

**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

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, 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.