

Utah Veterans Advisory Council
Minutes of Monthly Meeting
January 17th, 2024

Place: Zoom online meeting

Members Present: Marti Bigbie, Gary Harter, Heath Silcox, James Patten, Bob Pagnani, Dave Phillips, Ninzel Rasmussen, Paula Stephenson, Angela Williams

Excused: Chris Holly

Secretary: Alan Ferner

Guests: Jennica Gruver, Jeff Hanson, Jeff Jones, Taylor Ricks

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 15 November meeting were reviewed and approved by the members of the Council.
3. VA Regional Office: Jeff Jones summarized the status of claims related to the PACT Act. The Utah approval rate is about 77.1% and the National approval rate is about 75.9%. Jeff stated that hiring continues to be a challenge. The hiring process is taking a long time, partly because wages are falling behind other options for potential employees.
4. VA Medical Center: Angela Williams announced that they are preparing for the 8 March opening of the new St. George Clinic. Angela also provided information on the August 2024 National Veterans Golden Age Games, adding that they are looking for donations and sponsorships.
5. Utah Dept. Veterans & Military Affairs: Gary Harter reminded us that the Utah legislative session has started and will end on 1 March. Jennica Gruver will be tracking for us and providing updates via email.

Jeff Hanson reported that the 4 Utah Veterans Nursing Homes are operating at a 93% occupancy. All 4 Homes ended the fiscal year in good financial condition. Recent ratings have scored 4.6 out of 5 for satisfaction. 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 43 internments per month: 73% Veterans and 27% spouses and dependent children. There are several ongoing projects. The proposed Northern Utah Veterans Cemetery continues to advance.

Taylor Ricks announced the Fallen Warriors event scheduled for 16 February and the Honoring Women Veterans event to be held on 15 March.

Jennica Gruver advised us that she will be sending out legislative updates by email each Friday.

Gary Harter briefed us on the Governor's Suicide Prevention Program. Gary also spoke of several tough experiences attending funerals resulting from Veteran suicides that occur, despite all the efforts by everyone. Gary advised that he and Cory will be in DC during our February meeting; they will be meeting with the VA Secretary and Under-secretaries.

6. Ninzel Rasmussen announced that the American Legion National Commander will be visiting SLC on 22 thru 25 March.
7. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM by Bob Pagnani. Our next monthly meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 20th at 4:00 PM, via Zoom online. Note: The February 21st meeting was cancelled.