

MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)

MEETING

SATURDAY, 22 JULY 2023

HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO TELECONFERENCE

Meeting called to order by **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1201**.

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation: The UVGO Chaplain, **Toni Cordell**, provided the invocation.

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 13 of 16

- **Regular Members Present were:**

- AFA (Bill Tidd)
- American Legion (Steven Shollenburg)
- AUSA (Bill Crist)
- DAV (Henry Hamel)
- 40 + 8 (Lou Neubecker)
- MOAA (Jim Woodbridge)
- MOPH (Todd Swanson)
- NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
- PVA Tri-State (Don Hedlind)
- VFW (Ron Ballard)
- VVA (Thom Weiss)
- Chair (Mary J. Mayer)
- Past Chair (Wayne Harvey)

- **Regular Members Absent were:**

- KVWA
- MCL
- NAAV

Associate Member Present: DAV Auxiliary (Karen Haltiner, Kathy Clampitt)

Other Attendees were:

- Kelly Fitzpatrick (ODVA Director)
- Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Director)
- Nicole Hoeft (ODVA Communications and Information Director; Zoom Host)
- Toni Cordell (UVGO Chaplain)
- John Lee (UVGO Legislative Committee Chair)
- Marco Oswald (UVGO Legislative Committee Vice Chair)
- Shaun Benson (COO,, 42nd National Veterans' Wheelchair Games in Portland)
- Michael Eschete (Former U.S. Marine Corps)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS: Chair **Mary J. Mayer** welcomed all members and guests to the first regularly scheduled virtual UVGO Meeting of the 2023-2024 Program Year and reviewed the Strategic Goals for 2023-2024:

- Continue to increase the membership and active participation of the UVGO.
- Continue to increase the effectiveness, visibility, and actual impact of the UVGO.
- Invite guest speakers that are key Veterans' advocacy stakeholders to UVGO meetings to exchange information and strategies including critical legislation and other Veterans' issues.
- Identify legislation to adopt and champion in the next Legislative Session.

SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT:

A motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 8 April 2023 UVGO Meeting be approved; the motion was passed. For the Financial Report, Secretary/Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that the beginning balance as of 21 March 2023 was \$4,772.89. Income from dues was collected, and one expense was incurred. Check #335 for \$50 was sent to the State of Oregon Non-Profit entity. The ending balance as of 22 July 2023 is \$4,942.89. A motion was made and seconded that the Financial Report be approved; the motion was passed.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS UPDATE:

ODVA Director **Kelly Fitzpatrick** provided an insightful and detailed report, with the following highlights:

- Since UVGO's last meeting, ODVA has been in a high-speed outreach mode, primarily hosting regional Pact Act clinics in urban and rural districts. The last day to file a notice of intent to file a claim or actual claim **and be eligible for one-year retroactive benefits is 9 August 2023.**

- **Report on the 2023 Oregon Women Veterans' Biennial Conference (20-21 May; Salem Convention Center, Salem, Oregon)**
 - Hosted by the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, this free, biennial event is the largest gathering of women veterans in the state. Women veterans from every branch of military service, era, and background attended, celebrating the service and contributions of women who answered the call to serve throughout history. The conference included informational workshops, keynote speakers, and networking opportunities.
 - Women Veterans from all branches of the Services (except for Space Force) participated; representing 23 out of 36 Oregon counties; with 62 vendors and exhibitors.
 - Women veterans make up one of the fastest-growing segments of the Oregon veteran community, with an estimated 25,000 women veterans living in the state today, representing nearly one-tenth of the overall veteran population. The first Oregon Women Veterans Conference was held 25 years ago in 1998.
 - UVGO donated \$1,000 to the event and had a membership table. UVGO was among the top three sponsors for the conference and received considerable recognition and visibility as a result of its generosity.

- **June 2023 Pride Activities in support of LGBTQ-I issues:**
 - ODVA hosted outreach activities including participation in an internment ceremony of a LGBTQ veteran in the Willamette Cemetery. The impact and reach of the activities emphasized the important role ODVA's LGBTQ-I Coordinator plays in ODVA's mission to support all Veterans.
 - Kelly indicated that no Pride Activities have been subject to violence or undue pressure from segments of society; nonetheless, prudence requires ODVA to plan and execute such events with security as an essential element.

- **ODVA Budget Submittal:**
 - Kelly walked us through the particulars of the 2024-2025 ODVA budget submittal, which provides measured but sustained and approved increases in ODVA's budget across all legacy and new budget items. The ODVA Budget document is [attached](#) to these minutes.
 - Oregon's Constitution earmarks 1.5% of lottery net revenue for Veterans' services. ODVA's operating budget is comprised of the lottery earmark and allowances from the Governor's bi-annual budget.

- Kelly noted that \$220K in the ODVA budget was destined to pay for a legislature-directed study of the state income tax treatment of Veterans.
- **ODVA Grant Administration:**
 - Kelly stated that the grant administration cycle had been revised to ensure that all grants supporting ODVA programs would be awarded by 1 November of the calendar year to minimize the impact of grant administration upon the Thanksgiving/Christmas family season. Accordingly, requests for proposals (RFP) will be issuing shortly.
 - Kelly acknowledged the substantial number of UVGO volunteers participating in the 2021-2023 grant evaluation and award process. Both Kelly and UVGO Chair Mary urged membership to volunteer and participate in the grant process. A formal call for volunteers will be issued shortly.
- **National Veterans' Advocacy Legislation:**
 - Kelly highlighted various Veterans legislative efforts at the national level, including SB 777 (providing recurring VA disability and income payments and annual COLA adjustment as is done with Social Security Administration payments); and SB 30 (addressing VA infrastructure and designating \$.5M for Portland's VA Hospital); among others.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

- ODVA Legislative Director **Jay DeFillipo**, encouraged all to subscribe to the ODVA Veteran Bill Digest he creates every week of the legislative session by accessing: <https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Legislation.aspx> The hyperlink also provides access to all of the weekly legislative updates from the 2022-2023 long session, including the 30 June 2023 final closeout update.
- Jay indicated that his first experience with the Oregon legislative session didn't disappoint; it endured the longest walkout in Oregon history but finished with flash action enacting many pieces of legislation.
- ODVA's biggest successes during the session was in its budget ---- the Governor's approved budget for 2024-2025 provides sustained increases for legacy programs and funding for new ODVA programs and initiatives.

- Jay highlighted HB 2147 --- providing recognition for unclaimed Veterans' remains --- which was enacted after substantial effort, with the particular involvement of **John Lee**, UVGO Legislative Chair. The bill is awaiting the Governor's signature (she has 30 days to sign the bill), and all expectations are the bill will be signed without objection.
- Another highlight was HB 2271, which made permanent the Educational Bridge Grant Program. This bill was also supported by the UVGO.
- Disappointingly, Jay noted, none of the income or property tax relief bills were enacted.
- Looking ahead, Jay stated that the 2023-2024 short legislative session begins on 5 February 2024. It will be preceded by legislative committee works days in September, November, and January. Typically, the short session does not deal with new legislation, or with previously failed legislation being reintroduced that has a substantial budget impact. The short session is generally used for legislative house-keeping measures.
- Lastly, Jay emphasized the fantastic working relationship developed with the UVGO.

UVGO LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:

- Legislative Committee Chair **John Lee** indicated that, despite the walkout, a last-minute flurry of activity in the legislature brought the track record of Veterans' and military bills enacted during this unusual session onto roughly the same trajectory as in the previous two long sessions. John presented comparison statistics for the 2023, 2021, and 2019 legislative sessions as to legislation before the House and Senate Veterans' Committees. John's presentation is [attached](#) to these minutes.
- John highlighted the UVGO efforts on behalf of HB 2147 --- Unclaimed Veterans' Remains. When John realized the bill was struggling in committee, he engaged with in-person testimony and a written submission before the House Veterans' Committee. As indicated by Jay DeFillipo, UVGO intervention and supporting advocacy had a galvanizing effect and helped ensure the bill passed. John fully expects the Governor to sign the bill soon.
- John also noted how COVID, and the ensuing transition to legislative Zoom meetings, had a secondary effect upon Veterans' advocacy. Before COVID, the gallery watching and participating in Committee meetings contained many Veterans. Today, even if there are more Veterans actually viewing the Committee meetings via the internet, often John was the only Veteran in the gallery. On a positive side, he was able to develop personal relationships with Committee members, who actively wish for and seek out Veterans'

participation in the process. John encouraged all members of the UVGO to ramp up personal advocacy efforts in support of key Veterans' legislation.

- John indicated that his “door was always open” to UVGO members wishing to consult on Veterans' legislation, and he thanked Jay DeFillipo at ODVA for his support and comradeship.
- Legislative Committee Vice-Chair **Marco Oswald** took the group into a deeper dive of the UVGO supported legislation. His presentation is [attached](#) to these minutes.
- Marco indicated that UVGO success on the Veterans' Remains and Bridge Grant Program overshadowed the failure of the other three UVGO-endorsed bills focused on tax, auxiliary education, and licensure matters. HB 2789, a placeholder bill requiring a study of military family member licensure portability, entertained no public hearings and didn't leave committee. The Oregon Promise Program (HB 2615) suffered from “sticker shock,” estimated at \$4.4M, and died in the House Ways and Means Committee.
- The two property and two income tax bills affecting Veterans did not pass; but two bills, SB 884 and SB 540, are worth examining and are candidates for potential UVGO support in the 2024-2025 long session. SB 884 would increase the current property tax exemption for disabled Veterans (60% or more service-connected); increase exemptions for 100% disabled; and provide relief for eligible surviving spouses. Purportedly, the \$50M loss in county property tax revenue was proposed to be reimbursed by the State, which led to its demise in the Finance and Revenue Committee. SB 540 would exempt from state taxation the first \$17.5K in military retirement pay for Oregon residents, age 62 and younger. This bill had made it through both committees to the President's desk when the legislature adjourned. Both proposals generated substantial discussion during the meeting and require further study. In particular, UVGO Past Chair **Wayne Harvey** requested ODVA assistance to quantify, by county, the number of 100% disabled Oregon resident taxpayers. ODVA Director Kelly Fitzpatrick indicated she would take the request for action. UVGO member Thom Weiss indicated that the VA already produces such a report.
- Marco stated that our next two UVGO Meetings on 14 October 2023 and 13 January 2024 are well placed to profit from Legislative Days in September, November, and January. The UVGO legislative team should have actionable intel on potential Veterans' legislation to be worked in committee. Nonetheless, we must maintain reasonable expectations for the limited legislative capacity of the 35-day short session commencing 5 February 2024.
- Chair Mary J. Mayer asked that the UVGO Legislative Committee work closely with ODVA's Jay DeFillipo to examine the tax issues, with a view towards consideration as priorities in the next legislative long session.

GUEST SPEAKER:

- **Shaun Benson, the Chief Operating Officer of the 42nd National Veterans' Wheelchair Games conducted in Portland, Oregon from 4-9 July 2023** provided a brief report and presented an inspirational video of the highly successful games. Shaun also gave a shout out to Paralyzed Veterans of America and UVGO's VVA rep Don Hedlind, who won three medals during the games.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America hosted the event, which is a sports and rehabilitation program for military Veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, amputations, or other neurological conditions.
- This year, some 350 Veterans traveled from around the country to compete in the games, the world's largest annual multi-sport wheelchair competition for Veterans. Festivities kicked off on 4 July with a festive opening ceremony--and ended with a closing celebration on 9 July. Shaun also acknowledged the critical support provided by the MOAA Portland Chapter and the DAV.
- **More than 20 Wheelchair Games events:** Veterans with similar athletic ability, experience, or age competed in more than 20 events, including: Adaptive e-sports, Adaptive fitness, Air pistol and rifle, Archery, Basketball, Bass Fishing, Boccia, Bowling, Cycling, Disc golf, Field events, Nine-ball, Pickleball, Power soccer, Wheelchair rugby, Slalom, Softball, Swimming, and Table tennis.
- To view photos from the 2023 games, and to obtain information about the upcoming 25-30 July 2025 games hosted in New Orleans, Louisiana, visit www.wheelchairgames.com

NEW BUSINESS:

- Chair **Mary J. Mayer** led a discussion of proposed UVGO leadership positions for the 2023-2024 and the 2024-2025 terms. Proposed candidates either self-nominated or accepted nominations from within the group. The following UVGO members were unanimously elected for the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 UVGO leadership and governance terms.
 - **Officers for 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 (2 Year Terms):**
 - Chair: Mary J. Mayer, AFA
 - First Vice Chair: John Lee, American Legion
 - Second Vice Chair: Henry Hamel, DAV
 - Secretary: Marco Oswald, MOAA

- Treasurer: Robert Haltiner, NCOA
- Immediate Past Chair: Wayne Harvey
- **Appointments:**
 - Chaplain: Toni Cordell, American Legion
 - Legislative Committee:
 - Chair: John Lee, American Legion
 - Vice Chair: Marco Oswald, MOAA
 - Governance Committee Chair: Mary J. Mayer, AFA
- **Meeting Schedule for 2023-2024 Program Year:**
 - Saturday, 22 July 2023 (rescheduled from 8 July 2023)
 - Saturday, 14 October 2023
 - Saturday, 13 January 2024
 - Saturday, 13, April 2024
- **Meeting Location Choices:**
 - Virtual via Zoom
 - Center 50+ (Salem Senior Center), 2615 Portland Road NE, Salem, OR 97301

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER: No items.

ITEMS OF INTEREST: The latest information on the Oregon Capitol Vietnam War Veterans Memorial was provided by the UVGO Chair on the agenda.

MEETING RECORD: UVGO Meetings are recorded on Zoom. To request a copy of the recorded meeting, contact UVGO Secretary, Marco Oswald, at: viaboeca17@gmail.com The file is approximately 970MB.

The next **UVGO Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, 14 October 2023** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1413**.

Respectfully submitted,

Reviewed by:

MARCO OSWALD

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