

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

August 14, 2026
Fort Bayard Medical Center
41 Fort Bayard Road
Santa Clara

The third meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, on August 14, 2026 at 9:05 a.m. at the Fort Bayard Medical Center in Santa Clara.

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
Sen. Rex Wilson

Absent

Rep. D. Wonda Johnson

Advisory Members

Sen. Gabriel Ramos

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

Guest Legislators

Rep. Rebecca Dow
Rep. Jenifer Jones

Staff

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

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.

Friday, August 14**Welcome and Introductions (9:05 a.m.)**

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

Welcome and Update on New Mexico Veterans' Homes (9:21 a.m.)

George Morgan, director, Office of Facilities Management, Department of Health, and Kenneth Shull, executive administrator of long term care, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, welcomed the committee and explained the status of the Fort Bayard State Veterans Home along with upgrades that are in progress. Additionally, they discussed workforce retention and recruitment as current challenges, specifically at the New Mexico State Veterans' Home in Truth or Consequences. Mr. Shull explained how the New Mexico State Veterans' Home is working with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to move from semiprivate to private rooms and that the occupancy rate for both homes averages between 98 and 99 percent.

Tour of the Fort Bayard Medical Center Complex (10:08 a.m.)

Committee members and committee staff toured the Fort Bayard Medical Center Complex.

Western New Mexico University (WNMU) Update (10:27 a.m.)

Jose Coll, Ph.D., president, WNMU, provided a brief update on his work at WNMU and some of the issues the university is facing, specifically regarding limited housing for students and how that is impacting recruitment. Additionally, President Coll discussed the partnership that the university has with the Fort Bayard State Veterans Home and stated that WNMU's nursing program graduates approximately 20 registered nurses and awards approximately 40 master's degrees in social work every year. Sylvia Sierra, veterans affairs manager and school certifying official, WNMU, discussed her work with various local VA entities, federal agencies and private institutions to provide resources for veterans and their dependents who want to pursue a traditional career path.

Local Veterans' Organizations (10:54 a.m.)

Charles LeBlanc, commandant, Gaffney-Oglesby Detachment 1328, Marine Corps League Department of New Mexico; Tim Zamora, member, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12212, and trustee, Grant County Veterans Coalition; John Tedford, interim department commander, Disabled American Veterans Department of New Mexico; and Joe Drake, vice commander, Area 1, Department of New Mexico, American Legion, discussed the work of their organizations in supporting veterans, including addressing food insecurity through food drives, hosting potlucks and picnics for veterans and families, providing transportation to appointments and assisting with funerals for veterans. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=8/14/2026&ItemNumber=3>.

Local Veterans' Services Providers (11:36 a.m.)

Mike Lopez, founder and organizer, Walk for Heroes; Mr. Zamora; Yolanda Amador, member, Chapter 358, Vietnam Veterans of America; and Billy Mize, owner, Indian Springs Ranch, discussed their organizations' priorities and how the organizations assist veterans and their families. Mr. Mike Lopez explained how he works with WNMU on a scholarship fund and that Walk for Heroes honors the families of deceased veterans with plaques in coordination with Representative Terrazas. Ms. Amador spoke on the legacy of her late husband. Mr. Zamora discussed how his organization works with other organizations to provide veteran support. Mr. Mize provided information regarding the Indian Springs Ranch, stating that it is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that was established in 2018 as a safe retreat for veterans, law enforcement officers and first responders. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=8/14/2026&ItemNumber=4>.

Approval of the Minutes (12:08 p.m.)

On a motion made, seconded and approved, the committee adopted the minutes of the June 26, 2026 meeting.

Fort Bayard Redevelopment (12:09 p.m.)

Sheila Hudman, administrator, Village of Santa Clara; Priscilla Lucero, director, Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments; and Arnold Lopez, mayor, Village of Santa Clara, spoke on the implementation plan for Fort Bayard redevelopment. Ms. Lucero stated that the redevelopment plan was a partnership between the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the General Services Department that was established during the 2025 legislative session. Ms. Lucero discussed how the redevelopment plan includes an assessment of and plans to improve infrastructure and housing, especially due to the site's proximity to Fort Bayard National Cemetery. Ms. Hudman discussed how the Village of Santa Clara supports veterans.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Tour of the Fort Bayard National Cemetery (12:45 p.m.)

Committee members and committee staff toured the Fort Bayard National Cemetery.

Tour of New Mexico State Veterans' Home (3:35 p.m.)

Committee members and committee staff toured the New Mexico State Veterans' Home.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.