



**MINUTES FROM THE UNITED VETERANS' GROUPS OF OREGON (UVGO)
MEETING
SATURDAY, 10 JANUARY 2026
HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

The meeting was called to order by the **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, at **1201**. She then led the Pledge of Allegiance, and UVGO Vice Chair Andrea Summerlin provided the Invocation.

Roll Call of Organizations/Voting Members: 11 of 14

- **Regular Voting Members Present were:**

- AFA (Mary J. Mayer)
- American Legion (Tim Cowan)
- AUSA (Bill Crist)
- DAV (Kari-Jo Parisi)
- GSW (Valerie Morey)
- KWVA (Mike Williamson)
- MOAA (Tom Majchrowski)
- MOPH (Todd Swanson)
- NCOA (Robert Haltiner)
- VFW (Albert Little)
- VVA (Steve Wiley)

- **Regular Voting Members Absent were:**

- 40 + 8
- MCL
- PVA TSC

- **Other Voting Members:**
 - UVGO Immediate Past Chair: Wayne Harvey (*Not present*)
- **Associate Member Present (non-voting):** DAV Auxiliary (Karen Haltiner)
- **Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary (guest):** Gayle Swanson
- **UVGO Officers (non-voting, unless representing a regular member organization):**
 - Chair (Mary J. Mayer)
 - First Vice Chair (Andrea Summerlin)
 - Second Vice Chair (Todd Swanson))
 - Secretary (Marco Oswald)
 - Treasurer (Robert Haltiner)
- **Other Attendees were:**
 - Representative Paul Evans (D-District 20-Monmouth)
 - Jay DeFillipo (ODVA Legislative Affairs Director)

CHAIR’S COMMENTS: The **Chair, Mary J. Mayer**, welcomed all members and guests to the third regularly scheduled virtual UVGO meeting of the 2025-2026 program year. The Chair affirmed that focusing on our strategic goals, expanding the membership, increasing the visibility of the UVGO brand, inviting guest speakers from the Oregon legislature, and maintaining active legislative participation by the UVGO in the upcoming short legislative session are key objectives for the upcoming program year. Immediately preceding this regular UVGO meeting, the Chair stated that she hosted an executive strategy session with members of the UVGO Legislative Committee and UVGO leadership. The meeting helped focus on the issues for discussion today.

SECRETARY’S REPORT:

The motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the 11 October 2025 UVGO Meeting be approved; the motion was passed unanimously.

TREASURER’S REPORT:

Treasurer Robert Haltiner reported that the UVGO beginning balance as of 6 October 2025 was \$6,020.39. Income was \$165.00 in dues and contributions of \$100.00 from the American Legion and an additional \$100.00 from American Legion Post 17 provided for the UVGO website. Expenses were \$580.79 for the creation and maintenance of the UVGO website. The ending balance as of 31 December 2025 was **\$5,804.60**. Two member organizations should bring their membership dues current (MCL and 40+8).

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS (ODVA) UPDATE:

- ODVA Director for Legislative Affairs, **Jay DeFillipo**, provided a quick snapshot of ODVA current operations:
 - ODVA is preparing for the upcoming legislative days and the start of the 2026 short legislative session (30 days) in February.
 - The focus of the short session is on budget and reconciliation; agencies like ODVA are not permitted to advance legislative concepts or proposed legislation.
 - Dr. Daniels, ODVA Director, will brief the legislature on federal funding for a HVAC renovation project at the Lebanon Veterans' Home.
 - The Advisory Committee to the ODVA met in December, and the meeting products are available on the ODVA website. Jay noted that UVGO Chair, Mary J. Mayer, is a member of this committee and serves as the Secretary.
 - The weekly ODVA Legislative Digest will resume next week and be available every Friday during the upcoming legislative session.
 - ODVA participated in a working group to refine Representative Paul Evans' "Omnibus Bill," designed to enhance multiple sectors of Veterans programs in Oregon.
 - ODVA continues work on implementing by rule and instruction the various legislative bills that were enacted in the 2025 legislative (long) session, such as enhancements to the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial and more readily available documentation to certify Veteran status (such as VA statements of Veterans benefits in lieu of a DD214). ODVA is also implementing enacted legislation that allows greater sharing of information between agencies with the goal of effecting better Veteran outreach and explanation of benefits.
 - ODVA is also supporting the implementation of enacted legislation extending Veterans' license plates to motorcycles and to curb abusive practices regarding representation for claimed Veterans' benefits (the so-called "Claim Shark" Bill).
 - ODVA home loan and refinance rules are complete and awaiting the installation of a new ODVA home loans manager (Chris Erinheart), which is imminent.
 - The previous, and dire, revenue forecast was updated to reflect a deficit which was much less severe than predicted earlier. All state agencies underwent an internal review with courses of action based upon potential 5% budget decrements. The next revenue forecast will be

released on 4 February, two days after the 4 February short legislative session opening. The budget deficit projection disclosed at that time will have a major impact upon the session.

GUEST SPEAKER: REPRESENTATIVE PAUL EVANS (D-District 20, Monmouth)

- Representative Evans stated that he believes the best defense is a good offense, and to that end he will be introducing an “omnibus” bill which is intended to address multiple areas of Veterans services and benefits. The draft bill has been refined by a working group of stakeholders, including ODVA and the UVGO’s Marco Oswald. The bill has ten major components and seeks to address:
 - Funding Goal: we are trying to return to the historical level of Veteran funding which comes from a specific lottery allotment and regular state appropriations. Over time, this balance has been distorted by reducing regular appropriations in light of the lottery proceeds. The omnibus bill will address this imbalance by providing a baseline formula for annual ODVA and Veterans’ funding, which can be adjusted upwards for inflation and other circumstances.
 - The omnibus bill would add additional billets to ODVA in three specific tranches---the first in 2028, and then 2030 and 2032 (approximately eight new positions, with focus areas on Veterans’ homelessness, incarcerated Veterans, and additional women’s Veteran coordinated, and behavioral health (suicide reduction).
 - Clarify that while the ODVA Deputy Director is not required to be a Veteran (as in the case of the ODVA Director), preference should be given to a Veteran candidate.
 - Address an imbalance in county Veteran support for suicide prevention to stabilize funding and encourage all county execution of allocated funding.
 - Help ensure that sensitive personal records of Veterans (such as the DD214) are better privacy-protected.
 - Expands and institutionalizes the Veterans Bridge Grant Program.
 - Establish a working group of stakeholders to roadmap expansion of Oregon’s Veterans Treatment Courts to all of Oregon’s counties (currently 7 counties have VTCs) and propose funding baselines and options independent of current lottery and regular appropriations.
 - Ensure that, should the new ODVA home loan program produce a positive revenue stream, those funds go to expand Veterans’ services and are not made a funding offset decrement, or absorbed by the General Fund.
 - In addition to the omnibus bill, we have two other Veterans issues to address this session. One seeks to minimize the impact to Veterans programs required by funding cuts imposed by the budget decrements and shortfall. Second, we may also need to intervene in a current rule-making proposal by Oregon Parks and Recreation Division to reduce the benefits provided to Veterans, such as camping fee discounts and exemptions. We might

also explore (especially with the active participation of Veterans' associations like the UVGO) partnering with Parks and Recreation at the county level to establish specific grants that encourage wider Veteran utilization of these recreation assets.

- The Veterans' Caucus in the legislature is trying to establish a full or part time position to administratively support the work of the caucus and Veterans' initiatives. In the alternative, we will seek to utilize volunteers for this support.
- Representative Evans thanked the UVGO for past support for the omnibus bill and asked for continued support in the next legislative session. He stated that legislation that advances the welfare of Oregon's Veterans is uniquely bipartisan and a win-win for all involved. This is particularly so when legislation respects fiscal realities, such as phased implementation to minimize the incremental costs.
- Representative Evans also solicited the continued support of the UVGO and individual Veterans' groups to remind the legislature that supporting Veterans is not only the right thing to do, but it also enhances Veteran presence and participation in making our communities stronger and more prosperous.
- Representative Evans stated that, for Veterans' advocacy before the state legislature to be most effective, it must have three components: First, advocacy must have a message that is both understandable and real. Second, advocacy must be genuine, and, even if it proposes something difficult, it is not impossible to do. Third, a continual physical presence before the committees so that its members understand your advocacy is genuine and personal. Showing up at committee hearings and work sessions and getting to know the members individually is crucial to establishing a rapport. More times than not, it is the additional weight necessary to swing the pendulum in favor of Veterans. Veterans who advocate as volunteers with equity in the result present a wholly different perspective than paid lobbyists, often constituting a distinct advantage.

UVGO LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

- UVGO Legislative Coordinator, **Marco Oswald**, reported that he participated in Representative Evans' omnibus working group through multiple sessions, a unique privilege for a private Veterans organization. UVGO made substantial input, particularly in the portion of the bill that seeks to expand Veterans Treatment Courts to all of Oregon's counties. Much of our UVGO input is reflected in the final draft of the omnibus bill.

- As UVGO voted to support the omnibus bill in the last legislative (long) session, UVGO is preparing both written and in-person testimony in anticipation of public hearing and work sessions before the House and Senate Veterans committees.
- The UVGO Legislative Committee is also preparing to support SB1094A, a bill that would revise the way current Veteran partial property tax exemption is calculated. UVGO supported this bill in the last legislative session. The bill almost made it across the finish line but became a victim to the chaos generated by the transportation bill and continuing controversy. UVGO is soliciting Senator Broadman to reintroduce this bill in the short session. If enacted, SB1094A would ensure that the Veteran property tax exemption is applied in a consistent and rational manner and is easily calculated. At present, the calculation of the exemption oftentimes works to the detriment of the active-duty military, disabled Veterans, and surviving spouses who can claim the deduction.
- UVGO was also invited to be a work group member on a Joint Ways and Means Committee exploring courses of action in light of expected ODVA budget reductions.
- The fast and furious pace of the short legislative session requires that UVGO be prepared and primed in advance of the expected public hearings on measures that we have agreed in advance to support.
- Tim Cowan entertained discussion regarding the best advocacy method before the committees ---- submitting written testimony or appearing before the committees in person. UVGO agreed that a combination of both written testimony (which becomes a part of the official record) followed up with a personal appearance to offer oral testimony (generally limited to 3 minutes) is our most effective advocacy.
- Todd Swanson reiterated that he is available to appear before the committee hearings given his close proximity to the Salem legislature.
- Chair Mayer stated that UVGO will move forward on those bills previously agreed by membership, but any new initiatives may require convening the UVGO in a short plenary session (even by telephone) to obtain required membership concurrence.

CHAIR MAYER: UNFINISHED/NEW BUSINESS:

- **Chair Mayer** stated that the UVGO website (<https://www.uvgo.org>) is fully operational. She also thanked the American Legion Oregon and American Legion Post 17 for their generous financial support to defray the costs of the website. Suggestions and/or additions to enhance the website are welcome. The cost of the website is a one-time \$530 charge for design and an expected \$60/yr maintenance fee. She asked UVGO member organizations to review the contact and representational information listed for each member organization to ensure accuracy. UVGO Meeting Minutes, which include the Financial Reports, are posted on the website.

- Chair Mayer recapped for UVGO members the subjects discussed at the preceding leadership meeting this morning. She announced that the Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary will be joining the UVGO as an associate member. Gayle Swanson should be their primary rep.
- Tim Cowan has volunteered to solicit UVGO membership interest of the American Legion Auxiliary (Oregon).
- Chair Mayer stated that the VFW Auxiliary would also be a good candidate. Vice Chair **Andrea Summerlin** has suggested that several Native American Veterans Organizations with a national charter and chapter in Oregon could be potential candidates for UVGO membership. Chair Mayer stated she would query ODVA's Tribal Veterans Coordinator for their status. Chair Mayer again solicited UVGO member reps to explore UVGO membership interest with their auxiliary chapters and associated organizations. Even though UVGO associate members do not vote, they can have large influence in the UVGO advocacy direction.
- Chair Mayers also solicited member suggestions for future guest speakers.
- Tim Cowan requested clarification of his role as a member of the UVGO Legislative Committee. The forum discussed forming a separate communication channel via email for legislative committee members to ensure all committee efforts are communicated, synchronized, and coordinated within the group. As a known entity with the House and Senate Veterans Committees, Tim is uniquely qualified to be a UVGO advocate, in addition to advocacy for the American Legion, as all specific UVGO advocacy must have the unanimous approval of all UVGO members.
- Chair Mayer said she would follow up with **Don Hedlind** (PVA-TSC) on his suggestion to create ways to promote and make known the UVGO "brand" -- such as QR codes, information tables at relevant conferences, and bracelets.
- The next quarterly UVGO meeting will be on Saturday, 11 April, at 1200 via Zoom.
- Chair Mayer noted a new website (<https://beyondthemilitaryuniform.com>), designed by ODVA to provide resources and opportunities to build community with fellow Veterans in Oregon, contains resources crafted specifically for military veterans facing mental health challenges.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER:

- MOAA (**Tom Majchrowski**) added that he had just finished service on the ODVA campus grant review panel. ODVA awarded 24 college resource grant disbursements totaling \$980,000 this year. He also relayed that President Trump has approved the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which included many various items related to Veterans and the VA. Congress needs to complete funding (appropriations) for the NDAA.

- DAV (**Kari-Jo Parisi**) asked if Oregon has any specific organizations that provide legal assistance on civil matters to Veterans. Marco suggested contacting the Oregon State Bar Association's Military and Veterans' Law Committee, whose members provide pro bono assistance on civil and criminal matters. Tom suggested contacting the Legal Aid Services of Oregon Association for assistance.
- GSW (**Valerie Morey**) noted that VA has a shortage of volunteer drivers who help ensure Veterans have transportation access to their appointments. She encouraged member organizations to solicit volunteers for certification and service as a volunteer driver.
- AUSA (**Bill Crist**) stated that Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) may be an additional resource for legal assistance to Veterans. Bill also stated that AUSA 2026 scholarships for college expenses are available for candidates who will go into the Guard or Reserve upon graduation. Bill encouraged members to forward him any relevant nominees.

MEETING RECORD: UVGO Meetings are recorded on Zoom. To request a copy of the recorded meeting, please contact the UVGO Secretary, Marco Oswald, at: viaboeca17@gmail.com

The next **UVGO Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, 11 April 2026** from **1200** to **1400** via **Zoom Video Teleconference**. The meeting was adjourned at **1317**.

Respectfully submitted,

Reviewed by:

MARCO OSWALD
UVGO Secretary
42154 N River Drive
Sweet Home, OR 97386
Cell Phone: 541-409-4146

MARY J. MAYER
UVGO Chair
P.O. Box 13408
Portland, OR 97213-4004
Cell Phone: 310-897-1902