



For Immediate Release
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ODVS Director Completes Visits to all 88 County Veterans Service Offices

COLUMBUS – Ohio Department of Veterans Services Director Tom Moe today completed a series of visits to all 88 county veterans service offices, fulfilling a promise to Governor John Kasich to look at the delivery of services to veterans across the state.

Director Moe and Assistant Director Jason Dominguez began the visits in April, traveling first to Lake, Cuyahoga, Portage and Stark counties, and finishing today with Franklin and Madison counties.

“Our county veterans service offices are on the front line, meeting with veterans every day and working to connect them to the benefits they’ve earned, so it was important to the both the Governor and me to get around Ohio and see how the state is doing,” Director Moe said. “These visits gave us a chance to get to know our state better and see first-hand the great work our service officers are doing – and to also see the challenges they face, particularly in our rural counties.”

Visits to each of the counties are instrumental to the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) as it examines ways of better delivering services to veterans statewide. The VA’s most recent data shows that the state ranks 4th in terms of total VA spending among all states and territories, but 46th in terms of the number of veterans connected to compensation. The department is currently working to develop a strategy for improvement.

Ohio has a network of county veterans service offices (CVSOs) in each county, a system established in the 1880s to serve veterans of the Civil War. Today, the CVSOs provide direct assistance to veterans and their family members. This includes assistance with obtaining benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) such as medical care, injury compensation, pension, education, and home loans. The offices also assist with state benefits such as the Ohio Veterans Bonus for Persian Gulf War and Iraq and Afghanistan era veterans, scholarships for war orphans, and hunting and fishing licenses for disabled veterans, as well as direct financial assistance from the county.

The state currently has the sixth-largest population of veterans of all eras in the country, estimated by the VA in 2010 to exceed 890,000. While this means the level of responsibility of each CVSOS is high, so are the tangible benefits they provide to veterans and their local communities. In 2010, the VA spent over \$5.2 billion in Ohio – up from \$4.4 billion in 2009 – with nearly \$1.4 billion going to compensation benefits and pensions of individual veterans. The Ohio Veterans Bonus has paid over \$38 million to Ohio veterans and families since August 2010.

“The work done by the CVSOSs is needed now more than ever,” Director Moe said. “In these most recent conflicts, we’ve been creating a community of ‘virtual veterans’ – unlike active duty who return to a home base, we’ve got thousands of Guardsmen and reservists who come back from deployments and have no formal support connection other than their armory, not to mention those who leave the active military and return home to re-start their lives.”

The CVSOSs are trained by the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, which also exercises oversight of their operations. However, the policies and procedures of each office and day-to-day operational control are maintained by a veterans service commission in each county; the department also trains and certifies the commissioners. Funding is also local, based on .5 of a mill per dollar of the assessed value of property in the county. Consequently, the available funds of the offices vary widely; for example, Cuyahoga County’s 2009 budget was \$16 million, while Vinton County’s was \$76,000.

Despite the challenges, Director Moe acknowledged that the CVSOSs play a role that can’t be replaced. “We found that in every county, the CVSOSs are doing their best to provide the maximum eligible benefits for each veteran they serve,” he said. “And while we all realize that there’s a lot of work yet to do, we’ll get there together.”

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