

DATE: April 1, 2026

TO: Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs

FROM: Darlene McMartin, Chair, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs

SUBJECT: Quarterly Commission Meeting

The Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs quarterly meeting was held on Wednesday, April 1, 2026, at the Iowa Veterans Home, Whitehill Auditorium, 1301 Summit Street, Marshalltown, Iowa 50158

AGENDA

- Called to Order at 10:01 am by Commissioner McMartin
- Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence led by Commissioner Mosby
- Welcome and Introduction of Guests
- Roll Call
 - **COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:** Darlene McMartin, Joella Perry, Elizabeth Ledvina, Becky Dirks Haugsted, Dennis Jones, Reginald Richardson, Gregory Paulline, Todd Jacobus, Scott Miller, Robert Suesakul, Dave Grimm, George Mosby
 - **COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:** None
- **VA Regional Office-Randal Beyer, VR&E Director (for Heidi Rhodes)**
 - Locally
 - Des Moines Regional Office completed 17,792 claims completed through March 28, 2026. This is an increase from last year at this time
 - Current Iowans receiving awards (Comp, Pension, DIC)
 - 61,289 | \$118,970,197 (Feb 2026)
 - 58,288 | \$103,373,358 (Feb 2025)
 - Adding staff to VR&E team
 - Three Voc Rehab Specialists
 - Two more will join in the upcoming months
 - VR&E is actively serving 1,320 Veterans across the state of Iowa from five locations
 - Des Moines, Sioux City, Mason City, Cedar Rapids and Davenport
 - Des Moines VR&E currently leading the continental district with an impressive 98.5% active caseload rate. That means that Veterans are staying engaged, progressing in their program, and ultimately achieving successful rehabilitation and employment outcomes
 - Nationally
 - Backlog
 - Continued focus and progress. 87,719 backlog claims as of 3/30/26, down from 244,067 one year ago-a 64% reduction
 - Going Forward
 - Locally
 - ISU outreach event on April 7, 2026
 - Continue to serve Veterans through claims completions, outreach and VR&E services
 - Nationally
 - Continuing to focus on reducing backlog claims
 - Ongoing enhancements to claims automations process to continue claim adjudicate times
 - VR&E transition to our new case management system, the Readiness and Employment System (RES). Expected completion of transition is June 2026. RES is designed to reduce administrative burden and give counselors more time for what matters most, direct counseling and support for Veterans

- **Questions to the presenter:** Chair McMartin asked Mr. Beyer if there were issues or anything that the RO is seeing in claims processing that we need to be focusing on? Is there an area of need that counties can work on or the State can work on ?
 - The answer was no.
- **VA Medical Center-Iowa City Update-Makenzie Johnson, Interim Assistant Director for the Iowa City VA Health Care System (for Heath Streck)**
 - **Outreach and Engagement**
 - Interim Medical Center Director, Heath Streck, could not make the meeting due to a scheduled meeting with Senator Duckworth (Illinois)
 - The 25th anniversary of the Renal Transplant Program will be celebrated on April 10, 2026 at 11:00 am-1:00 pm, in room 3W101a
 - Since inception, the Iowa City VA Renal Transplant Program has successfully performed 513 kidney transplants and facilitated an additional 49 simultaneous pancreas-kidney transplants and 14 pancreas only transplants
 - Annual Workplace Evaluation with VISN (April 13-16)
 - In depth review of program and document reviews; discussions with program managers; technical staff engagement; and walk through of various work areas to ensure compliance
 - Quarterly Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Stakeholder Meeting (April 16th)
 - Volunteer Appreciation Week
 - Volunteer Appreciation Dinner (April 24)
 - Recognizing more than 200 volunteers
 - Patient Experience Week (April 27- May 1)
 - This year's theme is "Own the Experience", a reminder of the commitment to putting Veterans first.
 - Patient Experience survey data continues to demonstrate strong performance.
 - Outpatient trust scores hold steady at 95.4% and inpatient trust scores are at 93.2%, both above national averages
 - May Stakeholder meeting will involve a facility tour, Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training, and educational sessions related to Veteran-focused services
 - Center for Development and Civic engagement remains actively involved in supporting homeless and underserved Veterans
 - Current needs
 - Nonperishable food items; sleeping bags; tents; warm clothes; hygiene items; and monetary donations to support outreach and women's' programs
 - Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
 - The National Veteran Suicide Prevention 2025 annual report was released
 - Overall Veteran suicide deaths saw a slight decline in 2023, the average remains at approximately 17, and notably, 61% of those Veterans were NOT receiving care through the VA
 - Spring is a high activity period for suicide prevention, continue to provide buddy checks and engagement across the Veteran community
 - Suicide and Crisis Line (988) is available 24/7 for confidential crisis support
 - Facility Improvements
 - Interventional Radiology /Cath Lab extension is moving forward and will include a third electrophysiology lab by fall 2026
 - Building 50 expansion will add two floors for specialty clinics and the Women's Clinic is on track for completion in early fall
 - Burlington CBOC expansion is slated for completion later this summer
 - Future Modernization plans
 - Dialysis renovation; the 9W inpatient mental health renovation; histopathology lab expansion; and key infrastructure upgrades such as electrical improvements, fire alarms, and HER modernization
 - Questions asked of presenter:

- Commissioner Ledvina asked if it would be possible to coordinate a meeting with the leaders of the CBOCs to ensure that diagnosis, as well as treatment are indicated in the health records
 - Commissioner Ledvina and Interim Assistant Director Johnson agreed to meet after the meetings conclusion to discuss further
 - Ms. Johnson mentioned that their public affairs officer, Justin Hardt, is actively planning more engagement with the VSOs to go out and meet with them or to invite them to the facility and answer even more questions
- **VA Medical Center-Central Iowa Update-Eddie Gutierrez, Acting Service Chief, Center for Development and Civil Engagement (for Lisa Curnes)**
 - Homeless Programs
 - In FY26, VA set three goals in continued commitment ending Veteran homelessness
 - Permanent Housing: VA will house no less than 48,000 individual Veterans in FY2026
 - Prevention of Returns to Homelessness under 5%
 - Engagement with Unsheltered Veterans: Nationally, VA will increase outreach and engage with no less than 40,000 unsheltered Veterans
 - Each VA Medical Center received local targets for both the number of homeless Veterans placed into permanent housing and the number of unsheltered Veterans engaged
 - As of February 2026, VA Central Iowa has permanently housed 114 homeless Veterans, achieving 66% of our FY26 goal of 172. VA Central remains on track to exceed this goal
 - Of the 114 Veterans housed, only 1 Veteran has returned to homelessness
 - VA Central Iowa has engaged 46 unsheltered Veterans as of February, reaching 46% of the goal to reach 100 Veterans
 - Of the 114, 24 have already transitioned into interim or permanent housing
 - Nationally, The Department of Veteran Affairs announced that it permanently housed 51,936 homeless Veterans across the country in FY 25
 - This is 4,011 more Veterans than in FY24
 - The nationwide numbers include 196 permanently housed by the VA Central Iowa Health Care System
 - Recap on 2025
 - VA Central Iowa has earned a 92.7% trust rating from the FY26 Q2 satisfaction survey result
 - National VA trust scores for outpatient care are at 93%
 - The American College of Emergency Physicians award VACIHCS's Emergency Department Bronze Standard-Level 3 Geriatric Emergency Department Accreditation on September 19, 2025
 - The Geriatric Emergency Department Accreditation program was implemented by American College Emergency Physicians, with support from the Gary and Mary West Health Instituted and John A. Hartford Foundation, to recognized those emergency departments that provide excellent care for older adults
 - VA CIHCS team is led by Dr. Randy Daniel, Patrick Ragland, RN, and colleagues
 - Expanded use of the Virtual Mobile Clinic to include Veterans currently facing homelessness.
 - On Fridays, the Virtual Mobile Clinic to Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) downtown and provide primary care services to homeless Veterans
 - Walk ins Welcome and VACIHCS will coordinate with homeless coordinators to have Veterans come for service
 - VACIHCS received their triennial accreditation from the Joint Commission in December 2025 for the next three years
 - Primary care Providers have been working to improve the Veteran experience related to their rating as a provider over the last year
 - VA Central Iowa has been identified as one of the top 10 most improved facilities
 - Fourth highest in terms of improvement over the last 4 quarters and ranked #22 out of all VA facilities.
 - Engagement

- In March 2026, six players from Drake University softball team and the Daughters of the American Revolution teamed up to serve over 75 pizzas and 15 pies to 180 staff and approximately 130 Veterans
 - Summer BBQ coming up!
 - Veteran Townhall was held in April to inform Veterans on VHA updates, current eligibility standards, and Care in the Community Processes.
 - Served pizza to attendees and had a Q and A session with the executive leadership
 - Next townhall will be in September
 - Construction Update
 - Telemetry
 - Building 1W 3rd floor renovations creates 10 single occupancy telemetry rooms.
 - Ribbon cutting to be held on April 14th
 - Steam Tunnel
 - Expands facility main steam and chilled water piping by 925 linear feet in a serviceable tunnel
 - Lab Addition
 - 9,830 SF building expansion including the basement and 1st Floor building 1W
 - Modernized space for Histology, Molecular Testing, Microbiology and Laboratory
 - Building 3 Annex has been demolished
 - Building 1, Level 1 clinics
 - 13,200 SF building renovation
 - Building 1: First Floor, renovates space for Oncology, Geri Pact, Geriatric patient reception areas and health care programs; Construction underway
 - Foundational Services Building
 - 11,000 SF Building located South of Building 25
 - Pain management clinics
 - Currently in design stage
 - **Question for presenter:** inquired “If a Veteran loses his private insurance, how long does it take to enroll and begin starting service in the VA”
 - Mr. Gutierrez says if the Veteran is eligible and have the correct documentation, they could be processed same day.
 - Commissioner Perry mentioned that when she puts in the new paperwork, some of the clients are not getting their letter saying that they are eligible for services, is there a way to get the letter timely? There is also an issue that CVSOs are checking the box that they request a doctor’s appointment, but those requests are not getting scheduled.
 - Mr. Gutierrez asked that he and Commissioner Perry meet after the meeting to share more details.
- **Presentations:**
 - **Dr. Hayley Harvey-Veteran Oral Health Coalition, Chair**
 - BLUF: They are requesting the current process of requiring Veterans to have two separate dental treatment plans or “Quotes” be removed.
 - Oral Health Iowa is a statewide coalition working to improve access, systems, and outcomes in oral health by providing education, advocacy and connections to the oral health care of underserved communities throughout the State of Iowa.
 - As part of their mission they formed a Veterans Oral Health Committee, where Dr. Destigter and Dr. Harvey co-chair.
 - What they have learned:
 - 15% of Veterans are eligible for dental care through the VA system, and that is established through Congress it Title 38
 - In partnership with the American Institute of Dental Public Health, they have spent the last three years doing research, engaging in reforms and holding summits to find out what more can be done to support Iowa Veterans in the space of dental health care.

- Veterans in Iowa have the ability to access dollars through the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund. To access those dollars, they are required to have two separate treatment plans through two different dentists, this creates a tremendous burden for Veterans
 - Availability of dental services in rural areas
- Dr. Harvey served 10 years in the Iowa/Michigan Army National Guard. Commissioned as a dentist upon completion of dental school at the University of Iowa. Her works included bringing up the readiness of Soldiers, particularly during war time situations
 - Class III classification (meaning the Soldiers were not dentally ready to be deployed). That meant that they had to remove teeth or repair teeth, or do whatever is necessary so that Soldier can be deployed.
 - Mission was to prevent a Soldier having a dental emergency within 12 months of being deployed, because that would take them out of doing the work they are assigned and trained to do
 - In 2026, to imagine that we may have to support a Soldier to serve, to survive and return to the great State of Iowa. Whether they are required to have hip replacement surgery, or a knee replacement or radiation therapy but they cannot get that done because they do not the dental readiness classification, is unacceptable
- Solution
 - The Oral Coalition can be part of the solution by doing a two-part approach
 - Day One: committed to finding volunteer dentists to review any treatment plans that are considered may be questionable or beyond the standard. They might even suggest that is above the cost or encroaching on appearing fraudulent or abusive.
 - Ready to provide a registry of dentists that are prepared to also serve, not only in the capacity of reviewing and creating treatment plans, but to provide treatment and care.
- Questions for the presenter
 - Commissioner Mosby commented that the problem is deeper than just two different emergency dental quotes, two quotes are necessary to deter fraud by comparing/contrasting the opinions of two different providers. There are dental care providers out there who know that the trust fund will approve \$10k (the max) so they will inflate the quote for financial gain. The deeper root of this entire problem for our veterans is preventative dental care and access to providers. What I mean by that is unless a veteran is 100%, there is no low/no cost source of dental insurance to encourage dental cleanings and minor dental care. My suggestion, is to research opportunities to use the Trust Fund to purchase dental a low cost insurance for our veterans. This could be a graduated program based on their disability percentage to help mitigate the financial load on the IVTF.
 - Commissioner McMartin commented on the how the program and the registry will help CVSOs and also allow the Trust Fund to provide quicker service.
 - Commissioner McMartin mentioned that there are two programs for dental coverage (Delta Dental and MetLife) for purchase by the Veterans. If a Veteran is on low income pension, those dollars that they spend on dental insurance can be taken off and reimbursed for the insurance. Recommends that educating the dentists as to what is the actual care that is necessary and keeping some of the funds out of the \$10,000 max for future needs
 - Dr. Harvey said that they are prepared to volunteer to review treatment plans if there is already one treatment plan from their provider
- Vote was tabled until the agreement is established and dentists vetted before bringing back to the Commission to vote



THE STATE OF VETERAN ORAL HEALTH IN IOWA

Understanding Outcomes and Opportunities for Improving
Oral Health and Well-Being for Iowa Veterans

Prepared by the American Institute of Dental Public Health in support of the Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation



Modernizing the Iowa Veteran Trust Fund Dental Treatment Protocols: An Initiative from Oral Health Iowa

The Iowa Veterans Trust Fund (IVTF) was established in 2003 by the Iowa General Assembly (Iowa Code §35A.13) with bipartisan support as a permanent fund to assist veterans and their families with quality-of-life improvements. The fund was established in response to growing recognition of unmet needs among Iowa's veterans, particularly related to essential living needs, healthcare access, and financial insecurity. The purpose of this fund is to provide emergency and supplemental financial assistance to qualifying Iowa veterans and their families in areas that federal VA or other benefits don't fully cover. These funds can cover a variety of out-of-pocket expenses for Iowa veterans, including dental care.

Modernize the Treatment Planning Requirement Using Teledentistry and Clinical Expert Oversight

The current IVTF requirement that veterans submit two independent dental treatment plans as part of their application was initially introduced to prevent fraud and ensure transparency. In practice, however, this policy has become a significant barrier to care, especially for veterans in rural areas with limited access to dental providers. As advocates for accessible dental care for veterans, Oral Health Iowa proposes the following solutions to address the dual-treatment burden.

1. Reducing the treatment planning requirements to one submitted plan, which can be reviewed and verified by a dentist as a subject matter expert.
2. Maintain a dual-treatment requirement but allow for the second treatment plan to be completed via teledental appointment - either as a separate treatment plan or a review and verification of the first plan.

Allowing teledentistry consultations to meet one or both treatment-planning requirements, using either live video assessments or asynchronous review of digital records and radiographs, could streamline this administrative requirement. Alternatively, the state could designate a contracted dentist familiar with veterans' benefits to review submitted treatment plans via teledentistry and determine whether the proposed care is reasonable, thereby eliminating the need for a second plan.

Oral Health Iowa is a coalition of oral health professionals that advocates on relevant and timely issues, educates the public and Iowa leadership on oral health information and best practices, and connects experts, providers, and practitioners to empower Iowans to improve their quality of life. Oral Health Iowa strongly urges decision-makers to consider solutions that maximize taxpayer dollars through more efficient allocation of the Iowa Veteran Trust Fund. For more information on this initiative, please contact us at oralhealthiowa@gmail.com.

- **Joella Perry-Iowa Women's Veteran Program**
 - Proposed in 2025 to Commandant Jacobus
 - Volunteer program with Commissioner Perry as the coordinator along with at least 12 CVSOs and female Veterans assisting
 - The program also has retired female Veterans assisting
 - First table was set up at the Iowa State Capitol during Veterans Day on the Hill which garnered interest from other women programs in combining forces for events and supporting each other
 - 4500 women Veterans receiving health care and benefits out of the 16,000 that actually live here
 - New health care at the VA that a lot of women do not know they can receive
 - Goal is to provide awareness, support and resources to the Veteran Service Officers in the State of Iowa
 - Events
 - June 12th-National Women Veterans Day, 4-8 pm, Za-Ga-Zig Shrine in Altoona
 - April 18th-DAV Women's Veterans Conference, 9-2. Iowa Gold Star Museum



- **Carlene Hall-Still Serving Iowa Veterans Podcast**
 - Started in January 2026 with Darlene McMartin as a concept at Veterans Day on the Hill
 - Podcast is presented once a week, and there have been 17,488 views and in excess of 5000 unique viewers in the 10 podcasts that have been posted
 - Demographics reached:
 - 52% female and 48% male
 - Ages 55-64 represent 26% of viewers; Over 65 25% ; Between 45-54 21%; and 27% under the age of 45
 - Stories they have told
 - Presented a Quilt of Valor to a WWII Veteran on his 100th birthday and they want to honor our Veterans and reach as many WWII, Korean and Vietnam Veterans as they can to preserve their memories and stories through this video podcast
 - The unpleasant stories about predatory claim sharks
 - They were able to visit organizations that create the quilts such as the Nishnabotna Quilting Guild and Women for Veterans from Woodbine, Iowa
 - Recently, they added a Wednesday podcast where Darlene posts a segment "In Case You Didn't Know". This included information about national park passes, the Iowa Veterans Court
 - Able to connect with mental health organizations such as NAMI
 - Exposed to an organization called Horses Help, where they were invited by a Veteran to video his horse therapy session
 - One Goal is to have conversations and interview each County Veteran Services Officer, either in person or by Zoom
 - Please Share: **Still Serving Iowa Veterans on Facebook** to help gain more viewers

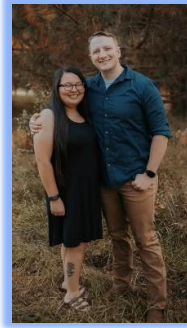


- **Iowa Association of County Veteran Services-Jim Jones**
 - What is the IACVS are and what they are comprised of
 - Comprised currently of 148 CVSOs across the state
 - Broken down into 7 Districts, each district has roughly 13-15 counties per district, each district has a director, elected by their district. Every district has two designated trainers, and work 28E agreements to cross over counties if needed
 - Member of NACVSO, comprised of CVSOs from across the nation is 32 states, 8 tribal nations, and as of March 2026 over 2200 CVSOs across the nation
 - IACVS has two CVSOs that are on the national training team, Jenni Olson from Iowa county and Jim Jones
 - IACVS has their own education committee
 - Education Committee
 - Single Subject Virtual Training, 1.5 hour monthly via Teams. All CVSOs welcome.
 - Amy Kretkowski, Veterans Law Professor from the University of Iowa and a nationally accredited Veteran Service Officer; Currently is provided Kent who is also a nationally accredited veteran affair lawyer in Amy's absence
 - The other 8 trainings are provided by the Regional Office here in Des Moines
 - Professional training each month with on average 75-85 of CVSOs logging in
 - January 28, 2026 training was completed on Ancillary Benefits by the DSM RO
 - February 25, 2026 training on Higher Level Reviews and Informal Conferences provided by Kent Eiler
 - March 25, 2026 training on Regulatory Protections provided by DSM RO
 - Future
 - April-no training scheduled as IDVA is providing state training
 - May-no training scheduled as the IACVS has training
 - June 24th-Presenting Late Evidence-Kent Eiler
 - IACVS Spring May 5-7 at the Stoney Creek Convention Center in Johnston. Still accepting registrations
 - Partnered with the American Legion and conducted training February 14, 2026 with approximately 40-45 CVSOs in attendance
 - NACVSO Education
 - Basic Benefits Course was conducted February 23-27 with 128 attendees
 - National Conference is May 31-June 5
 - Certified Veterans Advocate Class (May 30-May 31)
 - Basic Benefits Course in person (May 31-June 4)

- Advanced Appeals Course (April 2-3)
 - Basic Benefits Course-virtual (September 28-October 2)
 - Monthly Statistics
 - Highlights (January-February 2026)
 - January: 1,331 new awards with compensation for the month at \$106,964,161.00
 - February; 1600 new claim awards with compensation for the month at \$107,743,820.00
 - Increased those receiving 100% compensation from 11949 to 12088, an increase of 139 new 100% ratings
 - Questions for presenter:
 - Commissioner Mosby extended his appreciation for Jim Jones' work in Plymouth County
- **Gavin Sandvik- Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits and Cemetery Update**
 - **Iowa Veterans Cemetery**
 - **Funerals**
 - March 21, 2026 the IVC was honored to lay to rest MAJ Jeff O'Brien and SGT Declan Coady of the 103rd ESC, USAR who were killed in action on March 1, 2026
 - **Entrance Gate**
 - The gate damaged by a semi-truck is currently being fabricated. A timeline for
 - **Education**
 - **County Veteran Service Officer School**
 - IDVA holds two schools per year (April/October)
 - Next session is scheduled for April 14-16, 2026 at the Stoney Creek Inn in Johnston.
 - National Veterans Legal Services (NVLSP) will be the presenters
 - 70 currently registered for the school
 - **Untold Stories Program**
 - ADM and Johnston schools participated in the Untold Stories Program which is funded by the VA. Students were assigned Veterans who were interred in State or National Cemeteries, they then researched on the Veteran and provide a presentation on February 27, 2026 at the IVC. The Veterans included in the presentations were all USMC Veterans
 - James McLeran-Wall 2 A5
 - Merton Hansen-Wall 3 A61
 - George Addison-Wall 6 A17
 - Robert Gaskill-Wall 2 D38
 - Raymond Dickes-Sec 3 Site 15
 - **Upcoming Events**
 - Tuesday, April 7th, Iowa State University Benefits Fair
 - Attending organizations include
 - VBA PCT, VR&E and VHA Eligibility with Education, Iowa Works/Homebase Iowa, VFW VSO, IDVA
 - CVSOs from Wayne, Iowa and Story counties
 - Possible future large-scale claims clinic at Iowa State University with the VA RO in the fall of 2026
 - Saturday, April 25, 2026, at the Pottawattamie County Veteran Service Office from 10-3
 - Pottawattamie County
 - Beginning in April 2026, the CVSOs in Pottawattamie County will be providing a Mobile Service Office throughout the towns in Pott county where they are going to be connecting with the Veteran community and providing services
 - Yellow Ribbon Events for those units that deployed from the Iowa Army National Guard are projected for 4th Quarter FY26
- **Nathan Wilson (for Mike Olson)-Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs-Legislative Update**
 - **Administrative Rules Update**

- IDVAs amendments on 801 Chapter 2,3,4 and 6 will be replaced by overarching rules that will apply to most state departments
 - 801 Chapter 9,13 and 16 are in the process of being rescinded as they no longer have supporting law in code
 - 801 Chapters 1,7 and 11 will be published in the April 15th Rules Bulletin and are scheduled for a Notice of Intended Action hearing at 1:00 pm on May 8th. These rules were submitted with the minor changes that were approved after the first public hearing
 - 801 Chapters 1-4, 6-11 and 13-17 all have preliminary drafts completed and IDVA will schedule meetings for review once the legislative session concludes
- **SF2466 Veterans Services Excellence Program Legislation**
 - Passed the Senate on a bipartisan basis with an amendment that adjusts the Veterans Trust Fund balance from \$50 million to \$75 million to account for inflation since its inception almost 20 years
 - The bill received very strong support from members of the Senate that are also Veterans
 - On March 18, 2026, opponents of the bill were successful in preventing the House Veteran Affairs Committee from voting on SF2466. This is despite the bill having passed the House Veterans Affairs Committee less than an hour before with an amendment proposed by the Governor's office to maintain the \$10,000 funding to each county as-is and provide an additional \$250,000 in incentive funding to County VSO offices. Since the bill did not pass the House Veterans Affairs Committee with the Governor's amendment, that amendment is no longer part of the bill unless offered again by the Governor's office. The opponents were not successful in stopping the bill, as it was reassigned the next day to the House Appropriations Committee, its last stop before the House floor.
 - This bill is supported by both the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans
 - There has been a significant amount of misinformation circulating about this bill. All questions about the bill can contact Mike Olson at 641-750-6185
- **Todd Jacobus- Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Update**
 - **Ultimate Sacrifice of Soldiers.** As we continue to work together to serve our State's Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors, we remember Iowans / Americans affected by the attacks on U.S. Forces on Saturday, December 13, 2025, in Palmyra, Syria, and on Sunday, March 1, 2026, near the Port of Shuaiba, Kuwait. All of these Soldiers had families, friends, civilian jobs outside the military, hobbies, and were living full lives. Blessings on each of these Soldiers and their families. For me – this event reinforced why our mission in support of Veterans is so important. Everyone who served in uniform took an oath of service – truly writing a blank check made payable to the American people for the cost of “up to and including my life”. We must never forget their sacrifice.
 - Two Soldiers of the 1st Squadron 113th Cavalry 2nd Brigade Combat Team 34th Infantry Division (Iowa Army National Guard), Staff Sergeant Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar of Grimes and Staff Sergeant William “Nate Howard of Marshalltown, were killed by a lone gunman suspected to be connected to the Islamic State of Iraq & Syria (ISIS). Several Soldiers assigned to this unit sustained career ending injuries and continue to be receive treatment at U.S. military facilities around the country.

Staff Sergeant William (Nate) Howard of Marshalltown, Iowa.
<https://www.mitchellfh.com/obituaries/sgt-william-howard>



Staff Sergeant Edgar “Brian” Tovar-Torres of Des Moines, Iowa.
<https://www.hamiltonsfuneralhome.com/obituaries/EdgarTorresTovar#obituary>



- Six Soldiers of the 103rd Sustainment Command (U.S. Army Reserve, headquartered out of Fort Des Moines, Iowa), were killed in action on Sunday, March 1, 2026, during Iran’s unmanned aircraft attack on American Forces as part of Operation Epic Fury at the Port of Shuaiba, Kuwait. There were many Soldiers wounded as well. These Soldiers’ families will forever establish time as before and after this date.

Sergeant First Class Nicole Amor of White Bear Lake, Minnesota.
<https://www.muellermemorial.com/obituaries/nicole-amor>



Sergeant Declan Coady of West Des Moines, Iowa. <https://www.ilesfuneralhomes.com/obituary/Sgt.-Declan-J.-Coady/West-Des-Moines-Iowa/1894467>



Captain Cody Khork of Winter Haven, Florida. <https://www.altogetherfuneral.com/obituaries/d-21432446/winter-haven-florida/major-cody-khork/march-2026>



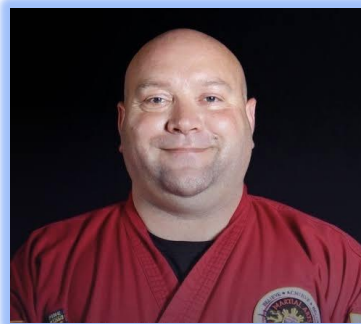
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Marzan of Sacramento, California. I could not find an obituary, but I found an article in the Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/obituaries/story/2026-03-06/youre-our-hero-with-servants-heart-mourning-for-california-solider-killed-in-iran-war>



Major Jeffrey O'Brien – originally of Coggon and resident of Waukee, Iowa;
<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/west-des-moines-ia/jeffrey-obrien-12777014>



Master Sergeant Noah Tietjens of Bellevue, Nebraska;
<https://www.forestlawnomaha.com/obituaries/Noah-L-Tietjens?obId=47521028>



- **Thanks to ICVA.** Thanks to each of our Commissioners of Veterans Affairs who invest your greatest resource – time – into advocating for Iowa Veterans through your work on this commission, and in other ways. This is the last Commission meeting for two of our Commissioners. Elizabeth Ledvina has represented the American Legion on the ICVA since 2015 and served as Chairwoman of the Commission for several years. Lieutenant Colonel George Mosby has represented the Iowa National Guard on the ICVA since 2021, and served as Vice Chair for two years.
- **New Commissioners.** Governor Reynolds appointed the following individuals to serve on the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs beginning May 1, 2026: Becky Dirks Haugsted (VFW, 2nd Term), Randall Johnson (American Legion, 1st Term), Joel Sage (Iowa National Guard, 1st Term), Dave Wilkins (AMVETS, 1st Term). The Senate Confirmed these appointments unanimously on March 30, 2026.
- **Thanks to all who made Veterans Day on the Hill on January 21, 2026, such a success.** Governor Reynolds was in the Middle East visiting Soldiers of the Iowa National Guard on this date, and was not able to attend. We are grateful to Lieutenant Governor Chris Cournoyer for hosting leadership teams from throughout Iowa, taking the time for photographs, and for leading the event in the rotunda. This event will take place next year on **Wednesday, January 20, 2027** at 10:00 am.



- **Claim Sharks.** Joella Perry informed me about a for-profit company called “Guardian Angels” with whom several Iowa nursing homes have partnered for residents, who are Veterans, to file claims for VA disability compensation and pension. The company’s message is that they will provide this service for \$1,500. Joella shared with me that Iowa has 395 nursing homes in 251 cities in Iowa that accept Medicare. Our concern, of course, is that our CVSOs offer this service free of charge, so why are nursing homes referring their residents to a for-profit organization to do the filing? It would be good to find out what is taking place Nationally to address claim sharks preying on Veterans. We will consider getting a message out to Nursing Home Administrators through HHS, DIAL, and the Iowa Healthcare Association. Thanks to Joella for sharing this information with me.
- **Iowa Homes for Heroes.** The Iowa Homes for Heroes 501c(3) non-profit built a home for an Iowa Veteran and dedicated that home in November 2025. This non-profit is building home in Urbandale for another Iowa Veteran with a completion date anticipated in the October 2025 timeframe. Thanks to all who have shared news of this opportunity for housing insecure Veterans. We accepted applications until March 17, 2026, and the application window is now closed. We are looking forward to sharing more about this program. <https://www.iowahomesforheroes.org/>
- **Update on Senate File 2466 (County Veteran Service Excellence Bill).**
 - On Tuesday evening, January 13, 2026, Governor Reynolds delivered her 9th and final Condition of the State Address in the House Chamber at the State Capitol. She spoke specifically regarding Iowa Veterans from the 14:25-15:41 mark in her comments. [\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AB3VtEs_2U\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AB3VtEs_2U). "We owe our servicemembers a debt of gratitude. And that debt is best paid by ensuring our veterans get every benefit they've earned. Iowa is home to nearly 178,000 veterans. Yet only one third is receiving the benefits they earned, placing Iowa 44th in the nation for VA compensation. That's not acceptable. An outdated system that provides little accountability is leaving too many veterans - - and well-meaning county officials - - without the tools, training, and consistency they need. So tonight, I'm proposing a bill to modernize the system statewide. I'm also proposing that we incentivize better performance by repurposing existing state funds to create a new, performance-based county grant program. The higher a county's VA compensation per capita, the more money a county will earn, ensuring that outcomes improve. The goal is simple: more benefits reaching more veterans. Let's do more for the heroes who've done so much for us."
 - I don't recall Veterans legislation ever being the first item mentioned during a Condition of the State address, and I can assure you that Governor Reynolds has made her objective in this area very clear to me as a Department Director – make an impact on this statistic, as being #44 of 53 states and territories reflects under-served Iowa Veterans”.

- There has been opposition. Some of this opposition has been loud, some of it has been unprofessional. I want to be very clear here on what this legislation will do:
- This legislation will increase transparency and consistency in the delivery of services through county veterans service offices.
- In terms of per capita Veterans compensation only six Iowa counties are above the national average. Recent monthly reports from the VA now have Iowa ranked 47th. An example of inconsistency is the difference in annual per capita veteran compensation from the top county in Iowa (\$10,889) to the bottom (\$4,397) of almost \$6,500. This is unacceptable, cannot be explained away by any reasonable person, and we as a state can do better.
- The **Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs** lists encouraging efficiencies, innovation, and incentivizing high performance of county veteran service officers (CVSOs) as a **top five 2026 legislative priority**. The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) believes that CVSOs provide a vital and much needed service and Iowa veterans will benefit greatly with passage of this legislation.
- Payments to Iowa veterans currently total \$1.104 billion annually and represent a significant economic impact to the state. However, only 52,000 Iowa veterans currently receive benefits (29%).
- Comparison with peer states shows there is an urgent need to act: **An increase of just 10% of current compensation levels is a \$110 million annual boost of federal dollars into the state, resulting** in a per capita of \$6,825 with Iowa ranking 37th nationally, just ahead of Minnesota but still well behind several other peers. This is an achievable goal and should be aggressively pursued.
- Senate File 2466 is supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disabled American Veterans-Iowa.
- As amended by the Senate, this bill adjusts the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund balance for inflation by raising the balance from \$50 to \$75 million through continued annual transfers from the Iowa Lottery.
- This bill reallocates existing appropriations to recognize high performance in the delivery of annual per capita Veterans benefits.
- The bill would require that the IDVA procure a universal claims management system and provide it to counties at no charge in order to bring consistency to the claims filing process. Currently, each county procures and pays for one of several different systems and maintains it separately.
- The bill eliminates paper filing of VA compensation claims.
- The bill requires that performance data at the state and county level will be provided from the claims management system to county supervisors and county commissions of veterans affairs on activity at the county and state level. An example would be identification of the county office that filed claims for veterans residing in a particular county. This is important because the tracking of benefits traces to the county of veteran residence, not the county that actually did the work to file the claim. This will give these elected officials additional data regarding their veterans service office to facilitate informed decisions. No individual veteran data will be shared.
- The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs would hire a dedicated training coordinator to enhance the semi-annual in person county veteran service officer training that we currently provide. Additionally, this trainer would assist newly hired CVSOs with in person training at their county office to get them credentialed sooner.
- There is NO change to local control. The counties remain in charge of their employees, but with enhanced performance data from which to make decisions.
- There is nothing in this bill that expands what is already in Iowa Code 35B.6, which authorizes the IDVA Commandant to determine standards and training requirements for county veteran service officers.
- Significant is that on Wednesday, March 18, 2026, Governor Reynolds compromised on withholding the \$10,000 appropriation to each county and injecting an additional

\$250,000 for the IDVA to use in order to recognize top-achieving counties, and providing additional resources to every county showing progress. That offer was also not accepted.

- The IDVA has been inundated with inquiries from elected officials regarding this bill, which is great. What is unfortunate is the incredible amount of mis-information that is being communicated to them about this bill, and Mike Olson has been providing
 - It would be easy to continue to do what we've always done. In fact, a significant part of the burden of fielding this legislation, if approved, would fall on the IDVA. We welcome this as an opportunity, as we recognize the importance of doing things differently in order to get a better outcome.
 - Thanks to Mike Olson for his great work at the State Capitol on this effort. I am more than happy to meet and discuss what we are doing and why we are doing it.
- **IDVA Schools for CVSOs.** The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) provides semi-annual in-person training for County Veteran Service Officers, and annual training for County Commissioners, and Boards of Supervisors. All training is provided at no cost to participants. On April 17, 2025, the IDVA published a letter outlining the dates for Fall and Spring training for 2025-2030. Our next training program will take place on April 14-16, 2026, at Stoney Creek Inn in Johnston. I am looking forward to seeing CVSOs at this training, which will be provided by the IDVA Benefits Bureau Team and the National Veterans Legal Services Program team out of Arlington, Virginia. I expect this training will be the best semi-annual training program to date. As a reminder, here are the dates for future training programs.

2026: CVSO Training April 14-16 & October 13-15; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 12

2027: CVSO Training April 13-15 & October 12-14; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 11

2028: CVSO Training April 11-13 & October 10-12; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 9

2029: CVSO Training April 10-12 & October 9-11; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 8

2030: CVSO Training April 9-11 & October 15-17; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 14

- **Admissions to Iowa Veterans Home.** I want to clarify some issues regarding admissions to the Iowa Veterans Home. First, we strongly encourage anyone who may seek admission to visit well in advance of your need for nursing level of care. Second, there is a fairly robust application – a unique application for Veterans, spouses, and gold star parents. Those are located on our website at: <https://dva.iowa.gov/veterans-home/apply-ivh>. The IVH provides nursing level of care to Iowa Veterans and their spouses. We do not provide skilled nursing care. We are unable to care for Veterans with alcohol or drug addiction, who are violent, and who are a risk to staff and other residents. All applicants are screened by our nursing staff and admissions committee. If anyone has a question or concern about a denial then we are happy to discuss.
- **National Association of Women Veterans Committee (NAWVC).** Joella Perry serves as Iowa's representative on the NAWVC. This is an additional duty to her responsibilities as the Wayne County Director of Veterans Affairs. She also represents the Iowa Association of County Veteran Services (IACVS) on the Commission. Joella and Jennifer Olson, Iowa County Director of Veterans Affairs, are organizing a **Women Veterans Meet & Greet on Friday, June 12, 2026 from 4:00-8:00 pm at the Za-Ga-Zig Shrine Temple in Altoona**. All are welcome to attend with specific invitations to female Veterans, legislators, boards of supervisors, Veteran Service Organizations, and others as we work to advocate for gender-specific healthcare, improve access to VA benefits for women Veterans, and foster a "community" for this fastest-growing Veteran demographic
- **Iowa DAV Women Veterans Conference, April 18.** Cindy Paris, Wapello County Commissioner of Veterans Affairs and as Adjutant of Iowa DAV, contacted me to share information about the Iowa DAV Women Veterans Conference, which will take place on **Saturday, April 18, 2026 9:00 am-**

2:00 pm, at the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum on Camp Dodge. This event is open to the public, is funded by the Iowa DAV, and will provide an opportunity to connect, unite, empower, and mutually support women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces

- **America 250 Celebration.** This is our Nation’s 250th year of independence. I would ask that Veterans organizations add events and activities taking place in your communities and ensure that they are captured on the “Iowa America 250 Events” website at <https://governor.iowa.gov/america-250/iowa-america-250-events>. It would be great to show Veterans Organizations leading and engaged in these activities as we recognize Iowa’s integral role and the impact of its people on our Nation’s past, present, and future.” Here are the logos:



- June 14, 2026 - U.S. Army Birthday (251 years - June 14, 1775)
- July 4, 2026 – 250th Independence Day Celebration
- 10:00 am – Parade on 13th Street in Marshalltown & Iowa Veterans Home, Marshalltown
- 11:00 am – 5:00 pm Community Celebration at Iowa Veterans Home, Marshalltown
- August 4, 2026 - U.S. Coast Guard Birthday (236 years, August 4, 1790)
- **August 17, 2026 11:00 am - Iowa State Fair Veterans Parade, Theme: “America 250”**
- September 18, 2026 - U.S. Air Force Birthday (79 years - September 18, 1947)
- October 13, 2026 - U.S. Navy Birthday (251 years - October 13, 1775)
- November 10, 2026 - U.S. Marine Corps Birthday (251 years - November 10, 1775)
- December 13, 2026 - National Guard Birthday (390 years - December 13, 1636)
- Anyone can add events. To add events, go to the "Iowa America 250 Events" tab on this website - - - <https://governor.iowa.gov/america-250/america-250-iowa-events> - - - find the tab labeled "tell us about your event", which will get your event added to the calendar. Click on that link and then you will be asked to populate the following fields:
- Event Title:
Host Organization Name:
Short Event Description (1-2 Sentences) - Briefly describe your event. What are you planning, and how does it celebrate America 250? (Limit: 400 characters)
Start Date & Time:
End Date & Time:
Event website or registration link:
Enter in the Venue Name:
Address:
City:
State:
ZIP:
- Upload a logo, flyer, or photo that represents your event
Name of main point of contact for the event
Email address for main point of contact for the event
Phone number for the main point of contact for the event

- **NASDVA Conference, March 1-4, 2026, Arlington, VA.** We met with each member of Iowa’s Congressional delegation. We also received briefings from the Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs; the Undersecretaries or Acting Undersecretaries from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, and National Cemetery Administration; three staffers from the Veterans Affairs Committees within the United States Congress; and several other governmental and not-for-profit Veterans’ services leaders. Some general takeaways:

- There are far too many cases where compensation and pension examinations are requested when there is no need for those.
- The VA Interim Rule regarding providing lower ratings based on the positive impacts of medication upon a Veteran's service-connected condition. That rule has now been rescinded and will not be implemented.
- We are working solutions to reimburse community care providers faster so more are willing to participate.
- Artificial Intelligence will continue to be used to adjudicate claims. Humans will review and approve this work.
- The VA needs authority from Congress to pay physicians more money in order to be more competitive in hiring process.
- We need to reinforce the concept that Veterans receiving disability compensation are not defrauding the VA or the public, as suggested by the Washington Post. We appreciate Veteran Service Organizations reinforcing this message in the halls of Congress and in the communities where we have a presence.
- VA healthcare enrollment reduces likelihood of Veteran deaths by suicide. More than 60% of Veterans who die by suicide have never had contact with the Veterans Health Administration. Connecting Veterans with VA services can save lives.
- The Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 2102/S. 1032), Love Lives On Act (H.R. 1004/S.410), Veterans' Assuring Critical Care Expansions to Support Servicemembers Act (H.R. 740/S.275), Veterans Claims Quality Improvement Act (H.R. 3983), Clear Communications for Veterans Claims Act (H.R. 1039), Providing Veterans Essential Medications Act (H.R. 1970), Guard & Reserve G.I. Bill Parity Act (H.R. 1423/S.649):
- **Veterans Benefits Administration**
 - VA Limits Apportionment of Disability Benefits. VA issued a final rule on this topic last month, holding that they will no longer grant apportionment of VA benefits in cases arising from family law disputes. The VA deems localized family courts and other forms of trial courts to be better-positioned to do this work. Thus, VA will no longer grant need-based apportionments of compensation, pension, and survivor's benefits in most circumstances. (Apportionments will continue to be reviewed and granted for Veterans who are incarcerated and who are trying to apportion part of their disability compensation benefits to members of their family).
 - Chapter 35 education benefits impacted adversely by the October 2025 government shutdown have been resolved. This impacted more than 75,000 dependents and survivors.
 - The VA is maintaining the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans. Any individual who interacts with a Veteran who is homeless, as well as any individual who sees someone purporting to be a Veteran who is homeless, is encouraged to contact VA's National Call Center for Homeless Veterans: 1-877-424-3838. Upon receiving the call, the VA will deploy individuals to the designated location to work with this individual, including screening for Veteran status and connections to key resources and services.
 - VA's "Solid Start" program assists Veterans during their transition from military service to civilian life. This program focuses on their first-year post-discharge. VBA has connected with more than 200,000 Veterans to conduct wellness checks and inform them about benefits for which they appear to be eligible based on their military service records. The program aims to contact Veterans at the 90-, 180-, and 360-day marks after the date of the Veteran's separation from service. Veterans who had a behavioral health touchpoint during their time in the military receive an even greater number of contacts from VBA during their first-year post-discharge. VBA has made a concerted effort to provide "Welcome Kits" to more recently discharged Veterans. For a look at the materials that these VA Welcome Kits contain, click here: <https://www.va.gov/welcome-kit/> [va.gov]
- **Veterans' Health Administration**
 - There will be a significant re-organization of the VA Healthcare System. The "Restructure for Impact and Sustainability Effort" (RISE) represents the most significant re-organization of the VA health care system since the 1990s. The total number of Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) will decrease from 18 to 5. Within each newly created larger

VISN will be a series of Health Service Areas to focus on medical centers and the communities where Veterans get their health services. A new Medical Operations Center embedded within the Veterans Health Administration will ensure that policies are implemented and followed as uniformly as possible throughout the entire VA healthcare system. The restructuring process focuses on community care as well. The Veterans Health Administration has already issued a nationwide call for contract proposals to provide medical services, agreements worth nearly \$1 trillion over the next 10 years.

- Currently, VA's community-based care program is managed and facilitated by two healthcare contractors, Optum and TriWest Healthcare Alliance. Under the RISE re-organization, the Veterans Health Administration will feature their own new Community Care Network Next Generation contract, providing an indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity structure and giving the Veterans Health Administration more flexibility overall in managing this program. The Veterans Health Administration will now have the ability to bring on multiple vendors and multiple contractors, who can then compete across the life of the contract for different task orders.
- Approximately half of Veterans nationwide are not enrolled in VA Healthcare, and the Veterans Health Administration is pursuing strategies to improve this enrollment number.
- Multiple provisions of Elizabeth Dole Act not yet implemented by the VA. This omnibus bill contained sweeping provisions regarding positive change in improving access to healthcare, reducing Veteran homelessness, improving services and resources for caregivers of Veterans, and providing unprecedented levels of federal funding for County Veterans Service Organizations. In particular, the promised transformations of VA's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program have not yet occurred. VA did publish a proposed rule regarding changes to this program, including expanded eligibility, fewer re-assessments, and virtual health care options, but the 60-day public comment period has closed on this proposed rule, and it is unclear what steps VA will take next. Staff members from Congress who briefed this gathering expressed frustrations with these delays but likewise did not know the timetable of the Veterans Health Administration's next actions in this area.
- Automatic enrollment for VA healthcare continues to move toward reality for transitioning service members. Under a new level of collaboration between the Pentagon and the VA, a Service Member transitioning out of their branch of the military will be able to have their military medical records shared rapidly with the Veterans Health Administration. Under this newly designed workflow, when the Pentagon gets a notice of intent from a Service Member to enroll in Veterans Health Administration care, the Pentagon will transition that Service Member's electronic health records to the Veterans Health Administration within twenty-four hours. This would be a tremendous procedural improvement, one that will improve vastly the ability of a transitioning Service Member to receive the proper continuity of medical care following their discharge from their branch of the military.
- Electronic Health Records System Revitalizing Efforts. Back in 2018, the Veterans Health Administration committed to replacing its legacy Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VISTA) with a modern, inter-operable Electronic Health Record (EHR) system. The VA Secretary recently placed this longstanding endeavor under the portfolio of Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Paul Lawrence, who is now working to test drive the latest version of this system in thirteen locations, with more sites being planned for the upcoming year. The VA Secretary expressed confidence that this project has now turned the corner and that a reliable EHR system at VA medical facilities is finally an attainable objective.
- Permissive TDY Gives Service Members Transition Assistance Program Options. Under this new policy, a transitioning Service Member can choose to receive the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) briefings and assistance at the military installation of their choice.
- **National Cemetery Administration**
 - Pre-need burials should become part of estate planning for Veterans & eligible dependents. To secure this determination of eligibility, a Veteran must complete and file VA Form 40-10007 (Application for Pre-Need Determination of Eligibility for Burial in a VA National Cemetery). Also, Federal law creates conflict for family members of Veterans who elect to

receive an urn or plaque from National Cemetery Administration. Federal law also prevents NCA from providing subsequent interment in a National Cemetery for this Veteran, and from issuing a headstone, medallion, or grave marker for this Veteran's cremated remains to be interred in any cemetery. Many family members are unaware of this law until it is too late, causing angst and frustration.

- Each of us have the best interests of Veterans as the focal point of our actions. I have shared strong feelings here, as I believe in what we are trying to accomplish. I appreciate and respect the efforts of those who have opposing views. Ultimately, we'll present our perspectives and lawmakers will make decisions – as it should be. If we continue to do what we've always done then we'll continue to get what we've always gotten; we should do better. **It's an honor to serve.**
- **Discussion and Decision on Self Reliance's Trust Fund request**
 - Amount of funding requested: \$6,000
 - Amount of funding approved: \$6,000
 - Motion to approve made by Elizabeth Ledvina 2nd: David Grimm Approved Unanimously

★ SOUTHEASTERN IOWA ★

VETERANS STAND DOWN

★ ★ ★ 24 JULY, 2026; 7AM-4PM ★ ★ ★

Who? WHEN? WHAT?

1) Veterans

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

2) First Responders

3) Area Employers

FREE ADMIT; FREE FOOD; BY, FOR & WITH VETERANS

- EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES
 - HIRING ON-SITE
- FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES
- DIRECT HEALTHCARE SERVICES
 - CLAIMS CLINIC ON-SITE
 - DENTAL/MENTAL/PHYSICAL
- COMMUNITY BASED RESOURCES
- Veterans Benefit Presentations
 - Connecting with your CVSO
 - Iowa Veterans Home
 - Keokuk National Cemetery
- First Responder Mental Health Panel
 - EMS/Fire/Law Enforcement

HOW? WHERE? WHY? INFO:

Focused Organization & Collaboration
Burlington Memorial Auditorium
SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED
Call: (319) 380-5642

Organized by regular collaborators on the SEIA Veterans Services & Supports Coalition:

- **Approval of minutes from the ICVA quarterly meeting on January 7, 2026**
 - Motion to approve by Dave Grimm 2nd by Robert Suesakul
 - Approved unanimously
- **Approval of minutes from the Trust Fund Meeting on January 7, 2026**
 - Motion to approve by Becky Dirks Haugsted 2nd by Joella Perry
 - Approved unanimously
- **Approval of minutes from the Trust Fund meeting on February 5, 2026**
 - Motion to approve by Dennis Jones 2nd by David Grimm
 - Approved unanimously
- **Approval of minutes from the Trust Fund meeting on March 5, 2026**

- Motion to approve by Reggie Richardson 2nd by Dennis Jones
- Approved unanimously
- **Old business: None**
- **New business**
 - Discussion of “for profit” claims assistance organizations in Iowa nursing homes
 - Claim Sharks are infiltrating Iowa nursing homes, charging \$1500 per Veteran to file claims, or a percentage of the compensation award through the approved claim
 - Getting around the current laws (Chapter 74, 546b.3) by charging the nursing home, not the Veteran directly. The homes then charge the Veteran.
 - IDVA to contact state nursing homes and governing agencies to have discussion of VA benefits available free of charge.
 - Will review other state’s legislation to prepare to introduce a revision of current law in Io
- **Public Comment**

Kevin Dill (unable to appear in person) sent a voice recording to the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, asking for it to be played at this meeting during public comment. The recording transcript is below:

The Hidden Truth of Iowa’s Veterans Services and Why Senate File 2466 Is Necessary

To members of the Iowa House and Senate from Kevin Dill, former Director of Veterans Affairs, Blackhawk County (2015-2019). Today’s date is March 25, 2026.

The Gold Standard vs. the Ghost System

During my tenure as the Director of Veterans Affairs for Blackhawk County, we proved what a high functioning office looks like. We sought specialized training at both the Des Moines and St. Paul VA regional offices to master complex pension claims. We averaged 10-13 outreach events a month, our volume was so high and our results so consistent that the staffs of Senator Grassley and Senator Ernst bypassed their own local offices to call us for help with Veterans across the state. In 2018 I received a call from the Whitehouse while Senator Ernst stood with President Trump as he signed Veteran centric reforms based on my specific ideas. I know what excellence looks like and I know what a ghost system looks like.

The Apathy of Oversight

In my years as a Director, I learned a harsh truth. Most Boards of Supervisors have zero interest in VA offices. As the smallest office with the smallest budget, we were often an afterthought. Supervisors didn’t really care what our monthly reports said, whether the numbers were big or small, because they didn’t understand the job. More importantly, they were too afraid to look closely. They feared that any audit or scrutiny of the VA office would be politically weaponized as upsetting the Veterans. This lack of oversight about Directors and counties like Bremer County, to submit reports that defied logic. I saw reports claiming engagement numbers that nearly matched the total Veteran population of the county, as if every Veteran in the area was rising from the dead every 30 days to visit the office.

The current opposition from the Iowa Association of County Veteran Service Officers is not about local control, it’s about fear of transparency. Many Directors were trained to use the Federal GDX report to pad their local activity. They take broad federal spending data and present it to their supervisors as if it represents people walking through their front doors. I knew of offices where the Director saw perhaps two Veterans per week but used fancy reporting to look busy enough to keep their job. The Association is terrified of a centralized, unified digital system, because every statistic we have proven the same fact. Many of these offices are not nearly as busy as they claim to be. They are fighting to keep a fragmented paper-based system because it is the only way to keep their lack of productivity hidden from the public.

The Mandate for Reform

Iowa ranks 44th in the Nation for VA compensation per capita. This is the direct result of a system built on administrative fiction rather than actual service. While our neighbors in Nebraska and Minnesota use professionalized audited systems to bring millions of federal dollars to their Veterans, Iowa is stuck in a cycle of unverified reports and political tip toeing. Senate File 2466 is the solution I proposed to Governor Reynolds in 2019. We need one single system that accurately tracks who is actually servicing Veterans and who is just filling a chair. We are defrauding the tax payers of Iowa and more importantly, we are failing the men and women who served this country. It is time to end the phantom reporting and bring the Blackhawk standard of accountability to all 99 counties.

Respectfully,

Kevin Dill, former Director of Veteran Services, Black Hawk County,

Former United States Marine

- Commissioner Ledvina offered comment on Mr. Dill
- Carlene Hall discussed the difference between counties when it comes to budgeted hours and what is necessary to perform within those constraints
- Becky Dirks Haugsted-brought attention to a webpage for a claim shark organization called “Patriot Angels” (Tennessee based company) where you can input what state and it will show you which homes they collaborate in.
- Jim Peterson, American Legion-A reminder to let county coroners that if a Veteran dies related to a condition related to Agent Orange or other service connected disability, to put it on the death certificate i.e. “pneumonia caused by Agent Orange”
- Wayne Marek-Injured Veterans Grant Program requirement for eligibility.
<https://dva.iowa.gov/benefits/state-benefits/injured-veterans-grant>
- Gavin Sandvig response to Mr. Marek about needing to revise Code to be more specific in regard to “hazardous duty” and “hostile fire”. Some areas such as Kuwait, that are not usually labeled under those categories, can change by situation, such as the attacks involving our Iowa Soldiers
- Commissioner Grimm offered comment on Mr. Dill
- **Darlene McMartin-Presentation of awards for outgoing Commissioners**
 - LtCol George Mosby, IANG (2021-2026)
 - Elizabeth Ledvina, American Legion (2015-2026)
 - New Commissioners, LtCol Joel Sage (IANG), David Wilkins (AMVETS), and Randy Johnson (American Legion) are encouraged to attend the next trust fund meeting for training that will be held in person on May 7th at 10 am
- **The Next Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs meeting will be:**
 - July 1, 2026 at 10:00 am, Joint Forces Headquarters, Enhanced Classroom, 7105 NW 70th St, Johnston, IA 50309
 - October 7, 2026 at 10:00 am, Iowa Veterans Home, Whitehill Auditorium, 1301 Summit Street, Marshalltown, Iowa 50158
- **Adjournment:**
 - Motion to adjourn: Joella Perry 2nd: David Grimm Adjourned at: 12:55pm