

MICROFILM DIVIDER

OMB/RECORDS MANAGEMENT DIVISION

SFN 2053 (2/85) 5M



ROLL NUMBER

DESCRIPTION

2007

2001 SENATE APPROPRIATIONS

SB 2007

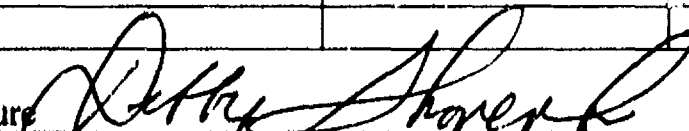
2001 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

BILL/RESOLUTION NO. 2007

Senate Appropriations Committee

Conference Committee

Hearing Date January 10, 2001

Tape Number	Side A	Side B	Meter #
3	Vet Affairs		0.00-42.9
Committee Clerk Signature 			

Minutes: Tape #3, Side A, 0.0

Senator Nething opened hearing on Veteran Affairs.

Ray Harkema, Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, (testimony attached), spoke on behalf of the Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs, the committee that oversees the operation of the North Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and gave an overview of the 2001-2003 budget. He gave an outline of their duties for the department and the responsibility of informing the 59,000 veterans of North Dakota of their benefits for compensation, pension, hospitalization, education, home loans and burial benefits. Introduced by Ray Harkema were fellow veterans in support of the budget today; Ken Anderson, Sub Chairman, Paul Aaberg, VFW, Don Weible, AC on Veteran Affairs, Joe Schneider, Veteran Affairs, Rudy Jenson, Amvets, Wilburt Warne, Vietnam Veteran's of America. Talked about money received from the VA system monetary benefits in the amount of \$110,736,754. These federal benefits just do not come to ND on their own, they must be sought daily. Our services include: loans, grants, transportation and

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claims/training. Transportation has been a major problem for many because of the distance to VA medical facilities. We now have five vans driven by volunteer drivers. Vans were purchased with the earned interest of the Post War Trust Fund. The grant program is used to provide dental care, optical care and hearing aids to veterans in need of the emergency hardship assistance. We have been able to maintain a County Veterans Service Officer in each county. Training sessions are held twice a year for the County Veterans Service Officers and daily contact is needed on a daily basis. Certification for the officers is on an annual basis. There are three specific issues I would like to address: To restore claims officer position to a full time position (was reduced to .75 FTE) in Bismarck. Due to the aging veterans population it is imperative that this position remain full time as only five counties in western ND employ a full time Veterans Officer.

Secondly, funding for the IT Plan upgrade to carry out work in a timely fashion to the veterans and their dependents; and travel expense for the Administrative Committee who serve without receiving compensation. The Governor appoints these individuals to represent the five veterans organizations.

Senator Tallackson: Was this position restored to full time?

Ray Harkema: Yes it was to keep it in the budget.

Cathy Halgunseth, Administrative Assistant for Veteran Affairs, stated the importance of the full time position as well as rent, salaries, travel and IT money. We have had a hard time with computers being down and we took cuts where we could. I am please with the budget and ask for your support.

Senator Lindaas: I have sent checks to the disabled veterans and noticed there is also a paralyzed veterans program now; are these similar or different.

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Senator Lindaas: I have sent checks to the disabled veterans and noticed there is also a paralyzed veterans program now; are these similar or different.

Ray Harkema: Yes they are similar. PVA (Paralyzed Veterans Association) is a legitimate program of which around 20% stays in North Dakota. Another organization is Members of Purple Heart (MOP) that also do fundraising in North Dakota.

Ken Anderson, Commandant of the North Dakota Veterans Home, testified in support of the 2001-2003 budget. He stated that Sharon Ulmer will present the details of the budget and he would recap the key areas.

Sharon Ulmer, accountant for the ND Veterans Home, (testimony attached with charts) stated the budget reflects the problems that we face daily. To meet the ever increasing needs of technology, we need to add a computer program for nursing which bills for residents days, calculates census days and shares all information with accounts receivable. Two employees are retiring and that comes with paying their earned vacation and 10% sick leave. We are requesting 3.8 FTE positions. 2.4 CNA positions; .4 housekeeping, 1 social worker. The increasing costs of professional services is keeping us down. The doctor at the home is asking for a \$50.00 an hour increase. Obtaining and retaining the nursing staff seems to be our largest challenge. We have implemented a program to pay for tuition for LPG's to train to be RN's. Various equipment requests were also made. This is necessary to keep in line with competition. We now have to make our salary package very attractive to get potential employees. We have worked very diligently to cut our budget in anyway that we could. I encourage and request for your continued support.

Senator Nothing: Is everything that you mentioned in this bill for your budget? Is the budget okay as it is?

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Sharon Ulmer: It is an optional budget; first we prepare an the regular budget as well as an optional budget. All of that what I stated is in the budget, I just explained them individually. The budget requested is right.

Senator Solberg: In your general fund, is this an increase in your budget?

Sharon Ulmer: Our last few budgets we were asked to spend down and this is now reflecting on our current budget.

Senator Solberg: Why weren't you getting money in the past?

Ken Anderson: The last two biennium's there were special funding that has all been spent down or you could say our surplus.

Senator Nething: Was the surplus used for operation purposes?

Ken Anderson: Yes.

Senator Nething: So these moneys are gone and this is the reason for your budget increase.

Ken Anderson: Yes and also projected revenues are not as high.

Senator Solberg: It looks like your federal money is half a million; so less federal funds and special funds?

Ken Anderson: Flip flop, we get money from different sources, like Medicaid; it depends on the patient.

Senator Solberg: Looking at the budget book for comparisons, why are the federal funds lowering?

Ken Anderson: It depends on the medical care of the patients which can be over estimated.

Senator Solberg: Medicaid verses private pay and more from the general fund; private pay shouldn't matter.

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Ken Anderson Over on one and under on the other; looking at history, we try to get the revenue right.

Senator Nething: Less general funds.

Ken Anderson: The Veterans Home Improvement fund 904 grew; the last two biennium's we asked legislature to use the money and still need it which is now added to the budget.

Senator Bowman: So for the last two biennium's you used these special funds when you ran short?

Ken Anderson: Yes, the budget was built with the special funds; the intent was to use these at the home.

Senator Solberg: So the special funds were used; was there a fiscal review to use these available funds to operate?

Ken Anderson: The costs of the home increased; revenues were projected; the \$750,000 was the money drawn off of.

Arvy Smith, OMB: This is a very confusing issue; present funding sources switch with special funds. Federal funds are on individual rates; revenue generated depending on sources, Federal or special. Special was way up and now it is used up.

Senator Nething: So the determination is made by this?

Ken Anderson: Correct.

Senator Holmberg: Is your opinion positive on this issue?

Arvy Smith, OMB: \$230,000 could be left in special funds but we can't do that.

Senator Thane: The issue of nursing home verses veterans home; is the state financially better off Medicaid verses veteran?

