Elizabeth Mense

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To: Elizabeth Mense
Subject: Online Form Submittal: Boards and Commissions Application

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Boards and Commissions Application

Received
County Administration
12/21/18

Board/Commission or position applying for:	Veterans' Service Officer
First and Last Name	Steve Otero
Address	PO Box 3387
City	Crested Butte
Phone	7138235828
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Why would you like to serve on this Board or Commission?	Over the previous two years, I've worked to understand how a rural county like Gunnison operates with regards to supporting a particular demographic of constituents, military veterans. Along with the tireless support of our Health and Human Services team, we have filed 52 new claims for service, with just over 75% being approved by the VA. Along with the disability/retirement pay/aid and attendance claims, we have also assisted 61 students with managing or accessing their earned federal education benefits. Further, we have processed 13 claims for service related to the death of a veteran. Outside of casework, my efforts have focused on the additional infrastructure needed in order to develop an environment conducive to attracting all manner of veterans to our community. Unfortunately, the medical care of veterans is politicized, and as such, I have visited with representatives from both Congressional and Senate offices, as well as Rep. Tipton and Senator's Bennett and Gardner, respectively. Rep.

Tipton chose to cosponsor H.R. 4347 after speaking with me about the experience's veterans gain when we choose to participate in adaptive sport therapy. Additionally, both Senate offices are engaged in conversation with me regarding H.R. 7138, which will direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish an inter-agency task force on the use of Federal lands for medical treatment and therapy through outdoor recreation for veterans. The goal of these conversations is to encourage one of our elected Senate representatives to introduce companion legislation. This will strengthen our position and encourage movement to floor debate. This could directly impact Gunnison County and a number of our business's. Additional infrastructure work completed during my current term is the gain of 7 new physicians registered with the Grand Junction VA as vendors, which allows them to directly accept payments for veteran's medical care. My goal is to remove politically developed payment systems from having undue influence over access to basic medical care for veteran families. Over the course of my two years in office, the direct financial contributions of veteran's in our county has increased from $4.32 million to $4.51 million. This is a direct result of our casework and approvals of veteran families for federal, tax free, income benefits. Two weeks ago we held a student and alumni outreach event on the Western campus, with approximately 35 veterans in attendance. One week ago a small contingent of veterans supported the logistics operations of Toys for Tots and Operation Homefront, two nonprofit organizations focused on ensuring all Gunnison County children have a bountiful Christmas. On Christmas eve, a group of us will visit the local senior center and deliver wool blankets as tokens of appreciation for our veterans in residence. The first week of January, Western is fully funding my attendance to the 2019 Student Veteran's of America conference. It is the largest gathering of student veterans each year and I am charged with learning the necessary details to establish a local chapter at Western. Further, a member of the board discovered my research efforts and has invited me to a private audience with the board so that I may explain my initiatives and the policy changes I hope to influence. SVA wants to help. As my mentor and former boss, Jim Mattis, so eloquently stated on December 20 this year, "one core belief I have always held is that our strength as a nation is inextricably linked to the strength of our unique and comprehensive system of alliances and partnerships." I too hold these words to be true and they resonate within me as a core value. In my humble opinion, these next few years should be focused on enhancing the alliances and partnerships which will serve to further enhance the quality of life for Gunnison County veterans. My

service at the request of the commissioners and I genuinely aim to serve this county for as long as the leadership team believes it to be appropriate. I look forward to our next meeting in person and hope everyone enjoys a safe and productive holiday season.

Additional Comments	Thank you for the opportunity. I am grateful.

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