



NEVADA LEGISLATURE
LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION'S SUBCOMMITTEE TO STUDY
ISSUES RELATING TO SENIOR CITIZENS AND VETERANS
(Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 35, File No. 109, *Statutes of Nevada 2007*)

SUMMARY MINUTES AND ACTION REPORT

The fifth meeting of the Nevada Legislature's Legislative Commission's Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Senior Citizens and Veterans (A.C.R. 35) was held on May 8, 2008, at 9 a.m. in Room 2135 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. A copy of this set of "Summary Minutes and Action Report," including the "Meeting Notice and Agenda" ([Exhibit A](#)) and other substantive exhibits, are available on the Nevada Legislature's website at www.leg.state.nv.us/74th/Interim. In addition, copies of the audio record may be purchased through the Legislative Counsel Bureau's Publications Office (e-mail: publications@lcb.state.nv.us; telephone: 775/684-6835).

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT IN CARSON CITY:

Assemblywoman Kathy McClain, Chair
Senator Joyce Woodhouse
Assemblyman James A. Settelmeyer

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT IN LAS VEGAS:

Senator Warren B. Hardy II
Assemblyman Joseph M. Hogan

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

Senator Joseph J. Heck (excused)

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU (LCB) STAFF PRESENT:

Amber J. Joiner, Senior Research Analyst, Research Division
Eileen G. O'Grady, Chief Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division
Charity Fowler, Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division
Ricka Benum, Senior Research Secretary, Research Division

OPENING REMARKS

- Chairwoman McClain welcomed the members, staff, and persons in the audience. She announced the entire meeting will be devoted to the subject of veteran's issues.

OVERVIEW OF NEVADA'S OFFICE OF VETERANS' SERVICES' PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIC PLAN

- Tim Tetz, Executive Director, Nevada's Office of Veterans' Services (NOVS), provided a follow-up to the briefing provided to the Subcommittee at its December 11, 2007, meeting, on the service programs offered to veterans in Nevada. Mr. Tetz provided comments on veterans' services provided by other organizations, the NOVS' Strategic Plan, and outlined items identified as priorities. He testified with the aid of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation ([Exhibit B](#)) and provided information on the per capita veteran's population, which is higher in Nevada's rural counties, as well as statistics on the per capita compensation and pension amounts of Nevada's veterans. Regarding the State Veterans Home Program, he stated that during the last seven years of its operation, the NOVS has returned 68 percent of the agency's appropriations to the State General Fund; amounting to 32 percent less than anticipated.

The programs highlighted by Mr. Tetz included the: (1) Nevada State Veterans' Home (Boulder City); (2) Northern Nevada Veterans' Memorial Cemetery; (3) Southern Nevada Veterans' Memorial Cemetery; (4) Veteran Guardianship Program; and (5) Veteran Gift Account. He noted that since the Memorial Cemetery in Fernley opened 18 years ago, 5,375 veterans or spouses have been interred, and the primary challenge now is that single burial vaults will run out in approximately six months. Any cemetery expansions are 100 percent funded by the federal government. He explained the new visitors' kiosk, which is a computer that denotes the cemetery's lanes, regions, and sections, with the ability for remote log ins and the capacity to print out maps to individual plots.

Mr. Tetz said the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery is the eleventh largest State veterans' cemetery in the nation, and in the 18 years since its opening, 22,530 veterans and their dependents have been buried or interned. He estimated that in 2011 the cemetery may run out of burial plots, and he has begun the funding process through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand the number of plots.

He briefly outlined the remaining services and programs offered through the NOVS (refer to pages 8 through 10 [Exhibit B](#)). Concluding, Mr. Tetz focused on the four Veterans' Gift Accounts (page 9 of [Exhibit B](#)) that fund special items that the State should not pay for, which may include items such as a Super Bowl party, cleaning of the aquarium, renovating landscape gardens, and new carpet in the chapel in Boulder City.

Responding to an inquiry from Assemblyman Hogan, Mr. Tetz outlined the caseload and backlog of cases assigned to each Veteran Service Officer (VSO) within the NOVS. He explained that with a total of 9,020 claims, each VSO oversees approximately 1,000 claimants, and noted that in other states most VSOs handle a caseload of 50 clients. Mr. Tetz said he is requesting an increase in staff next biennium and added that there is no way to cap the caseloads as the NOVS will not turn away any veteran.

OVERVIEW OF VETERAN POPULATION GROUPS IN NEVADA

Homeless Veterans

- Chuck Fulkerson, Veterans Advocate, Reno, and retired Director of the NOVS, testified that the homeless veteran population remains underserved and stressed the need for additional resources. Mr. Fulkerson reported that the need to provide care for homeless veterans has grown, due in part to increased technology of battlefield medical procedures and techniques; as weapons have become more lethal, medical technology on the battlefield has become more effective. There has been an increase in traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and the loss of limbs and sight, which account for a decrease in the number of soldiers killed in action and a dramatic increase in the amount of veterans with serious and life-altering wounds. Mr. Fulkerson noted that these major injuries involve difficult recoveries in order to regain self sufficiency and a quality of life; as a result, there is a need for long-term transitional centers which do not employ revolving door treatment practices. It is imperative that these transitional facilities provide security for recovering veterans by restricting entry to employees and veteran clients only, in order to hinder alcohol and drug abuse activity. In addition, he said that long-term assistance from social workers provides the client help to relearn personal hygiene, checkbook management, grocery shopping, housekeeping, assistance in creating a resume, completing job applications, and preparing for job interviews. (Mr. Fulkerson's comments are available as [Exhibit C](#).)
- Gregory F. Abernathy, M.S.W., Team Leader, Mobile Assistance for Shelter for the Homeless/Community Based Outreach Clinic (CBOC) for Homeless Veterans, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Las Vegas, outlined the composition of the staff and services provided at the shelter in southern Nevada. Mr. Abernathy listed the following items as primary services: (1) medical and mental health assessments and education; (2) supportive crisis therapy; (3) needs assessments for all homeless veterans and those veterans with a risk factor of becoming homeless; (4) networking and referrals to other veteran agencies; and (5) consultation and case management for as long as necessary.

Mr. Abernathy said that the CBOC manages two grant and per diem programs for the housing of homeless veterans: (1) the US Vets program is a 118-bed unit for homeless veterans with substance abuse problems; and (2) the Help USA program is a 150-bed unit which provides housing for low income veterans. After verifying a veteran's eligibility status, the CBOC helps the homeless obtain housing by interfacing with other

assistance organizations and VA agencies. In addition, the CBOC assists with benefit education; referrals to the Social Security Administration, state and local agencies, and Job Connect; and provides assistance for obtaining food, clothing, and personal hygiene items. Mr. Abernathy said additional help may include mail services that provide a permanent address, storage for personal items, and transportation assistance in the form of bus passes.

Between the two housing assistance programs, Mr. Abernathy stated that the CBOC maintains a budget over \$300 million to assist veterans to sustain housing provisions and keep them from living on the streets. The CBOC has implemented a dental program under the Homeless Veteran's Compensation Assistance Act of 2001. The program has served just fewer than 300 veterans and provided over \$350,000 of dental care under the program. Mr. Abernathy identified as areas of critical need: (1) dental care for homeless veterans who are not associated with the CBOC's grant and per diem programs; (2) housing for veterans released from hospitals; (3) short-term housing for veterans waiting for space in the CBOC programs; (4) long-term, low cost, permanent housing; and (5) an in-patient substance abuse program. (Mr. Abernathy's handout is available as [Exhibit D.](#))

In response to an inquiry from the Chairwoman, Mr. Abernathy clarified that the CBOC's dental program is in partnership with University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Dental School. He stated that currently the CBOC estimates the number of homeless veterans in the Las Vegas area at 4,400; this figure also includes persons who may be homeless for a portion of the month and persons considered "couch surfers." He noted that county officials conducted two homeless counts in 2007 and estimated the number of homeless at 1,308.

Veterans Who Have Contact With the Justice System

- Terrance P. Hubert, National Chair, Veterans Incarcerated Committee, Vietnam Veterans of America, Carson City, testified that he has been associated with incarcerated veterans' service organizations and currently instructs Criminal Justice at Western Nevada College (WNC). Mr. Hubert also serves as President of the Board of Directors, The Ridge House, which provides transitional housing for former inmates and works extensively with veterans. He explained he has studied the impact of veterans' involvement with the justice system and provided statistics on veterans, suicides, and women veterans. Mr. Hubert testified from a prepared statement available as [Exhibit E-1](#) and provided additional information available as [Exhibit E-2](#).
- Assemblyman Hogan inquired whether Nevada's prison system has the ability to address issues associated with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Mr. Hubert responded that the Director of Nevada's Department of Corrections (NDOC), Carson City, Howard Skolnik, encourages the participation of an active Chapter of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) functioning within the Nevada State

Prison. Mr. Hubert explained that in the past an incarcerated veteran was never contacted by the VA and no counseling or medical services were provided. During the 1990s, there was a lack of prisoner programs to address issues of PTSD, which may have contributed to an inmate's bad decisions and lifestyle choices. The VVA stepped up and began developing programs which included literacy classes, street-readiness courses, and substance abuse counseling for all inmates not just veterans. Eventually, the NDOC took over the programs and now offer many inmate programs. Mr. Hubert said that today the VA has an active role, reaches out to incarcerated veterans, and has developed specific programs.

Responding to Senator Hardy, Mr. Hubert restated the veteran suicide rate statistics and confirmed that the reports vary, depending on who conducts the study; he noted that there have been estimates of 1,000 veteran suicides a week nationwide and added that the figure may be conservative considering the estimated number of veteran suicides in America last year was 65,000.

Female Veterans

- Carole L. Turner, Deputy Director, NOVS, provided an overview of the Women Veterans Program and the services offered to women veterans. Ms. Turner stated that the resources are primarily allocated for the two positions of Collateral Women Veteran Coordinators, one in northern Nevada and an additional position in the Las Vegas NOVS office. Ms. Turner provided her prepared comments ([Exhibit F](#)) and outlined the following items:
 1. The success of the Women Veterans Summit 2008 with 92 women in attendance, representing women veterans from World War II to GWOT (global war on terrorism) veterans;
 2. Nevada women veteran demographics and utilization statistics; and
 3. The NOVS Women Veterans Program performance indicators.

A discussion ensued between Ms. Turner and Assemblyman Hogan; he complimented the excellent training offered to women military personnel in non traditional fields of work. He questioned whether women veterans are being made aware of the employment opportunities in the Las Vegas area in the construction and homebuilding industries. Assemblyman Hogan expounded on the importance of educating all returning veterans on apprenticeship and job training programs.

- Senator Hardy confirmed that the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) of Las Vegas has implemented numerous programs to draw women into the apprenticeship programs. He added that the contractor and electrical unions also encourage women to participate in apprenticeship programs.

Veterans in Universities

- Robert Ackerman, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Higher Education, College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), provided the Subcommittee with information developed from research on combat veterans as students. Mr. Ackerman stated he is a member of a national task force surveying college campuses with the specific goal to identify the areas of difficulty student veterans encounter following serving in a combat zone. (Please refer to [Exhibit G](#).) An additional project he is involved in is compiling data for a publication designed to educate college administrators to recognize the best practices college campuses can implement to be veteran friendly.

He recounted the impact of the Government Issue (GI) Bill following World War II and how it changed higher education and how the success of those educational benefits continues. Mr. Ackerman stated that there were very few studies conducted regarding the adjustments related to education of the Vietnam era veterans. As part of the book research, Mr. Ackerman recently interviewed approximately 50 Vietnam era combat veterans, who returned to attend a college or university and found there was little done by the institutions to facilitate adjustment to higher education. He highlighted the following items:

1. Many university campuses do not provide transition assistance to veterans returning from combat;
2. Students encounter problems associated with repayment of financial aid and student loans during their deployment;
3. Student veterans returning to an academic setting must readjust to the unstructured life of college campuses; and
4. Almost every veteran returning from combat experiences some degree or form of PTSD, which increases the difficulty of the psychological adjustment from a combat zone to the college campus.

OVERVIEW OF ISSUES RELATING TO VETERAN BENEFITS IN NEVADA

(As directed by Chairwoman McClain, this agenda item was taken out of order.)

Education Benefits and Programs for Veterans

- Johann Sprenger, Coordinator of Veterans Services and Admissions, Department of Admissions and Records, University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), NSHE, testified his office helps veterans obtain and make use of their GI benefits. Mr. Sprenger indicated that his office has received an increased number of requests for additional services,

such as advisement and assistance with the applications; coordinating appointments and services with the student's academic advisor; referring students to career counseling; monitoring academic progress; and ensuring that the student receives educational support to achieve academic success. In addition, he coordinates with the Reno Vet Center and the VA Hospital in Reno to aid veterans seeking help with PTSD or other health concerns that the university system is not equipped or prepared to handle. (Please refer to [Exhibit H](#) for Mr. Sprenger's handout.)

Mr. Sprenger outlined the criteria for the only scholarship available to a veteran at UNR, which is very specific and excludes many members of the National Guard and other reservists. He proposed that the Subcommittee include in its recommendations that veteran reservists receive the tuition and fee waivers currently offered to students in the Nevada National Guard units. In addition, he requested that Nevada create and follow the same waivers offered to veterans in California, including:

1. Waiving the nonresident college fee for dependents of veterans, so they may attend at the same cost as residents; and
2. Waiving nonresident college fees for dependents of veterans who do not otherwise qualify for the benefits.

Mr. Sprenger explained the Boots to Books program currently in place at the Citrus College, Glendora, California. He encouraged the Subcommittee to support creating such a program at UNR using the Citrus College program as a model. Mr. Sprenger added that the program provides a four-credit course for the veteran student, with a curriculum designed to assist in making a positive transition from the military to civilian life. In addition, Mr. Sprenger recognized the need for combat veterans to have access to a counseling program that is associated with the school to assess current medical and psychological status. He said it is common for veterans to have trust issues and often do not discuss combat situations with others, and he added that none of the counselors at UNR are veterans.

Concluding, Mr. Sprenger expressed concern with Nevada's approving authority of a veteran's request to complete a dual major. He said that veterans would benefit from the eligibility decision for dual majors being made at the university level, and noted that veterans with dual degrees have increased success with employment. Mr. Sprenger outlined the problems encountered by his office, as the certifying official, and the unnecessary difficulties the process causes for the student veteran; if the dual major request is denied, the decision is deemed to be final with no avenue for appeal. According to Mr. Sprenger, the approving authority often requires an inordinate amount of justification for approval from the student and from his office as the certifying official. He explained that he has experienced arbitrary justification requirements that when questioned, the response is an ambiguous quote of federal regulations. Mr. Sprenger said he has challenged these denial rulings and has never received a substantiated reason for either the denials, or the requests for the inordinate

amounts of curriculum context. He requested that the Subcommittee investigate the situation further, since he has researched the regulations and has not found a basis that one person, acting as the approving authority, has that specific power. Mr. Sprenger requested that NSHE be given the specific authority to determine a veteran's dual major request.

- Chairwoman McClain requested staff to research the approving authority of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education, *Nevada Revised Statutes* (NRS) 394.383 "Commission: Creation; number, appointment and compensation of members; expenses of employees" as explained by Mr. Sprenger.

In addition, Chairwoman McClain suggested that the Subcommittee send a letter of support regarding the Boots to Books program encouraging the NSHE to implement a similar curriculum modeled after the Citrus College program.

- Assemblyman Settlemeyer and Mr. Sprenger discussed the U.S. Army's pilot program allowing GI education benefit credits to be transferred to the spouse or dependents of a veteran and ways to expand on the concept.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVE DUTY CONCERNS IN NEVADA

(As directed by Chairwoman McClain, this agenda item was taken out of order.)

Naval Air Station Fallon

- Michael H. Glaser, Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, Fallon, discussed the duties of the Fallon base, which is termed as one of the "crown jewels" of the U.S. Naval aviation duty stations. Captain Glaser explained the commands focus on the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center, and provide graduate-level training to every air carrier's crew prior to deployment. He estimated that between 50 to 60,000 Marine personnel use the facilities annually, and the permanent workforce is approximately 3,000 employees, which include active duty military, Navy civil employees, and contract employees. Captain Glaser said that in addition to services for active duty personnel, veteran services are also offered at the base, including: (1) the only commissary exchange in northern Nevada; (2) the branch medical clinic, providing a tri-care service office; (3) medical prescriptions in stock; and (4) moral, welfare, and recreation facilities.

Captain Glaser addressed active duty concerns and the Navy's recent policy change for geographic stability. Currently, the Navy is attempting to maintain areas of large fleet concentration and noted the Naval Air Station Fallon is considered a remote duty station, which accounts for the unintended consequence of a large percentage of geographic bachelors. He noted the two common reasons given by the 5 to 10 percent of the naval personnel who do not move their families to Fallon is a lack of job opportunities for spouses and the perception of low quality schools in Nevada.

In response to a comment from Assemblyman Hogan, Captain Glaser outlined the Navy's mandated transition assistance program (TAP). The classes cover various employment opportunities and offer State representatives the chance to recruit persons leaving the military to relocate to Nevada.

Active Duty and National Guard Family Assistance

- Major Trish Svare, State Family Program Director, Family Programs, Nevada National Guard, Reno, provided an overview of the duties of the ten civilian contractors associated with the resource center. Major Svare said there are five resource contractors located in either the northern or southern portions of the State.

She testified that services are provided to any military member, and since there is no active duty U.S. Army post in the State, many services are provided to families of service members currently deployed. The office staff goes out of their way to provide help or any needed service, such as teaching a spouse to balance the family checkbook to finding free hay for a soldier's livestock. Major Svare explained her budget only covers salaries and the program is otherwise dependent on the volunteer resources such as the American Legion.

Major Savre described the resource program called Military One, which provides counseling, mental health services, and financial assistance. Any military service personnel, dependent, or veteran may access the services through the 800 telephone number.

OVERVIEW OF VETERAN INTEREST GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN NEVADA

(As directed by Chairwoman McClain, this agenda item was taken out of order.)

Nevada Veterans' Services Commission

- Senator Terry Care, Clark County Senatorial District No. 7, commented on the structure of the Nevada Veterans' Services Commission and detailed its duties and appointments. Senator Care explained that the Commission was created under NRS 417.150 "Creation; number of members; appointment, removal and terms of members; vacancies." The Commission is required to meet a minimum of four times a year and no more than eight times, at various locations throughout the State. He outlined its primary function, which is to advise the Executive Director and the Deputy Director of the NOVS and to formulate recommendations to the Governor and Legislature as to veterans' benefits and issues.

Senator Care reported that testimony is received from members of Nevada's Congressional Delegation, the public, and members of various veteran organizations.

He added that the majority of the Commission's efforts are spent in preparation for the upcoming legislative session and that the Commission requests veterans' organizations to develop a legislative agenda.

Enlisted Association for the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)

- John V. Hefner, Chairman, Legislative Committee, Nevada Chapter, EANGUS, explained his full time work with the operation center and familiarized the Subcommittee with the organization. Mr. Hefner reported that the group is the largest enlisted reserve component, which was formed in 1970, and now represents over 414,000 enlisted National Guardsmen nationwide; in Nevada there are currently 3,700 Army and Air Guard members. Mr. Hefner provided testimony with the aid of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation available as [Exhibit I](#).

Mr. Hefner testified that EANGUS has supported a number of legislative efforts and has a growing list of successes (see page 6 of [Exhibit I](#)). There is an active EANGUS chapter in every state and noted the Nevada Chapter has a significant list of accomplishments (page 7 of [Exhibit I](#).) Concluding, his remarks focused on the We Care for America Foundation that provides scholarships, an Awards Program, the Veterans Against Drugs Program, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, and emergency grants for financial hardships experienced by the Air National Guard and the Army National Guard members.

- Assemblyman Hogan requested more information on the organization's reintegration program. In response, Mr. Hefner explained that the extended concept is to reach the service member's spouse as an incentive to attend classes with the veteran and facilitate the transition back to civilian and family life. The stipend that is provided is to help defray costs of babysitting, meals, and travel costs.

Membership Organizations

- D. Rodger Waters, Commander, Department of Nevada, American Legion, Las Vegas, spoke on the difficulty of accessing care for veterans in rural communities. Mr. Waters provided a written summary of his comments (please refer to [Exhibit J](#)) and outlined the concerns identified by the American Legion. He stated that many veterans' advocates and organizations have successfully worked to reach rural veterans and help with their medical services and ongoing needs, which may include transition assistance centers, education benefits, help with employment factors, and extended care facilities.

Mr. Waters expounded on the benefits, services, and care at the Nevada State Veterans' Home in Boulder City. He stressed the need for additional funding to build a similar facility in northern Nevada and the concept of providing treatment for the veteran family as a unit. He commented on the plight of homeless veterans and reported that many communities are stepping up to organize clothing and shoe drives, and Mr. Waters encouraged additional community-based support.

- Chairwoman McClain commented that the Nevada State Veterans' Home in Boulder City should be considered the "gold standard" of nursing homes and that all skilled nursing facilities should use it as an example of the model facility.
- Gerry Saich, Commander, Chapter 7, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and a Service Officer for the DAV, described the services offered to homeless veterans at the Reno VA hospital which includes the availability of showers and washers and dryers. Ms. Saich said there is staff at the hospital who coordinate services to the homeless veteran and will assist with any issue or problem if the veteran requests help. The DAV provides referrals to appropriate agencies and assists other veterans' organizations to provide clothing, food, and personal hygiene items.

Ms. Saich outlined the DAV's major project, which is to obtain and maintain the large-sized passenger vans and arrange for the transport of veterans for medical treatments at the Reno facility. The primary fundraiser of the DAV is the Vans for Vets project. Ms. Saich provides outreach services and educational talks to veterans in several senior centers in the outlying rural areas; she also offers presentations on benefits that veterans may not be aware they are entitled to services.

- Michael H. Musgrove, State Adjutant, Department of Nevada, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Elko, provided a brief overview of the VFW, a veteran service organization that was established in 1899. Mr. Musgrove testified that the VFW is the primary support of the National Home for Children, Eaton Rapids, Michigan, which cares for the children of deployed active duty military personnel if family is not able to. The VFW scholarship program has been implemented for service members or those who have been discharged within a three-year period. Mr. Musgrove said that the veteran may transfer the scholarship funds to a dependent if the veteran qualifies.

Mr. Musgrove offered the support of the VFW to the legislative goals of the NOVS, and expounded on the need for funding of the proposed State Nursing Home to be established in Sparks. In addition, he indicated that the growing number of veterans has brought on an increased need for an accredited VSO to be located in Elko. He explained he is also working to have a Veterans Administration Clinic opened to serve clients in Elko and veterans in northeastern Nevada. Mr. Musgrove thanked the DAV representatives for the van that was provided to the Elko area VFW, noting that the nearest VA clinic is located in Salt Lake City, Utah.

OVERVIEW OF ISSUES RELATING TO VETERAN BENEFITS IN NEVADA

Nevada National Guard Transition Assistance

- Carmen Rank, Transition Assistance Advisor, Office of the Military, Carson City, provided details of the assistance and support offered to members of the military and their families. Ms. Rank said her job is to ensure that uniformed personnel understand

the services they are entitled to under the VA's military health system and coordinates the resources.

Ms. Rank provided information on the post-deployment health reassessment which is offered only to military members of the reserve component to identify the health needs of those returning from combat. She suggested the program be enhanced with the involvement of private and State health agencies and added that many of the warfare veterans return with PTSD; therefore, early counseling sessions could prevent the veteran from becoming overwhelmed with life issues. Ms. Rank said counselors encourage veterans to open up and accept treatment before an actual crisis arises. She stated she would like to see Nevada require combat returnees to participate in the health assessments. In addition, Ms. Rank explained that medical records need to be complete and shared among the agencies to help the veterans' transition to civilian life. She suggested a memorandum of understanding be developed between State agencies and Nevada's Office of the Military to assist with the outsourcing of treatment and tracking of records.

Concluding, Ms. Rank addressed the issue of tri-care and explained that soldiers are provided 180 days of medical benefits as if they were still deployed. When the soldiers come home to Nevada's rural areas, there are few medical facilities, and she described a need to develop an effective tri-care program; she outlined the difficulties involved in traveling 50-plus miles for specialized medical treatment.

Active Duty Transition Assistance Program

- Darrol L. Brown, Director, Veterans Employment and Training Service, U.S. Department of Labor, Carson City, outlined the history and specifics of TAP as first associated with larger military bases. Mr. Brown's testimony focused on the following items regarding TAP programs:
 1. The TAP classes are a federally mandated four-part course that consists of counseling prior to separation from the military, employment workshops, VA benefit briefings, and TAP classes specifically designed for disabled veterans;
 2. All TAP instructors are trained facilitators, offering instruction issues such as identifying goals, career decision-making, successful job search strategies, and effective resumes;
 3. Last year 4,100 TAP workshops were conducted at 260 sites in the U.S. and overseas military bases; and
 4. The Nevada TAP and workshop locations include Naval Air Station Fallon; Nellis Air Force Base, Las Vegas; the Air National Guard, Reno; and the National Army Guard, Las Vegas.

Mr. Brown's Microsoft PowerPoint presentation is available as [Exhibit K](#).

Vet Centers for Counseling and Outreach Services

- Scott Drew, Team Leader, Reno Veterans Center, indicated he is also a Readjustment Counseling Therapist at what is termed the Reno Vet Center, which is under the purview of the, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Drew provided an overview of the services offered at the Vet Center and described the types of medical or readjustment problems that veterans or their families commonly struggle with and the troubles associated with working through combat issues. He explained that the Vet Center treats the family unit and provides counseling sessions for problems such as: (1) alcohol or drug assessment and referral; (2) consultation on benefits; (3) bereavement counseling for loss of an active duty family member; or (4) military sexual trauma.

Mr. Drew stated that following the Vietnam War, the VA noticed that veterans were not utilizing the hospitals and wanted to establish a type of storefront clinic atmosphere. After the success of the Veterans Centers, Congress issued a charter in 1979. The Reno Vet Center hired a GWOT outreach coordinator in 2006, who assists with the post-deployment health reassessments in the rural areas, as well as at community functions, at the Reno VA hospital, on community college campuses, and for the NSHE. In addition, Mr. Drew also addressed the issue of reaching veterans in the rural areas and the difficulties associated with providing outreach services. He outlined an outpatient service whereby a psychiatrist in Las Vegas meets with a veteran via videoconference in Winnemucca. The rural outreach services are lacking primarily due to the difficulties of traveling the long distances.

Veterans Medical System

- Alicia M. Adams, R.N., Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Program Manager, VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System, Veterans Health Administration, Reno, testified that the primary function of the seamless transition program is to care for veterans returning from the current war. Ms. Adams aided her testimony with the use of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation ([Exhibit L-1](#)), and she highlighted the following items:
 1. The goal of a seamless transition for veterans returning from combat and identifying illnesses and emotional trauma by ensuring all returning service members receive priority consideration and service;
 2. Benefits available to returning combat veterans has been increased from two years to five years, with dental care going from 90 days to 180 days from separation (please see [Exhibit L-1](#) for a listing of additional benefits);
 3. Initiatives for returning OEF/OIF veterans initiated by the VA;

4. General and injury statistics pertaining to the OEF/OIF veterans; and
5. The importance of the transition program for Nevada and its communities.

Ms. Adams expounded on the need to recruit mental health providers and that the rural areas are critically underserved. She proposed incentives such as financial tuition assistance to encourage people to enter the mental health care fields. Ms. Adams also suggested that funds be expended for continuing education courses for mental health providers especially for cases of PTSD. (Additional handouts provided by Ms. Adams are available as [Exhibit L-2](#).)

- Assemblyman Settlemeyer suggested promoting the concept of offering continuing education classes as double credit courses to rural physicians to ensure that doctors are instructed in treating PTSD. He said this would incur no additional cost to the State and, therefore, would not require a hearing before the Senate Committee on Finance and the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means.

A general discussion ensued pertaining to the effectiveness of outreach programs, counseling veterans and their families, and providing care and counseling prior to a veteran needing help in a time of crisis. Ms. Adams commented that it is common for returning combat veterans to think they can handle problems without help, and they do not seek treatment until problems have become overwhelming and serious.

- Tim Tetz (identified previously on page 2) spoke on the veteran medical facilities in southern Nevada and stated that approximately 40,000 veterans are receiving care through the Southern Nevada Health Care Network. Mr. Tetz explained that there is discussion regarding whether “Category 8” veterans, those who earn over a certain amount and are not currently service-connected, can access the VA medical system. Since the VA implemented a record budget last fiscal year, the number of veterans requesting services would drastically increase. Additionally, the current number of OEF/OIF veterans in southern Nevada number 1,239; the number of female veterans receiving medical care in southern Nevada totals 3,064 patients.

Mr. Tetz conveyed that mental health care providers are a major focus of the VA and that southern Nevada currently has five full time OEF/OIF staff to provide seamless transition coordination. The staff consists of one suicide prevention coordinator, one local recovery coordinator, 21 additional mental health providers, and other mid-level care providers. He informed the Subcommittee that the new medical center complex will be located on a 151-acre site, will encompass a 900,000 square foot facility, and will accommodate 90-inpatient beds, including a 120-bed extended skilled care nursing home unit. Additionally, the VA will open four leased community-based clinics throughout the Las Vegas Valley.

Guest House for Families of Hospitalized Veterans and Veterans Receiving Outpatient Treatment

- Noreen E. Leary, Executive Director, Veterans Guest House, Inc., Reno, provided an outline of the services provided by the Reno facility, how the Guest House began, and the growth that has taken place since its inception in 1994. Ms. Leary credited the efforts of Chuck Fulkerson and Richard Rhyno with starting the facility after realizing that out-of-town veterans and their families were sleeping in automobiles while receiving treatment at the Reno VA hospital. In 2004, a 4,700 square foot facility was constructed, which was totally financed from community and private donations. She added that the Veterans Guest House is the only facility of its kind, and during the last year the guests numbered over 3,000 veterans and their families. Ms. Leary's handout is available as [Exhibit M](#).

Education Benefits and Programs for Veterans

- Robert Hernandez, Director, Veterans Upward Bound Program, Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), NSHE, informed the members that the programs are 100 percent federally funded by a grant issued by the U.S. Department of Education. Mr. Hernandez explained that nationwide there are approximately 45 Veterans Upward Bound Programs, that the grants are highly competitive, and that they are primarily associated with universities and colleges. He explained that the programs target a specific veteran population, which includes the veteran with an interest in college who has less than a four-year degree, a need for educational assistance, a low income status, and is a member of a first generation college family.

Mr. Hernandez noted that the program includes a large amount of public outreach services to generate veterans' participation. He outlined the services, which include: (1) academic preparation classes, particularly in English and mathematics; (2) career planning; (3) assistance with college enrollment forms; (4) college study and survival skills; and (5) supporting the veterans with transitioning so they may attend any college, even out-of-state schools, although the majority enrolls at the TMCC. He added that most importantly, they outline a written plan for the veteran to follow and offer support to assist them in achieving their goals. Mr. Hernandez added that there has been no turnover of the professional staff members of the Program in over 16 years. The counselors develop relationships that offer the veterans continuity in a very individualized and personalized interaction. Concluding, Mr. Hernandez said that the courses are offered to the veteran at no charge and noted that the veteran population is changing to a much younger populace. He also reported that counselors have tracked the successes of every veteran student involved in the program since it began in 1989.

In response to Assemblyman Hogan, Mr. Hernandez explained that to implement an Upward Bound Program in southern Nevada, it is imperative to recruit an effective grant writer. Secondly, responding to the number of veterans served annually, Mr. Hernandez stated that he has received no increase in federal funding in five years. The program must

serve 120 veterans a year, but in actuality they advise a higher number, since no veteran is turned away. He added that some returnees just need information and commented it is difficult to convince a returning GWOT veteran that they need to spend the time preparing for college. Many veterans are in a rush to start receiving their benefits. He added that the Reno Veterans Upward Bound Program is considered to be a model and best practice program and noted he has receive calls and visits to implement programs in other areas. (Mr. Hernandez handouts are available as [Exhibit N.](#))

Compensation and Pension Benefits for Veterans

- Donald D. Iddings, Director, VA Regional Office, Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Reno, testified that the office handles the benefit affairs for all veterans in the State, and four counties in northern California. Mr. Iddings provided statistics relating to compensation and pension benefits with the aid of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation ([Exhibit O](#)) and an explanation of each type of claim including:

1. Disability compensation;
2. Dependency and indemnity compensation;
3. Individual unemployability; and
4. The income-based program known as the Pension (disability and death).

Mr. Iddings described how VA benefits continue for long periods of time and stated that currently the VA is providing payments to three children of Civil War dependents and over 200 widows and children of the Spanish American War veterans. He added that the last Union Civil War widow died in 2003, and the last Confederate Civil War widow died in 2005. Additional items of interest outlined by Mr. Iddings include the following:

1. Nevada has a relatively low percentage of veterans receiving benefits; however, nationwide the VA disburses nearly \$300 million annually;
2. A chart that illustrates the Age/Disability Percentage of Veterans receiving compensation (please refer to page 12 of [Exhibit O](#));
3. Nationwide statistics demonstrate that there are a total of 24 million veterans, and based on eligibility criteria there is a potential for 60 percent of the nation's population being entitled to some type of VA benefit; and
4. There are several outreach programs held throughout the State, including monthly TAP and disability transition assistance programs (DTAP) briefings held at the Naval Air Station Fallon, and Nellis Air Force Base; and additionally, the

VA participates in “homeless stand downs” in Reno and Las Vegas to provide personal hygiene, medical services, and counseling.

Concluding, Mr. Iddings stressed that the returning wounded GWOT veterans differ from veterans of previous conflicts, in that the soldiers are surviving horrific injuries and coming home with much worse, life-altering injuries that makes returning to an independent civilian life difficult. Many veterans suffer from severe TBI and PTSD and must relearn how to function within the realm of their disabilities; disabled veterans benefit from the topics specific to their restrictions from attending the DTAP courses.

Veterans Nursing Home Program

- Gary Bermeosolo, Administrator, Nevada State Veterans Home, Boulder City, reported that on July 4, 1864, the first veteran’s home was opened in Minnesota to care for soldiers of the Civil War. In 1888, the federal government established the first program to provide financial assistance to states to help care for veterans; the initial amount was \$100 per year per veteran. Mr. Bermeosolo stated there are currently 135 veterans’ homes nationwide, and he outlined the existing programs in Nevada that the VA participates in which are grant and aide programs: (1) the State Home Construction Grant Program; and (2) the State Home Per Diem Program.

Mr. Bermeosolo provided a written copy of his testimony, available as [Exhibit P](#).

PREVIEW OF FUTURE PLANS FOR NEVADA’S OFFICE OF VETERANS’ SERVICES

- Mr. Tetz (identified previously on page 2) offered a summary of ideal models of other veterans’ homes, such as the residence-type facility in Phoenix, Arizona. These ideal veterans’ homes are based on the concept of the “greenhouse philosophy” and are the vision for the veterans’ home proposed in northern Nevada. The Phoenix facility is a ten-bedroom and ten-bath residence with communal eating areas and access to the kitchen, which is available for residents to use at anytime. The other nine homes in the complex provide housing for 90 residents. Mr. Tetz explained that the entire area is respected as a private home would be and does not resemble a hospital environment.

Mr. Tetz provided an additional Microsoft PowerPoint presentation ([Exhibit Q](#)) and outlined the list of future projects proposed by the NOVS, and the agency’s plan to make the northern Nevada home a reality. He referred to the budget (outlined on page 4 of [Exhibit Q](#)) and stated that he has developed a plan enabling the agency to continue to operate beneath the market average and pay down its own bond, making it possible for the NOVS to fund the home. Mr. Tetz stated that the plan should not cost the State any additional revenue than currently is being spent on veterans.

He noted another goal is to supplement the services offered to GWOT veterans, and stated he considers the group to be an underserved faction of Nevada’s veterans.

Mr. Tetz announced the upcoming GWOT Veteran Summit, to be held in Reno on September 13, 2008.

Mr. Tetz was proud to report that during the previous budget cycle, the NOVS has reverted 68 percent of the State General Fund revenue allocated for the State Veterans' Home. He said the agency has developed mechanisms to enable it to eliminate its dependence on the State General Fund revenue entirely, and will have the ability to self-manage all veteran programs. (A copy of Mr. Tetz's entire presentation is available as [Exhibit Q](#).)

REVIEW OF VETERANS LEGISLATIVE SYMPOSIUM

- Mr. Tetz (identified previously on page 2) provided a briefing on the proposals and items discussed during the recent 2008 Nevada Veterans Legislative Symposium. He provided a condensed version of the legislative successes during the 2007 Legislative Session and listed the incomplete goals of the NOVS. Mr. Tetz reported that approximately 40 veterans' advocates attended the symposium and identified 37 topics of interest. He highlighted the administrative and legislative resolutions to various problems discussed during the conference. (Mr. Tetz's Microsoft PowerPoint presentation is available as [Exhibit R](#).)

In addition, Mr. Tetz briefly mentioned a few of the items that were discussed during the symposium, and noted the growing concern regarding the ongoing increase in the number of unemployable veterans. He explained the military's Gold Star, which is awarded to a dependent of a veteran who died serving our country. He also noted there is an increase in the popularity of the Gold Star License Plate in Nevada, with the focus on GWOT families. Mr. Tetz outlined other miscellaneous veteran issues and the items that were determined as unfeasible at the present time.

- Assemblyman Settlemeyer requested that Mr. Tetz explain the process of changing a service member's status from missing in action (MIA), to either prisoner of war (POW), or killed in action. Mr. Tetz indicated that in the past each branch of the armed services would take care to ensure that their own military personnel had the correct determination. He concluded by stating that the consolidated MIA/POW Center, located in Hawaii, is charged with determining and changing the status of a service member.

DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE BILL DRAFT REQUESTS RELATING TO VETERANS

- Chairwoman McClain reminded the members and all interested parties of the May 19, 2008, deadline to submit recommendations for the upcoming work session.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Kathy Agee, Deputy Director, Procurement Outreach Program, Division of Economic Development, Nevada's Commission on Economic Development, Carson City, explained the Program is funded by the U.S. Department of Defense and was started in 1986 to assist Nevada companies in conducting business with federal, State, and local governmental agencies. Ms. Agee described the Memorandum of Understanding, an agreement between the Nevada agency and the Center for Veterans' Enterprise, which is under the purview of the VA, located in Washington, D.C. She indicated that the passage of Public Law 109-461 provided that special consideration be given to veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses from the VA, when those businesses owners enter into public contracts. (Ms. Agee's handouts are available as [Exhibit S](#).)

Ms. Agee requested that legislation be considered to provide a preference status or set-aside opportunities for Nevada's veteran-owned businesses, and for service-disabled veterans who own businesses when competing for State, local government, or school district contracts for products or services. Further, she commented that implementing preference procedures would serve to help the small businesses compete against large franchise stores.

In response to an inquiry from Assemblyman Hogan, Ms. Agee stated that the State of Nevada has no preference or set-aside procedures for any socio-economic group, such as women-owned small business.

- Robert T. Hogan, Program Director, Nevada Community Enrichment Program, Las Vegas, explained the agency is a brain injury rehabilitation program, partially funded from State revenue. Mr. Hogan reported that many of their clients are returning veterans, and he has worked to establish services with the VA medical facilities for veterans determined to have mild TBI.
- Chairwoman McClain referred to a handout provided by Roy L. Brown, Veterans Coordinator, Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation, ([Exhibit T](#)) to be included as part of the permanent record.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Subcommittee, the meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ricka Benum
Senior Research Secretary

Amber J. Joiner
Senior Research Analyst

APPROVED BY:

Assemblywoman Kathy McClain, Chair

Date: _____

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Exhibit A is the “Meeting Notice and Agenda” provided by Amber J. Joiner, Senior Research Analyst, Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB).

Exhibit B is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “Nevada Office of Veteran Services Overview and Strategic Plan,” provided by Tim Tetz, Executive Director, Office of Veterans’ Services (NOVS), Carson City, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit C is the prepared testimony of Chuck Fulkerson, Veterans Advocate, Reno, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit D is a handout titled “Community Based Outreach Clinic for Homeless Veterans CBOC/MASH,” VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System Las Vegas, Nevada, submitted by Gregory F. Abernathy, M.S.W., Team Leader, Mobile Assistance for Shelter for the Homeless/Community Based Outreach Clinic (CBOC) for Homeless Veterans, United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Las Vegas.

Exhibit E-1 is the prepared comments of Terrance P. Hubert, National Chair, Veterans Incarcerated Committee, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc., Carson City, titled “Justice Involved Veterans,” dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit E-2 is a compilation of documents submitted by Terrance P. Hubert, National Chair, Veterans Incarcerated Committee, Vietnam Veterans of America, which consists of:

1. A statement of Vietnam Veterans of America provided by Thomas J. Berger, Ph.D., Chair, VVA National PTSD and Substance Abuse Committee, and presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health, titled “Substance Abuse/Co-morbid Disorders: Comprehensive solutions to a Complex Problem,” dated March 11, 2008;
2. A statement for the record of Vietnam Veterans of America submitted by Sandra A. Miller, Chair, Homeless Veterans Committee, and presented before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee titled “Ending Homelessness for our Nation’s Veterans,” dated April 9, 2008;
3. An article from *The Buffalo News* titled “Focus: War Veterans—The new Veterans Court helps vets in trouble get back on track,” written by Lou Michel, News Staff Reporter, January 19, 2008; and
4. A document from The Ridge House, Inc., titled “Veterans Specific Services.”

Exhibit F is the prepared testimony of Carole L. Turner, Deputy Director, NOVS, Las Vegas, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit G is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “From Combat to Campus: An Invisible and Emerging Student Population” submitted by Robert Ackerman, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Higher Education, College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada System Higher Education (NSHE).

Exhibit H is a series of handouts provided by the Veterans Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, submitted by Johann Sprenger, Coordinator of Veterans Services and Admissions, Department of Admissions and Records, UNR, NSHE, including:

1. A Veterans Administration Education Service—September 2006 document titled “Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) - Chapter 1607”;
2. A Veterans Administration Education Service—September 2006 document titled “Montgomery GI Bill - Active Duty - Chapter 30”;
3. A Veterans Administration Education Service—September 2006 document titled “Post-Vietnam Veterans’ Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) - Chapter 32”;
4. A Veterans Administration Education Service—September 2006 document titled “Survivors’ & Dependents’ Educational Assistance - Chapter 35”; and
5. A Veterans Administration Education Service—September 2006 document titled “Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve - Chapter 106.”

Exhibit I is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States Nevada Chapter ‘EANGUS 101,’” submitted by John V. Hefner, Chairman, Legislative Committee, Nevada Chapter, EANGUS, Carson City.

Exhibit J is a handout from the American Legion Department of Nevada, titled “Views and Estimates,” which contains the prepared testimony of D. Rodger Waters, Commander, Department of Nevada American Legion, Las Vegas, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit K is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshop Briefing” submitted by Darrol L. Brown, Director, Veterans Employment and Training Service, U.S. Department of Labor, Carson City.

Exhibit L-1 is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “Seamless Transition Program OEF/OIF Program (Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom)” presented by Alicia M. Adams, R.N., Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Program Manager, VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System, Veterans Health Administration, Reno.

Exhibit L-2 are handouts provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs submitted by Alicia M. Adams, R.N., Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Program Manager, VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System, Veterans Health Administration, Reno, which include:

1. A pamphlet titled “Strategic Goals,” dated February 2008; and
2. A pamphlet titled “Seamless Transition Program.”

Exhibit M is a document titled “Veterans Guest House 2008 Annual Campaign” provided by Noreen E. Leary, Executive Director, Veterans Guest House, Reno.

Exhibit N is information provided by Robert Hernandez, Director, Veterans Upward Bound Program, Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), NSHE, which includes:

1. A brochure titled “TMCC Veterans Upward Bound—A college preparation program for educational success”; and
2. A handout titled “TMCC Veterans Upward Bound—Veterans Upward Bound Program Changes Lives.”

Exhibit O is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “Department of Veterans Affairs Benefit Briefing” presented by Donald D. Iddings, Director, VA Regional Office, Veterans Benefits Administration, Reno, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit P is the prepared testimony of Gary Bermeosolo, Administrator, Nevada State Veterans Home, Boulder City, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit Q is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “Nevada Office of Veterans Services 2008 & Beyond” presented by Tim Tetz, Executive Director, NOVS, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit R is a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation titled “A Summary of the 2008 Nevada Veteran Legislative Symposium” presented by Tim Tetz, Executive Director, NOVS, dated May 8, 2008.

Exhibit S is a brochure prepared by the Nevada Procurement Outreach Program, titled “Connecting Nevada Companies,” submitted by Kathy Agee, Deputy Director, Procurement Outreach Program, Division of Economic Development, Nevada’s Commission on Economic Development, Carson City.

Exhibit T is a pamphlet titled “Veterans’ Employment Services” prepared by the Employment Security Division, State of Nevada Veterans Employment Services, Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation submitted by Roy L. Brown, Veterans’ Coordinator, DETR, Las Vegas.

This set of “Summary Minutes and Action Report” is supplied as an informational service. Exhibits in electronic format may not be complete. Copies of the complete exhibits, other materials distributed at the meeting, and the audio record are on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, Carson City, Nevada. You may contact the Library online at www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/feedbackmail.cfm or telephone: 775/684-6827.