

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

**November 5, 2025
State Capitol, Room 309
Santa Fe**

The fifth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, on November 5, 2025 at 10:05 a.m. in Room 309 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

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

Absent

Rep. D. Wonda Johnson

Advisory Members

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Joy Garratt
Sen. Gabriel Ramos

Sen. Pat Boone
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Staff

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

Minutes Approval

Because the committee will not meet again this year, the minutes for this meeting have not been officially approved by the committee.

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.

Wednesday, November 5

Welcome and Introductions (10:05 a.m.)

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

Veterans' Services Department Update and Session Priorities (10:08 a.m.)

Jamison Herrera, secretary, Veterans' Services Department, provided updates on the department's budget for fiscal year 2025 and budget requests for fiscal year 2027. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Veteran Assistance Programs and The Food Depot (10:46 a.m.)

Jill Dixon, executive director, The Food Depot, and Katy Anderson, vice president, Roadrunner Food Bank, discussed the activities of food banks in New Mexico and partnerships with military bases and veterans' services programs.

Approval of Minutes (11:37 a.m.)

On a motion made, seconded and approved, the committee unanimously adopted the minutes of the October 14, 2025 meeting.

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Contamination in New Mexico (11:38 a.m.)

J.D. Nance, chief, Hazardous Waste Bureau, Resource Protection Division, Department of Environment (NMED), and Eric Chapman, Ph.D., science coordinator, Office of Strategic Initiatives, NMED, discussed data and statistics surrounding military members and veterans and their families who are being exposed to the PFAS plume near Cannon Air Force Base in Curry County. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Update on New Mexico State Parks (1:17 p.m.)

Toby Velasquez, director, State Parks Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, provided an overview of the current status of the State Parks Division and presented information on House Bill 161 (2025). The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Veterans Justice Initiative Program (1:58 p.m.)

Clark Pennington, executive director, First Responders Action Group (FRAG), provided information on the Veterans Justice Initiative pilot program implemented by the FRAG in North Carolina.

Department of Military Affairs Update and Session Priorities (2:19 p.m.)

Major General Miguel Aguilar, adjutant general, New Mexico National Guard, gave an update on the New Mexico National Guard's activities in the state and presented the Guard's budget requests for the 2026 legislative session.

Discussion of Navajo Code Talker Museum and Consideration of Legislation for Endorsement (3:32 p.m.)

Vern Lee, board member, Navajo Code Talkers Museum, Inc. (NCTMI); Peter MacDonald, Sr., president, NCTMI; Candice Yazzie, director, Division of Community Development, Navajo Nation; Sharilene Jeff, senior program specialist, Division of Community Development, Navajo Nation; Michelle Peterson, department manager, Capital Projects Management Department, Navajo Nation; Richelle Montoya, vice president, Navajo Nation; and Josett Monette, secretary, Indian Affairs Department, discussed the status of the planned Navajo Code Talkers Museum in Tse Bonito. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=11/5/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 4:39 p.m.