

VETERANS OF SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS AND IRREGULAR FORCES IN LAOS

Advisory Task Force

Minnesota Session Law – 2025, Regular Session - [Chapter 30, SF Number 1959, Article 2, Sec. 6](#)

November 13, 2025

2:00PM CT

MEETING AGENDA

1. Call Meeting to Order: Chair Pha

Chair Pha called the meeting to order at 2:00pm.

2. Roll Call & Introductions: Vice Chair Johnson

Vice Chair Johnson conducted roll call and introductions. All members present except for Stephen (Tim) Kirk and Sen. Jeff Howe.

3. Opening Remarks: Chair Pha

Senator Pha opened the meeting by acknowledging the committee's significant progress and expressing her gratitude for the time and effort dedicated by all members. She then introduced a motion proposed by Scott Walker that had been postponed from the previous session due to time constraints.

Regarding the pre-circulated materials, the Senator referenced the documents provided by Jon Kelly in an email prior to the meeting. She stated that a general recap of the handouts was unnecessary, as all attendees were expected to have reviewed the information in advance.

Finally, she set ground rules for the discussion, emphasizing the need to respect all viewpoints and requesting that comments from Scott Walker be limited to a maximum of two minutes to ensure efficient use of time.

4. Discussion Topics

a. Scott Walker Motion

During a task force meeting, a motion was presented by Scott Walker to pause legislative advancement and request a legal review concerning veteran-qualifying documentation. Discussion ensued regarding the task force's authority, the precedent for creating veteran subclasses.

- i. Scott Walker began discussing his motion at 2:08pm which centered around three topics: DEI, Verification of Service and Potential Conflict between the U.S. definition of Veteran and the new the MN State category of Veteran of the

Secret War in Laos – Foreign Nationals (Lao and Hmong). In summary, the motion is to suspend the work the Task Force is assigned to do and send this back to the legislature to have the law reviewed and refined. Scott Walker concluded his remarks at 2:13pm.

1. During this discussion, Vice Chair Johnson redirected Scott Walker to put this Motion up for vote, rather than recite the motion in its entirety, as all members have been able to review the document ahead of time.
- ii. Chair Pha thanks Scott Walker for his motion but acknowledges that this motion violates the legislative mandate that was passed into law in 2025 and oversteps the authority of the Task Force. Furthermore, pausing or suspending this work is not the job of the Task Force, as it is the duty of the Task Force to carry out the law that is already in place to develop eligibility criteria for the SGU and Irregular Forces. Therefore, Chair Pha asks everyone to vote against this motion.
 1. As a result of Chair Pha's comments, Scott Walker makes an amendment to his motion and presented that to Chair Pha and the Task Force.
- iii. A large discussion took place from some of the members as noted below, which consumed the first 36 minutes of the meeting:
 1. Trent Dilks disagrees with all the points of Scott Walker's motion but will not go into details with each. He will vote against this motion.
 2. Rep. Cha reviewed all seven points of Scott Walker's motion and disagrees with all of them. Stating that this legislative bill was vetted and passed and to suggest that we pause this legislation is not the task nor duty of this Task Force. It is our job to advise the Commissioner as to what needs to go back to the legislature in February.
 3. Tou Yang states that the Task Force cannot adopt a motion to suspend without legislative authority, as that is not the duty of the Task Force and respectfully will not support this motion.
 4. Bill Strusinski highlights the good discussion and agrees that the Task Force exists to develop criteria to give people an opportunity to apply for state level benefits. He has some suggestions for what criteria could be created and hopes to discuss those at the next meeting. He stated he will not support the motion.
 5. Mr. Roleau makes a statement as it relates to one of Scott Walker's points, that it's not just the Hmong, it's all ethnic groups of Veterans. Public law from 2000, at the time the SGU members were brought into the country, required certain documents to receive benefits. Chair Pha acknowledges Mr. Roleau's comments regarding the Official Documents and Records.

iv. VOTE ON MOTION: 10 No, 1 Yes, 2 Absent. Motion fails.

MDVA Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson	No
Trent Dilks (DAV of MN)	No
Bill Strusinski	No
Tou T. Yang	No
Gia T. Lee	No
Tong Vang	No
Scott Walker	Yes
William F. Roleau	No
Stephen (Tim) Kirk	Absent
Rep. Ethan Cha	No
Rep. Bidal Duran	No
Sen. Jeff Howe	Absent
Sen. Susan Pha	No

b. Eligibility Protocol Discussion

- i. Thank you from Chair Pha to Ben Johnson and Jon Kelly for Eligibility Protocol Recommendations.
- ii. Jon Kelly goes through the document labeled “Eligibility for State Veterans Benefits and Privileges Protocol – Veterans of the Secret War in Lao”.
- iii. Discussion
 1. Tou Yang asked if the Veteran must apply for the Federal Burial Benefit before they can apply for the State Burial Benefit? Jon Kelly provides information that eligibility criteria for burial is the same process at both levels.
 2. Trent Dilks likes this format and the layout of these criteria. The only comment he had was that if an appeal reaches the Commissioner’s Level, perhaps the Task Force could establish a panel of three SGU Veterans, as an advisory board to the Commissioner to ensure the information is factual.
 3. Rep. Cha agrees with Mr. Dilks points and does like the idea of advisory board.
 4. Tong Vang, Scott Walker and Gia Lee all made short comments.
 5. Chair Pha stated the application deadline of 2 years is not long enough, and recommends it be increased to a minimum of 4 years, if not 6 years. Consensus is that increasing the timeline is a great idea.

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting should focus on taking the recommendations – concrete recommendations, language changes or ideas, and brainstorm or get feedback on why it could or couldn't work and then evaluate all of them to determine which items the Task Force supports or does not support.

5. Public Comment

No members of public requested to speak.

6. Adjourn: Chair Pha

a. Chair Pha called the meeting adjourned at 3:54pm.

Action Items

Everyone is to bring proposed edits.

Bill Strusinski will share a Documents List with the group.

Next Meeting: Monday, November 24, 2025, at 10:00am

Location: Veterans Service Building/Microsoft Teams

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

MDVA Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson – *The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs Commissioner, or a designee*

Mr. Trent Dilks (DAV of MN) - *A representative of the Minnesota Commanders Task Force designated by the Commanders Task Force*

Mr. Bill Strusinski - *A United States armed forces veteran who served on active duty in Vietnam during the Vietnam War*

Mr. Tou T. Yang - *A Hmong American Minnesota resident who served in the United States armed forces*

Mr. Gia T. Lee - *A veteran of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos*

Mr. Tong Vang - *A veteran of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos*

Mr. Scott Walker - *A member with expertise in the history of allied irregular and surrogate forces*

Mr. William F. Roleau - *A member with direct experience in United States intelligence or special operations in Southeast Asia*

Mr. Stephen (Tim) Kirk - *A member with direct experience in Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Forces operations*

Rep. Ethan Cha - *A member appointed by the MN House Democratic-Farmer-Labor leader*

Rep. Bidal Duran - *A member each appointed by the Speaker of the MN House of Representatives*

Sen. Jeff Howe - *A member appointed by the MN Senate Minority Leader*

Sen. Susan Pha - *A member appointed by the MN Senate Majority Leader*

2025 Session Law Excerpts Regarding “Veteran of the Secret War in Laos”

Reference: Chapter 30 – SF Number 1959, Article 2 (Military Affairs and Veterans Affairs Policy)

Section 9. [197.448] **VETERAN OF THE SECRET WAR IN LAOS.**

Subdivision 1. **Definition.** As used in this section, the term "Veteran of the Secret War in Laos" means a person who resides in Minnesota and who:

(1) was naturalized as provided in section 2(1) of the federal Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000, Public Law 106-207; or

(2) is a person who the commissioner of veterans affairs determines served honorably with a special guerrilla unit or with irregular forces that operated from a base in Laos in support of the armed forces of the United States at any time during the period beginning February 28, 1961, and ending May 14, 1975, and is a citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States.

Subd. 2. **Eligibility for benefits and privileges.** (a) A veteran of the Secret War in Laos, as defined in subdivision 1, clause (1), is entitled to the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) the day following the effective date of this act.

(b) A veteran of the Secret War in Laos, as defined in subdivision 1, clause (2), is entitled to the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) after the commissioner of veterans affairs verifies the person's veteran status. The commissioner must not begin accepting applications for verification under this paragraph until the legislature enacts criteria and a protocol to determine:

(1) which Minnesotans served in special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos; and

(2) which of the Minnesotans who served in special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos are deserving of Minnesota veterans benefits.

(c) If the commissioner verifies a person's status as a veteran of the Secret War in Laos, the commissioner must provide the person with a certificate of eligibility for the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) on a form developed by the commissioner for this purpose. The commissioner must develop the form required under this paragraph no later than September 15, 2025.

(d) The following statutory benefits and privileges available to a veteran, as defined in section 197.447, are also available to a veteran of the Secret War in Laos: section 171.07, subdivision 15 (veteran designation on drivers' licenses and state identification cards); section 197.23 (purchase of grave markers); section 197.231 (honor guards); section 197.236 (state veterans cemeteries); section 197.455 (veterans preference); section 197.4551 (permissive preference for veterans in private employment); section 197.63 (vital records, certified copies); section 197.65 (renewal of professional licenses, motor vehicle registration, and drivers' licenses); and section 197.987 (honor and remember flag).

Sec. 13. **ADVISORY TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED; VETERANS OF SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS AND IRREGULAR FORCES IN LAOS.**

Subdivision 1. **Establishment; membership.** (a) The commissioner of veterans affairs must establish a Veterans of Special Guerilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force.

(b) The advisory task force must consist of the commissioner, or a designee, and the following additional 12 members appointed by the commissioner, except as otherwise provided:

(1) a representative of the Minnesota Commanders Task Force designated by the Commanders Task Force;

(2) one member with direct experience in Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Forces operations during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2);

(3) a United States armed forces veteran who served on active duty in Vietnam during the Vietnam War;

(4) a Hmong American Minnesota resident who served in the United States armed forces;

(5) two veterans of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos;

(6) one member with expertise in the history of allied irregular and surrogate forces during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2);

(7) one member with direct experience in United States intelligence or special operations in Southeast Asia during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2); and

(8) four legislators, with one member each appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, the house Democratic-Farmer-Labor leader, the senate majority leader, and the senate minority leader.

Subd. 2. **Duties; report.** (a) The task force must:

(1) establish criteria for determining which Minnesotans served in the special guerrilla units or with irregular forces in Laos; and

(2) establish criteria and a protocol to determine which Minnesotans who served in the special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos are deserving of the benefits of a veteran under Minnesota law and which veterans benefits should be extended to these Minnesotans.

(b) The task force must prepare a report to the legislature that includes the findings, criteria, protocol, and recommendations required under paragraph (a). The commissioner must deliver the report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by February 15, 2026.

Subd. 3. **Administration; terms of membership.** The commissioner shall convene the first meeting of the advisory task force by September 15, 2025, and provide staff support to the advisory task force. Minnesota Statutes, section 15.059, subdivision 6, governs the terms and removal of members of the advisory task force. Members of the task force serve without compensation or per diem.

Subd. 4. **Expiration.** The task force expires February 15, 2026.