

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

**September 22, 2017
Visitors Center
Vietnam Veterans Memorial
Angel Fire**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez, co-chair, on September 22, 2017 at 9:10 a.m. at the Visitors Center of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire. Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Present

Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez, Co-Chair
Rep. David E. Adkins
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Harry Garcia

Absent

Sen. Bill Tallman, Co-Chair
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Bob Wooley

Advisory Members

Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.
Sen. Richard C. Martinez
Sen. John Pinto
Rep. Dennis J. Roch

Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Rep. Randal S. Crowder
Rep. Jim Dines
Sen. William H. Payne
Rep. Jane E. Powdrell-Culbert
Rep. Debbie A. Rodella
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Rep. Jim R. Trujillo

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Peter Kovnat, Staff Attorney, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Copies of all handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file.

Friday, September 22

National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center

Chuck Howe, board president, National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center, and mayor pro tempore, Village of Angel Fire, welcomed the committee on behalf of the mayor. Mr. Howe described the history of the methodology employed by the center. The center was created outside of New Mexico and funded by Ross Perot for the first 10 retreats. After that funding dried up, Mr. Howe and others raised money to hold a retreat in Angel Fire. The person who created the program ran the first retreat for 11 couples for \$12,000, which is inexpensive for a seven-and-one-half-day retreat. The program has since been going strong in Angel Fire.

The program, which is open to any veteran who has been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress, is very holistic, incorporating tools to deal with posttraumatic stress and moral injury and using eastern medicine, yoga, reiki, Native American healing techniques and horseback riding to get veterans and their spouses to a place where they can communicate and process their emotional and physical wounds.

Mr. Howe noted that the program does not use the term "posttraumatic stress disorder" but rather "posttraumatic stress" because there is stigma attached if it is considered a disorder. He also explained that moral injuries, including survivor's guilt or killing an innocent person, often do not surface until long after the veteran comes home. Mr. Howe said that the spouse gets as much treatment as the veteran and clarified that the spouse need not be the veteran's actual spouse but must be an individual who has some influence on the veteran.

When asked about funding, Mr. Howe said that the center is in the third year of four years of stability due to receiving state funding, and the belief is that it will be funded again with behavioral health money from the state. However, for out-of-state veterans, the center has to raise the money. The cost is \$4,000 per couple per retreat, and the center can accommodate up to 15 couples per retreat.

Asked if the program is scalable, Mr. Howe said yes, the center currently has a program in Fort Worth and another in Wichita Falls. While most of the veterans in New Mexico served in Vietnam, Fort Worth hosts primarily veterans from the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. Although there are similar programs that exist, none is as long or as comprehensive.

Committee members asked staff to find out the details of how the state is funding the center.

Not Forgotten Outreach

Don Peters II, executive director, Not Forgotten Outreach, started by saying that he is a disabled U.S. Army veteran who worked in counternarcotics in Colombia. Currently, he is a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) caregiver and receives \$1,200 a month to help another

disabled veteran. He wanted to make sure that legislators tell their constituents that such funds are available from the VA.

Not Forgotten Outreach is run by two disabled veterans — one cognitively disabled and one physically disabled. Over the last year, the organization has provided service to 4,800 military families, many from northern New Mexico. The organization has a seven-bedroom respite center in Taos and an active farming project and also hosts events, such as a Veterans Day meal that feeds about 1,000 people.

The veteran farming project succeeded in creating a veteran-specific motto for agricultural products produced by veterans, so consumers can choose to support veteran farmers.

Mr. Peters covered a broad array of ways in which he is leveraging resources to provide free services to veterans, including seeking federal dollars to get local children working in the program and providing space to assistance dog trainers, who, in turn, train veterans to train therapy dogs. The next big project, Mr. Peters said, is to buy some land for affordable housing for veterans.

Next year, the National Veterans Golden Age Games will be held in Albuquerque on August 3-8, and Mr. Peters said that participants and people to fill the stands are needed.

Legislators directed Mr. Peters to focus on outreach, as his program has a lot to offer, but this is the first they have heard about it. One member suggested that the Tourism Department could provide some funding for the games and recommended contacting it.

Navy League of the United States New Mexico Council

Tom Gutierrez, president, Navy League of the United States New Mexico Council (Navy League), and Rebecca Vigil, public affairs, Navy League, discussed the mission of the Navy League. It is committed to six areas of focus:

1. supporting naval youth and education programs;
2. providing opportunities for sailors on the USS *Santa Fe* and the USS *New Mexico* to travel to New Mexico;
3. providing opportunities for New Mexicans to travel to ceremonies honoring the return of active duty members;
4. providing opportunities for the Navy League to honor active duty members serving in New Mexico;
5. assisting the USS *Los Alamos* Committee in its effort to get a submarine named after Los Alamos; and
6. assisting in the relocation and display of the battleship USS *New Mexico's* bell.

Mr. Gutierrez said that the Navy League works closely with the Veterans' Services Department (VSD) and is accountable for every dollar the state has given the group.

Ron Oleksak, USS *Santa Fe* Committee, said that there is not a lot of awareness of the U.S. Navy in New Mexico, so he spends a lot of time trying to create public awareness.

Ms. Vigil thanked the committee and said that the Navy League is an umbrella group, each part of which provides a great service to the state. She noted that the Navy League raises money to support applicants for scholarships to the United States Naval Academy.

In closing, Mr. Gutierrez said that the Navy League is requesting \$150,000 in funding from the legislature, which is similar to last year's request that was line-item vetoed by the governor.

VSD Update

Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, VSD, said that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was recently transferred from the State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department to the VSD's control. While the division did a great job, the memorial is not really part of the division's mission, and it made sense to put a veteran-specific agency in charge.

More than 4,000 veterans and their family members and friends walk the grounds weekly. The museum, in which every exhibit is donated, partners with the Cultural Affairs Department for curation. Currently, the museum is seeking \$150,000 in capital outlay funding to fix its water system. At this time, there is only nonpotable water at the facility.

In response to a question, Deputy Secretary Martinez said that Angel Fire is third on the list for New Mexico state veterans' cemeteries. First, Fort Stanton is about to open. Second, Gallup is doing its paperwork now, and the process takes about two and one-half years to complete. So the Angel Fire cemetery, if it stays on target, will probably start its process in about three years.

New Mexico Fisher House

Aaron Dean said the groundbreaking for the New Mexico Fisher House in Albuquerque was scheduled to happen in January 2015, but the Historic Preservation Division of the Cultural Affairs Department has put up one obstacle after another to prevent the construction. Mr. Dean said that people are sleeping in their cars and that it is unbelievable to him that the division has not been more agreeable.

Mr. Dean said that a typical Fisher House looks nothing like the one proposed for Albuquerque and that the Fisher House organization has gone out of its way to make the house look more "New Mexican". The plan is for a 16-suite house with a common living room and kitchen area. The houses are designed to allow families an opportunity to discuss and work out family issues and decide how best to care for the hospitalized veteran.

According to Mr. Dean, the money raised for the New Mexico Fisher House will not revert, but every time the Historic Preservation Division delays the project, the organization

moves its focus to another location, and there are many places that are looking to build a Fisher House.

Upon discussion by the committee about writing a letter to the division, a staff member said that Dr. Jeff Pappas, state historic preservation officer and director, has agreed to present on this issue before the committee at its next meeting in Santa Rosa.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:48 p.m.