

MINUTES  
STATE OF NEBRASKA  
COMMISSION ON MILITARY AND VETERAN AFFAIRS  
301 Centennial Mall South, PO Box 95083, Lincoln, NE 68509-5083

Monday, October 28, 2019 - 10:00 a.m.  
301 Centennial Mall South, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, NDVA Conference Room A

The Commission on Military and Veteran Affairs (Commission) met on October 28, 2019 at 10:00 a.m. in the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs (NDVA) Conference Room A, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, Nebraska.

In compliance with the provisions of *Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1411*, printed notice of this meeting was posted at NDVA. In addition, the notice was published in the Omaha World Herald on page 6C on September 18, 2019, and posted to the Nebraska Public Meeting Calendar ([nebraska.gov](http://nebraska.gov)) on September 16, 2019.

In compliance with the provisions of *Neb. Rev. Stat. §55-602 and §55-603*, a quorum was established with five of six voting members present. A written notice of the time and place of the meeting was mailed to all members in advance of the meeting. The aim of these minutes is to comply with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act, specifically *Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1413*.

Commissioners present (voting members):

Anthony Goins, Director, Nebraska Department of Economic Development  
Major General Daryl Bohac, Adjutant General of the Nebraska National Guard  
John Hilgert, Director, Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Tami Thompson, 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District  
Dave Bloomfield, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District

Commissioners present (nonvoting, ex officio members):

Terry Eklund, Veterans' Program Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Labor  
Mike Navrkal, Chair, State Committee Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

Commissioners excused (voting member):

Bill Williams, 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District

Commissioners excused (nonvoting, ex officio members):

Colonel Alan Dayton, 55<sup>th</sup> Wing Designee  
Brigadier General Bob Stevenson, U.S. Strategic Command Designee  
Colonel Brian Pukall, 557<sup>th</sup> Weather Wing Designee

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Phil O'Donnell, Military Affairs Liaison.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Goins, Bohac, Hilgert, Thompson, Bloomfield, Eklund, and Navrkal were present. Williams, Dayton, Stevenson, Pukall, excused.

**III. ENTRY OF PUBLIC NOTICE INTO THE RECORD IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT, SPECIFICALLY *Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1411*. ADVISE THE PUBLIC THAT THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT APPLIES AND IS PUBLICALLY POSTED PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF *Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1412*.**

Military Affairs Liaison, Phil O'Donnell, announced the location of the Open Meetings Act on the wall of NDVA Conference Room A. O'Donnell also noted the public notice of the meeting was posted in the Omaha World Herald (page 6C) on September 18, 2019, and posted to the Nebraska Public Meeting Calendar (nebraska.gov) on September 16, 2019.

**IV. MOTION TO DESIGNATE ENTRY OF PUBLIC NOTICE FOR THE NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON MILITARY AND VETERAN AFFAIRS IN THE OMAHA WORLD HERALD AND ON THE NEBRASKA.GOV CALENDAR PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF *Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1411* – Action/Vote**

Moved by Bloomfield and seconded by Hilgert to designate entry of public notice in the Omaha World Herald and the Nebraska Public Meeting Calendar on nebraska.gov. Voting Aye: Goins, Bohac, Hilgert, Thompson, Bloomfield. Motion carried.

**V. APPROVAL OF JUNE 18, 2019 COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – Action/Vote**

Hilgert asked for the addition of “County” on page 8, to clarify “County Veteran Service Officers.”

Moved by Hilgert and seconded by Bohac to approve the revised June 18, 2019 Commission Meeting Minutes. Voting Aye: Goins, Bohac, Hilgert, Thompson, Bloomfield. Motion carried.

**VI. VETERANS' PROGRAM COORDINATOR REPORT PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF *Neb. Rev. Stat. §48-203* – TERRY EKLUND**

O'Donnell noted the passage of LB138 and the associated changes to *Neb. Rev. Stat. §48-203*.

O'Donnell introduced and welcomed Terry Eklund, the Veterans' Program Coordinator within the Office of Employment & Training for the Nebraska Department of Labor.

Eklund provided a progress report to the Commission on Military and Veteran Affairs pursuant to the provisions of *Neb. Rev. Stat. §48-203*.

Eklund discussed the implementation of LB138. Eklund noted the cross training of NDVA and NDOL staff regarding state benefits, licensure portability provisions, outreach to transitioning service members (almost 100 per month). Eklund discussed outreach efforts by NDOL's Omaha-based veteran business specialist at Offutt AFB to include Transition Assistance Program outreach, “Right Start” (newcomer orientation) presentations, Star Spouse Transition and Readiness meetings. Additionally, Eklund presented initial results of a survey which seems to illustrate homeownership and military spouse employment as leading indicators of whether or not a transitioning service member stayed in Nebraska. Finally, Eklund discussed his service on the

National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), Veterans Affairs Committee. Eklund was designated by Nebraska Commissioner of Labor John Albin to serve as NASWA's contact for the State of Nebraska for any veteran related transition issues.

Bloomfield asked Eklund if he could share the list of state points of contact with the county veterans service officers. Specifically, NASWA's "TAP warm handoff State Contact List." Eklund agreed to check and would share the information if authorized.

Bohac asked if the 24% military spouse unemployment rate was a national rate or Nebraska rate. Eklund confirmed that the rate was national. Bohac asked whether or not the survey would include military spouse unemployment rate specific to Nebraska. Eklund responded that it would not given that the purpose of the survey was to learn why veterans choose to stay or leave Nebraska.

O'Donnell and Eklund clarified the frequency of these NDOL outreach efforts on Offutt AFB and confirmed that licensure reciprocity, Military Teaching Permits, Class 1-D applicants to the Nebraska Bar, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) are covered. Eklund noted that there is opportunity for improvement, specifically alternative outreach venues, increased frequency, and increased presentation time.

Bohac emphasized the importance of sharing this information.

Eklund continued his report by focusing on hiring events both in Nebraska and outside of Nebraska in surrounding states. Examples include the "Boots to Fill" hiring fair in Omaha and the Military and Veteran Career Fair in Lincoln. Eklund discussed registered apprenticeship programming at NDOL. Eklund discussed his attendance at a recent Home Base Iowa summit. Eklund noted that there is really no difference in what the State of Iowa offers compared to what the State of Nebraska offers in terms of employment resources. Eklund did note that Iowa has a number of local incentives at the county and community level. Examples of local incentives include a gym membership or the first year of paid utilities if you move to the local community. Eklund described the functionality of NEworks for employers who can search for veteran candidates.

Eklund followed up on a question regarding homeless veterans and employment services. Specifically, Eklund noted a study illustrating that unemployment was not the number one reason for causing homelessness however, it was the number one reason for sustained homelessness.

Hilgert asked about the "Boots to Fill" hiring fair specifically related to the nature of the jobs and who the employers were. Eklund noted that the "Boots to Fill" employers tended to focus on hiring veterans for careers (as opposed to jobs).

Hilgert asked Eklund to broadly describe the registered apprenticeship program.

Eklund noted that employers were responsible for all of the training costs and half-time pay with one pay increase.

Hilgert asked about NDOL's role in the registered apprenticeship program.

Eklund noted that NDOL is building out that capability to support the program and connecting employers to potential employees.

Hilgert asked if employers had to commit to hiring a certain percentage of veterans. Eklund noted that NDOL was simply looking for a commitment by employers to hire veterans in the “Boots to Fill” program.

Hilgert asked if the State of Nebraska’s veterans hiring preference was robust enough to consider the State of Nebraska as a committed employer for veterans. Eklund responded yes, coupled with milestones related to veteran hiring and retention. Eklund noted a potential shortfall in that programing still needs to expand across the State beyond Omaha.

O’Donnell closed the discussion by noting that Eklund’s oral report serves to meet the requirement in Nebraska Revised Statute 48-203 paragraph (3)(c) for the Veterans’ Program Coordinator to “Submit an annual progress report to the Commission on Military and Veteran Affairs.”

## **VII. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD – October 28, 2019**

*In accordance with provisions of Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1412, the public shall have the right to attend meetings of the Commission and to speak on matters related to Commission business. Any person may appear before and address the Commission concerning any item on the agenda for that meeting. Further, any person may appear before and address the Commission at an annual or scheduled meeting on any matter concerning the Commission not on the agenda by notifying the Commission Secretary in advance of the meeting at which the person desires to address the Commission. A reasonable time limit [usually five (5) minutes] shall be placed upon each individual appearance before the Board, and no more than thirty (30) minutes shall be allowed for public comment, unless a majority of the quorum present shall extend such time limit. The Chairperson shall have the right to prohibit appearances by persons presenting needlessly repetitious or redundant testimony.*

Ron Dupell and Dean Kenkel, co-founders of the Nebraska Veterans Coalition, thanked NDOL and NDVA for their action and implementation of LB138. Dupell emphasized the need for workforce development in Nebraska with veterans and members of the Reserve Component as ideal hires to be recruited to the State. Dupell advocated for the establishment of a veterans council to form a common united front for all veterans not just those represented by a veterans service organization. If established, the council could provide input to the Commission, legislature, and governor’s office on agreed upon priorities. Dupell advocated for a Home Base Nebraska program focused on employment and PTSD treatment services similar to those in Massachusetts. Dupell noted significant resources for addressing veteran homelessness. Dupell thanked the Commission for its continued efforts.

Kenkel was pleased with coordination by NDOL vis-a-vis Home Base Iowa. Kenkel noted the Home Base Iowa offers a website and links recruiters to veterans. Kenkel then provided a sheet comparing veterans’ benefits in Massachusetts, Iowa, and Nebraska.

Dupell noted that Home Base Iowa keeps a database of veteran email addresses.

Kenkel would like to see more involvement by the Veterans Service Organizations and is willing to help distribute any and all information.

Bohac asked for clarification regarding the Nebraska Veterans Council and Dupell’s proposal.

Hilgert described Veterans' Advisory Commission as provided for in *Neb. Rev. Stat. § 80-401.09*, the informal Governor's roundtable of past VSO commanders, and the Nebraska Veterans Council of recognized veterans organizations of the State (not government funded, no formal reporting mechanism).

Dupell noted shortfalls of VSOs as critiqued by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans on Facebook. Dupell suggested that these veterans can and should take a more active role in the VSOs. Dupell described a need to unite all veterans to articulate issues and propose solutions to the Legislature.

Goins agreed with Dupell's comment on a need for a united front and asked Dupell what is our value proposition? Goins asked what differentiates Nebraska and why should veterans move to Nebraska? Goins noted that it is important to focus on Nebraska's value proposition. Goins described his corporate experience with veteran hiring fairs and the commitment (or lack of commitment) by firms to hire veterans. Goins described a need for acclimatization with an infrastructure and support network within a company. Goins noted that Nelnet and Speedway do it well in Lincoln and J.P. Morgan as a best-in-class example.

Dupell agreed with Commissioner Goins and looks forward to doing more.

Kenkel explained how Home Base Iowa is a public-private partnership with county specific job opportunities and county specific benefits.

Dupell noted data available by the Nebraska Department of Labor.

O'Donnell thanked Dupell and Kenkel for their input and comments.

### **VIII. NEBRASKA MILITARY SUPPORT COMMITTEE BRIEF – JEFF MIKESELL**

*Jeff Mikesell, the Director of Military Affairs for the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, will discuss the priorities and activities of the Nebraska Military Support Committee and other organizations that support Offutt AFB.*

O'Donnell introduced Jeff Mikesell, the Director of Military Affairs for the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce.

Mikesell briefed the Commission on five topics: improvements to the levees surrounding Offutt AFB, Offutt AFB runway repairs, flood recovery efforts and spending on Offutt AFB, potential withdrawal from the Open Skies treaty and associated mission loss, and the STRATCOM Consultation Committee reorganization.

O'Donnell briefed the Commission on the opportunity to present on Offutt AFB flood recovery at the Association of Defense Communities Installation Innovation Forum in San Antonio, Texas, February 10-12, 2020. O'Donnell noted that the 55<sup>th</sup> Wing would most likely to be asked to present at this Forum and that it may be an opportunity for the Nebraska National Guard to present on the recovery of Camp Ashland.

Bohac thanked O'Donnell for noting recovery efforts at Camp Ashland. Bohac described how National Guard and Reserve facilities can sometimes be overshadowed by major active component installations given the relative magnitude of recovery efforts.

## **IX. DELIBERATION – COMMISSION REPORT, RECOMMENDATIONS, COURSES OF ACTION**

*Neb. Rev. Stat. §55-606. Report; contents.*

*The Commission on Military and Veteran Affairs shall prepare an annual report summarizing the military assets of Nebraska, including installations and missions, and the economic impact of the military assets in Nebraska. The report shall also include recommendations for preserving and sustaining military assets and missions existing in Nebraska and recommendations for actions which the state can take to encourage expanding such assets and missions. The commission shall submit the report electronically to the Legislature, the Governor, and the commanding officer of every military base in Nebraska on or before November 15 of each year.*

O'Donnell described the process for distributing the annual report as outlined in statute. O'Donnell introduced Dr. Eric Thompson, and Dr. Mitch Herian with the University of Nebraska Lincoln's Bureau of Business Research to provide a brief summary of their findings.

Thompson thanked the Commission for the opportunity to continue this important work. Thompson described the research methodology and presented a summary of the findings. Thompson noted that with three years of data, we could start to analyze trends. Of note, Thompson described how DoD spending was slightly down compared to the initial (2017) study.

Herian described the research methodology for the five special studies and summarized the findings. These studies were: an analysis of tax policies in Nebraska and Iowa, trends in GI Bill utilization in Nebraska, a profile (survey) of County Veteran Service Offices, a review of military leave benefits to employees in each state, and a review of state veteran services websites.

Goins asked if Iowa's tax policy was a differentiating factor in its change in DoD retirees.

Herian unpacked the regression analysis and associated tables and figures. Thompson noted that the tax exemption policy was approaching statistical significance and that the threshold for "statistical significance" is very conservative.

Hilgert observed that the results illustrate the statewide economic impact of military retirees in Nebraska. Hilgert shared a story regarding a retired Navy veteran in Lewellen, Nebraska who was instrumental in the economic revitalization and development of the town. Hilgert encouraged the passage of Legislative Bill 153 which would exempt 50% of military retirement payments from state income taxation.

Bohac asked if there was a way to capture the other local Home Base Iowa benefits into the regression analysis.

Goins described the marketing efforts by the business community in Texas. Goins stated that Nebraska has a better story to tell.

Bloomfield emphasized the importance of connecting with veterans who serve three or four years.

Hilgert agreed with Bloomfield that more needs to be done. Hilgert also stated that LB 153 is the

bill that we have on the table today. Hilgert emphasized that Nebraska needs to pass LB 153 in order to stay competitive with other states.

Thompson asked if there was interest in discussing the other special studies.

Bloomfield expressed interest in learning more about the CVSOS survey.

Herian described the research methodology associated with the profile (survey) of County Veteran Service Officers and presented the results. The CVSOSs noted that more training and technical assistance from the state would be appreciated.

Bloomfield noted that 7% of the CVSOSs traveled outside their office at least once a year. Bloomfield asked if there was anything the Commission could do to get CVSOSs out of the office and attend at least once American Legion or VFW meeting a year.

Bohac and Hilgert noted the role of the county board in overseeing the CVSOSs. Hilgert noted that the statute governing CVSOSs was antiquated. Bohac asked if the Commission could share the results with the county boards.

Herian noted that the CVSOSs are organized in an association. Herian asked if it would be helpful to connect with the association if there is a follow-on CVSOS survey.

O'Donnell noted that the leader of the CVSOS association has attended Commission meetings. Hilgert noted that the leader of the CVSOS association has also attending Veterans Advisory Commission meetings.

Bloomfield argued that it may be more beneficial to survey the veterans that the CVSOSs are supposed to serve. Bloomfield expressed a need for more CVSOS accountability.

Bohac made the case for potentially engaging the county boards with the results of this survey.

Hilgert noted that more work could be done to improve the research methodology of the profile of CVSOSs.

#### **X. MOTION TO AMEND AND SUBMIT THE COMMISSION REPORT PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF *Neb. Rev. Stat. §55-606* – Action/Vote**

O'Donnell described the remaining data collection efforts and workflow for developing the Commission's annual report. O'Donnell noted that this was the first time the Commission was voting to support two specific legislative bills in its recommendations to the Governor and Legislature. Specifically, the draft annual report recommended the passage of LB 450 and LB 153.

Bohac asked that the Commission have one final opportunity to review the Commission report prior to submission. O'Donnell proposed that he could send the draft annual report electronically for final review on November 7<sup>th</sup> and requested responses by November 13<sup>th</sup> to meet the statutory deadline of November 15<sup>th</sup>.

Moved by Hilgert and seconded by Bloomfield to amend, review, and submit the annual report of the Commission on Military and Veteran Affairs. Voting Aye: Goins, Bohac, Hilgert, Thompson,  
As of: 07/23/2020

Bloomfield. Motion carried.

## **XI. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Col Pukall – 557<sup>th</sup> Weather Wing – Excused.

Brig Gen Stevenson – U.S. Strategic Command Designee – Excused

Col Dayton – 55<sup>th</sup> Wing Designee – Excused

Mike Navrkal – State Committee Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

Navrkal noted a recent effort by the National Guard to integrate ESGR into the recruiting process to illustrate how the National Guard would facilitate working with recruits to connect them with civilian employers.

Bill Williams – 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District – Excused

Maj Gen Bohac – Adjutant General Nebraska National Guard

Bohac added to Navrkal's comment regarding the value of Tricare Reserve Select to employers. Bohac said the average cost savings to the State of Nebraska for personnel using Tricare Reserve Select instead of state health insurance is about \$24,000 a year per employee.

Anthony Goins – Nebraska Department of Economic Development

Goins thanked the Commission for the opportunity to serve and grow Nebraska. Goins shared his military experience in the United States Marine Corps.

Tami Thompson – 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District

Thompson thanked Dr. Eric Thompson and Dr. Mitch Herian for their hard work on the report.

Dave Bloomfield – 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District

Bloomfield emphasized his desire to focus on helping the so-called grunts and hold the CVSOs accountable.

John Hilgert – Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

Hilgert agreed with Bloomfield to not lose sight of the majority of veterans and continue dialogue with the CVSOs. Hilgert thanked the report authors for their work.

## **XII. MOTION TO ADJOURN – Action/Vote**

Moved by Bohac and seconded by Thompson to adjourn. Voting Aye: Goins, Bohac, Hilgert, Thompson, Bloomfield. Motion carried.