

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON**  
**VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

January 25, 2005 Hearing Room C

8:30 A.M. Tapes 7 - 9

(corrected 07/26/05)

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Rep. Donna Nelson, Chair

Rep. Phil Barnhart, Vice-Chair

Rep. Debi Farr, Vice-Chair

Rep. Brian Boquist

Rep. Scott Bruun

Rep. Dave Hunt

Rep. Betty Komp

**STAFF PRESENT:** Jim Stembridge, Committee Administrator

Erin Seiler, Committee Assistant

**MEASURES/ISSUES HEARD:**

**Veterans' Issues - Informational Meeting**

**These minutes are in compliance with Senate and House Rules. Only text enclosed in quotation marks reports a speaker's exact words. For complete contents, please refer to the tapes.**

<b>TAPE/#</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Comments</b>
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TAPE 7, A

002 Chair Nelson Opens the meeting at 8:31a.m. Opens an informational meeting on Veterans' Issues.

**VETERANS' ISSUES - INFORMATIONAL MEETING**

047 Dr. James Tuchschnidt Director, Portland Veterans' Administration Medical Center. Submits and summarizes written testimony related to the Department of Veterans' Affairs Medical Centers and Community Based Outpatient Centers (**EXHIBIT A**).

066 Dr. Tuchschnidt Discusses the availability of medical and mental health services to veterans.

100 Dr. Tuchschnidt Speaks to the importance of reaching out to injured veterans and their families and ensuring a veterans access to local medical facilities.

118 Dr. Tuchschnidt Identifies the location of all Veterans' Administration (VA) medical facilities in Oregon (**EXHIBIT A, Page 3**).

122 Chair Nelson Asks if the VA can you handle the increasing numbers of veterans needing or seeking medical assistance.

134 Dr. Tuchschnidt Addresses the concerns as to how long a veteran must wait for primary care and specialty services at a medical facility, notes that high priority is given to soldiers from the Middle East.

162 Chair Nelson Asks for clarification as to whether they have the capacity to care for the current 365,000 veterans in Oregon and those who will be returning.

167 Dr. Tuchschnidt Speaks to the ability of VA medical facilities to care for veterans in Oregon.

179 Chair Nelson Asks what has caused the delay in treatment.

190 Dr. Tuchschnidt Identifies that the primary cause of delay are delays are related to eligibility rules.

201 Dr. Tuchschnidt Offers a possible explanation why Oregon National Guard and Reserve soldiers do not use VA medical services as much as regular army veterans.

220	Rep. Bruun	Asks what era of veterans has created the increase in the VA patient load.
226	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Discusses the “across the board” increase in veterans seeking care at VA facilities.
241	Rep. Boquist	Referring to the Southern Oregon Veterans’ Administration Clinics, asks if the increase in the occurrence of catastrophic injuries has led to increase of use on the Southern Oregon Clinic.
261	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Explains that the facility in Medford is mainly for mental health care not physical rehabilitation therapy.
300	Rep. Boquist	Asks whether there is plan for responding to the large number of soldiers who are likely to return with psychological issues.
336	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Explains that the delay in the appearance of mental health issues is the reason there is a major effort to reach out to returning veterans as soon as they return and prevent them from ‘falling through the crack.’”
346	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Speaks to how psychological treatment resources are limited and that there is little ability to expand mental health services.
372	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Confirms that the challenge to the Veterans’ Administration is to improve efficiencies as more and more veterans are seeking out medical and mental health care at there medical facilities.
402	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Suggests that the committee could assist with connecting veterans to available veteran’s resources primarily through County Veterans’ Service Officers.

**TAPE 8, A**

058	Molly Cook	Benefit Eligibility Coordinator, Portland VA Medical Center. Explains the meaning of fee-based care for veterans and what qualifies a veteran for such a program.
074	Chair Nelson	Asks if a veteran in need of emergency care can go to any hospital and it would be covered by the Veterans’ benefits.

093	Cook	States that the cost for emergency care coverage depends upon type of eligibility, “reasonable person” consideration, and whether an individual has received healthcare at the VA in past twenty-four months.
161	Chair Nelson	Asks for information about the number of veterans who have been served by local hospitals or the volume of dollars paid to hospital.
174	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Discusses how the VA purchases “tens of millions of dollars from the community each year.”
201	Cook	Clarifies the VA does not distinguish between military branches when providing medical treatment.
251	Rep. Farr	Comments on likely increase in Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome amongst soldiers and asks how it is treated.
290	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Speaks to the comprehensive array of medical and psychological treatment services for veterans at the VA.
361	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Gives the National statistics for the rate of drug use and drug abuse amongst veterans.

**TAPE 7, B**

015	Rep. Hunt	Asks if there is a cost shift for the VA with the increase in use of contracted providers and how the reimbursement rate compares to Medicare reimbursements.
026	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Explains that reimbursement rates are set nationally, but there is the ability to contract with outside providers for a reimbursement rate close to the Medicare rate.
074	Cook	Verifies that ten percent of veterans that they see have other health insurance, but only six percent have an insurance that can be billed.
091	Dr. Tuchschnidt	Summarizes the VA budget, the budget limitations, and the capacity to care for the increasing number of veterans.
160	Lori Sattenspiel	Government Relations Director, Oregon Community College Association. Submits and summarizes written testimony regarding the

ability of community colleges to provide educational services to veterans (**EXHIBIT B**).

- 198 Dr. Fred Smith President, Klamath Community College. Speaks to the efforts of Klamath Community College to assist Oregon soldiers and veterans in earning or completing their college degree.
- 257 Dr. Smith Describes the scholarship and grant programs established at Klamath Community College to assist veterans and active soldiers with educational costs.
- 295 Dr. Smith Verifies that Klamath Community College and Oregon Institute of Technology anticipate enrolling four hundred veterans by October.
- 312 Dr. Smith Confirms that Congress expanded the education benefits of the Montgomery G.I. Bill.
- 356 Pat Martin Associate Vice-President of Student Development and Services, Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC). Speaks to the programs, services, and financial assistance that MHCC offers veterans. Identifying specifically the Veterans' Forum that provides support for veterans and their family, tuition assistance, and social service referral system.

#### **TAPE 8, B**

- 052 Tom Moore Adjunct Faculty, Chemeketa Community College. Gives testimony about how he, as a Vietnam veteran, was able to take advantage of veteran's services and benefits when he returned from combat, in particular the G.I Bill for education.
- 116 Moore Speaks to personal experience as an advisor and adjutant professor at Chemeketa Community Center that many veterans do not know they even qualify for assistance or where to find information about benefits.
- 162 Moore Explains why it is important to make certain that veterans are aware of all availability services.
- 185 Tom O'Connor Religious Services Administrator, Oregon Department of Corrections. Submits and summarizes written testimony regarding veteran prison population (**EXHIBIT C**).

- 219 O'Connor Identifies and explains the assistance program available to veterans once released from prison.
- 251 O'Connor Submits and summarizes an Oregon Department of Corrections Study that profiles the veteran population in prison **(EXHIBIT D)**.
- 294 O'Connor Answers questions as to the rate of recidivism, the factors that lead to recidivism, and how recidivism is affected by limited access to psychological treatment services.
- 386 Rep. Boquist Speaks to concern about the potential increase in criminal activities and mental health issues as soldiers begin to return from the Middle East and Afghanistan.

**TAPE 9, A**

- 011 O'Connor Confirms the importance of providing support services and assistance to the families of veterans being released from prison.
- 033 DeAnna Hartwig Administrator, Office of Federal Resources and Financial Eligibility. Submits and summarizes written testimony on the role of the Department of Human Service (DHS) in assisting veterans **(EXHIBIT E)**.
- 060 Hartwig Defines long-term nursing care and what qualifies a veteran for long-term care.
- 088 Hartwig Submits written testimony on behalf of Nancy Horn on the assistance provided to veterans through the Office of Medical Assistance Program (OMAP) **(EXHIBIT F)**.
- 091 Wayne Sharp Member, Travel Information Council. Submits and summarizes written testimony on the purpose of the Travel Information Council **(EXHIBIT G)**.
- 117 Sharp Explains why historical markers for Camp Adair need to be restored. Submits an Oregon Historical Markers and Heritage Trees map **(EXHIBIT H)**.
- 152 Chair Nelson Closes the informational meeting on Veterans' Issues. Adjourns the meeting at 10:35 a.m.

## **EXHIBIT SUMMARY**

- A. Veterans' Issues, written testimony, Dr. James Tuchschildt, 3 pp**
- B. Veterans' Issues, written testimony, Lori Sattenspiel, 1 p**
- C. Veterans' Issues, written testimony, Tom O'Connor, 2 pp**
- D. Veterans' Issues, Oregon Department of Corrections Study, Tom O'Connor, 4 pp**
- E. Veterans' Issues, written testimony, DeAnna Hartwig, 2 pp**
- F. Veterans' Issues, written testimony of Nancy Horn, DeAnna Hartwig, 2 pp**
  
- G. Veterans' Issues, written testimony, Wayne Sharp, 8 pp**
- H. Veterans' Issues, Oregon Historical Markers and Heritage Map, Wayne Sharp, 8 pp**