

# IDAHO VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

January 15, 20009

Pursuant to agreement, a meeting of the Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held in the conference room at the Idaho State Veterans Home – Boise, Thursday, October 9, 2008, for the purpose of reviewing program reports and other items of business.

**PRESENT:** Commissioner, Donald Riegel, Chairman  
Commissioner Art Gimpel  
Commissioner Mel Napier  
David Brasuell, Administrator, IDVS  
Susan Lowman-Thomas, Human Resource Officer, IDVS  
Debbie Spence, Financial Manager, IDVS  
Jim Adams, Administrative Support Manager, IDVS  
James Roberts, Administrator, IDVH – Boise  
Sarah Yoder, Administrative Support Manager, IDVH-Boise  
Brent Schneider, Administrator, IDVH-Pocatello  
Tom Ressler, Supervisor, Office of Veterans Advocacy  
Zach Rodriguez, Director, Veterans Cemetery  
Tammy Hebdon, Administrative Assistant 2, IDVS

Chairman Don Riegel called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

## **INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS:**

Frank Richardson, American Legion Post 2, Past IVAL Commissioner

## **APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 2008 IDAHO VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES:**

Commissioner Napier made a motion to dispense with the reading of the minutes. Commissioner Spurny seconded; vote was taken and motion passed.

## **IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES HUMAN RESOURCES:**

Susan Lowman-Thomas, Senior Human Resource Specialist for the Division provided the Commission with the Human Resources update.

As a way to show the Commission what an actual payroll consists of, Susan provided information on the cost breakdown and what a normal, biweekly payroll costs the Division.

- Payroll Total: \$514,245
- Employer Costs: \$94,452
  - (workers comp, unemployment, retirement, DHR fees)
- Employee Deductions: \$121,722
  - (retirement and miscellaneous deductions)

With the current employment market issues, Susan showed the Commission how IDVS compares to the open market. The first, and major, area of concern is pay. Susan graphically displayed the open market

and the state pay rates which provided a shocking visual of how far below the market rate our current employees are. It is the goal of Governor Otter to get all employees in State government closer in pay to those in private market, but with the budget issues, this problem will not be resolved any time soon.

The second area of concern is turnover. Surprisingly, the economic downfall has actually helped in this area. The graph provided by Susan displayed that from 2007 to 2008 turnover has actually decreased. It appears that with the poor economy people who have safe, secure feeling jobs are holding on to them.

Susan also discussed the issue of Workers Compensation and how it works. Currently the Division pays about \$331,556 in yearly premiums. In 2008 about \$140,905 of that was disbursed out in payment of claims. Part of the balance comes back to the Division in a rebate, but not all of it. The Division as a whole has seen a decrease in losses, which results in the premiums decreasing. The area of concern is Open Claims, of which there are currently nine. These are the ones that are on-going and costly. It is very important that all employees adhere to the Divisions safety policy and that managers thoroughly investigate any accidents to identify how the accident happened and what can be done differently to avoid this in the future.

On-going training is an important, and will continue this fiscal year. However, due to the budget constraints it will have to be streamlined and scaled back, and the staff will have to come up with some innovative training options (i.e. webinars, conference meetings).

Succession Planning will be an area of importance this upcoming year. Due to the upcoming retirement of key personnel, Susan reported that a good succession plan and training will be critical so as to assure operations continue without problems. Susan will begin working with each Home, OVA, the Cemetery and Division to assure this is being developed.

## **IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES FINANCIAL REPORT:**

Debbie Spence, Financial Manager began her report to the Commission with a couple of “heads up” comments.

- Per Diem costs per home need to be monitored. Cost per day is \$256.35 average. Pocatello is higher due to census
- Occupancy Rate for nursing average is 83.7%. Our goal is to always be above state level, which we are, but we are dropping. Need to keep occupancy up.

Debbie then addressed the 2009 Governor mandated hold back concerns. The Division has had to cut the General Funds budget by 4%, or \$72,100. Debbie reminded the Commission that these cuts are not one time, they are permanent and this money WILL NOT be automatically returned next budget year.

The 4% came from:

- \$28,400 Personnel – through salary savings
- \$30,000 operating, which should be okay due to lower census
- \$13,700 Trustee & Benefit;
  - \$700 left over from the 2008 county service officer training
  - \$13,000 from veterans wheelchair transportation program

As a result of these cuts, the FY09 appropriation is now \$35,428,900, of which \$1,731,700 (5%) is General Funds

Commissioner Spurny wanted to know if there were any federal funds available to help replenish the wheelchair transportation program. Dave commented that he was not aware of any, and Jim added that the Division has asked the various veterans organizations for donations to IVAL to support this program.

FY09 will be a tough, tight year, and Debbie reminded everyone to tighten their spending and to make sure the items are really something our veterans need before purchasing.

The FY10 Governors Recommendation is for \$35,830,000 and is comprised of:

- 4% (\$68,700) general fund reduction to the Division base budget (this is in addition to the FY09 hold backs which were already implemented)
- \$397,600 inflation for utilities, medical and contracts
- \$329,400 for replacement items (i.e. vehicle, computer equipment, telephone system and miscellaneous facility necessities). There are NO general funds for this category.
- \$10,500,000 for the additional cemetery
- \$80,900 for new capital outlay (dietary, therapy, lawn maintenance, computer equipment). Again, NO general funds.
- \$184,100 for the Veterans Education Program, which is being transferred to IDVS from Professional-Technical Education.
- General funds will be in Trustee & Benefits only (Service Officers School, Emergency Grants, wheelchair transportation program) and some (very little) personnel.
- With the reduction in General Funds, it will be imperative that the Homes generate enough revenue to cover their expenses.

Debbie added that the Cemetery will be increasing the fees for interment in a vault in the upper area from \$300 to \$500, which will help recoup some of the money lost in the past. Currently the cost to inter at the Veterans Cemetery is about 1/3 the cost of other cemeteries in the state, so the increase should not cause a problem.

Frank Richardson wanted to know if the budgets cuts affected the funding in the Emergency Grant program. Debbie assured Frank that this fund was not touched and it remains at \$30,000. Tom Ressler added that the fund is active and about half of the funds have been disbursed so far this year, which is right on track.

## **QUESTION/ANSWER PERIOD ON THE VETERANS HOMES, THE OFFICE OF VETERANS ADVOCACY AND THE STATE VETERANS CEMETERY FY07 THIRD QUARTER OPERATIONS REPORTS:**

### **POCATELLO VETERANS HOME OPERATIONS REPORT:**

Brent Schneider began his report to the Commission by pointing out that the VA ran out of funds prior to issuing payments for November services, but as is indicated in the December numbers, this payment, as well as the December payment, were both received in December.

Occupancy continues to be an issue for the Pocatello home. Census, which dictates how much the Home can spend, is increasing, but slowly. Brent is aware of this and is keeping a close watch on the numbers and is trying to increase occupancy even more. To this end, Brent continues to meet with community groups (i.e. American Legion, Kiwanis, veterans groups, etc.) as well as with local doctor's offices and hospitals. Additionally, the Pocatello Home recently changed Medical Directors and their new doctor, Dr. J. Warren Willey, is younger, makes better decision, and is beginning to bring in some of his patient.

The location for submitting pharmacy billings changed recently, and the Pocatello Home was unaware of this change. Consequently, the November and December bills had to be resubmitted and payment has not yet been received. The issue has been resolved, and the money is coming. Brent also reported that

the PPD for pharmacy has finally begun to drop, and is now down to \$6 - \$7ppd. This is a welcome change.

Nursing hours have also been a bit high this past quarter, but Brent assured the Commission that he is watching this closely and will continue to do so. The months of November and December required some use of agency hours, but the problem dictating that use have been resolved and the usage should drop. Brent pointed out that service to the residents is the first priority, so by watching hours he can assure the residents are getting the level of service they deserve, without having an excess of hours.

As in past reports, the Activities/Volunteer Services continues to be a very active, supportive component of the Pocatello Home. Over the past quarter, the POW/MIA group head a rally with a public BBQ that resulted in a \$350.00 donation; Col. Hollingsworth spoke at the Veterans Day Ceremony; the American Legion Auxiliary hosted their annual Gift Table where the residents were able to shop for gifts for their family members; the Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance was held; American Legion Food Convoy delivered much appreciated food and monetary donations – which help to make special holiday meals a reality; and the Elks held a dinner and made a monetary donation to the Home. Brent attended a local Chamber of Commerce meeting where Donna Jones, State Controller, spoke about the endowment funds and presented a “ceremonial” check to Brent for the Home (this money is actually for the entire IDVS, and the money is received throughout the year, not in one lump sum as the check indicated), which resulted in more exposure and publicity for the Pocatello Home. Sugar City was honored as Capital of the Day, and Brent gave an informative report on what IDVS does, as well as the services provide at the Pocatello Home, which provided another avenue for educating the public about the Home.

Tom Ressler wanted to know how Brent was using the VA Work Study students he has. Brent reported that they do a bit of everything—activities, running canteen, if certified/licensed can help with C.N.A. work, or wherever else they may be needed to assist.

### **LEWISTON VETERANS HOME OPERATIONS REPORT:**

Although Clark was unable to attend the Commission meeting in person, he called in and gave his quarterly report to the Commission.

Clark and the Lewiston Home continue to have few issues with their census, which contributes to the overall positive financial position they are in. Revenues continue to be received on a regular basis, with very few problems, and thanks to watchful staff, expenses are being kept down as much as possible.

The only area that Clark reports to be having some issues is in the receipting of payments from pharmacy. There appears to be a problem with the Spokane VA system, but Clark reported that he continues to work with Spokane VA and they are all trying to get the issues resolved.

Staffing at the Lewiston Home is holding steady, with very little turn-over. This trend is expected to continue, and Clark and his staff continue the work necessary for that to happen. There has been a small increase in absence due to illness (flu, pneumonia, etc), but so far that has been fairly minor.

The Lewiston Home was also very busy with holiday activities over the past quarter, and was fortunate to receive a \$5000.00 Christmas tree (Festival of Trees) donation and accompanying items that can be reused for years to come.

An unfortunate accident took place in October that involved one of the Home's vehicles. No one was hurt, but the vehicle, which is now out of service. Jim Adams reported that the check has been received from the insurance company, and the vehicle will get repaired and back in use.

## **BOISE VETERANS HOME OPERATIONS REPORT:**

Sarah Yoder, Administrative Support Manager for the Boise Home began the report by briefing the Commission on the on-going issue of payment receipting from the pharmacy providers. Recently, Sarah spent time training with the providing company and discovered a problem in the initial set-up that is contributing to the Home not receiving payment. This problem has been corrected, but all pharmacy claims must now be resubmitted for payment. The Home will begin with the current residents claims, and then will go back and resubmit claims from former residents. As this is for Pharmacy D billings, it is very labor intensive and will take some time, but all claims will be resubmitted so payments can be received. In addition, the Boise Home currently has 35 residents without a Part D provider, so staff will be working to get providers established and billed.

It has also been discovered that pharmacies in other facilities (not just State) do their own billing, which is not currently the situation in Boise. PharmaServe, the pharmacy program, was never intended to be a facility program—it was designed so that the person filling the prescription would also be the person billing. Boise will review the pharmacy contract when it renews and make the necessary adjustments.

Census at the Boise Home has seen a bit of a decline over the past quarter. In December alone, nine residents passed away, which is a contributing factor. Another component of the decline is the ongoing construction projects and the need to keep rooms open in order to move residents while their rooms are worked on. The Boise Home is working on a marketing strategy which they will market in an effort to bring their census back up to where it has been.

James Roberts, Boise Home Administrator began his portion of the Boise report by addressing the mandated budget hold backs, and the potential it has to impact the Medicaid reimbursement that is received by our residents. As a way to work around this, a recent IHCA workshop proposed that providers (including IDVS) be required to pay an assessment back to the state—in the neighborhood of \$3million over the 82 homes based on beds, which would go into the state fund. As a result, approximately \$11 million of federal funds would come back to the homes. Debbie Spence commented that the IDVS consultant advised that in order for this to work, the Division would have to go back to the legislature and ask for general funds to pay the assessment, which would most likely not happen, so the consultant suggested the Homes ask to be exempt from the assessment. It was asked if the Boise Home would still be able to share in the \$11 million as it is part of the Medicaid reimbursement if they were exempted, and James said yes.

The Administrators In Training (AIT) Program has sparked interest in two new candidates. Customarily, only one is admitted at a time, but because both of these candidates are strong and outstanding, James has decided to admit both. The first candidate is Tracy Schaner, who is currently the HR Specialist at the Boise Home and the second is Oni Kinberg, who is a Social Work at the Home. Both candidates have been approved by the Board of Examiners, and will provide excellent backup should something happen to the Home Administrator.

As has been anticipated, there are several DPW projects currently underway at the Boise Home. The projects include installation of the Arctic Doors in the front, installation of a commercial dishwasher, new cooler, new freezer, replaced flooring on 2W & 1W, new nurses station on 2W & 1W, new updated coffee bar in the dining room, new carpet on 2E, and a fire panel upgrade to help identify problems immediately.

Over the past few months the Boise Home has been subject to six (6) surveys; two (2) were complaint surveys (1 employee, 1 resident) and both were unsubstantiated; one (1) Life Safety survey; VA annual

survey; an L&C annual survey; and one Mock Survey in the Dietary area, which was an honor to have had, as it is used by the surveyor's to train their employees on how to perform a survey.

In anticipation of the upcoming Analog/Digital TV transfer the Boise Home will be installing two antennas necessary to receive analog signals, and is working through IVAL to obtain conversion systems for those residents who need them. The Boise Home WILL NOT be covering cable for anyone; if the resident wants cable that is an expense they must cover. Sarah recently did a television story that talked about the need for conversion boxes and accessories at the Boise Home, which has generated an outpour of community support. In addition, the Ada County United Veterans Council donated \$600 to help with the costs. It appears that due to the hard work of everyone, and the early planning, the conversion should happen with little to no problems.

Recently the Boise Home had an opening for a Staff Development Coordinator. Although several outside applications were received, it was decided to promote from within. Knowing what the quality of the employee was, and how well that person worked with staff, with a driving factor in this decision. As a result, Amanda Stewart, a Boise Home nurse, was chosen and promoted to Staff Development Coordinator. Her appointment to this position has been very well received and she is well liked. There is still a need for a Nurse Manager on 2W. This position has been filled a couple of times, but the person has never worked out, consequently it is still open. If you know of anyone who might like to manage a 44 bed unit, please send James the information. Currently a Boise Home employee is filling in, but she does not want the job permanently. This position is very intense and has a lot of responsibility.

Susan Lowman-Thomas commented that the RN Manager salary issue has been recognized by the Governor and the classifications has been moved to a higher pay grade, but this was done without funding, resulting in the Division not being able to pay the higher wage.

Susan also commented that she was very happy to see Tracy and Oni in the AIT program, as this helps with succession planning. These two candidates come with a really good pool of experience to draw upon. James added that another employee, Ann Henderson-Activities, has indicated she would like to participate in the AIT program next year.

Commissioner Riegel thanked both James and Sarah for all of their great work and dedication to the Home and the veterans.

## **IDAHO STATE VETERANS CEMETERY OPERATIONS REPORT:**

Interments at the Veterans Cemetery are on track. Unfortunately, as the census at the Homes decreases, the Cemetery numbers increase. However, having a respectful place to intern loved ones provides a nice end for the family, and allows them to continue working with people they are familiar with and trust. Normally winter months see a decline in services, but not so for December 2008, which saw 13 interments (as compared to December 2007, with three in-ground interments).

Plot allowance reimbursement is still an issue. It seems as though once the billing process is caught up there are several new billings to process and it begins all over. The Cemetery staff is working hard to stay on top and ahead. There is still some questions on the interpretation of when exactly the two year time limit begins and ends, which is affecting some of the billing, but Zach and Jim Adams are working to get this resolved.

Customer Service is a top priority for the Cemetery staff, and that does show. Recently Zach was contacted by Lt.Col Schmidt, who returned to Nampa after retiring. His father, also a veteran, was interred in Alabama, next to a feed lot. Lt. Col Schmidt wanted to move his father to Boise, and Zach

and his staff worked to get that accomplished. As a result of the care given, Lt. Col. Schmidt now has his father close to him, resting in a respectful, peaceful place, and is planning to have both himself and his wife interned in Boise when the time comes. To reinforce this outstanding customer service, Zach is working on getting some training done with his staff and some of the mortuary staff at each facility so that both sides totally understand the paperwork process, thus reducing turnaround time. The Cemetery staff at the cemetery is very conscious of jobs and responsibilities; they constantly teach and learning from each other and cross train. As a result, this outstanding group of employees is able to help and cover each other as necessary.

Commissionaire Napier asked about the status of the Eastern Idaho cemetery. Jim Adams and Dave Brasuell will provide an update in their report. However, Zach did inform the Commission that he received an email asking about some land in the Blackfoot area that supposedly has been given to us. Unfortunately, Zach has no idea what this is about (nor does anyone else) but he is going to explore further and see what he can find out. Jim Adams added that as of today, the Division has not been able to secure any land in Eastern Idaho, but they are working on it.

## **OFFICE OF VETERANS ADVOCACY OPERATIONS REPORT:**

Prior to coming to the Commission meeting, Tom was reviewing his report and thought that it looked like his staff seemed to be working harder. In order to determine if that was so, he pulled up the same report from 2003 and discovered that:

	<u>2003</u>	<u>2008</u>
YTD Office Interviews	18,000	22,000
Phone Calls	9,000	17,000
Staff Training Hours	280	570
VA Hearing	20	46
Mailing had increased over 5000		
Claims filed had more than doubled		
Appeals have increased		
House visits increased due to veterans aging & unable to come to scheduled area visits		

Recently the VA infused \$22million into rural veteran services, which was divided by VIZNS. The VIZN serving Idaho was given about \$1million to buy mobile vans, help outreach clinics, etc. This money will be very useful as the recently opened Caldwell CBOC is already at capacity, and because of the great demand and use, will be moving to a new facility in the next year, and a new mobile unit (van) has been added to the Idaho team.

On Saturday, August 29, 2009, following the annual County Service Officers training, Idaho will host the first Idaho Women's Veterans Conference. The conference will be held at the DoubleTree Inn. Gina Stamper, State Service Officer, is in charge of the conference, which will honor the Idaho Woman Veteran of the Year. Forms for both the conference and nominations have been sent out and are available on the IDVS web page. At the July Commission meeting, Commissioners will determine the winner of the Women's Veteran of the Year Honor. In addition, the French Family from Caldwell, the family of the only Idaho female killed in combat, will be honored.

There are a few VA issues that are worth mentioning:

- Month of Death Checks – these are the checks the widow/er is supposed to get for the month the soldier dies. However, that has not been happening. The courts have said the VA could not deny this benefit as they had passed a law saying they would pay it. Consequently, the VA must now go back and pay everyone that is due the money. Some of this has been paid- without

rhyme or reason or accountability – so it's not clear who is still owed the funds. Anyone who is owed the money must now submit their name and the claim has to be researched.

- Clothing Allowance – the Court Appeals has overturned a court ruling that only allowed veterans with prosthetics to have one clothing allowance per year. The new ruling states that if a veteran has more than one prosthetic he is allowed more than one allowance. As a result, the VA must now go back and reassess the allowances.
- The 1-800-827-1000 line will no longer give the veteran access to the Boise VA office. This number will now connect the veteran with a call center in Phoenix or Salt Lake, and they will not transfer the call into the Boise office. Tom is anticipating a very negative response to this change, Due to the volume of calls, it is not possible for Tom to get an 800 number and be able to adequately staff it. Therefore, he has given his 334-1245 number to the call center to give out..
- VA insurance dividend checks – it's the time of year again when there is talk of a VA insurance dividend check coming to veterans. UNLESS the veteran is a WWII or Korean (the early wars) they are not eligible for this dividend check. Viet Nam veterans DO NOT get this.

The new Boise VA Regional Office is coming along. Current progress shows that the steel framing has gone up, and exterior walls should be going up next month.

Sarah Yoder commented that Rocky Heath, State Service Officer, Lewiston Home, spoke at IHCA in Spokane and did an excellent job.

## **DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES OPERATIONS REPORT:**

### **DAVE BRASUELL, Administrator:**

Dave began by delivering his JFAC Budget Presentation to the Commission. The actual 12 minute presentation will be made in front of JFAC on Friday, January 23, 2009, at 8:00a.m. In years past spectators have been encouraged, but due to very limited space that cannot happen this year. When the legislature moves back to the Capital next year spectators will be welcome.

The ongoing appeal for Mr. Fast, a former Pocatello Home resident, has been resolved. Dave reported that Health & Welfare sided with the Pocatello Home, setting precedence for future issues, and the hearing file will be retained for future reference. Mr. Fast has moved on to another assisted living facility.

Dave announced that the Division has met with the architect for the new Div building. Plans have been submitted, and all of the Division employees have had the opportunity to provide their input and are satisfied with the plans. The target move in date is Christmas 2009. At that time, the Division staff will grow by two. The GI Bill State Approving Agency will actually begin functioning under IDVS in July, but due to space constrains, Phil & Judy will not actually move over until the new building is completed.

The Boise Cemetery Grant close out is in process and should be completed soon. The Eastern Idaho Cemetery is still in the works, and there are currently two potential sites to look at. Dave has put together a guide to explain the cemetery process, and this will be going out to those who want to help with land.

IDVS will be taking over the Memorial Day Veterans Cemetery program effective this year. A planning committee has been formed and it will begin meeting and planning for the upcoming Memorial Day ceremonies. This change is a result of the veterans groups unwillingness to help, and everything being dropped on Zach and the cemetery staff at the last minute. By taking this project over, the Division can assure a respectful, well thought out program will be presented.

Due to the economy, and all the mandated state and federal funding cuts, it is anticipated that surveys may be delay up to 18 months. While waiting, Dave has asked for the consultant to come in and review the Homes and give input on areas of concern. Once this is completed, the Homes will be expected to make the changes and have them completed before the actual survey takes place.

The Division has several reports that are used to provide information to the Governor, legislature and public. Providing this information in a timely manner is essential, therefore it is imperative that all facets of the Division provide their reports as required. Dave informed the Commission that he was worked with Debbie to get a current list of the required reports, and he will be tracking them to make sure all those required are completed. As the reports are tracked, if it appears they are not needed, then Dave will inform everyone and the report will stop.

Dave has received notification that March 17-19, 2009, the Medicaid audit will be conducted. During this time the 2008 Medicaid files will be reviewed. It is important to have everything ready prior to the audit beginning.

As reported last quarter, the implementation of CareTracker, the computerized system that tracks the care each resident receives, is installed and operational all three home. The second phase, ChargeTacker, which tracks all ancillary charges for a resident, went live January 1, 2009, and on February 1, 2009, the Homes will begin using the purchase order process. These programs are already producing reports that show an increase in accuracy of care of residents, as well as supplies being used, which will help to assure the correct items and amounts are billed to each resident.

### **JIM ADAMS, Administrative Support Manager:**

Before Jim Adams continued the Division report, Trent Hanson, IT Manager, provided the Commission with an update on CMP-Consolidated Messaging Program. As Trent explained at the October meeting, this is the email system that the Department of Administration is mandating all agencies use. It was suggested that IDVS should ask for an exception to this policy, as implementation will be extremely difficult due to the various programs currently being used. Per Governor Otter, there will be NO EXCEPTIONS. Dept. of Administration has promised they will help in any way they can. However, a legislative review of this program is planned in the next few months, and it is possible that the entire program may get shut down. Trent will provided another update at the April 2009 Commission meeting.

Jim Adams, Administrative Support Manager, has been very busy preparing for the upcoming Legislative session. On January 27, 2009, Jim will present the IDVS proposed rule changes, which include the following:

- Asking for authority for the IDVS Administrator to hire a hearing officer that would be used in hearings where the Commission does not feel they have adequate knowledge to handle.
- To close the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery at 6pm on any days with firework displays, so as to avoid groups gathering around the flag pole to have a picnic and watch the displays.

- To increase in the wheelchair reimbursement per trip from \$50 to \$100 (\$100 one way, \$200 round)
- To change the dollar reference to plot allowances & internment fees to wording that states “whatever the VA pays”; not a dollar amount specific.
- To be in compliance with 38CFR Sec 39.75 the Division will add the wording that anyone convicted of certain crimes or convicted of leaving the country to avoid prosecution, will be denied burial in the State Veterans Cemetery.

Commission Reigel suggested that since the first rule change also changes the power of the Commissioners when a hearing officer is hired, a motion probably needs to be made to approve that change. Commissioner Napier moved that the Commission authorize the change in the rules to allow the IDVS Administrator to hire a hearing officer when the Commission does not feel they have adequate knowledge to rule on a claim. Commissioner Spurny seconded the motion. The Commissioners voted and the motion passed.

The only piece of legislation being promoted and endorsed by the Division for the 2009 legislative session is for Gold Star License plate, which would allow spouses and parents of soldiers killed in war to obtain the special Gold Star plate without having to pay the special plate fee. Other family members will be allowed to purchase the plates, but they will have to pay the special plate fee. Jim has met with Transportation on this bill and they are in support of it. Opposition to this bill is expected to be minimal, if any.

The Veterans Support Fund check off on the State Tax forms is available. The commercial that Dave made has been distributed to all the television stations in the state, and it has begun airing. Jim asked everyone to please remember to remind and encourage everyone to contribute to this fund.

Jim and Dave have met with the Lottery Director about producing a Veterans scratch tickets and that is in the works. The money generated from the sale of these tickets will be deposited into the Veterans Support Fund as well.

For the past year Jim has been reporting on the rule that was passed in 2006 that address payment of fees to nursing facilities for veterans who have a disability rating of 70%-100%. As he’s reported, this law is being enforced in private facilities, but the VA still refuses to pay state ran Homes for these veterans. This was supposed to have been corrected no later than January 2009, but that still has not happened. Jim has sent an email to the Idaho congressional body, asking them to “jab” the VA and try and get this corrected. Brent Schneider has had to turn some veterans away from the Pocatello Home, where census is an ongoing issue, so this is having a negative impact on the Idaho facilities.

Susan informed the Commission that at the IHCA meeting she attended yesterday, a representative from the American Health Care Association reported on a change in the health care market in Oregon. In the past, 70% of care was being provided by facilities; now that number is down to 30%. Susan suggested that the Division keep an eye on this and start planning accordingly. It appears that Assisted Living facilities are taking over the market, and long-term care facilities are really being built as short term care/transitional care, not the traditional long-term. IDVS may need to start looking at respite and short term care options.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

There was no Old Business to discuss.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

Tom Ressler wanted to know if there was a united message that those attending the Legislative Reception needed to be conveying to the legislators. Commissioner Riegel and Dave Brasuell both responded that there really aren't any issues this year, but that the message needed to be one of thankfulness for the support the legislators give the veterans, and for that to continue.

In closing, Dave reminded everyone that the next 18 months or so are going to be tight, so everyone needs to be consolidating and streamlining.

The next Commission meeting will be held April 8, 2009.

As there was no further business, Commissioner Napier moved that the meeting be adjourned; Commissioner Spurny seconded the motion; all agreed.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

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Don Riegel, Chairman

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David Brasuell, Executive Secretary