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Sen. Kathleen Vinehout unveils plan to help Wisconsin veterans

Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, Democratic candidate for Governor, Friday, released a four-point plan to address the “very serious management problems” with the state’s veterans homes.

“As Governor, I will restore funding to the Veteran Assistance Program for homeless veterans, and to the Assistance to Needy Veterans program, both of which were cut by the current Governor in his first budget,” Vinehout said.

“I will stop the current practice of shifting funds away from our Veterans Homes to fund other budget needs at the expense of our veterans.”

“I will focus state resources on high quality medical care, recreational opportunities, and well-trained staff. To retain high quality staff, I will fill vacant positions and raise wages, if needed.”

“I will restore the advisory organizations including the Board of Veterans Affairs committees to oversee program review, legislation, long term care and financing.”

Vinehout, a three-term state senator from Alma, cited several audits that documented problems at the three state veterans’ homes: King in Waupaca County, Union Grove in Racine County and Chippewa Falls.

“Our veterans are more in need. Over the nine years covered by the audit, there was a 28 percent increase in the number of residents at King with dementia and a 262 percent increase in the residents diagnosed with PTSD.

“Staffing hasn’t kept up with the increased needs, neither has staff training. Vacant positions are increasing. Mandatory overtime may be causing unsafe conditions,” Vinehout said.

“Regular staff shortages pulled caregivers to other areas, leaving veterans without the consistent care they needed. The audit also shows that morale is poor. Many employees are looking for another job. Incidents of abuse and neglect were not always reported for fear of retaliation.”

“Facilities are deteriorating. Auditors detailed a long list of needed projects including several related to potential resident safety.”

Vinehout said, “As Governor, I will have zero tolerance for any manager that retaliates against staff who report abuse or neglect of our honored veterans or their family members. I will create systems and processes to keep Veterans Homes in good repair.”

“Veterans served us and it’s our obligation to serve them,” Vinehout concluded. “Correcting the deficits at our state veterans’ homes is a moral imperative.”