

Utah Veterans Advisory Council
Minutes of Monthly Meeting
March 18th, 2026

Place: Zoom online meeting

Members Present: Marti Bigbie, Mike Crouse, Gary Harter, Dave Phillips, Paula Stephenson, Angela Williams

Excused: Laurie Charry, Bob Pagnani, John Robertson, Steve Prestwich

Secretary: Alan Ferner

Guests: Nina Alvarez, Mike Brown, Jeff Hanson, Cory Pearson, Terry Schow, Sonny White, Laurie Wynn

1. The meeting was called to order at 4:03 PM by Paula Stephenson. Paula introduced and welcomed those in attendance. This was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. The minutes of our 18 February meeting were reviewed and approved by the members of the Council.
3. VA Regional Office: Mike Crouse stated that they are ramping up for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The new goal is to have the backlog of claims below 65,000 cases by 30 June. They also hope to add 328 new people to the staff by 30 June. Mike added that they are always working to do better, through both human interaction and AI technologies.
4. VA Medical Center: Angela Williams reminded us that the grand opening of the new Elko Clinic is scheduled for 26 March. She also advised that the virtual town halls that were held in March were very well attended. Angela announced that the new signage is now in place throughout the campus. They are also adding more primary care doctors to the clinics.
5. Utah Dept. Veteran & Military Affairs: Gary Harter reminded us of the Veterans Business Summit on 8 May at Salt Lake Community College. He also announced that there will be a Memorial Day event at the Capitol, with the Governor speaking. Gary asked that any information regarding Memorial Day events be provided to Jennica Gruver. Gary stated that the legislature provided an additional \$4 million for the new SL Nursing Home. The State is now providing a total of \$39 million. We may get the Federal Grant next year.

Jeff Hanson summarized the status of the four Utah Veteran Nursing Homes. The four Homes are at 94% occupancy. He noted that the legislature did not pass the bill for sufficient funding that would allow construction to start on the new SLC home; therefore, we will wait for the Federal grant. Jeff advised that the Federal Grant Program has additional funding; this may speed up grants for cemetery improvements, as well as the proposed Northern Utah Veterans Cemetery.

Laurie Wynn updated us on key events that impact Veterans. These included the Honoring Women Veterans event “Sisters in Service” on 20 March at 6 pm at the capitol rotunda, and National Vietnam Veterans Day on 29 March, at the Veterans Wall in Layton. Laurie also advised of a Northern Utah “Mission Ready” event on 18 April, at the HAFB Museum.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 4:44 PM by Paula Stephenson. Our next monthly meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 15th at 4:00 PM, via Zoom online.