

Minnesota Veterans of the Special Guerrilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Task Force

Meeting 1 Summary – September 30, 2025

Date: September 30, 2025

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Location: Veterans Service Building (In-Person & Microsoft Teams)

1. Opening Remarks: MDVA Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson

MDVA Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Audio connectivity for virtual participants was confirmed. A quorum was present.

Deputy Commissioner Johnson stated that the purpose of the meeting was to convene the Task Force pursuant to 2025 Session Law Chapter 30 and to address initial organizational, legal, and procedural matters. He noted that meetings would be public, recorded, and posted on the MDVA website in accordance with transparency and reporting requirements.

2. Member Introductions

Task Force members, MDVA staff, and invited guests introduced themselves.

Introductions reflected a range of perspectives, including SGU veterans, family members of SGU veterans, legislative appointees, veterans service organization representatives, and individuals with historical or operational expertise related to U.S. operations in Laos.

3. Legal Overview – Kristen Root, MDVA General Counsel

Kristen Root presented on three areas of law:

a) Minnesota Open Meeting Law (Ch. 13D)

Meetings are subject to public notice and quorum requirements, with materials and recordings made publicly available.

b) Task Force Enacting Law (2025 Session Law, Ch. 30, Sec. 13)

The Task Force is advisory in nature and charged with developing criteria and a protocol to assist the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs in determining eligibility for recognition as a Veteran of the Secret War in Laos for individuals not already covered under federal naturalization law. The Task Force must submit a report to the Legislature by February 15, 2026.

c) Naturalization Law (Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000):

Federal law established a naturalization pathway for certain SGU veterans and spouses and remains distinct from Minnesota's 2025 statute, which addresses eligibility determinations for individuals not previously naturalized under that federal act.

Discussion Points:

Discussion emphasized that the Task Force's role is limited to developing recommended criteria and protocols; final determinations and any statutory changes remain within legislative authority. Members acknowledged the importance of clarity regarding scope, timelines, and the advisory nature of the Task Force's work.

4. Election of Task Force Chair/Vice Chair: MDVA Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson

Chair Election Votes:

Member	Voted For
Trent Dilks	Sen. Susan Pha
Tou T. Yang	Sen. Susan Pha
Rep. Bidal Duran	Initially Scott Walker → later changed to Sen. Susan Pha
Rep. Ethan Cha	Sen. Susan Pha
Gia T. Lee	Sen. Susan Pha
Tong Vang	Sen. Susan Pha
Scott Walker	Sen. Susan Pha
Sen. Susan Pha	Sen. Susan Pha

Sen. Jeff Howe	Absent at vote (left early)
Ben Johnson	Sen. Susan Pha
Bill Strusinski	Absent
William F. Roleau	Absent

Chair: Senator Susan Pha was elected Chair by majority vote, with unanimous support following a change in vote.

Vice Chair: Ben Johnson was confirmed as Vice Chair without objection.

5. Discuss and Establish Task Force Meeting Rules: Task Force Chair

The Task Force discussed and reached consensus on initial procedural matters, including:

Quorum: Seven members constitute a quorum. Informational or working discussions may occur with fewer members present.

Meeting Cadence: Tentative plan for twice-monthly meetings.

Meeting Format: Hybrid meetings hosted at the Veterans Service Building with remote participation available via Microsoft Teams.

Work Plan: The Task Force aims to develop a draft report in early 2026, with final review and submission by mid-February 2026.

6. Next Steps & Adjournment

Members reminded to complete oath of office filings with Secretary of State.

Ideas for future agenda items welcomed to be sent to MDVA.

Meeting adjourned by Chair Sen. Susan Pha at 10:30 a.m.

Key Action Items

- Kristen Root to make available PowerPoint materials & legislative excerpts.
- Task Force Members to complete Secretary of State oath filings.
- MDVA Staff to post meeting minutes, materials, and recordings on MDVA SGU Task Force webpage.

- Chair Sen. Pha to finalize cadence and agendas for upcoming meetings.
- MDVA to look into Mr. Kirk's application to fill vacant position on Task Force.