

Veterans Outreach Meeting

On Tuesday, 30 July Senator Klobuchar's office sponsored a Veterans' forum hosted by the Dilworth VFW Post. Outreach director Greg Swanholm, reviewed legislative action at the Federal level. The primary concern of the Senator's office is the health care provided to Veterans by the VA. This includes the very high rate of suicides among our Veteran population. Ruby DeBellis, constituent advocate described her role as an advocate for Veterans needing help with issues dealing with the VA, but also dealing with other governmental agencies. Although the Senator's office cannot tell federal agencies how to resolve a problem, they can be very helpful finding answers. She also talked about the Senator's office cooperating with the Library of Congress' Veterans Oral History project. The project is a repository of Veterans' oral history stories and is a wonderful program. Andy Martin, the Senator's local contact person has an office in Moorhead and should be the stop for Veterans with problems if other services have been unable to help.

Ben Johnson, Legislative director with the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs distributed a summary of Veterans actions of the recently completed MN legislature. Funding for five Veterans homes, three Veterans cemeteries and other Veterans projects was passed and signed into law. The Department, along with the rest of us is very concerned with the Veterans suicide rate. The first Saturday in October has been designated Veterans Suicide Awareness Day. POW/MIA Day has been officially declared to be the third Friday of September.

Greg Peterson, the president of the state Veterans Service Officers organizations talked about their role in the State. VA benefits paid to Veterans in Clay County is approximately 40 million dollars per year. Veterans Service offices were established immediately following WWII. MN representatives of the VSO were recently at Ft Hood talking to MN service members being discharged from military service. As a couple others at the meeting said, we had no such thing when we got out.

LaDeen Schillinger, Veterans Employment Representative from MN Career Force for the NW region spoke about helping Veterans find employment. One of their priorities is to assist Viet Nam era Veterans mostly to find supplemental employment. As with most other groups, MN has one of the lowest unemployment rates for Veterans in MN history.

Curt Cannon finished the session by talking about the role of the local Veterans Service Office. Curt's office should be the first step in resolving Veterans problems.

Good information was distributed by all presenters. Veterans should use these services. After all, all of them are being paid by tax dollars.