have been cited this is a tremendous outcome. These outstanding survey results would not be possible without the dedication and hard work of each and every one of you. The surveyors spoke very highly of the appearance of our facility and grounds, and most importantly, they noted how happy our residents are. Our annual VA survey has been completed and we are expecting the final results to be sent to us any day now. Overall, it was an excellent survey, with only minimal deficiencies noted.”
- n. **AMVETS Commissioner Resignation.** Linda Jones, who was representing Department of Iowa AMVETS on the ICVA resigned on April 8, 2025. She extends her regrets on not being able to fulfill her four-year tour on the Commission. Mary VanHorn, former ICVA Commissioner and current Department of Iowa AMVETS Commander, will work to find two nominations to replace Linda on the commission.
- o. **Women Memorial “Strive for 500” Campaign.** Please help us market this endeavor throughout your organizations. We heard from Dr. Charlene Gooch, Iowa Ambassador for the Military Women's Memorial, during the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs' quarterly commission meeting on Wednesday, January 8, 2025, regarding the efforts of the Women's Memorial Team across the Nation. Dr. Gooch shared with us that there is an effort underway for each State to have the military careers of at least 500 women captured and updated in the Military women's Memorial in 2025. So far, 43 female Veterans from Iowa have accomplished this in 2025. Our goal is to ensure that every female Veteran in Iowa knows that there is an initiative to capture their story and perspective by inputting their name and service information into the registry for future generations. To do so they need to go to this website, create an account and provide details of their career.
https://myaccount.womensmemorial.org/nc_createaccount. It doesn't matter if the Veteran served for 1 year or 40 years. We want the stories of these women Veterans, and I hope that we can get the word out there to share this request / call to action. There is also a YouTube video available at <https://www.youtube.com/@WomensMemorial>.
- n. **Significant Events and Commemorations:**
 - a. **Volunteers Recognized.** IDVA hosted a Volunteer Appreciation luncheon and awards program on Wednesday, April 23, 2025. Volunteer Services Coordinator Laurel Degelau mentioned the 681 volunteers – all of whom have been vetted by our staff, the 9,634 hours of volunteering that took place since April 2024, the 156 chapel services, the 588 recreation trips – 76% of which

were supported by volunteers, and the 44 new volunteers who have registered since last year – 18 more than in 2023. Amazing statistics that translate directly to quality of life for those we serve. I invite those interested in volunteering to go to the IDVA website, <https://dva.iowa.gov/iowa-veterans-home/work-iowa-veterans-home/become-volunteer>, and find the “Make a Difference at the Iowa Veterans Home” link. We have some amazing volunteers!

- b. **Vietnam Veterans & Fall of Saigon / USMC Corporal Darwin Judge Commemoration Day.** On Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 10:00 am, the Iowa Veterans Home hosted an event to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the United States leaving Vietnam. It was on this date in 1975 that the United States Embassy was evacuated as the People’s Republic of Vietnam and the Viet Cong began their final assault on Saigon. Also, on this date two Marines, Darwin Judge of Marshalltown, IA, and Charles McMahon of Woburn, MA, were killed in action by rocket fire while defending the evacuation of the embassy. These two Marines were the last casualties in Vietnam. Darwin’s sister and brother-in-law, Lori and Greg DeSaulniers, attended and contributed at the ceremony. Darwin’s high school friend and fellow Eagle Scout, Ken Locke, who now lives in Warsaw, Indiana, also spoke at the event. The keynote speaker for this event was Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, Retired State Department leader and President Emeritus of The World Food Prize. This was an extraordinary program, including an overflow in the Malloy LRC, and we are grateful to all who participated.
<https://www.timesrepublican.com/news/todays-news/2025/04/hundreds-pay-tribute-to-marshalltown-native-darwin-judge-other-vietnam-casualties-at-iowa-veterans-home/>
- c. **Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day.** The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs partnered with the Disabled American Veterans to host a Vietnam Veteran Recognition Day program at the Vietnam Memorial on the State Capitol grounds on Wednesday, May 14, 2025. Colonel Gerry Berry, USMC Retired, was the keynote speaker. Thanks to former Commissioner and current DAV board member Dan Gannon for his efforts in making the day such a success. It was an outstanding day in every way. 15 IVH residents traveled to Des Moines, and both Governor Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Cournoyer attended. President Barack Obama launched a 13-year commemoration of the Vietnam War in 2012; activities focusing on recognizing Vietnam Veterans specifically will culminate on November 11, 2025. We’ve done a great job here in Iowa to honor and recognize those who served in Vietnam – including the 210 Vietnam Veterans residing at the IVH.
<https://www.weareiowa.com/article/news/history/one-iowans-critical-role-in-the-vietnam-war-draft-saigon-deploy-deployment-history-ambassador-evacuation-president-marine-time-of-service-conflict/524-1d19d14b-a7fb-4f10-87d9-02d008a1ed28>
- d. Colonel Gerry Berry, U.S. Marine Corps Retired, visited the Iowa Veterans Home on Friday, May 16, 2025, and provided an overview of his 25-year career as a Marine pilot, highlighting his two tours in Vietnam, and his involvement in Operation Frequent Wind on April 29-30, 1975. It was a privilege to host him here at the Iowa Veterans Home 50 years after “The Fall of Saigon” and to learn about his thoughts and perspective on life at that time. He thoroughly enjoyed his time at the IVH. He shared with me that it makes

him feel so good to know that Marines (and all other Veterans) are so well supported here, and at other State Veterans Homes across our Nation. Thanks to Mike Donahey and the T-R for providing coverage of this event. <https://www.timesrepublican.com/news/todays-news/2025/05/former-iowan-helped-evacuate-us-embassy-in-vietnam-during-operation-frequent-wind/>

- e. **Interment of World War II Veterans Remains.** The U.S. Department of Defense POW MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) recovered and identified two Iowa World War II Veterans recently and those remains were interred since our last Commission meeting. I attended both ceremonies and extend a hearty thank you to Veterans, Service Organizations, and communities of both Cincinnati / Appanoose County, Iowa Falls / Hardin County and all of Iowa for the honorable transfer and interment ceremonies.
 - i. There was an interment of remains of **U.S. Army Private James L. Harrington** at Pleasant Hill Cemetery, Cincinnati (Appanoose County), Iowa, on Friday, June 6, 2025 at 11:00 am. Private Harrington was killed in action in Normandy, France, on D-Day. Governor Reynolds signed a proclamation that Friday, June 6, 2025, is Pvt James L. Harrington Day in Iowa. Governor Reynolds has ordered flags at half-staff on all public buildings, grounds, and facilities throughout Iowa to honor Private Harrington. Thanks to Vietnam Veteran Larry Wright, and the entire Appanoose County community, for their efforts. He was interred 81 years after his death on the beaches of Normandy. I met James Harrington's grandnephew and his wife from Indiana attended the ceremony, and they were very appreciative of the support.
 - ii. There was an interment of remains of **U.S. Army Air Corps Corporal Melvin Huff** on Saturday, June 28, 2025 at 1:00 pm at Union Cemetery in Iowa Falls (Hardin County) Iowa. Governor Reynolds ordered the flags to half-staff to honor Corporal Huff. Numerous first and second cousins of Melvin Huff came from Idaho, Washington, and Texas to attend this service. Again, very well done by the community.
- o. **Passing of Dave Thornburg.** The Veterans Community lost a strong supporter last month. I was informed by Chris Salladay, Commander of Department of Iowa Disabled American Veterans, that **David "Dave" Thornburg passed away on Saturday, June 21, 2025.** Dave Thornburg was among the key leaders for many years for Iowa DAV Chapter 20 - where he was the long-time Adjutant, and the Department of Iowa - where he was the Judge Advocate, served on the Legislative Committee, and held other leadership positions over the years. In 2023 Dave Thornburg visited the Iowa Veterans Home and he and I walked around the facility. I mentioned to Dave that the air conditioning had gone out on one of our vans and that it was not worth the investment to get it fixed as the vehicle was old, we needed to replace it, and so we were making due by not using that van when it was hot outside. Dave brought that situation to a DAV Department meeting later that week and secured approval by their board of directors to donate \$70,000 to replace the van. He asked that we put the DAV Logo on it, and we gratefully complied with that request. Dave was interred at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery on July 1, 2025. <https://www.ernstfuneralhome.com/obituaries/david-thornburg-jr>
- p. Approval of Minutes from the ICVA quarterly meeting on April 2, 2025.
 - a. Motion to approve made by Becky Dirks Haugsted , 2nd by Robert Suesakul . Motion passed unanimously.
- q. Approval of Minutes from the Trust Fund in person meeting on April 2, 2025.

- a Motion to approve made by Joella Perry , 2nd by Reginald Richardson Motion passed unanimously.
- r. Approval of open session meeting on License Plate Fund donation to Veterans Casting Away Disabilities.
 - a. Motion to approve made by David Grimm, 2nd by Scott Miller Motion passed unanimously
- s. Approval of Minutes from the Trust Fund conference call on May 1, 2025.
 - a Motion to approve by George Mosby , 2nd by Joella Perry . Motion passed unanimously.
- t. Approval of Trust Fund conference call on June 5, 2025.
 - a Motion to approve by Reginald Richardson. 2nd by David Grimm Motion passed unanimously
- u. Commission Elections
 - a. No new nominations, positions to remain as is
 - i Chair-Darlene McMartin
 - ii First Vice Chair- Joella Perry
 - iii Second Vice Chair. George Mosby
 - b Motion to approve made by Greg Paulline, 2nd by Reginald Richardson. Motion passed unanimously
- v. Old Business
- w. New Business
- x. Public Comment.
- y. Next ICVA meeting will be October 1,2025 at 10.00 am at the Iowa Veterans Home, Whitehill Auditorium, 1301 Summit Street, Marshalltown, Iowa 50158.
- z Motion to adjourn made by Joella Perry, 2nd by Robert Suesakul Motion passed.