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

September 15, 2026
Christus Health
Conference Room
2669 North Scenic Drive
Alamogordo

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, on September 15, 2026 at 9:44 a.m. at Christus Health in Alamogordo.

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

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

Advisory Members
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Sen. Gabriel Ramos

Sen. Pat Boone
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Joy Garratt
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Guest Legislator
Rep. John Block

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.

Tuesday, September 15

Welcome and Introductions (9:44 a.m.)

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

Welcome (9:53 a.m.)

Sharon McDonald, mayor, City of Alamogordo, welcomed everyone to Alamogordo.

Update from Holloman Air Force Base (HAFB) (9:55 a.m.)

Colonel John R. Stripling IV, deputy commander, HAFB, discussed HAFB priorities to empower and train combat-ready airmen and nurture community. He provided an overview of the history and orientation of HAFB and updates on its ongoing missions, including the largest F-16 formal training unit, the BEAR Base oil reserve and test groups. Colonel Stripling provided updates on HAFB challenges, including a lack of child care providers, access to specialized medical care and housing and a low national ranking in schools, along with updates on increased housing infrastructure and renovations for dorm residences.

Update from White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) (10:31 a.m.)

Colonel Michael A. Lueckeman, garrison commander, WSMR, provided an overview of the WSMR's geography and infrastructure, including roads, power lines, vertical structures and personnel necessary for the WSMR's testing and evaluation missions. He provided updates on testing and evaluation missions, the Narrow Band Test Facility and a project to modernize water infrastructure to facilitate the testing and innovation. Colonel Lueckeman discussed the WSMR's role in increasing service member safety and the importance of the WSMR's community engagement events. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=9/15/2026&ItemNumber=2.

Base and Community Interactions: Chambers of Commerce and the Casa Big Give (11:09 a.m.)

Adam Hoppes, executive director, Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce; Stacie Allen, president and chief executive officer, Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce; and Lieutenant Hayden Meek, liaison, Casa Big Give, provided updates on their

organizations. Mr. Hoppes discussed improving the quality of life for the community and enhancing the regional economic health through initiatives, including the City Tour, the Gateway Freedom Monument, a regional microplex, housing expansion, commercial air service and military-civic partnerships. Mr. Hoppes provided an overview of Alamogordo's challenges in education, health care, workforce, spousal employment and infrastructure as readiness issues. Ms. Allen provided an overview of the history of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce and discussed its role in community advocacy, events and partnerships. Lieutenant Meek provided updates on Casa Big Give's community development projects, demonstrating the organization's community outreach and services. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=9/15/2026&ItemNumber=3.

New Mexico State University-Alamogordo (NMSU-A) Veteran Services (11:51 a.m.)

Aidee McKinney, associate director, Student Services, NMSU-A, provided an overview of the NMSU-A military and veterans programs, including student demographics, enrollment growth, veteran and dependent student services and workforce and degree programs. Ms. McKinney highlighted NMSU-A veteran services and resources, as well as partnerships with HAFB and the Community College of the Air Force. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=9/15/2026&ItemNumber=4.

Local Veteran Experiences (12:33 p.m.)

Gloria Fernandez, retired lieutenant colonel, United States Air Force (1955-1975), and member, Rio Grande Honor Flight and Yellow Jackets of Otero County; Irvin Michaud, retired airman, United States Air Force (1950-1953), and member, Rio Grande Honor Flight and Yellow Jackets of Otero County; and Floyd Stringer, specialist 5, United States Army (1968-1971), and member, Rio Grande Honor Flight and Yellow Jackets of Otero County, shared personal experiences from their military service, reflected on the importance in acknowledging veterans for their service and discussed the role of the Rio Grande Honor Flight and Yellow Jackets of Otero County in honoring veterans.

Approval of the Minutes (1:18 p.m.)

On a motion made, seconded and approved, the committee adopted the minutes of the August 14, 2026 meeting.

Healing America's Heroes (1:18 p.m.)

Bob Wooley, former state representative, District 66, and president, Healing America's Heroes; and Allen Cavazos, chief executive officer, Healing America's Heroes, discussed the organization's mission to provide free services to veterans and first

responders. Mr. Wooley discussed updates to Healing America's Heroes' operations and partnerships that are contributing to the program's success. Mr. Wooley and Mr. Cavazos discussed Healing America's Heroes' updated programs and services, including individualized sessions with licensed practitioners, recreational and therapeutic activities and expanded medical services. Mr. Cavazos discussed the importance of grants and other funding sources in determining the number of individuals the organization can serve and highlighted the need for continued behavioral health funding to provide individuals with opportunities to address trauma and improve their overall well-being.

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substance (PFAS) Contamination in Holloman Lake (1:43 p.m.)

Jean-Luc Cartron, M.D., Ph.D., research professor, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico, discussed PFAS contamination at Holloman Lake and its effects on wildlife and the surrounding environment. He discussed research examining potential health effects of PFAS exposure and ongoing monitoring of wildlife in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife and local hunting organizations. Dr. Cartron emphasized the importance of continued monitoring of Holloman Lake and other areas of New Mexico as remediation efforts continue. The presentation materials can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=9/15/2026&ItemNumber=7.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Tour of HAFB (2:44 p.m.)

Committee members and committee staff toured the HAFB.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.