

Truth in Testimony Disclosure Form

In accordance with Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5)* of the *Rules of the House of Representatives*, witnesses are asked to disclose the following information. Please complete this form electronically by filling in the provided blanks.

Committee: Veterans' Affairs 

Subcommittee: _____

Hearing Date: 03/03/2021

Hearing Title :

Legislative Presentation of DAV, DAV, BVA, NASDVA, MOAA, SVA, MVA, NCHV

Witness Name: John Hilgert

Position/Title: President, National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs

Witness Type: Governmental Non-governmental

Are you representing yourself or an organization? Self Organization

If you are representing an organization, please list what entity or entities you are representing:

National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs

FOR WITNESSES APPEARING IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

Are you a fiduciary—including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent—of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing? If so, please list the name of the organization(s) or entities.

National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs

Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) related to the hearing's subject matter that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs does not receive federal grants or contracts.

Please list any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government and related to the hearing's subject that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the amount and country of origin of each contract or payment.

The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs does not receive grants, payments or does contracting with foreign governments.

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

- I have attached a written statement of proposed testimony.
- I have attached my curriculum vitae or biography.

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5), of the U.S. House of Representatives provides:

(5)(A) Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof.

(B) In the case of a witness appearing in a non-governmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include— (i) a curriculum vitae; (ii) a disclosure of any Federal grants or contracts, or contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, received during the past 36 months by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness and related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (iii) a disclosure of whether the witness is a fiduciary (including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent) of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing.

(C) The disclosure referred to in subdivision (B)(ii) shall include— (i) the amount and source of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (ii) the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract related to the subject matter of the hearing originating with a foreign government.

(D) Such statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the privacy or security of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form 24 hours before the witness appears to the extent practicable, but not later than one day after the witness appears.



False Statements Certification

Knowingly providing material false information to this committee/subcommittee, or knowingly concealing material information from this committee/subcommittee, is a crime (18 U.S.C. § 1001). This form will be made part of the hearing record.

John A Hilgert

Witness signature

March 1, 2021

Date



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Joint Hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees

Oral Testimony

March 3, 2021

Presented by

John Hilgert

President, National Association State Directors of Veterans Affairs

Director, Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tester, Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Moran, Ranking Member Bost and distinguished members of the Committees, my name is John Hilgert, and I serve as the President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) and as the Director of the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs.

NASDVA is comprised of the State Directors of Veterans Affairs for all fifty States, the District of Columbia, and five territories. In person I would have been joined by – John Scocos, NASDVA Executive Director, and Tom Palladino, Executive Director, Texas Veterans Commission and NASDVA Senior Vice President.

States and Territories continue to increase their role as holistic service providers to Veterans.

We coordinate, connect, and convene teams to address veteran employment, education, economic empowerment, and continued whole health and wellness. Despite constrained State budgets and the challenges of COVID-19, States collectively contribute over \$10 billion each year in service to our nation's Veterans and their families. NASDVA, through its Member States and Territories, is the single organization outside of the federal VA that serves 19 million Veterans.¹ Given that we are tasked and held accountable by our respective Governors, State Boards or Commissions, we are well positioned to deliver efficient, effective, and veteran focused services.

Regarding Veterans Healthcare Benefits and Services: NASDVA supports the continued implementation of the provisions of the VA MISSION Act. NASDVA's priorities for the care of our Veterans are consistent with those of the VA, especially in the area of behavioral health and suicide prevention. NASDVA supports an "all of the above" strategy for health care delivery which recognizes the diversity, geography, and demographic makeup of today's Veterans.

Regarding State Veterans Homes: The State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program is

¹Veteran population estimate, as of September 30, 2019 (VetPop 2016) 19,119,131. See FY 2019 GDX available: <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp>

the largest and one of the most important partnerships we have with the VA.

COVID-19 focused national attention on State Veterans Homes. In Nebraska, I am responsible for four State Veterans Homes. Given that a number of State Veterans Homes (roughly 30%) are not CMS certified, the VA may need to provide more support to State Veterans Homes when health measures are directed but unfunded to non-CMS homes. The VA may also consider defining what a maintenance charge covers in a State Veterans Home relative to what specialty care the VA covers. Arguably, both VA and State Veterans Homes have a role to provide mental health care services. The challenge is delineating the cost of care associated with geriatric psychiatry. To be direct, NASDVA would offer that the VA should allow mental health services to be deemed as specialty care services and not a basic service expected to be provided by the State Veterans Home through the basic per diem allowance. This would allow VA to provide the services desperately needed by veterans. Additionally, the VA with congressional support could also consider changing the 70% Service-Connected Disability provision for full State Veterans Home per diem from the VA to 50% Service-Connected Disability. This would be an important step to help states fund the cost of care.

Despite all of the challenges of COVID-19, NASDVA supports a continued commitment to the significant funding of the State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program. NASDVA strongly supports increasing funding to at least \$500 million.²

NASDVA is encouraged by the Committee's oversight and interest in examining and improving the VA's support to State Veterans Homes. Please use NASDVA as resource to validate lessons learned, test ideas, and identify potential legislative changes. For example, as the VA's Millennium Electronic Health Record is deployed, use the State of Washington to test consistency for the seamless delivery of quality care.

² Government Accountability Office, VA Health Care: Veterans' Use of Long-Term Care is Increasing, and VA Faces Challenges in Meeting the Demand, GAO-20-284, (February 19, 2020). Available: <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-284>

Regarding Veterans Benefits Services: Given the claims backlog and number of claims on appeal, NASDVA recommends serious consideration to making federal funding available to States to assist with outreach efforts “on the ground.” NASDVA also recommends funding and focus for VA adjudication of these claims. Beyond funding, the VA should offer more virtual training to accredited service officers. Finally, NASDVA would like to emphasize the important role of the National Personnel Records Center in providing the vital records which are the lifeblood for the system.

Regarding VA Funding: Once released, NASDVA would welcome the opportunity to review the details of the President’s Fiscal Year 22 VA budget request.

Regarding Women Veterans: Women now comprise nearly 20% of the Armed Forces and assume roles in nearly all military occupational specialties.³ NASDVA strongly encourages the VBA to make the Women Veteran Coordinator role a full-time role.

Distinguished members of the Committees, with your continued support, **we can** ensure that the needs of our Veterans and their families are addressed, adequately resourced and remain a priority.

Use State Directors as a resource.

Thank you for including NASDVA in this very important hearing.

I look forward to your questions.

³ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness. Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2017 Summary Report. Published in 2018. Accessed Feb 24, 2021. <http://www.cna.org/research/pop-rep>



NASDVA President

John Hilgert – Nebraska

John Hilgert was elected as the 2019-2021 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs President and serves as the Director of the State of Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs. The department is the statewide advocate for our veterans' earned benefits and services.

Since leaving the State Legislature in 2001 as the State Senator serving Downtown and South Omaha, John Hilgert has served as the Director of the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs, having been appointed by then-Governor Mike Johanns. Governor Heineman retained John as Director and assigned him additional duties as a Division Director of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services with direct oversight of the Veterans Homes Division. He continued to serve the State in both capacities, having been retained by Governor Pete Ricketts in 2015. In 2017, the Veterans' Homes Division was merged into the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs. John is an Army veteran of the Gulf War, having served with the First Infantry Division.