

Utah Veterans Advisory Council
Minutes of Monthly Meeting
October 18th, 2023

Place: Zoom online meeting

Members Present: Gary Harter, Chris Holly, James Patten, Bob Pagnani, Dave Phillips, Ninzel Rasmusen, Paula Stephenson, Angela Williams

Excused: Marti Bigbie, Heath Silcox

Secretary: Alan Ferner

Guests: Jeff Hanson, Taylor Ricks, Terry Schow

1. The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM by Bob Pagnani. Bob introduced and welcomed those in attendance. This was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. The minutes of our 20 September meeting were reviewed and approved by the members of the Council.
3. VA Regional Office: Chris Holly summarized the status of claims related to the PACT Act. There have been over a million claims, with approximately 654,000 completed nationally. The Utah approval rate is about 79%. Chris advised of an internal transformation of computer systems, which will incorporate AI. Chris also stated they continue to hire new employees to fill vacancies.
4. VA Medical Center: Angela Williams advised of a 9.2 increase in Veterans this FY (ending 30 Sep.) Angela announced a new theme for the new fiscal year: Raising the Bar, Promoting excellence, and Veterans Care. She also advised that the drive-thru flu clinic will end on 27 October. On 30 October, thru the end of November, the basement clinic will be providing flu and Covid vaccines.
5. Utah Dept. Veterans & Military Affairs: Jeff Hanson reported that the 4 Utah Veterans Nursing Homes are operating near capacity. A recent outbreak of Covid at the Payson Home resulted in mostly mild symptoms for 19 residents and 13 employees. Weekly testing and masks are in effect. The new SLC Home is in the design/development stage, and federal funding approval is expected in FY 2024. The Veterans Cemetery remapping has been completed and there are several other ongoing projects. The proposed Northern Utah Veterans Cemetery continues to advance.

Taylor Ricks summarized planned Veterans Day events, including the honoring of Centenarian Veterans on 10 November at the State Capitol.

Gary Harter led a discussion on the Veterans license plates program. Gary advised that in 2023 there are about 20,000 veterans plates on Utah vehicles. Gary reported on how the

funds from license plate fees have been allocated. We agreed to consider some new designs for the plates, which may require legislative approval.

Gary also asked that we consider appropriate ways to honor families of Fallen Warriors (those that don't qualify for Gold Star status), such as a dedicated license plate design.

6. Bob Pagnani announced the plan to hold our December meeting in person, with a time for socializing and refreshments. Taylor Ricks agreed to find a suitable location.
7. The meeting was adjourned at 4:39 PM by Bob Pagnani. Our next monthly meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 15th at 4:00 PM, via Zoom online.