

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

February 24, 2005 Hearing Room C

8:30 A.M. Tapes 28 - 29

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

Introduction of Committee Measures – Work Session

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.

TAPE/#	Speaker	Comments
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TAPE 28, A

004 Chair Nelson Calls the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. Recognizes veterans present. Opens the informational meeting on Veterans' Issues.

VETERANS' ISSUES –INFORMATIONAL MEETING

014 Debbie Kincaid County Veterans' Service Officer (CVSO), Washington County. Submits and reviews written testimony on veterans' issues (**exhibit a**). Mentions significant issues for veterans. Notes the necessity of representation for veterans. Explains the role of County Veterans' Service Officers. Discusses the Veteran's Pilot Project. References related budget note (**exhibit b**). Reviews cost reduction determinations of the Project. References and reviews summary data of savings from the Pilot Project (**exhibit b**). Relates the impact of uncaptured data from pending claims remaining at the conclusion of the Project. Notes the value of the program due to savings generated.

168 Chair Nelson Inquires how Kincaid's position is currently funded.

174 Kincaid Reports her position is currently funded by county general fund dollars. Elaborates.

181 Chair Nelson Inquires regarding the average salary for Kincaid's position.

185 Kincaid Believes the amount is inconsistent across the state, but in pending legislation is based upon the Veteran's Benefits Counselor position of \$45,000 to \$50,000 per annum including benefits.

194 Chair Nelson Questions how many clients are served in Washington County.

195 Kincaid Notes of the 39,000 veterans, 3,000 are actively served by three officers.

203 Chair Nelson Inquires as to the best method of expediting the processing of claims.

214 Kincaid States advocacy is crucial, noting those who are not receiving, or receiving less than the benefits to which they are entitled.

247 Chair Nelson Inquires if Kincaid works on a daily basis with TRICARE and TriWest.

248 Kincaid Notes she works less with TRICARE. Mentions why.

256	Rep. Bruun	Questions the training process for CVSO's.
264	Kincaid	Relates details which include training from the county, state and federal departments. Discusses tools available such as the National Veteran's Legal Services Project.
295	Rep. Bruun	Inquires about an informal network of officers.
300	Kincaid	Notes there is not enough contact between officers of different counties, although they do have a loose knit association.
322	Chair Nelson	Questions whether veteran's benefits are more comprehensive than Medicaid benefits.
330	Kincaid	Comments the benefits are not as comprehensive, but more complicated and complex. Refers to Medicaid as the "full meal deal." Relates the disadvantage of there being no single coordinator of benefits for a veteran or widow of a veteran. Relates the lack of coordination between the compensation, health and cemetery arms of the Veteran's Administration.
379	Rep. Boquist	Questions why the Pilot Project spent \$70,000 less than was authorized.
403	Kincaid	Relates she is unsure. Notes the differences between the operating platforms of Washington and Multnomah counties.
419	Rep. Boquist	Inquires about the remaining \$70,000. Requests clarification regarding the savings in the second year of the program when there was no staff to generate savings.

TAPE 29, A

004	Kincaid	Reports more than 79 clients were served in the first year. That is the number of clients that actually received awards from the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) that showed a savings. The totals in the succeeding year are cumulative.
011	Rep. Boquist	Suggests the savings-per-veteran would rise with additional FTE's. Questions how many additional people were hired as a result of the

		Project's determinations. Asks how many CVSO's there are statewide.
031	Kincaid	Relates she is the lone surviving Pilot Project CVSO. Believes the \$300,000 accounted for five staff members. Discusses varying funding sources for CVSO's.
044	Rep. Boquist	States the CVSO is the first person aware of deployments and therefore able to inform others. Discusses expanding the duties of the CVSO's.
073	Kincaid	Notes existing legislation is intended to build in sureties that funding will not be removed. Relates the number of CVSO's statewide. Relates CVSO's not only serve veterans, but also their dependents.
091	Rep. Boquist	Requests a matrix from the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) of the existing CVSO's and their funding streams.
117	Rep. Komp	Concurs with Rep. Boquist's request.
127	Chair Nelson	Inquires if there is a need for the Legislature to define the responsibilities and role of CVSO's.
145	Kincaid	Comments such does not exist.
147	Chair Nelson	Requests the Association survey its members to provide a draft of responsibilities and how they can be measured.
153	Rep. Boquist	Notes identifying by county is also identifying by vote count.
170	Chair Nelson	Discusses the overwhelming responsibilities for CVSO's. Comments Oregon has almost as many veterans as school children. Asks Kincaid if she is aware of any veteran moved from Medicaid to VA benefits that has been geographically displaced from their family.
207	Kincaid	Explains how the combination of benefits works and the unlikelihood of anyone being displaced when moving from Medicaid to VA benefits. Relates the differences between various VA benefits. Discusses nursing homes.
270	Chair Nelson	Asks how often Kincaid speaks with the state VA offices.

271	Kincaid	Notes she speaks with the state VA Portland office daily and they are very responsive.
280	Chair Nelson	Inquires about requests that the toll-free number to be advertised.
283	Kincaid	Believes the access number is for CVSO's only. Relates the intent is for veterans to work through they local CVSO.
300	Chair Nelson	Inquires where veteran's go for financial help when in need.
310	Kincaid	Comments there are always people who will fall through the cracks. Notes various benefits are only available to certain veterans.
318	Chair Nelson	Requests a recommendation on how the Legislature should respond to such complications and make coverage more comprehensive, providing bridge money to those in need. Inquires about Kincaid's contact with the Oregon National Guard.
400	Kincaid	Reports her contact with the Guard is infrequent.
417	Chair Nelson	Requests to be part of the April meeting in which Kincaid is involved.

TAPE 28, B

011	Ed Winkler	Major, Oregon National Guard. Submits and reviews written testimony on his recent experiences while serving in the Middle East (exhibit c). Relates six key points related to training, medical issues, injuries and equipment.
188	Chair Nelson	Asks how information is communicated through the ranks.
190	Winkler	Reports information was generally communicated by email due to geographical constraints. Continues testimony.
233	Chair Nelson	Questions whether there are any restrictions on military personnel speaking before the committee on issues of concern.
242	Winkler	States he has never been told he could not speak about his organization.

262	Rep. Bruun	Requests more detailed information on Winkler's personal experience with the network of support, beginning with his activation for service.
282	Winkler	Relates his wife indicated she could always access the help she needed.
301	Rep. Bruun	Inquires regarding the ability of Winkler's squad to acclimate to civilian society, life and work.
312	Winkler	Mentions those who returned to small businesses that had folded while they were gone. Notes most did not have trouble finding work. Comments most made more money while deployed than while in civilian employment.
332	Rep. Farr	References testimony of a witness in an earlier committee meeting who reported waiving rights to military medical coverage so he could return home. Questions whether this needs to be addressed at Fort Lewis.
353	Winkler	Relates how medical issues were addressed in his battalion.
370	Rep. Farr	Restates it appears information on such things needs to be coordinated to all locations.
378	Chair Nelson	Inquires about the opportunity of commanders to assess the mental stability of their personnel on return, and questions how such opportunities can be facilitated.
388	Winkler	Reports he met with each of his squad and reviewed a mental health checklist available in the demobilization packets. Notes he recommended further evaluations based on the results of his interviews.
423	Chair Nelson	Questions where the evaluations go when complete.
424	Winkler	States the evaluations remain with the individual packets. Notes someone is assigned to address the red flags.
439	Rep. Farr	Questions whether soldiers might be uncomfortable admitting to side effects of combat.

TAPE 29, B

003	Winkler	Confirms, yes. Clarifies the day-to-day reality of constant conversation with other members of one's squadron.
013	Rep. Farr	Asks what kind of treatment is available to personnel with issues.
017	Winkler	Reports returning veterans are qualified for VA benefits.
030	Chair Nelson	Inquires if Winkler has ever spoken with his CVSO.
031	Winkler	States, no.
032	Chair Nelson	Inquires if Winkler has ever had contact with the VA.
033	Winkler	Confirms, yes, at the unit level.
036	Rep. Boquist	Requests persons in Winkler's chain of command.
041	Winkler	Relates persons in leadership and when they changed command.
056	Rep. Boquist	Inquires about Winkler's drill schedule.
057	Winkler	Notes they were not required to drill until September.
062	Chair Nelson	Questions what one benefit would be most appreciated by returning veterans.
077	Winkler	Relates a package he received as a citizen-soldier is highly prized. Notes the money now being offered to enlist and extend one's enlistment.
115	Bill Kluting	Legislative Advisor, Western Council of Industrial Workers. Notes his only question was answered relating to whether necessary information reaches the families back home.
131	Mac MacDonald	Representative, Veterans' Organizations. Reports the joint VA office in Portland has Veteran's Service Officers in addition to the 34 county CVSO's. Discusses claims for disability. Explains the impact on

Medicaid benefits when someone receives VA benefits. Expresses concern the Pilot Project will not benefit veterans.

- 179 Jim Willis Director, Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs. Offers to answer questions.
- 189 Chair Nelson Closes the informational meeting on Veterans' Issues. Opens a work session for the introduction of committee measures.

INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE MEASURES - WORK SESSION

- 190 Jim Stembridge Committee Administrator. Submits and summarizes the list of legislative drafts for introduction as committees measures (**EXHIBIT D**).
- 203 Rep. Hunt Mentions the bills that don't relate to the jurisdiction of the Committee.
- 215 Chair Nelson Addresses LC 3197.
- 240 Rep. Komp Inquires whether each representative's name on the committee will appear on the bill.
- 244 Stembridge Explains the name of the committee will appear on the bill.
- 254 Rep. Farr Questions whether LC 3437 is unconstitutional.
- 256 Chair Nelson Notes her understanding of the concept.
- 265 Rep. Farr Relates the finding in Eugene that no stickers or decals are allowed on state vehicles.
- 278 Stembridge Comments the merits of the drafts could be more appropriately argued after they are printed as bills.
- 330 Rep. Boquist **MOTION: Moves that the list of LC drafts with the exception of LC 3197 and LC 3404 BE INTRODUCED as committee bills.**

VOTE: 7-0-0

345 **Chair Nelson** **Hearing no objection, declares the motion CARRIED.**

363 Stembridge Mentions the special committee meeting Monday, February 28 at 3:45.

380 Rep. Komp Notes her unrewarding experience using the TriWest website. Requests assistance in a future meeting.

454 Chair Nelson Discusses future invited testimony. Closes the work session on introduction of committee measures. Adjourns the meeting at 10:25 a.m.

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EXHIBIT SUMMARY

1. **A. Veteran's Issues, written testimony, Debbie Kincaid, 5 pp**
2. **B. Veteran's Issues, Veteran's Pilot Project Budget Note, Debbie Kincaid, 3 pp**
3. **C. Veteran's Issues, written testimony, Ed Winkler, 1 p**
4. **D. Introductions, LC 1911, LC 2038, LC 2039, LC 3021, LC 3042, LC 3396, LC 3399, LC 3400, LC 3401, LC 3430, LC 3433, LC 3437, LC 3439, staff, 1 p**