

APPROPRIATIONS - FINANCE & CLAIMS

SUBCOMMITTEE: HUMAN SERVICES

AGENCY I

MARCH 9, 1979 - SRS CONFERENCE ROOM

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 a.m. by Chairman Steve Waldron with the following members present:

Chairman Steve Waldron  
Senator Gary Aklestad  
Representative Bill Hand  
Representative Robert Marks  
Senator Pat Regan

Senator Pete Story - absent

Others present were: Keith Colbo, Director of SRS; Ben Johns, Deputy Director of Administration; Curt Nichols, LFA; Ron Weiss, OBPP; Bob Durkee, VFW; Dave Armstrong, Veteran's Affairs Division; Roxie K. Thomas, Veteran's Affairs Division; John E. Grauman, Chairman of the Veteran's Affairs Board; Jack McGlynn, Veteran's Affairs Board; James E. Sloan, DAV; Joe Kissoc, DAV; Charles Hundley, Montana Foundation for Medical Care; Joyce Steffich, Montana Foundation for Medical Care; and Dr. John McMahon, Montana Foundation for Medical Care.

VETERAN'S AFFAIRS BOARD MEETING

Chairman Waldron explained the reason for the meeting. It was to discuss the subcommittee's recommendations for the Veteran's Affairs Division for the Appropriations Committee. The actions taken were: 1) Funding was pulled for the secretary of the Board. The 1976 audit pointed out this position was illegal. They have ignored that fact. The Board recently did suspend the funding; however it was late in coming. 2) Funding for the two secretaries at the Fort was pulled. The contracts were illegal. 3) They recommend that any time a termination occurs, the Board cannot hire anyone for the position.

The chairman went on to explain that in two years the subcommittee will come back and see if there is a better method to provide service to the veterans at a better cost. He explained it is all general fund money and the Legislature has been mandated to hold down spending, they have done it to other programs and they are not being treated differently.

Senator Regan explained to the Board that it was not the intent to de-emphasize or lower the services, but to find

better ways to handle the services. Her concerns are: 1) Finding the most efficient manner to serve veterans and 2) Getting the job done. She read a sheet which indicated that employee level has remained constant in the division; however the budget has increased. Senator Regan felt that Montana was very generous with the veteran funding.

John Grauman, Chairman of the Veteran's Board, told the subcommittee that the program is taxed to its limit. The work load is increasing. He did not feel contracting out the work to a Veterans' organization will work. The personnel need training to handle claims. He also felt there should be federal matching funds; but there are none available. Mr. Grauman pointed out a change in the state constitution may affect the services to veterans. They have changed the wording from "should" serve veterans to "may" serve veterans.

Jack McGlynn, Vice Chairman of the Veteran's Board, told the subcommittee that they have continuously been cut back. They started with 27 offices and are now down to ten with more veterans to serve. Senator Regan refuted that statement by reading the total number of claims handled from 1970 through 1978. The claims remained fairly stable. In 1978 they had 38 fewer claims than in 1970. She also pointed out that funding has not been cut back but increased. Mr. McGlynn did not feel the claims reflected all the contacts they make. Mr. Grauman also explained that not all cases took the same amount of time. Chairman Steve Waldron commented that they should average out. He also stated that contacts were not good statistics; what gets done in the end is what counts.

Chairman Waldron stated further that the subcommittee had been upset that the department could not produce figures on what the Veteran's Division was doing. Mr. Armstrong disagreed with the chairman. He told him they could have those figures at any time. What they had to research was regarding appeals.

This brought Senator Regan to another point. She felt the reports were meaningless. She would like the field offices to account for their time and productivity. She wants to know what's involved and what's the result. The reports now do not show what they're getting for the appropriation.

Senator Regan suggested having a veteran's contact in every SRS office throughout the state. This would give representation in every county. Mr. McGlynn told the members that veterans did not feel like welfare cases. Senator Regan pointed out that several of the Veteran's Affairs Offices were already located in with SRS facilities.

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John Sloan, DAV from Fort Harrison, spoke about the program. They service over 17,000 veterans through power of attorney. He felt they should be allowed the secretaries the subcommittee deleted.

Senator Regan pointed out that there is no fiscal accountability as pointed out by the 1976 Audit. She had an auditor check again recently and the situation has not changed much. The Audit suggested that the accounting be transferred to SRS. Senator Regan did not feel they would lose funds by doing that.

Chairman Waldron pointed out that if the service was set up with SRS they could utilize SRS secretaries. Mr. Grauman said that the offices were secondary to service to the veterans.

Representative Marks and the chairman told the Board they may be missing out on other programs available to the veterans through SRS. The officer in the SRS office would be able to help in all areas. Representative Marks proposed that the Board start looking at this and working with SRS management to see if this would work. Mr. Grauman told the subcommittee to give them some recommendations and they will try.

Senator Regan made the comments that she did not think Veteran's Affairs would be swallowed up by SRS. She cautioned that officers in SRS offices may be part-time or work in other capacities for SRS. She also felt that the person handling the work should be a veteran and that the Board could make recommendations for the positions; however, SRS would have the ability to hire. The chairman added they would not lose the division or the board.

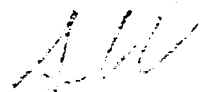
Mr. Grauman pointed out they needed qualified officers to do proper claims or there is a possibility of being sued.

The chairman urged the Board to look at the Audit Report. He warned they better start handling the funds better. He also instructed the secretary to mail a copy of the minutes to the Board.

Keith Colbo, Director of SRS, pledged the cooperation of his office on the problems.

Senator Regan moved that this subcommittee request the Veteran's Affairs Division to work with the SRS office in developing a plan which shall be presented to the subcommittee in two years which will implement the recommendations discussed by the subcommittee today.

Representative Hand requested to move the date up to six or nine months and have it sent to the subcommittee members.



Representative Marks put in the terminology "not restricted to just these issues." They may have other areas they wish to revise.

All were in favor of the motion; the motion passed.

The subcommittee went back to the question of the twelve social workers for screening nursing home patients. The previous evening the Foundation for Medical Care had suggested an alternative proposal to contract the service to them. Mr. Colbo reported that he has read the proposal. He felt both SRS and the Foundation were concerned with the program. They felt it is very worthwhile. He did point out that for a contracted service the match is 50-50 whereas if SRS handled the service the match is 75-25. In the long run they would save about \$20,000 in general funds using the contracted services.

The chairman pointed out also that the SRS workers also develop placement for nursing home prospectives.

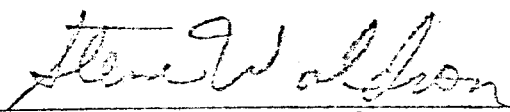
Mr. Colbo was asked if they could do the job with eight social medical workers. Mr. Colbo told the subcommittee that they would have to reduce the staff by four, but would continue the contract with the Medical Foundation at about current level.

Representative Marks moved to fund the program at \$170,000 of general fund and \$510,000 total fund for the biennium. It was also noted it was the intent of the subcommittee that they cover boarding home screening. All present were in favor except Senator Aklestad. The motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

Curt Nichols, LFA, questioned the chairman on the FTE level for the social workers. The chairman felt it was the intent of the subcommittee to leave it up to SRS, but they have no more than eight FTEs.

Respectfully submitted:

  
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Steve Waldron, Chairman  
Approved