

Approved:

February 7, 2012

(Date)

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE VETERANS, MILITARY AND HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mario Goico at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 17, 2012 in Room 546-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Representative Steven Johnson, Excused

Committee staff present:

Dennis Hodgins, Legislative Research Department

Rich Mergen, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the Committee:

Michelle (Sheli) Sweeney, Advocacy & Member Services Coordinator

Kansas Association of Community Mental Health Centers

Robbin Waldner Cole, Executive Director, Pawnee Mental Health Services

Laura Snow, OEF/OIF/OND Program Manager, VA Eastern Kansas Healthcare
System, Kansas

Gregg Burden, Executive Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs

Others in attendance:

See attached list.

Chairman Goico opened the meeting; reminded the Committee of the Agent Orange Resolution (HCR 5016) that was proposed in the 2011 Session, supported by the Veterans, Military and Homeland Security Committee members and passed by the House unanimously. The resolution was assigned to Senator Brungardt's (Senate Federal & State Affairs) Committee. Chairman Goico intends to meet with Senator Brungardt to further discuss the issue and is hoping for a Joint Resolution of the House and Senate regarding this matter.

Chairman Goico recognized Representative Melanie Meier, who indicated that a bill was passed several years ago allowing active duty military a tax exemption (property taxes) on their first two

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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(2) vehicles, but for some reason, an unintentional misinterpretation has taken place, and some active duty National Guard members have been denied this benefit. Representative Meier would like to see some clarifying language on this issue to resolve any future problems.

Representative Meier requested a bill and made a motion that all active duty military, including National Guard and Reserves be exempt from property taxes on two (2) vehicles. The motion was seconded by Representative Grange and passed on a voice vote.

Chairman Goico recognized Michelle Sweeney who addressed the Committee regarding the mental health needs of returning veterans and their families.

Ms. Sweeney, who is a retired Air National Guard Major, talked about the “invisible wounds” that our returning veterans are dealing with, all of which can have impact on their families, children, employers and communities. Efforts are continually being made to inform veterans what is available and where to go to get additional assistance. (Attachment #1) Question and answer period followed.

Chairman Goico recognized Representative Fawcett who offered his assistance and willingness to work on such a conceptual bill (suicide prevention) with Ms. Sweeney and others and made the appropriate motion. The motion was seconded by Representative O'Brien and passed on a voice vote.

Chairman Goico recognized Robbin Waldner Cole who spoke about the Pawnee Mental Health Services organization, returning veterans & families, and identified some concerns within the system. (Attachment #2) Question and answer period followed.

Ms. Cole presented information about the “funding” concerns / conditions of Kansas (in the mental health arena) versus the remainder of the country. Ms. Cole, when asked, agreed to provide an article to the Committee for review to show where Kansas ranks among states in the nation.

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Ms. Cole agreed to prepare a letter and submit to the United States Senate and House of Representatives addressing the needs for additional federal monies and resources as it relates to substance abuse, mental health, and veteran's needs.

After hearing Ms. Cole presentation, the Committee decided it would be appropriate for a TRICARE representative to meet / provide information to the Committee, and be given an opportunity to explain how the TRICARE system works.

Chairman Goico recognized Laura Snow who presented information regarding the mental health coverage (at the VA Medical Centers), treatment teams that are available, and outreach programs available to all veterans. (Attachment #3) Question and answer period followed.

Chairman Goico recognized Gregg Burden, who is the newly named Executive Director of the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs (KCVA). In short, Mr. Burden indicated that the KCVA is simply an "advocate for the veteran", in response to medical needs, substance abuse needs, mental health issues and many others. (Attachment #4) Question and answer period followed.

Again, funding items and issues surfaced between the Committee members and Mr. Burden, who was joined by Wayne Bollig, Veteran Services Director, who assisted with providing some actual funding numbers (costs, cuts, etc) within the State of Kansas. In the end, Representative Meier agreed to prepare a letter detailing some of the funding costs / cuts consequences, as it relates to Veterans' programs, and present to the Kansas House Appropriations Committee, Speaker of the House, and House Minority Leader.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:19 a.m.

The next House Veterans, Military & Homeland Security Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 19, 2012

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