

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

**October 10, 2019
Daniels Leadership Center
New Mexico Military Institute
Roswell**

The fifth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, co-chair, on October 10, 2019 at 9:45 a.m. in the Daniels Leadership Center at the New Mexico Military Institute (NMMI) in Roswell.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Co-Chair
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Absent

Sen. Bill Tallman, Co-Chair
Rep. Rachel A. Black
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt

Advisory Members

Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown
Rep. Randal S. Crowder
Rep. Joy Garratt
Rep. Jane E. Powdrell-Culbert

Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Sen. Richard C. Martinez
Sen. William H. Payne
Rep. G. Andrés Romero

Guest Legislator

Rep. Rod Montoya

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Staff, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file.

Thursday, October 10

Introductions

Representative Garcia held a moment of silence for the late Senator Carlos R. Cisneros, who recently passed away. Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Welcome and NMMI Update

Representative Greg Nibert welcomed committee members, staff and members of the audience to the NMMI.

Major General Jerry Grizzle, president/superintendent, NMMI, also welcomed committee members, staff and members of the audience to the NMMI and gave a brief overview of the history and curriculum at the NMMI and the performance of its students. Major General Grizzle said that the City of Roswell and the NMMI work in close collaboration with the veteran community to host several events for veterans. He said that a parade and breakfast are held each November to honor those who have served in the military and that since 2017, there has been an increase in the number of students attending the NMMI because of financial assistance made available through the General Richard T. Knowles Legislative Scholarship Program.

In response to a question from a committee member, Major General Grizzle said that he is currently waiting to see the details of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham's proposal for free college tuition that she plans to introduce in the upcoming legislative session. Specifically, he is interested in how much financial aid the governor's proposal will cover since some funding is available to the NMMI from the United States Army.

Transportation for Veterans Task Force — House Memorial (HM) 32 (2019)

Representative Martinez presented on actions arising out of HM 32 (2019), which requested the establishment of a task force to identify transportation challenges and solutions for veterans living in rural communities who seek health services from federal health care systems. Representative Martinez said that representatives from the University of New Mexico (UNM) and other state agencies have met four times throughout the year and that there are additional state agencies that want to participate in the task force, including the Aging and Long-Term Services Department and the Department of Transportation.

Representative Martinez described a proposed pilot program to integrate and improve existing transportation and other services. He said that the pilot program is proposed to be in Deming and would follow a hub and spoke model. The spokes would radiate outward from Deming, creating routes to nearby small communities and to major medical facilities in Albuquerque. He said that the drives would be long and the return home would often happen late at night, so finding volunteer drivers would be a challenge. The pilot program would not only provide transportation for veterans but would also provide other types of assistance to those in need. The cost of a passenger vehicle that seats 12 to 14 passengers is \$65,000, Representative Martinez said, and a passenger vehicle that seats 19 to 23 passengers costs around \$75,000, plus additional costs to provide proper training to the drivers.

Questions and comments from the committee included the following:

- there is confusion as to who the pilot program benefits: veterans or others in need;
- there is confusion over what this task force does, what other programs already do and who will administer the pilot program and, eventually, a more permanent program;

- the Information Technologies Department at UNM created and administered a survey to identify the number of veterans in each area of New Mexico; however, data is not accurate because it does not include veterans that are not registered; and
- whether vehicles would be able to cross state borders, as the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinic in Tucson, Arizona, is closer to Deming than the VA clinic in Albuquerque.

Southeast New Mexico Veterans' Transportation Network

Magil Duran, president, Southeast New Mexico Veterans' Transportation Network, told the committee that the transportation network is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that provides health care transportation services to local veterans, spouses of veterans and caretakers free of charge. He said that the program started in February 2013, and the average number of veterans that use the transportation services is about 1,400 each year. He added that all of the drivers are volunteers, and the drivers are sometimes veterans or relatives of veterans. There are 13 vans used by the network, and the network does not receive government assistance. Mr. Duran said that funding comes from donations.

In response to committee members' questions, Mr. Duran said that certain criteria must be met for a transportation vehicle to cross state lines. He said that the largest transportation vehicle in their fleet can hold up to 12 passengers, and volunteer drivers do not need to hold a commercial driver's license to drive their vans.

General Douglas L. McBride Roswell Veterans Cemetery

Former New Mexico Representative Bob Wooley said that the General Douglas L. McBride Roswell Veterans Cemetery officially opened on July 4, 2014. It is a 20-acre cemetery adjacent to Roswell's South Park Cemetery. He said that the legislature awarded \$350,000 to develop this cemetery and that a gazebo will be installed in the cemetery to hold funeral services.

State Approving Agency (SAA)

Marilyn Dykman, director, SAA, Veterans Services' Department (VSD), introduced Bryan Osterhage, deputy secretary, VSD, to the committee. She said that the SAA is responsible for the administration of veteran educational benefits, commonly known as GI Bill benefits, and other military educational benefits. This oversight includes the approval of all new schools, training facilities and nongovernmental testing organizations. She said that the mission of the SAA is to ensure quality instruction and equitable practices for every veteran and eligible person who enters an SAA-approved educational program. The SAA also ensures that educational programs are in compliance with federal and state guidelines. Currently, there are 136 SSA-approved facilities in New Mexico, with 105 considered active and 31 considered inactive, Ms. Dykman said. She said that if a veteran is involved in an SAA-approved program, the facility, program or organization receives funding. Ultimately, the more veterans enrolled, the more funding the entity receives, she noted. As shown on slide 17 of her presentation, for fiscal year 2018, there were 5,291 students enrolled in educational programs under GI Bill benefits and 582 students from the United States Army National Guard and United States Army Reserve who use military tuition assistance. On August 16, 2017, President Donald Trump signed into law the

federal Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, otherwise known as the "Forever GI Bill", which brings comprehensive changes to the GI Bill, Ms. Dykman said.

Questions and comments from committee members included the following:

- the SAA has some data regarding training and what is needed to do outreach in the pueblos, but additional data is being gathered;
- the process for creating a veterans' resource center at a college or university varies by the amount of funding dedicated to creation of the center; and
- a committee member suggested that the SAA make a presentation to the Legislative Finance Committee.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the September 9, 2019 meeting were approved.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall Project Update

Jerry Martinez, chair, Chapter 996, Vietnam Veterans of America, introduced Jake Lopez, president, Chapter 996, Vietnam Veterans of American; Frank Carrillo, Sergeant of Arms, Chapter 968, Vietnam Veterans of America; and Edward Mendez, Benefits and Services Director and Cemetery Program Director, VSD. Mr. Martinez said that the Vietnam Veterans of American's Northern New Mexico Chapter, Chapter 996, has partnered with the VSD to construct a one-half scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. Mr. Martinez said that the replica will be built in Angel Fire and will commemorate 398 Vietnam veterans from New Mexico who were either killed or are missing in action. Mr. Lopez said that this project will be completed in two years and that there is a need for \$50,000 to purchase the granite. Mr. Lopez said that by the end of the year, the granite should be purchased and ready to install.

Committee members commented that the chapters should look into capital outlay funding to help fund the memorial wall project and that they should contact their respective legislators on how to make those capital outlay funding requests.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.