

STEVE SISOLAK
Governor



NEVADA VETERANS SERVICES COMMISSION

**Recommendations to the Governor and the Nevada Legislature
Prepared by the Veterans Services Commission (VSC)
February 15, 2020**

1. Executive Summary

a. This report fulfills the requirement of Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 417.190 that the VSC submit a report to the Governor, the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs, and the Director of the Legislative Counsel by February 15 of each even-numbered year. The report:

(1) summarizes the activities of the Commission during the preceding two calendar years (January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020),

(2) makes recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Director of Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS) regarding issues relating to veterans, and,

(3) makes recommendations to the Governor pursuant to NRS 417.400 (Recommendation by the VSC of deceased to be honored).

b. Attached to this report are the past year's VSC agendas and minutes (see Enclosure A).

c. The VSC considers the most important aspect of this report to be the 24 recommendations starting on page four. These recommendations cover a wide range of topics, to include the prevention of suicide, supporting the needs of aging veterans and their caregivers, helping ensure the success of all student veterans, and expanding veteran and military outreach efforts to better connect veterans to earned benefits. Some of these recommendations require legislative action.

2. VSC's Duties and Responsibilities

a. NRS 417.150 creates the Veterans Services Commission, establishes the composition of its members, its duties, and outlines requirements for its meetings.

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b. As the primary advisory body for state-funded veterans' services in Nevada, the VSC brings together a diverse group of representatives from various veteran service organizations and includes State Legislators and members of the Northern and Southern Nevada Veteran Memorial Cemetery Advisory Committees.

c. According to NRS 417.190, the VSC shall:

(1) advise the Director (NDVS), and

(2) prepare and submit a report, on or before February 15 of each even-numbered year, to the Governor, the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs, and the Director of the Legislative Counsel Bureau for transmittal to the Legislative Commission. The report must, without limitation:

(a) summarize the activities of the Commission during the Preceding two calendar years, and,

(b) make recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, the NDVS Director regarding issues relating to veterans.

d. Biographies for each member are provided in Appendix B of this report.

3. 2018-2019 VSC Activities

a. On February 1, 2018, the VSC made several important recommendations to the Governor, the Nevada Legislature, and the Director, NDVS. In their 2018 Report to the Governor and the Nevada Legislature, the VSC approved 15 recommendations, 11 of which were adopted completely or partially.¹

b. In addition to the recommendations included in this report, during the past two years the VSC offered advice to the Governor and to NDVS on several important matters. These included:

(1) Suggestions on the composition of the VSC to better represent to interests of the Nevada Veterans Community by adding a member of Nevada's Native American Population and a Gold Star Blue Star Family member (recommendation 23 of this report).

¹ Baumann, Chairman William. Recommendations to the Governor and the Nevada Legislature Prepared by the Veterans Services Commission (VSC) February 1, 2018. State of Nevada, pp. 4-7.

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(2) Improving the Veteran of the Month (VOM) and Veteran Supporter of the Month (VSM) NDVS Policy. In addition to recommending changes adopted in the Governor's VOM and VSM Policy, the VSC recommended a new recognition program, the Youth Veterans Supporter of the Month Program (recommendation 24 of this report).

(3) Installation of signage to improve public access to the Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

(4) Need for increased investments in Veteran Suicide Prevention and Disabled Veteran Sports Programming.

(5) Suggestions on improving outreach through connections with Nevada's Veterans Services Organizations.

4. 2020 VSC Recommendations

a. The recommendations below were discussed and approved by the VSC. The first 10 recommendations are listed in priority order; the remaining 14 are not prioritized; they should be considered of equal value.

b. Recommendations included in the VSC's 2018 Report to the Governor and Legislature are annotated with the words, "Carry over Recommendation."

TOP Ten Recommendations in Order of Priority:

Recommendation 1: The State of Nevada should continue to pursue activities in support of reducing suicide among Nevada's veterans. While Nevada was the only state to show a decrease in veteran suicide, this tragic problem continues to need attention. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 2: As the new Northern Nevada Veterans Home is built, fund and modernize the Southern Nevada State Veterans Home (SNSVH). A key recommendation in the 2018 VSC report was the construction of the new Northern Nevada State Veterans Home (NNSVH). While the Commission is pleased that the NNSVH has opened, the existing home must receive the support it needs to keep abreast of the latest practices, procedures, and technologies to ensure the best care possible to the veterans and their spouses who live there. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 3: Reduce or eliminate business license fees for veteran owned businesses. Over the past few legislative sessions, some action has been

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taken to support veteran owned businesses. The commission believes that supporting these new business owners is a win for our veterans, and a win for the state who welcomes responsible, innovative, and hard-working veterans into the Nevada business community.

Recommendation 4: Construct and operate veterans adult day health care facilities. Many veterans would welcome an Adult Day Health Care option for their medical treatment were one available. Prior to 2018, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) did not reimburse states for providing this care to veterans. The VA now provides the reimbursement that will make it possible for Nevada to offer these much-needed services to Nevada's aging veterans and their spouses.

Recommendation 5: Allow students at universities and colleges not associated with the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) to use veterans services at NSHE Schools. Student veterans attending school at the NSHE are receiving the information and services needed to ensure their success through their student veteran centers. We believe that these NSHE student veterans centers, which provide services from other state, Federal, and non-profit organizations should consider opening their doors to student veterans attending non-NSHE schools. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 6: NDVS should create an outreach officer position in northern Nevada. NDVS has a state position for a Southern Nevada Veterans Outreach Officer in Southern Nevada. Because it was not possible for this position to meet the needs of the veterans in Northern Nevada, NDVS hired a contracted outreach officer. This position should be converted to a state employee to ensure that this important service continues. This position is critical to ensure that veterans and survivors who are not connected (homebound, rural, less computer savvy, etc.) learn of benefits and services that improve their lives. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 7: The State of Nevada should pursue options to improve support to caregivers of Nevada's veterans. This recommendation is carried over from the previous VSC Report. Family caregivers provide crucial support in caring for veterans. Under the "Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010," VA services are available to seriously injured post-9/11 veterans and their family Caregivers through a program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. This service can include a monthly stipend, medical care, travel expenses, and access to health care insurance, training, and counseling. Unfortunately, caregivers of earlier era veterans are not eligible for these benefits. Caregivers, who bear the brunt of the responsibility for

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veterans who supported their nation, should be supported as well. At a minimum this support should include counseling and training. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 8: Nevada State agencies should support veteran personal data input into the Nevada Veterans Information System (VIS). Once populated with veteran data, the VIS can help locate and inform veterans, their families, and their survivors of benefits and services needed to improve their quality of care and quality of life. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 9: NDVS should continue to pursue water-wise options at State Veterans Cemeteries. The VSC recommends that NDVS continue to explore alternative solutions, to include ground and surface water options, for resourcing the water needs of the Northern and Southern Nevada Veteran Memorial Cemeteries in Fernley and Boulder City. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 10: Create a State Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The VSC recommends that Federal Transition Assistance Programs be augmented with a State Transition Assistance Program. There are many state benefits that would help military members in Nevada prepare to transition out of service.

UNPRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS 11 THROUGH 24:

Recommendation 11: Consider offering a week-end burial option at Nevada State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries. Currently, interments at the Southern and Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemeteries are only offered on weekdays. Many local families and family traveling from other locations are unable to take time off during the week for burial services. Offering a weekend option would help support families wishing to inter their loved ones at the State cemeteries. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

Recommendation 12: Create Scatter Gardens at both cemeteries. Not every veteran wishes to be interred; many chose to be scattered. The VSC recommends the creation of a peaceful and respectful place to scatter the ashes of our veterans.

Recommendation 13: Create and support Military Spouse Employment and Reciprocity Programs. Military spouse unemployment and underemployment continue to persist despite legislative and community efforts. With military families moving an average of once every three years, military spouses in licensed occupations must undertake the costly and time-consuming process of

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obtaining a new license every time they PCS across state lines. The VSC recommends the expansion of Military Spouse Employment and Reciprocity Programs.

Recommendation 14: Reduce or eliminate Nevada State Park Fees for all veterans. The VSC recommends that, like many other states, Nevada reduce or eliminate state park fees. Providing veterans this complimentary benefit would express Nevada's appreciation, gratitude, and respect for their service.

Recommendation 15: Create property tax/vehicle tax exemption categories for all veterans. The VSC recommends expansion of tax exemptions of veterans. Current exemptions favor combat veterans. While it is appropriate to honor those veterans, who risked their lives in combat, all veterans placed themselves at risks when they put on the uniform of their nation; prepared to serve wherever and whenever directed to do so.

Recommendation 16: Support the creation of a rural Burial Ground in Elko. In 2013, the VA announced plans to construct a rural burial ground in Elko. Several hurdles remain in bringing this much needed cemetery for our veterans to Elko, and the VSC recommends that the State of Nevada remain committed to assisting our Federal Partners complete this project.

Recommendation 17: The VSC recommends that NDVS continue with plans to create a veterans burial site location system. The current VA burial site location is antiquated and often off line. Creating a satellite-enabled geo-location system will help visiting family find and pay respects to departed veterans at our State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries.

Recommendation 18: Eliminate the fees for spouse interment at State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries. While the VA does not reimburse states for interring spouses of veterans, spouses are buried at no charge at Federal veterans' cemeteries and at some state veterans' cemeteries. The VSC recommends that the spouses of our veterans, whose contributions are incalculable, are interred at no cost.

Recommendation 20: Continue funding the Adopt-a-Vet Dental care program. The Adopt-a-Vet Dental Care Program provides equipment and supplies to dentists and their staffs who provide their services free to veterans who are not eligible for VA services and cannot afford other dental care. This program fills a critical gap in services. (Carry-Over Recommendation)

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Recommendation 21: Create and expand programs to support isolated veterans, to include homebound, incarcerated, rural, Native American, and veterans in care facilities. While outreach has dramatically increased over the past decade, more work remains. NDVS should consider making permanent the contracted Outreach Officer currently serving Northern and Central Nevada and increasing the use of information technology solutions such as mobile video-teleconferencing devices. Also, the expansion of Veterans living areas in State Prisons by the Department of Corrections and NDVS the efforts to provide veterans service officer support to inmates via teleconferencing, are critical programs that need to be expanded upon.

Recommendation 22: Recommend that the State of Nevada participate in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) Governor's Challenge to address suicide amongst of service members, veterans, and family members. Since the VSC voted on this recommendation in October 2019, the Governor announced that Nevada was selected by SAMHSA to participate in the Governor's Challenge. The VSC is pleased that Nevada has been selected and will have the opportunity to improve suicide prevention collaboration state-wide.

Recommendation 23: Recommend that the Governor appoint two VSC members who are (1) a Native American veteran and a (2) Gold or Blue Star Family member. By Statute the Governor appoints two members to the VSC who are representatives of the general public. The VSC recommends that one of these members be filled by a member of the Gold Star or Blue Star family members and one by a veteran who is a Native American. We believe that candidates with these qualifications can best advise the Nevada Department of Veterans Services, State of Nevada Legislators, and the Governor regarding issues affecting their constituencies.

Recommendation 24: Create a Youth Veteran Supporter of the Month Award. There are many young people who volunteer to help veterans, however, their contributions do not rise to the level of adults who have more available time and resources, therefore, their efforts often go unacknowledged. The VSC recommends that NDVS create a program like the VOM and VSM programs.

5. Conclusion: This report and its recommendations align with the VSC's duty to advise the Governor, Nevada Legislature, and the NDVS Director. The VSC believes that through reports such as this, it can continue to make important contributions to improving service to Nevada's service members, veterans, and their families. It is in the pursuit of this goal that the VSC submits this report for consideration ahead of the next Legislative Session.

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Chairman William Baumann
Nevada Veteran Services Commission

1/22/2020
Date

Enclosure A: 2018-2019 VSC Agenda's and Minutes