

Utah Veterans Advisory Council
Minutes of Monthly Meeting
November 15th, 2023

Place: Zoom online meeting

Members Present: Marti Bigbie, Gary Harter, Chris Holly, James Patten, Bob Pagnani, Dave Phillips, Paula Stephenson

Excused: Ninzel Rasmusen, Heath Silcox, Angela Williams

Secretary: Alan Ferner

Guests: Jennica Gruver, Ashley Herbert, Jeff Hanson, Cory Pearson, 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 18 October 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 1,158,000 claims, with approximately 738,500 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: No report.
5. Utah Dept. Veterans & Military Affairs: Jeff Hanson reported that the 4 Utah Veterans Nursing Homes are operating at a 95% occupancy. All 4 Homes held formal Veterans Day programs. A recent outbreak of Covid at the Ogden Home resulted in mostly mild symptoms. The new SLC Home is in the design/development stage, and federal funding approval is expected in FY 2024. The Veterans Cemetery is averaging approximately 45 internments per month: 73% Veterans and 27% spouses. There are several ongoing projects. The proposed Northern Utah Veterans Cemetery continues to advance.

Cory Pearson reported that VSOs have been very busy over the past several months. Cory then summarized the November 2nd Business Conference, indicating a good turnout. He also updated us on the Governor's Challenge for Suicide Prevention.

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

Gary Harter briefed us on the recent meeting of the Veterans and Military Affairs Commission. Agenda items included the Governor's Challenge, Veterans Courts, and

helping military children. The next meeting will probably be in May. Gary also reminded us that we are now in budget season and requests are being coordinated with legislators.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 4:32 PM by Bob Pagnani. Our next monthly meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 17th at 4:00 PM, via Zoom online. Note: The December meeting was cancelled due to the weather.