

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

**October 14, 2025
University of New Mexico-Gallup
Student Services and Technology Center, Room 200
705 Gurley Avenue
Gallup**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Harold Pope, chair, at 10:16 a.m. on October 14, 2025 in Room 200 of the University of New Mexico (UNM)-Gallup Student Services and Technology Center in Gallup.

Present

Sen. Harold Pope, Chair
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana, Vice Chair
Sen. Jay C. Block
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Sen. Pat Boone
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Catherine J. Cullen
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Advisory Members

Rep. Joy Garratt
Sen. Gabriel Ramos

Staff

Erin Bond, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Domenica Nieto, Research Assistant, 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, October 14

Welcome and Introductions (10:16 a.m.)

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

UNM-Gallup (10:20 a.m.)

Sabrina Ezzell, chancellor, UNM-Gallup, and Jayme McMahon, director of student affairs, UNM-Gallup, discussed concerns regarding support for students who are experiencing food insecurity and limited access to health care services. They said that to address those basic needs, the campus's Accessibility Resource Center was expanded to the Student Resource Center. The center's services include support for veterans and dependents of active-duty members of the military.

Shana Arviso, student success coordinator, UNM-Gallup, discussed her work with helping students who are veterans or dependents of members of the military navigate their academic journeys, including connecting them to resources and coordinating with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. She noted that there is a work-study site that employs four veteran work-study students.

Approval of Minutes (10:47 a.m.)

On a motion made, seconded and approved, the committee adopted the minutes of the August 13, 2025 meeting.

American Legion Post 8-Gallup (11:00 a.m.)

Danny Unale, commander, NM Post 0008, American Legion, provided background on the American Legion, stating that Gallup's post was founded in 1920 and is one of the oldest in New Mexico. He discussed the Gallup post's ongoing community activities, including searching for permanent land for the post and engagement with high schools in Gallup. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=10/14/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Navajo Veterans (11:36 a.m.)

Demetria A. Simms, veterans liaison, Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, described her work supporting veterans in the Navajo Nation. Ryan Benally, member, Advisory Committee, Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council, spoke about his work on the committee

and with the Northern Agency Veterans Organization, which encompasses Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. They highlighted the strong relationship between the Navajo Nation and the Veterans' Services Department and listed continued priorities for supporting Navajo veterans.

Public Comment (12:33 p.m.)

A list of individuals who made public comment is available in the meeting file.

Update on Navajo Code Talkers Museum (1:17 p.m.)

Albert Damon Jr., secretary/treasurer, Navajo Code Talkers Museum, Inc. (NCTM); Vern Lee, director, NCTM; former State Representative Anthony Allison, member, Board of Directors, NCTM; Malula Sandoval, vice president, Board of Directors, NCTM; and Michele Peterson, director, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, Capital Projects Management Department, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, provided an overview of the status of the museum, expressing concerns over the lack of progress, and provided information on the current location and zoning study. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=10/14/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:26 p.m.