



NEW MEXICO LEGISLATURE

**MILITARY AND
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE**

2025 INTERIM FINAL REPORT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SERVICE
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INTERIM SUMMARY

Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee 2025 Interim Summary

The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) was created by statute for the 2009 interim and was permanently reauthorized during the Forty-Ninth Legislature, Second Session. Pursuant to Section 2-20-2 NMSA 1978, the MVAC meets to consider and study military and veterans' issues in several geographically dispersed areas of the state. The MVAC is also tasked with making legislative recommendations to the legislature and regulatory recommendations to the United States Congress, United States Department of Veterans Affairs and United States Department of Defense.

The MVAC held five meetings in 2025, traveling across New Mexico to address a range of issues affecting service members, veterans, and military installations. Meeting locations included Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces and Gallup. Throughout the interim, the MVAC received updates from Kirtland Air Force Base, Holloman Air Force Base and the White Sands Missile Range.

The committee also heard presentations on programs provided by the University of New Mexico system and New Mexico State University that support students interested in military service, active duty service members and families and veterans, as well as the operation of the New Mexico State Veterans' Home in Truth or Consequences. Additional presentations received by the committee addressed veteran homelessness, environmental issues, such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances contamination, and an update on the proposed Navajo Code Talkers Museum in Gallup.

The committee engaged throughout the interim with local organizations serving veterans, including the American Legion and the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, and received updates from the Veterans' Services Department and the Department of Military Affairs on the departments' priorities for the 2026 legislative session.

WORK PLAN AND MEETING SCHEDULE

2025 APPROVED
WORK PLAN AND MEETING SCHEDULE
for the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Members

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Sen. Harold Pope, Chair | Rep. D. Wonda Johnson |
| Rep. Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair | Sen. Nicholas A. Paul |
| Sen. Jay C. Block | Sen. Shannon D. Pinto |
| Rep. Art De La Cruz | Rep. Luis M. Terrazas |

Advisory Members

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Sen. Pat Boone | Rep. Alan T. Martinez |
| Sen. Craig W. Brandt | Rep. Angelita Mejia |
| Rep. Catherine J. Cullen | Sen. Gabriel Ramos |
| Rep. Stefani Lord | Rep. Andrea Reeb |

Work Plan

The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was first created by statute for the 2009 interim. The committee was permanently reauthorized by statute during the 2010 regular legislative session. The committee has various statutory duties, including making an annual report; recommending any necessary legislation to the next session of the legislature; and requesting necessary action to the United States Congress, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States Department of Defense. The committee is required to conduct meetings in several geographically dispersed areas of the state and to conduct hearings relating to military issues and veterans' issues.

During the 2025 interim, as time permits, the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee will:

- A. receive updates from New Mexico's military installations;
- B. study issues relating to female veterans;
- C. receive updates regarding college credit for military service from the Higher Education Department and the Veterans' Services Department;
- D. receive testimony regarding jobs and business opportunities for veterans;
- E. study long-term care options for veterans;
- F. study transportation to and from medical providers for veterans, particularly those living in rural areas of the state;
- G. receive testimony pertaining to education opportunities and outreach offered by state educational institutions and public community colleges to veteran students;

H. examine options for the prevention of homelessness and support for homeless veterans in areas throughout the state;

I. receive testimony regarding health care options both within the Veterans Administration system and outside of it, including behavioral health care, suicide prevention and treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder;

J. examine actions New Mexico can take to improve quality of life for military and veteran families;

K. examine processes related to tax incentives or discounts for services provided by local and state government for the benefit of veterans;

L. examine issues relating to New Mexico's active duty, reserve and National Guard military personnel, veterans and military families;

M. examine various issues relating to veterans and taxes;

N. examine housing issues near New Mexico's military installations;

O. examine meeting educational needs for military bases;

P. receive testimony regarding the Military Base Impact Fund;

Q. receive testimony on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances and updates regarding the cleanup process of the Ogallala Aquifer;

R. study the impact of cuts to federal funding on active-duty service members, veterans and their families;

S. examine the budget shortfall at the Veterans' Services Department to identify ways to ensure adequate staffing; and

T. examine home modification assistance for veterans.

**Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee
2025 Approved Meeting Schedule**

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|-------------|-----------------|
| June 4 | Santa Fe |
| July 15 | Albuquerque |
| August 13 | Las Cruces |
| October 14 | Gallup |
| November 5 | Santa Fe |

AGENDAS AND MINUTES

Revised: May 29, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FIRST MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**June 4, 2025
State Capitol, Room 322
Santa Fe**

Wednesday, June 4

- 10:00 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Harold Pope, Chair
—Representative Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
- 10:10 a.m. (1) **Update from the Veterans' Services Department**
—Jamison Herrera, Secretary, Veterans' Services Department
- 10:40 a.m. (2) **2025 Proposed Work Plan and Meeting Schedule**
—Committee Members
- 11:50 a.m. **Public Comment***
- 12:00 noon **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Virtual Public Comment" section of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee [web page](#).

**MINUTES
of the
FIRST MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**June 4, 2025
State Capitol, Room 322
Santa Fe**

The first meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, on June 4, 2025 at 10:06 a.m. in Room 322 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Present

Sen. Harold Pope, Chair
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Sen. Jay C. Block
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Sen. Nicholas A. Paul
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto

Advisory Members

Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Angelita Mejia

Sen. Pat Boone
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Sen. Gabriel Ramos
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Staff

Erin Bond, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Domenica Nieto, Research Assistant, LCS
Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, LCS

Guests

The guest list in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Wednesday, June 4

Welcome and Introductions (10:06 a.m.)

Senator Pope called the meeting to order and asked committee members and staff to introduce themselves.

Update from the Veterans' Services Department (10:12 a.m.)

Jamison Herrera, secretary, Veterans' Services Department, provided a brief overview and update on the needs of the department. Secretary Herrera discussed core programs, highlighting topics such as coordinating with county assessors on tax exemptions for veterans and with the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department to provide state park day passes for veterans, as provided by House Bill 161 (2025). Additionally, Secretary Herrera discussed the conditions of state veterans cemeteries, explained that the department is now in charge of the Taos State Veterans Cemetery and expressed the need for permanent personnel to be funded through the General Fund. He also discussed various forms of outreach the department is performing, including addressing homelessness among veteran communities. Secretary Herrera then answered questions from committee members. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=6/4/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

2025 Proposed Work Plan and Meeting Schedule (11:10 a.m.)

Committee members discussed and made changes to the 2025 proposed interim work plan and meeting schedule. The approved work plan and meeting schedule can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Publications/Work_Plans/MVACworkplan25.pdf.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 11:29 a.m.

Revised: July 11, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
SECOND MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**July 15, 2025
University of New Mexico
Student Support and Services Center
1155 Avenida Cesar Chavez SE
Albuquerque**

Tuesday, July 15

- 10:00 a.m. **Call to Order, Welcome and Introductions**
—Senator Harold Pope, Chair
—Representative Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
- 10:15 a.m. (1) **[University of New Mexico \(UNM\) Veteran and Military Resource Center \(VMRC\), Reserve Officers' Training Corps \(ROTC\) Program Updates](#)**
—Alonzo Maestas, Ph.D., J.D., M.S., M.A., M.L.S., M.C.J., Captain, United States Army Judge Advocate General's Corps, Retired, Director, VMRC, M.R.C., UNM
—Jesse Preciado, Student Success Specialist Senior, VMRC, Master of Science Candidate, Veteran, United States Marine Corps, UNM
—Sergeant First Class Kevin Stanger, Senior Military Science Instructor, Army National Guard Liaison Officer, UNM
—Gary L. Cave, Captain, United States Navy, Commanding Officer, Professor of Naval Science, Naval ROTC, UNM
—Robert G. Lacy, Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force, Commander, Air Force ROTC Detachment 510, UNM
—Ian Bush, Technical Sergeant, Air Force ROTC, UNM
- 11:00 a.m. (2) **[New Mexico Veterans Integration Centers and Veteran Homelessness](#)**
—Brock Wolff, Chief Executive Officer, Veterans Integration Centers
- 11:30 a.m. **Public Comment***
- 12:00 noon **Working Lunch**
(3) **[Military Base Planning Commission Legislative Priorities](#)**
—Megan A. Cornett, Executive Director, Office of Military Base Planning and Support

- 12:45 p.m. (4) **Veterans' Services Department Processes**
—Brigadier General Jamison Herrera, Secretary, Veterans' Services Department
- 1:30 p.m. (5) **Women in the Military**
—Gloria Gutierrez, Second Vice President, Women Veterans of New Mexico
—Jan Jourdain, Secretary, Women Veterans of New Mexico
- 2:15 p.m. (6) **Kirtland Mission Brief**
—Colonel Justin Secrest, Wing and Installation Commander, 377th Air Base Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base
—Eva Blaylock, Public Affairs Specialist, 377th Air Base Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base
—Oneika Banks, Public Affairs Specialist, 377th Air Base Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base
- 3:00 p.m. (7) **Environmental Concerns on Military Bases and in Albuquerque: Investigation and Remediation Being Conducted**
—Kelsey Bicknell, Environmental Manager, Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority
—John-David Nance, Chief, Hazardous Waste Bureau, Department of Environment
—Ryan Wortman, Physical Scientist, Air Force Civil Engineer Center, Bulk Fuels Facility, Kirtland Air Force Base
- 4:15 p.m. (8) **USS Albuquerque Monument**
—Allen D. Tate, Treasurer, Bullhead Base
- 4:40 p.m. **Adjourn**

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**MINUTES
of the
SECOND MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**July 15, 2025
University of New Mexico
Student Support and Services Center
1155 Avenida Cesar Chavez SE
Albuquerque**

The second meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, at 10:06 a.m. on July 15, 2025 at the Student Support and Services Center at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque.

Present

Sen. Harold Pope, Chair
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
Sen. Jay C. Block
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto

Absent

Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Sen. Nicholas A. Paul
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Advisory Members

Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Alan T. Martinez

Sen. Pat Boone
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Sen. Gabriel Ramos
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Guest Legislators

Rep. Joy Garratt
Sen. Linda M. López

Staff

Domenica Nieto, Research Assistant, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, LCS
Gabriel Suazo, Intern, LCS

Guests

The guest list in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

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Tuesday, July 15

Welcome and Introductions (10:06 a.m.)

Senator Pope welcomed the committee. Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves.

UNM Veteran and Military Resource Center (VMRC), Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Program Updates (10:15 a.m.)

Alonzo Maestas, Ph.D., J.D., M.S., M.A., M.L.S., M.C.J., captain, United States Army Judge Advocate General's Corps, retired, and director, VMRC, UNM, discussed how the ROTC program helps students complete college. Through the VMRC, students can access support, academic services, career counseling, community outreach and help navigating transfer credits. Captain Maestas noted that the average national graduation rate for military-affiliated students is between 48% and 52%.

Jesse Preciado, student success specialist senior, VMRC, UNM; master of science candidate, UNM; and veteran, United States Marine Corps, reinforced that the ROTC program has been a student resource for 15 years. Additional services offered by the VRMC include a small food pantry, printing services, a lactation room in partnership with UNM Women's Resource Center and a peer advisor program.

Sergeant First Class Kevin Stanger, senior military science instructor and Army National Guard liaison officer, UNM, discussed new building construction. Sergeant Stanger highlighted the 60 cadets who are part of the ROTC program, half of whom have stayed in the state after graduation. Additionally, Sergeant Stanger pointed out that the ROTC program is the largest single source of commissioned officers in the National Guard.

Gary L. Cave, captain, United States Navy, and commanding officer and professor of naval science, Naval ROTC, UNM, provided insight into the scholarships offered by the Naval ROTC. Captain Cave mentioned that from the 1,800 scholarships available, 1,000 to 1,200 are awarded to students annually. He expressed concern that the New Mexico school system may not prepare future Naval ROTC students for science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs.

Robert G. Lacy, lieutenant colonel, United States Air Force, and commander, Air Force ROTC Detachment 510, UNM, spoke about the passing rate required from cadets to pass the Air Force Officer Qualifying Test successfully. The pass rate tends to be out of the fifteenth

percentile, but with help, cadets are able to pass with a minimum score of 78% by their third and final attempt. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/15/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Public Comment (11:29 a.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

New Mexico Veterans Integration Centers (VIC) and Veteran Homelessness (11:40 a.m.)

Brock Wolff, chief executive officer, VIC, mentioned the twentieth anniversary of the program. A new campus opened in October 2024 with 42 beds as part of the VIC's transitional housing facility. The VIC offers a food pantry, a donation center and counseling services. Mr. Wolff stated that the campus is a community building, so organizations are encouraged to use VIC facilities to provide direct and straightforward services to veterans. The organizations include UNM, Central New Mexico Community College and the Workforce Solutions Department. The centers' model involves street outreach, transitional housing for four to six months, life skills, substance use counseling, mental health care and case management.

Approval of Minutes (12:41 p.m.)

On a motion duly made and unanimously approved, the committee adopted the minutes of the June 4, 2025 meeting.

Motion to Send Letter (12:43 p.m.)

On a motion made and approved, the committee voted to send a letter to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requesting clarification for the 30,000 staff layoffs at the VA as well as nondiscrimination protections. Representative Martinez and Senator Block voted not to send the letter; Representative Cullen abstained from the vote.

Military Base Planning Commission Legislative Priorities (12:45 p.m.)

Megan A. Cornett, executive director, Office of Military Base Planning and Support, emphasized the need to keep the governor informed regarding issues related to New Mexico's military bases. Additionally, Ms. Cornett discussed fiscal year (FY) 2026 operations, with a \$100,000 increase over previous fiscal years, along with a flat budget for FY 2027. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/15/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Veterans' Services Department Processes (1:42 p.m.)

Brigadier General Jamison Herrera, secretary, Veterans' Services Department, discussed the veteran property tax exemption provided by House Bill 47 (2025). Brigadier General Herrera mentioned the \$4,000 to \$10,000 increase in the tax exemption for veterans. In FY 2026, this includes veterans from the 10% - 90% disability rating implemented. Brigadier

General Herrera urged a one-stop implementation partnered with the VA, which calculates disability ratings for veterans. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/15/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Kirtland Mission Brief (2:32 p.m.)

Colonel Justin Secrest, wing and installation commander, 377th Air Base Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, commented on the host wing for Kirtland Air Force Base and its economic impact to Albuquerque. The missions combined show an increase in economic growth from 2022-2024. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/15/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Women in the Military (3:00 p.m.)

Gloria Gutierrez, second vice president, Women Veterans of New Mexico, stated that the organization represents 17,000 women in the state. Ms. Gutierrez's organization has been chartered in the state since 2006, being one of few women veterans organizations nationally. Membership is open to all women veterans in New Mexico of any rank, including active, reserve and National Guard. Currently, the organization is made up of 500 members, mainly from Albuquerque and Santa Fe. It is funded by donations, and there is no membership fee.

Environmental Concerns on Military Bases and in Albuquerque: Investigation and Remediation Being Conducted (3:22 p.m.)

Kelsey Bicknell, environmental manager, Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA), stated that the ABCWUA is the largest utility in the greater Albuquerque area and supports one-third of the state's population. The ABCWUA produces 30 billion gallons of drinking water per year. Ms. Bicknell discussed the importance of protecting water resources and ensuring New Mexico has access to water when needed. She noted that the Rio Grande's current state has forced the ABCWUA to depend entirely on ground water.

John-David Nance, chief, Hazardous Waste Bureau, Department of Environment (NMED), noted that the NMED is a regulatory agency and enforces rules under resource administration outlined in the New Mexico Administrative Code. Mr. Nance also discussed the stakeholder engagement between the Air Force, the NMED and the public.

Ryan Wortman, physical scientist, Air Force Civil Engineer Center, Bulk Fuels Facility, Kirtland Air Force Base, discussed the continuing cleanup of fuel that was dissolved in the ground water under the base. This fuel then traveled off the base, away from where the fuel contacted the ground water. Base personnel plan to perform predictive ground water modeling

every six months to ensure 100% capture of ethylene dibromide to avoid future migration to drinking water supplies. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/15/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

USS *Albuquerque* Monument (4:15 p.m.)

Allen D. Tate, treasurer, Bullhead Base, described the proposed monument for the USS *Albuquerque* submarine at Tingley Beach. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/15/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

Revised: August 7, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
THIRD MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**August 13, 2025
New Mexico State University
Golf Course
3000 Herb Wimberly Drive
Las Cruces**

Wednesday, August 13

- 9:30 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Harold Pope, Chair
—Representative Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
- 9:35 a.m. (1) **[New Mexico State University \(NMSU\) Military and Veterans Programs Updates](#)**
—Hector Sanchez, Director of Military and Veterans Programs, NMSU
- 10:00 a.m. (2) **[Holloman Air Force Base Mission Briefing](#)**
—Colonel John Stripling, Deputy Commander, 49th Wing, Holloman Air Force Base
—Shelley M. Bailey, Chief, Community Engagement, 49th Wing Public Affairs, Holloman Air Force Base
- 11:15 a.m. (3) **[Mesilla Valley Community of Hope](#)**
—Nicole Martinez, Executive Director, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope/Abode, Inc.
- 11:45 a.m. **Public Comment***
- 12:00 noon **Lunch**
- 1:00 p.m. (4) **[New Mexico State Veterans' Home Discussion](#)**
—Andrea Trujillo, Marketing and Admissions Director, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, Department of Health
—Kenneth Shull, Administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, Department of Health

- 1:45 p.m. (5) **White Sands Missile Range Update**
—Colonel Andrew R. Morgan, Senior Commander, White Sands Missile Range
—Command Sergeant Major Hermes F. Acevedo, Command Sergeant Major, White Sands Missile Range

2:30 p.m. **Adjourn**

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**MINUTES
of the
THIRD MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**August 13, 2025
New Mexico State University
Golf Course
3000 Herb Wimberly Drive
Las Cruces**

The third meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, on August 13, 2025 at 9:34 a.m. at the New Mexico State University (NMSU) Golf Course in Las Cruces.

Present

Sen. Harold Pope, Chair
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
Sen. Jay C. Block
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Nicholas A. Paul
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto

Absent

Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Advisory Members

Rep. Angelita Mejia
Sen. Gabriel Ramos

Sen. Pat Boone
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Staff

Erin Bond, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Domenica Nieto, Research Assistant, LCS

Guests

The guest list in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

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"Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Wednesday, August 13

Welcome and Introductions (9:34 a.m.)

Senator Pope called the meeting to order and asked committee members and staff to introduce themselves.

NMSU Military and Veterans Programs (MVP) Updates (9:40 a.m.)

Hector Sanchez, director of MVP, NMSU, presented on the various MVP offices throughout southern New Mexico and the MVP's mission. He discussed the support that the programs provide to veteran and active-duty military students at NMSU. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=8/13/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Holloman Air Force Base Mission Briefing (10:22 a.m.)

Colonel John Stripling, deputy commander, 49th Wing, Holloman Air Force Base, and Shelley M. Bailey, chief, Community Engagement, 49th Wing Public Affairs, Holloman Air Force Base, presented on the history and recent activities of the 49th Wing at the base. They discussed the base's education, training and research programs and noted challenges the wing is working to address. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=8/13/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Approval of Minutes (11:00 a.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded and with one change, the committee adopted the minutes of the July 15, 2025 meeting.

Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH) (11:02 a.m.)

Nicole Martinez, executive director, MVCH/Abode, Inc., presented on the MVCH's outreach and support programs for unhoused individuals, including veterans. She discussed veteran-specific services the MVCH provides and noted the importance of state funds to support those services. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=8/13/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Public Comment (11:46 a.m.)

A list of individuals who made public comment is available in the meeting file.

New Mexico State Veterans' Home Discussion (1:04 p.m.)

Andrea Trujillo, marketing and admissions director, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, Department of Health (DOH), and Kenneth Shull, administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, DOH, gave an overview of the New Mexico State Veterans' Home's facilities and goals. They discussed the demographics of the veterans the home serves and the resources and services provided to residents. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=8/13/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) Update (1:39 p.m.)

Colonel Donyeill A. Mozer, garrison commander, WSMR, presented on the history and current operations of the WSMR. He noted the number and variety of tests the WSMR conducts and discussed efforts to improve housing and education on the installation. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=8/13/2025&ItemNumber=5>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:27 p.m.

Revised: October 10, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**October 14, 2025
University of New Mexico-Gallup
Student Services and Technology Center, Room 200
705 Gurley Avenue
Gallup**

Tuesday, October 14

- 10:00 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Harold Pope, Chair
—Representative Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
- 10:15 a.m. (1) **University of New Mexico (UNM)-Gallup**
—Sabrina Ezzell, Chancellor, UNM-Gallup
—Jayme McMahon, Director of Student Affairs, UNM-Gallup
—Shana Arviso, Student Success Coordinator, UNM-Gallup
- 11:00 a.m. (2) **American Legion Post 8-Gallup**
—Danny Unale, Commander, NM Post 0008, American Legion
- 11:30 a.m. (3) **Navajo Veterans**
—Demetria A. Simms, Veterans Liaison, Navajo Nation Veterans
Administration
- 12:15 p.m. **Public Comment***
- 12:20 p.m. **Lunch**
- 1:00 p.m. (4) **Update on Navajo Code Talkers Museum**
—Albert Damon, Secretary/Treasurer, Navajo Code Talkers Museum, Inc.
- 2:00 p.m. **Tour of Navajo Code Talkers Museum Site****
- 3:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Additional Information" section of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee [web page](#).

**Committee members and committee staff only.

**MINUTES
of the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**October 14, 2025
University of New Mexico-Gallup
Student Services and Technology Center, Room 200
705 Gurley Avenue
Gallup**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, at 10:16 a.m. on October 14, 2025 in Room 200 of the University of New Mexico (UNM)-Gallup Student Services and Technology Center in Gallup.

Present

Sen. Harold Pope, Chair
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
Sen. Jay C. Block
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Sen. Pat Boone
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Advisory Members

Rep. Joy Garratt
Sen. Gabriel Ramos

Staff

Erin Bond, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Domenica Nieto, Research Assistant, LCS

Guests

The guest list in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Tuesday, October 14

Welcome and Introductions (10:16 a.m.)

Senator Pope welcomed everyone and asked committee members and staff to introduce themselves.

UNM-Gallup (10:20 a.m.)

Sabrina Ezzell, chancellor, UNM-Gallup, and Jayme McMahon, director of student affairs, UNM-Gallup, discussed concerns regarding support for students who are experiencing food insecurity and limited access to health care services. They said that to address those basic needs, the campus's Accessibility Resource Center was expanded to the Student Resource Center. The center's services include support for veterans and dependents of active-duty members of the military.

Shana Arviso, student success coordinator, UNM-Gallup, discussed her work with helping students who are veterans or dependents of members of the military navigate their academic journeys, including connecting them to resources and coordinating with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. She noted that there is a work-study site that employs four veteran work-study students.

Approval of Minutes (10:47 a.m.)

On a motion made, seconded and approved, the committee adopted the minutes of the August 13, 2025 meeting.

American Legion Post 8-Gallup (11:00 a.m.)

Danny Unale, commander, NM Post 0008, American Legion, provided background on the American Legion, stating that Gallup's post was founded in 1920 and is one of the oldest in New Mexico. He discussed the Gallup post's ongoing community activities, including searching for permanent land for the post and engagement with high schools in Gallup. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=10/14/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Navajo Veterans (11:36 a.m.)

Demetria A. Simms, veterans liaison, Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, described her work supporting veterans in the Navajo Nation. Ryan Benally, member, Advisory Committee, Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council, spoke about his work on the committee

and with the Northern Agency Veterans Organization, which encompasses Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. They highlighted the strong relationship between the Navajo Nation and the Veterans' Services Department and listed continued priorities for supporting Navajo veterans.

Public Comment (12:33 p.m.)

A list of individuals who made public comment is available in the meeting file.

Update on Navajo Code Talkers Museum (1:17 p.m.)

Albert Damon Jr., secretary/treasurer, Navajo Code Talkers Museum, Inc. (NCTM); Vern Lee, director, NCTM; former State Representative Anthony Allison, member, Board of Directors, NCTM; Malula Sandoval, vice president, Board of Directors, NCTM; and Michele Peterson, director, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, Capital Projects Management Department, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, provided an overview of the status of the museum, expressing concerns over the lack of progress, and provided information on the current location and zoning study. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=10/14/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:26 p.m.

Revised: November 4, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FIFTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**November 5, 2025
State Capitol, Room 309
Santa Fe**

Wednesday, November 5

- 10:00 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Harold Pope, Chair
—Representative Debra M. Sarinaña, Vice Chair
- 10:05 a.m. (1) **Veterans' Services Department Update and Session Priorities**
—Jamison Herrera, Secretary, Veterans' Services Department
- 10:30 a.m. (2) **Veteran Assistance Programs and The Food Depot**
—Jill Dixon, Executive Director, The Food Depot
- 11:15 a.m. (3) **Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Contamination in New Mexico**
—J.D. Nance, Chief, Hazardous Waste Bureau, Resource Protection
Division, Department of Environment (NMED)
—Eric Chapman, Ph.D., Science Coordinator, Office of Strategic Initiatives,
NMED
- 12:00 noon **Public Comment***
- 12:10 p.m. **Lunch**
- 1:00 p.m. (4) **Update on New Mexico State Parks**
—Toby Velasquez, Director, State Parks Division, Energy, Minerals and
Natural Resources Department
- 1:45 p.m. (5) **Veterans Justice Initiative Program**
—Clark Pennington, Executive Director, First Responders Action Group
- 2:15 p.m. (6) **Department of Military Affairs Update and Session Priorities**
—Major General Miguel Aguilar, Adjutant General, New Mexico National
Guard

3:00 p.m. (7) **Discussion of Navajo Code Talker Museum and Consideration of Legislation for Endorsement**
—Committee Members

4:30 p.m. **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Additional Information" section of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee [web page](#).

**MINUTES
of the
FIFTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**November 5, 2025
State Capitol, Room 309
Santa Fe**

The fifth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, on November 5, 2025 at 10:05 a.m. in Room 309 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Present

Sen. Harold Pope, Chair
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
Sen. Jay C. Block
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Rep. D. Wonda Johnson

Advisory Members

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Joy Garratt
Sen. Gabriel Ramos

Sen. Pat Boone
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Staff

Erin Bond, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Domenica Nieto, Research Assistant, LCS
Gabriel Suazo, Intern, LCS

Minutes Approval

Because the committee will not meet again this year, the minutes for this meeting have not been officially approved by the committee.

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Wednesday, November 5

Welcome and Introductions (10:05 a.m.)

Senator Pope welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked committee members and staff to introduce themselves.

Veterans' Services Department Update and Session Priorities (10:08 a.m.)

Jamison Herrera, secretary, Veterans' Services Department, provided updates on the department's budget for fiscal year 2025 and budget requests for fiscal year 2027. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Veteran Assistance Programs and The Food Depot (10:46 a.m.)

Jill Dixon, executive director, The Food Depot, and Katy Anderson, vice president, Roadrunner Food Bank, discussed the activities of food banks in New Mexico and partnerships with military bases and veterans' services programs.

Approval of Minutes (11:37 a.m.)

On a motion made, seconded and approved, the committee unanimously adopted the minutes of the October 14, 2025 meeting.

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Contamination in New Mexico (11:38 a.m.)

J.D. Nance, chief, Hazardous Waste Bureau, Resource Protection Division, Department of Environment (NMED), and Eric Chapman, Ph.D., science coordinator, Office of Strategic Initiatives, NMED, discussed data and statistics surrounding military members and veterans and their families who are being exposed to the PFAS plume near Cannon Air Force Base in Curry County. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Update on New Mexico State Parks (1:17 p.m.)

Toby Velasquez, director, State Parks Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, provided an overview of the current status of the State Parks Division and presented information on House Bill 161 (2025). The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Veterans Justice Initiative Program (1:58 p.m.)

Clark Pennington, executive director, First Responders Action Group (FRAG), provided information on the Veterans Justice Initiative pilot program implemented by the FRAG in North Carolina.

Department of Military Affairs Update and Session Priorities (2:19 p.m.)

Major General Miguel Aguilar, adjutant general, New Mexico National Guard, gave an update on the New Mexico National Guard's activities in the state and presented the Guard's budget requests for the 2026 legislative session.

Discussion of Navajo Code Talker Museum and Consideration of Legislation for Endorsement (3:32 p.m.)

Vern Lee, board member, Navajo Code Talkers Museum, Inc. (NCTMI); Peter MacDonald, Sr., president, NCTMI; Candice Yazzie, director, Division of Community Development, Navajo Nation; Sharilene Jeff, senior program specialist, Division of Community Development, Navajo Nation; Michelle Peterson, department manager, Capital Projects Management Department, Navajo Nation; Richelle Montoya, vice president, Navajo Nation; and Josett Monette, secretary, Indian Affairs Department, discussed the status of the planned Navajo Code Talkers Museum in Tse Bonito. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 4:39 p.m.



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SERVICE
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO