

Approved: Feb. 9, 2011

Date

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY AND HOMELAND
SECURITY

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mario Goico, at 9:00 a.m. on January 25, 2011, in Room 546-S of the Capitol.

All members were present.

Committee Staff Present:

Julian Efir, Legislative Research
Dennis Hodgins, Legislative Research
Doug Taylor, Revisor
Ann Deitcher, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the Committee:

Brigadier General Lee Tafanelli, Kansas Adjutant General
Jack Fowler, Exec. Director, Kansas Commission on Veteran's Affairs
Charles M. Yunker, Adjutant, The American Legion Dept. of Kansas

At the request of the Chairman, members of the Committee introduced themselves.

Chairman Goico introduced General Lee Tafanelli who offered a power point presentation from the Kansas Adjutant General's Department and spoke of the welcoming transformation of the military. (Attachment 1).

General Tafanelli recounted the beginning of the Kansas National Guard and explained today's organizational structure. He said that the Guard's mission was really a dual mission, consisting of the Federal side where they were training for wartime as well as supporting Army and Air Force missions; while on the state side they were protecting life and property, maintaining peace and order and civil defense.

Questions and answers followed.

Appearing before the Committee next, Jack Fowler spoke of what he called the current difficult and tumultuous times for Kansas veterans. (Attachment 2).

He pointed out that there were some 225,000 Kansas veterans scattered throughout the 105 counties. The challenge for his organization was to identify and locate all those who would benefit from state assistance. He accomplished this through phone calls, the internet and personal visits.

Mr. Fowler told how they were working with the Department of Revenue to identify motorists who were veterans. He said that last year Kansas ranked last among 50 states in the ratio of veterans service representatives to the number of veterans served, and that our veterans are underserved.

This fiscal year the KCVA budget permitted the reopening of two VSR offices – Hutchinson and Marysville – that had been closed because of lack of funds. These reopening – from 11 to 13 VSR offices – moved Kansas to 47th among the 50 states. However, they are still short of funds as the result of Gov. Parkinson's line item veto last year.

Mr. Fowler stated to the Committee that the message to our veterans is twofold: (1) that veteran's status isn't well respected in the state and; (2) that Kansas doesn't support its veteran populations.

Questions and answers followed.

Charles Yunker addressed the Committee next. He stated that the VA itself relies upon Service Organizations like the Legion and VFW to help them insure every veteran wishing to apply for their benefits may do so in the most accurate and expedient manner. (Attachment 3).

CONTINUATION SHEET

Minutes of the Committee on Veterans, Military and Homeland Security at 9:00 p.m. on January 25, 2011, in Room 546-S of the Capitol.

Mr. Yunker said this fact was established when the VA refused to provide a one-stop facility on Fort Riley unless the Veteran Service Organizations were responsible for the workforce for the facility. The American Legion accepted the invitation and they now maintain a fully staffed office at Ft. Riley which is not part of the state grant.

He closed by stating that he was asking for the Committee's help in their partnership by finding new innovative sources for more revenue so more staff could be hired and trained to meet the ever-increasing need of those who serve and have served to protect us as a nation.

Questions and answers followed.

Copies of questions were distributed regarding how Kansas state government can help their veterans.

(Attachment 4).

Representative Meier spoke of a bill she would like the Committee to consider regarding license plates honoring gold star next of kin.

The motion was accepted by the Chairman to introduce this as a committee bill.

A motion was made by Representative Meier to alter the Kansas Income Tax forms by placing a check-off block for those wishing to donate \$5.00 to KCVA. With no objections, the motion was accepted.

Chairman Goico introduced a resolution to create a caucus on mental health issues for veterans.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 27, 2011.