

Dept. of Veterans Affairs: Secretary-designee Bond announces leadership team

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MADISON—Secretary-designee James Bond announced today the leadership team of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.

“The newly appointed WDVA leadership team brings decades of experience alongside incredible talent and vision,” said Secretary-designee Bond. “I am confident this team has the unique expertise and dedication to best serve Wisconsin’s veterans and their families across 72 counties and 11 tribal nations.”

Christopher J. McElgunn will serve as Deputy Secretary effective February 13, 2023. The Deputy Secretary is responsible for day-to-day operations, as well as directing and coordinating the Department’s strategic planning and program development. Christopher is a Navy veteran with more than a decade of state civil service experience. He served on active duty in the United States Navy and as a member of the Naval Reserve from 1991 to 1999 with assignments at home and deployment abroad. He began at the state of Wisconsin in 2012 as a Senior Policy Analyst at the Department of Workforce Development. In 2014, he transitioned to an Executive Budget and Policy role at the Department of Administration where he guided budget and policy development for multiple state agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Military Affairs, and Department of Health Services.

From 2017 to 2019, he served as Legal Counsel to the Board on Aging and Long Term Care. Currently, Christopher serves as an Assistant Attorney General with the Department of Justice in the Civil Litigation Unit and will continue in this role until February 13, 2023. Christopher received his Bachelor of Science degree from

Northwestern University and his Juris Doctorate Degree from the University of Illinois Chicago School of Law. Christopher lives in Fitchburg with his wife, Megan, and their two sons, Max and Alex.

Joseph Hoey will serve as Assistant Deputy Secretary effective February 13, 2023. The Assistant Deputy Secretary is the primary contact for inter-governmental agency functions, as well as the agency's legislative liaison. Joseph began his service in Wisconsin State Government in 1993 when, shortly after moving to Madison to attend UW Law School, he worked as a part-time messenger in the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms office. Over the course of almost 30 years, Joseph worked for six different legislators representing the south side and northern suburbs of Milwaukee, Green Bay, Stevens Point, and the largest Senate District stretching from the south shore of Lake Superior to the rolling hills of Barron County and the forests of Price County.

Joseph most recently served as Chief of Staff for Senate Minority leader Janet Bewley. He is proud of the many relationships he forged and maintained working with legislators and staff on both sides of the aisle in the Senate and Assembly, as well as the administrations of five different Governors. He enjoyed working with outgoing Assistant Deputy Secretary Kathy Still and looks forward to continuing and building on the bipartisan relationships she established with the legislature.

Brian Jones will serve as the Division Administrator of the Division of Veterans Benefits, which administers an array of grants, benefits, programs, and services to all eligible state veterans, their families, survivors, and to many organizations that serve veterans. Brian served in the Department of Veterans Affairs from 2011 through 2018. His first position was as the Veterans Outreach Supervisor where he was responsible for leading a team of Agency Liaisons and Veterans Program Specialists in educating veterans on the benefits and services they had earned. He later transitioned to the role of Program Section Chief for WDVA and was instrumental in the development and implementation of WDVA initiatives such as the MyWisVets Portal and the Veterans Benefits Resource Center.

Prior to employment with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, Brian served in and retired from the United States Army after more than 26 years of service. Brian also served 3 years with the U.S. Government Civil Service at the Milwaukee Army Recruiting Battalion. Brian lives in Brooklyn, WI. with his wife Michelle. They have two sons, two daughters, and eight grandchildren.

Chad Kopljen will continue to serve as Chief Legal Counsel, a position he has held since 2013. Chad previously served as the administrator/top prosecutor at the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services and prior to that worked in the private sector focusing on business litigation.

He is a Veteran with 22 years of military service. He currently serves as command judge advocate for the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (2nd tour), Wisconsin Army National Guard in its OCONUS mission. He previously served as the state deputy judge advocate overseeing legal operations for Wisconsin's covid and public security missions, to include the Democratic National Convention security task force in 2020. Chad has served as the command judge advocate in 64th Troop Command (2 tours) and as deputy command judge advocate for the historic 32nd Brigade. As a former active-duty enlisted Airman, he was assigned to the U.S. Air Force, 820th RED HORSE Squadron at Nellis AFB, NV.

Chad is a graduate of UW Oshkosh and received a post-graduate certification in Long-Term Care Administration from UW Madison. He earned his law degree from Marquette University Law School and holds advanced military degrees from the US Army Judge Advocate's Legal Center, Command and General Staff College, and the US Air Force War College. Chad and his wife Heidi reside in Waunakee. They have two daughters.

Colleen Flaherty will continue to serve as Communications Director. Colleen has more than a decade of communications, nonprofit, and legislative experience. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Minnesota, Mankato, she lived in New York and Washington D.C., working in various communications positions, including production assistant, copywriter, and education advocacy communications specialist. She returned to her home state of Wisconsin in 2015 where she worked for several legislative offices. Before joining the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs in March 2022, she worked as a communications specialist for the Department of Tourism while obtaining her master's degree in communications from UW Whitewater. Colleen lives in Monona with her husband, David, and their daughter, Elaine.