

# MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON MEETING

**SATURDAY, JULY 20, 2019**

Meeting called to order by Chair, Mary J. Mayer, at **12:00 p.m.**

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation: Jack LaBox

**Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 14 of 16**

**Present were:**

- AFA (Bill Tidd)
- American Legion (Jack LaBox)
- AUSA (MG Curt Loop)
- DAV (Tom Cousino)
- 40+8 (Jim Willis)
- KWVA (Chuck Lusardi)
- MOAA (BG Dennis Merrill)
- MOPH (Todd Swanson)
- NAANV (John Roten)
- NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
- OPVA (Roger Robinson)
- VFW (Wayne Sharp)
- Chair (Mary J. Mayer)
- Secretary/Treasurer (Gary Zwicker)

**Absent were:** VVA & Past Chair

**Associate Attendee:** DAV Aux President, Karen Haltiner

**Guest Attendees were:**

- Kelly Fitzpatrick (ODVA Director)
- Laurie Skillman (ODVA Senior Policy Advisor)

Meeting was called to order by the UVGO Chair who noted that today was the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Apollo Moon Landing by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. She also mentioned that over the past two years, we had made some progress towards meeting our Strategic Goals: we have increased membership in the UVGO, increased visibility of the UVGO, and have championed several important pieces of legislation. The Chair also announced that we would be electing the following officers for a two-year term: Chair, First Vice Chair, Second Vice Chair, and Secretary/Treasurer. The current Secretary/Treasurer, Gary Zwicker, is not able to continue in this role; he said that eight years was enough and health issues were also a consideration.

**Secretary/Treasurer's Report:** The April 20 Minutes and the current Finance Report were approved as issued. Gary Zwicker also reminded all that FY 20 dues were due by the July meeting. Dues for voting members are \$55.00 and \$27.50 for Associate members. Dues remitted at the July meeting total \$275.00. Dues are still owed by American Legion, AUSA, 40+8, OPVA, & VVVA. (NOTE: Since the July meeting, dues have been paid by American Legion, AUSA, and OPVA). My address information is at the end of the Minutes. It was also noted that the Secretary/Treasurer position could be filled by any member of a member organization, separate from that organization's representative.

**Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Update:** Director Kelly Fitzpatrick indicated she had placed hand-outs at the entry side of the room. The hand-outs covered topics such as the 27 July Expo in Pendleton, the Veteran Volunteers Program (which is now active in two counties), Oregon's Veteran Home Loan Program, the VA Benefits Program, and the Mid-Willamette Valley Stand-Down in September. She followed her review of those programs with a discussion of the recently passed ODVA Budget. She expressed her thanks to UGVO for its support and the letters sent to individual members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee. She also expressed her pleasure in the increases in Grant monies, especially the Grant of \$ .5M in support of providing medical transportation for veterans in rural areas. Kelly also briefly discussed the Veteran's Education Team and the increased effort in working with tribal veterans. In closing, she mentioned the departure of Mitch Sparks, her Deputy Director and mentor, who had been selected as the Legislative Liaison/Coordinator for all Oregon tribes. With no more discussion, Director Fitzpatrick asked Ms. Skillman to continue with a Legislative update.

**ODVA LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** Ms. Laurie Skillman provided attendees with a hand-out for reference to her presentation of Bills of interest to ODVA, UVGO, and the military community that were passed or died in committee. The hand-out will be attached to the file copy of the UVGO minutes. She started by addressing the first item on the hand-out, HB 2195A. This is the Bill to develop a Vietnam Veterans War Memorial on the grounds of the State Capitol. She noted that the Bill did not pass and died in committee. After addressing the concerns of the Joint Ways and Means Committee and working with the State Parks and Recreation Department, this issue will be brought before the 2020 Legislature. Ms. Skillman limited most of her discussion to Bills that had passed, but specifically addressed two more that had not, SB 462 and SB 500 A. SB 500A was the Bill that addressed an increase in the amount of property tax exemption that a 40% or greater disabled veteran could take. It is known that most county Commissioners and tax assessors were opposed to the Bill. SB 462 was an attempt to authorize veteran' recognition license plates for the United States Naval Construction Force, or "Seabees." This got the attention of former ODVA Director, Jim Willis, who was instrumental in getting the current veterans' plates. He stated that, if that door was opened, we would have opened the floodgates, as what was to prevent other such groups, such as the Navy Seals, the Army Special Forces, the Army Rangers, the Delta Force, etc. from requesting their own plates. Jim praised Laurie for the work she has done, but he cautioned her not to lend her support to this issue. Gary Zwicker questioned Ms. Skillman on the intent of SB 5543 EN and was informed that this was a transfer of lottery funds for an educational program that ODVA accepted responsibility for when Measure 96 passed. Laurie then turned to a discussion of where some of the Measure 96 Lottery dollars were going: Salem YMCA – \$1M + \$4M Lottery bond for

assisting in solving the homeless veterans problem; Oregon Health Authority - \$2.5M to develop programs to aid those veterans with PTSD or other mental issues; NVSOs – \$600K; Campus Grant Program – \$1M; VSO Grant – \$1M; State Approving Authority - \$125K + \$400 – 450K from the Federal Government; Suicide prevention – \$350K; Criminal Justice Commission – \$500K. Most discussion concerned the YMC Grant, as it is not known where this money is going to be spent and what specific results are expected. When asked about the initial distribution of the remaining Lottery Funds, Laurie admitted there was no breakdown of funds yet, as the budget was just passed. Once the breakdown has been accomplished, UVGO will be provided the information. Chuck Lusardi questioned Ms. Skillman as to the availability of Grants for Memorials. She responded that the State Parks and Recreation Department handled that, and one could go on-line and find the procedure and information required for submitting a request.

**UVGO UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** UVGO Chair, Mary J. Mayer, indicated that on 23 April 2019 and on 30 May 2019 she sent letters to all members of the Joint ways and Means Committee expressing our strong endorsement of SB 5538, the ODVA Budget Bill. We must continually be alert, as the Joint Ways and Means Committee has indicated that they will seek opportunities to use Lottery Funds in place of General Funds and will consider shifting Lottery Funds to agencies other than ODVA, without concern for ODVA priorities.

**UVGO NEW BUSINESS:** Nomination and Election of Officers for 2019-2021. The following individuals were nominated and accepted the nominations as indicated:

- Chair: Mayer J. Mayer
- First Vice Chair: Tom Cousino
- Second Vice Chair: Robert Haltiner

There were no nominations accepted for the position of Secretary/Treasurer. There being no additional nominations, nominations were closed. The above three individuals were unanimously approved by acclamation in the positions noted. Jim Willis announced that he thought that he could find a possible fill for the Secretary/Treasurer position, and we could nominate and elect on-line prior to the October meeting. Gary Zwicker agreed to be on hand at the October meeting to assist the new Secretary/Treasurer.

As far as appointments, Jack LaBox will continue as Chaplain, and Jim Willis will most likely continue as Legislative Chair. Mary J. Mayer will serve as Governance Chair.

#### **ITEMS OF INTEREST:**

- **Vietnam War Memorial Project:** The status of this project was discussed previously during Ms. Skillman's Legislative Update. The VVMF has commitments from legislators to pursue a new bill in the 2020 legislative session, and there is an application process with the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department which will be addressed. For additional information on his project, visit the website for the Vietnam War Memorial Fund at [www.vietnamwarmemorialfund.org](http://www.vietnamwarmemorialfund.org). For additional information, contact Steve Bates, President-Vietnam War Memorial Fund at [vietnamwarmem@aol.com](mailto:vietnamwarmem@aol.com), phone 503-663-6271.

- **Fifth Annual Veteran Benefit Expo:** Saturday, July 27: This was addressed previously by the ODVA Director.
- **2020 Oregon Women Veterans Conference:** Hosted by ODVA; Date: 29-31 May 2020; Location: Riverhouse on the Deschutes; 3075 N. Business 97, Bend, OR 97703-7511; Invitees: All military women are invited. Fee: There is no conference fee, but each individual must pay her own lodging and transportation; veteran organizations are encouraged to set-up membership/information tables.
- **40<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games, July 3-8, 2020:** 650-700 athletes from every state, Puerto Rico, and England attend these games. Veterans are being exposed to wheelchair sports at their home VAMC or PVA Chapters as part of their rehabilitation. The Games have 19 different events in which Veterans can choose to participate. Events such as Wheelchair Basketball, Softball, Swimming, Cycling, Power Lifting, and Trap Shooting are just a few of the events that support this dynamic competition. To carry out a successful event, history has shown that it takes upwards of 3,000 volunteers from the community to bring this event together. There will be many opportunities for organizations to sponsor/donate to the general operation or specific events/needs. Roger Robinson questioned if ODVA had grant money or funds to assist veteran organizations in the support of the Games. For instance: his organization is charged with providing lunch for the athletes. Director Fitzpatrick replied that it was something she would look into, but there was no current plan or budget item for support of the Games. Bill Tidd indicated that the Game sponsors were more concerned about sufficient volunteer support than monetary needs.

#### **FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:**

- Tom Cousino: DAV National Convention in Orlando, FL 2-4 August.
- Jim Willis: 40+8 State Convention next week in Lebanon; American Legion National Convention in Indianapolis last week of August.
- John Roten: NAANV National Convention 16-20 Sep, Ohio.
- Bill Tidd: His book, *Operation Sunrise: Secrets of the Deep*, has been published and is being sold at a discounted price by Lulu Press; it is also available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Informational hand-outs are available.
- MG Curt Loop: AUSA Golf Tournament to be held on 2 August; the entry fee is \$100 and includes lunch. On 7 August, a Birthday Party will be held for Colonel Bud Lewis – the 99-year-old World War II veteran.
- Robert Haltiner: Just back from San Antonio – National NCOA Convention
- Karen Haltiner: DAV Aux National Convention in Orlando; Just back from MOPH Convention in MO.
- Wayne Sharp: State Commander for VFW is John Wrinkle.
- Jack LaBox: 40+8 National Convention in August.
- Todd Swanson: Clackamas County recognized as Purple Heart County.
- Gary Zwicker: “Mac” MacDonald is now a resident of the Lebanon Veterans’ Home.
- Mary J. Mayer: The annual Air Force Association Convention and Conference will be held from 13-18 September 2019 in National Harbor, MD.

**Next meeting will be Saturday, October 12, 2019 from 12:00 to 2:00 pm at Center 50+ in Salem, OR.**

Meeting adjourned at **1:45 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

**GARY ZWICKER**

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