

# MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

2009  
INTERIM  
FINAL REPORT



New Mexico Legislature  
Legislative Council Service  
411 State Capitol  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

**MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

## **2009 INTERIM SUMMARY**

The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) was created by statute for the 2009 interim. Laws 2009, Chapter 116 required the MVAC to hold hearings relating to military issues and veterans' issues and to make an annual report, with recommendations for any necessary legislation, by December 15 prior to each session of the legislature. The MVAC also was tasked with making legislative recommendations to Congress and regulatory recommendations to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States Department of Defense.

In fulfillment of its statutory duties, the MVAC held five meetings during the 2009 interim. At its initial meeting, the MVAC developed a work plan, to be approved by the New Mexico Legislative Council, which identified numerous military and veterans' issues of concern. The work plan identifies the specific topics explored and discussed during the 2009 interim.

During its organizational meeting, the MVAC reviewed past session legislation and heard testimony from John Garcia, secretary of veterans' services, Colonel John Baca, chief of staff of the Army National Guard, and General Hanson Scott, director of the Office of Military Base Planning and Support. Each of the departments presented its legislative priorities. The MVAC took into consideration the requests of these departments as it scheduled testimony and presenters for the coming interim.

At its second meeting, the MVAC heard testimony from Alan Martinez, director of the State Benefits Division of the Veterans' Services Department, regarding federal benefits and state benefits for New Mexico veterans. Additionally, the MVAC focused on veterans and family support services, particularly for behavioral health. Moreover, the MVAC heard about preparations for a study of the feasibility of developing a veterans' wellness center, which was

requested in House Memorial 39 and Senate Memorial 29. Finally, the MVAC heard testimony on Cannon Air Force Base's mission and its future community planning.

The MVAC continued its focus on veterans' health issues, particularly long-term care issues, at its third meeting. Dr. Meghan Gerety, chief of staff, New Mexico Veterans Affairs Health Care System, Department of Veterans Affairs, provided a detailed report on the quality and accessibility of health care provided by the federal government for New Mexico veterans. The MVAC made a recommendation to Dr. Gerety that she or the appropriate personnel visit the building of the past Miners' Colfax Medical Center and consider using that building for the New Mexico Veterans Affairs Health Care System. Subsequently, the co-chairs were informed that the facility had been toured and progress was made on securing the location for use by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The MVAC also heard testimony regarding the commissioning of the USS *New Mexico*. Through a series of correspondence, the MVAC sought to secure a date for the commissioning, which members of the legislature and the Office of the Governor could attend. The MVAC also sent a letter to the New Mexico congressional delegation requesting that the United States Congress continue a mission for the 150th Fighter Wing. Additionally, the MVAC heard testimony on the mission of, and community planning for, Kirtland Air Force Base.

The MVAC postponed its meeting originally scheduled for October 15 and 16 due to the special session of the legislature that was held in late October. The MVAC held its fourth meeting on November 9 and 10. During the fourth meeting, the MVAC focused on the educational opportunities for military personnel and their spouses and dependents; veteran homelessness; and the missions and concerns of White Sands Missile Range and Cannon Air

Force Base. Jim Rickle and Dale Van Detter, regional liaisons for military families, Department of Defense, provided their department's legislative priorities, including the Interstate Compact for Military Children and custody concerns for children of active duty military personnel.

At its final meeting of the 2009 interim, the MVAC heard reports that were requested in various memorials, and it also considered legislation. In addition to the recommendations made to the United States Congress and federal agencies via correspondence, the MVAC endorsed various bills for the upcoming legislative session. The bills endorsed by the MVAC are as follows:

- Child Custody Clarification for Active Duty Military Personnel — 202.179656.1
- Protecting Veterans' Disability Payments from Creditors — 202.180290.1
- Free Fishing or Small Game License for Military on Leave — 202.180133.1
- Military Discount for General Hunting and Fishing License — 202.180134.1
- Educational Interstate Compact for Military Kids — 202.180222.1
- Veterans' National Cemetery Fund — 202.179571.1
- Reauthorizing the Statutory Creation of the MVAC — 202.180254.1
- HJR — Property Tax Exemption for Veterans' Organizations — 202.180201.1
- HJM — Study Military Credit and Articulation — 202.180251.2
- HJM — Recognizing the Commissioning of the USS *New Mexico* — 202.180204.1
- HM — Requesting the Continuation of the MVAC — 202.180205.1

The MVAC also endorsed, in concept only, amending the statute that sets the reimbursement to veterans' service organizations for performing honors at funerals to \$50.00.

All of the endorsed legislation is located at the end of this report.

**2009 APPROVED  
WORK PLAN AND MEETING SCHEDULE  
for the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Members**

Sen. David Ulbarri, Co-Chair  
Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair  
Rep. Elias Barela  
Rep. Nathan P. Cote

Sen. Eric G. Griego  
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton  
Sen. John Pinto  
Sen. William E. Sharer

**Advisory Members**

Sen. Rod Adair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Sen. Dianna J. Duran  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia  
Rep. Karen E. Giannini

Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez  
Rep. Kathy A. McCoy  
Sen. William H. Payne  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

**Work Plan**

The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was created by statute for the 2009 interim only. The committee was given various statutory duties. The committee shall conduct meetings in several geographically dispersed areas of the state and shall conduct hearings relating to military issues and veterans' issues. The committee shall make a report and recommend any necessary legislation to the next session of the legislature and make legislative recommendations to Congress and regulatory recommendations to the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs and the United States Department of Defense.

A. The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee proposes to explore and discuss the following topics during the 2009 interim:

1. federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 impacts on the Department of Military Affairs and Veterans' Services Department, including sustainment, restoration and modernization of military installations, veterans' hospitals and national cemeteries;
2. the interface of Native American veterans and the military;
3. the interface of veterans in the judicial system (SM 74);
4. the commemoration of veterans, including veterans' museums, memorials and monuments;
5. health care delivery systems for military personnel, veterans and those in

transition, such as expansion of emergency room treatment to primary care, Fisher House in Albuquerque and establishment of a holistic wellness center;

6. family support centers, support for family operations and community, and veteran business and entrepreneur programs;

7. the missions and functions of military bases and the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission's assessments and possible reports;

8. the assurance of adequate resources for military women and women veterans, such as sexual assault prevention and response programs and a clinic for women veterans;

9. educational opportunities for veterans and their families;

10. increased outreach to veterans, in particular to Native American veterans, women veterans and veterans who have served in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq;

11. long-term care for aging veterans;

12. the integration of homeless veterans back into stable homes;

13. the deployment and mission of the New Mexico National Guard at the state and federal level;

14. the interface of New Mexico National Guard personnel and the federal government during active duty and as veterans, including hazardous pay and other benefit requirements and employer support of the guard and reserve programs; and

15. the establishment of missions and operations in support of foreign conflicts that can be carried out in New Mexico, such as cyber-defense command and endurance category unmanned aerial vehicles.

B. The committee will coordinate, as needed, with other committees regarding presentations of subject matter of common concern.

## MEETING SCHEDULE

### Dates

May 29, 2009  
July 17, 2009  
September 2, 2009  
October 15-16, 2009  
November 30, 2009

### Location

Santa Fe  
Angel Fire  
Albuquerque  
Alamogordo and Las Cruces  
Santa Fe, State Capitol

# AGENDAS

Revised: May 21, 2009

**TENTATIVE AGENDA  
for the  
FIRST MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**May 29, 2009  
Room 309, State Capitol  
Santa Fe**

**Friday, May 29**

- 10:00 a.m.     **Call to Order**
- 10:05 a.m.     **Interim Committee Protocol and Procedure**  
—Paula Tackett, Director, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
- 10:30 a.m.     **2009 Legislation — Summary**  
—Chase Van Gorder, Staff Attorney, LCS
- 11:00 a.m.     **Veterans' Services Department Presentation (Priority Initiatives)**  
—John Garcia, Secretary, Veterans' Services Department
- 12:00 noon     **Lunch**
- 1:00 p.m.     **Department of Military Affairs Presentation (Priority Initiatives)**  
—Kenny Montoya, Adjutant General, Department of Military Affairs
- 1:45 p.m.     **Office of Military Base Planning/Support Presentation (Priority Initiatives)**  
—Hanson Scott, Director, Office of Military Base Planning and Support
- 2:30 p.m.     **Presentation of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Impact**  
—Karen Wells, LCS
- 3:00 p.m.     **Discussion of Focus Areas**  
—Chase Van Gorder, Karen Wells, Damian Lara, LCS
- 4:30 p.m.     **Adjourn**

Revised: July 16, 2009

**TENTATIVE AGENDA  
for the  
SECOND MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**July 17, 2009  
Angel Fire Resort, Angel Fire, New Mexico**

**Friday, July 17**

- 9:00 a.m.     **Call to Order**
- 9:05 a.m.     **Welcome and Introductions**
- 9:10 a.m.     **September 2, 2009 Meeting Location**  
—Kenny Montoya, Adjutant General, Department of Military Affairs
- 9:25 a.m.     **Veterans' Wellness Center (HM 39 and SM 29)**  
—Charles "Chuck" E. Howe, Mayor Pro Tem, Village of Angel Fire  
—Secretary John Garcia, Veterans' Services Department
- 10:00 a.m.    **Cannon Air Force Base Mission and Community Planning**  
—Colonel Stephen A. Clark, Wing Commander
- 11:00 a.m.    **Military and Veterans' Commemoration**  
—John Garcia, Secretary, Veterans' Services Department  
—David J. Simon, Director, New Mexico State Parks, Energy, Minerals and  
Natural Resources Department
- 11:15 a.m.    **Vietnam Veterans' War Memorial Site Visit and Presentation**  
—David J. Simon, Director, New Mexico State Parks  
—Kate German, State Park Ranger, Vietnam Veterans' War Memorial
- 12:30 p.m.    **Lunch**
- 1:30 p.m.     **Veteran and Family Support Services**  
—Chris Burmeister, L.M.F.T., Administrator  
—Linda Roebuck, Director, Intrastate Behavioral Health Purchasing  
Collaborative
- 2:30 p.m.     **Summary of State and Federal Benefits for Veterans**  
—Alan Martinez, Director, Benefits Division, Veterans' Services Department
- 3:20 p.m.     **Status of Proposals to Increase Cost Sharing in TRICARE**

—Pamela C. Garcia, Constituent Liaison, Office of Congressman Ben Ray Lujan

3:30 p.m. **Public Comment**

4:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

Revised: August 26, 2009

**TENTATIVE AGENDA  
for the  
THIRD MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**September 2, 2009  
NM National Guard Armory  
600 Wyoming Blvd. NE, Albuquerque**

**Wednesday, September 2**

- 9:00 a.m.     **Call to Order**
- 9:05 a.m.     **Welcome and Introductions**  
—Senator Timothy M. Keller
- 9:10 a.m.     **Health Care Access for Veterans**  
—Dr. Meghan Gerety, Chief of Staff, New Mexico VA Health Care System,  
Department of Veterans Affairs
- 10:15 a.m.    **Long-Term Care and Brain Injury Services for Veterans**  
—Kimberly Austin-Oser, Division Director, Elderly and Disabled Services  
Division, Aging and Long-Term Services Department (ALTSD)  
—Fred Schaum, Director, Performance Management, and Liaison to Veterans'  
Services Department (VSD), ALTSD
- 10:45 a.m.    **Veterans' Home; Long-Term Care Services for Veterans**  
—Lori Montgomery, Administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home (Invited)
- 11:15 a.m.    **Veterans Integration Center**  
—Larry J. Campos, State Veterans Coordinator, Workforce Solutions Department
- 11:45 a.m.    **Lung Cancer Screening Program for Veterans**  
—John Cousins, President and CEO, Biomoda
- 12:15 p.m.    **Working Lunch**
- 12:30 p.m.    **Commissioning of the USS *New Mexico***

—Dick Brown, Chairman, Navy League's USS *New Mexico* Commissioning Committee

—CDA Mark Prokopius, Commanding Officer, USS *New Mexico*

—ETCS Eric Murphy, Chief of the Boat, USS *New Mexico*

1:00 p.m. **New Mexico National Guard Missions/New Mission 150th Fighter Wing**  
—Kenny Montoya, Adjutant General, Department of Military Affairs

2:00 p.m. **Kirtland Air Force Base Mission and Community Planning**  
—Thomas Berardinelli, Executive Director

3:00 p.m. **Public Comment**

3:30 p.m. **Optional Tour of 150th Fighter Wing**

4:30 p.m. **Adjourn**

Revised: November 3, 2009

**TENTATIVE AGENDA  
for the  
FOURTH MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**November 9, 2009  
American Legion Post 10  
1185 E. Madrid Ave., Las Cruces**

**November 10, 2009  
Sgt. Willie Estrada Memorial Civic Center  
800 1st St., Alamogordo**

**Monday, November 9 — American Legion Post 10**

- 10:00 a.m.    **Call to Order**
- 10:05 a.m.    **Welcome**  
—Ken Miyagishima, Mayor, Las Cruces (Invited)
- 10:15 a.m.    **Mission of the Vet Center in Southern New Mexico**  
—Guy McCommon, Team Leader, Vet Center
- 10:30 a.m.    **Veteran Homelessness**  
—Pamela Angell, Executive Director, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope
- 11:15 a.m.    **Veterans Museum — Status Update**  
—Colonel Joseph Long, USMCR (Ret.), Joseph C. Long Consulting, LLC
- 12:00 noon    **Veterans Museum Site Visit and Lunch at Veterans Park**
- 1:00 p.m.    **Higher Education for Military Personnel — GI Bills**  
—Roberta Derlin, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Student Success,  
New Mexico State University (NMSU)  
—Eva Armijo, coordinator for Student and Veterans Affairs, NMSU  
—Lieutenant Colonel Elise Wheeler, United States Air Force (Retired),  
Director, UNM Veterans Resource Center
- 1:45 p.m.    **Public Comment**

- 2:15 p.m.     **Travel to White Sands Missile Range**
- 3:00 p.m.     **White Sands Missile Range — Site Visit and Briefing**  
—Brigadier General John S. Regan, White Sands Missile Range Commander
- 5:00 p.m.     **Recess**

**Tuesday, November 10 — Sgt. Willie Estrada Memorial Civic Center**

- 9:00 a.m.     **Welcome**  
—Ed Cole, City Commissioner, Alamogordo
- 9:10 a.m.     **Interstate Compact for Military Kids**  
—Jim Rickles, Regional Liaison, Military Families, Department of Defense  
(DoD)  
—Dale Van Dettay, DoD
- 10:00 a.m.    **4H's Operation Military Kid (OMK)**  
—Frank Hodnett, Department Head, Extension 4-H, College of Agricultural,  
Consumer and Environmental Sciences, NMSU
- 10:45 a.m.    **Holloman Air Force Base: 49th Fighter Wing Mission and Unmanned Aerial  
Vehicles**  
—Colonel Jeffrey L. Harrigion, Wing Commander, Holloman Air Force Base  
(HAFB)  
—Tom Fuller, Chief Community Relations, HAFB
- 11:45 a.m.    **46th Test Group**  
—Colonel Tom Curry, Commander  
—Lieutenant Colonel Wim Libby, Deputy Commander
- 12:15 p.m.    **Public Comment/Working Lunch**
- 12:45 p.m.    **Troop Deployment and Medical Screening**  
—Colonel Christine A. Sautter
- 1:30 p.m.     **Adjourn**

Revised: November 24, 2009

**TENTATIVE AGENDA  
for the  
FIFTH MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**November 30, 2009  
Room 311, State Capitol, Santa Fe, NM**

**Monday, November 30**

- 9:00 a.m.        **Call to Order**
- 9:05 a.m.        **Veterans Exposed to Uranium — Status Update**  
**SB 611 (2007) and SB 165 (2007)**  
—Sam Howarth, Ph.D., Director, New Mexico Health Policy Commission
- 10:00 a.m.        **SM 74: Veterans' Court**  
—Alan Martinez, Veterans' Services Department (VSD)  
—Delano Garcia, Department of Military Affairs  
—Peter Bochert, Administrative Office of the Courts
- 11:00 a.m.        **HM 21: Isleta All Purpose**  
—Ulysses Abeita, Pueblo of Isleta  
—Theresa Zuni, Pueblo of Isleta  
—Joe Garcia, Pueblo of Isleta
- 12:00 noon       **Lunch**
- 1:00 p.m.        **HM 39 and SM 29: Veterans' Health and Healing Center Near Angel Fire**  
**SM 31: Acupuncture for Post-Traumatic Stress**  
—John M. Garcia, Secretary, VSD  
—Chuck Howe, Mayor Pro Temp, Village of Angel Fire
- 2:00 p.m.        **Consideration of Legislation**
- 4:00 p.m.        **Public Comment**
- 4:30 p.m.        **Adjourn**

# MINUTES

**FIRST MEETING  
of the  
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**May 29, 2009  
State Capitol, Room 309  
Santa Fe**

The first meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 2009 interim was called to order by Senator David Ulibarri, co-chair, on Friday, May 29, 2009, at 10:10 a.m. in Room 309 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

**Present**

Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair  
Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair  
Rep. Nathan P. Cote  
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton  
Sen. John Pinto

**Absent**

Rep. Elias Barela  
Sen. Eric G. Griego  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez  
Sen. William E. Sharer

**Advisory Members**

Sen. Rod Adair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Sen. Dianna J. Duran  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia  
Rep. Karen E. Giannini  
Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Rep. Kathy A. McCoy  
Sen. William H. Payne  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

**Staff**

Damian Lara, Legislative Council Service (LCS)  
Chase Van Gorder, LCS  
Karen Wells, LCS  
Michael Calderon, LCS

**Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

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

**Friday, May 29**

**Welcome and Introductions**

The co-chairs briefly identified their primary interest in introducing the legislation that created this committee. The members of the committee introduced themselves and identified their primary interest in military and veterans' issues. Representative Thomas A. Garcia requested that members keep these interests in mind as they hear testimony in consideration of the work plan to be discussed at the end of the day. Members of the audience were invited to introduce themselves.

### **Interim Committee Protocol and Procedure**

John Yaeger, deputy director, LCS, reviewed protocols and procedures to be observed during the interim. A quorum for this committee may be established in two ways: five voting members will constitute a quorum for the purposes of voting; and any five members present will constitute a subcommittee and be considered a quorum for the purpose of being reimbursed and to conduct other business not requiring a vote. He noted that the speaker of the house or the president pro tempore may appoint a voting member for any meeting in which it is known in advance that a quorum will not be present. He explained the difficulty in scheduling the interim committees with minimal overlap and urged the members to not change the proposed schedule if at all possible.

### **2009 Legislation — Summary**

Mr. Van Gorder presented an overview of the legislation that was introduced during the 2009 legislative session. A handout was provided that presented those bills that passed and have been chaptered and those memorials that passed and were signed. Other bills and memorials that were considered and did not pass were also reflected. Mr. Van Gorder briefly described those measures that passed. He noted that, during each session, dozens of measures are typically considered dealing with military and veterans' affairs, which this year gave rise to the establishment of this committee. He pointed out that the committee will only be convened for one year and will not automatically extend past that term. The legislature can always extend the term of the committee by statute, memorial or New Mexico Legislative Council action. He noted that the bills and memorials may give some guidance to the committee in determining the content of its work over the interim.

Following the presentation, committee members asked questions and made comments. Representative Cote noted the omission of House Memorial 4, Blue Star Mothers' Day. Additionally, the committee requested clarification regarding the term of the committee.

### **Veterans' Services Department Presentation (Priority Initiatives)**

John Garcia, secretary of veterans' services, began by thanking the legislators for creating this committee. There are multiple and broad issues that affect veterans and that deserve more in-depth discussion. Additionally, there are numerous members of the legislature that are veterans. The cabinet-level status of the department was established in 2003 by unanimous consent of the legislature. He reviewed the mission of the Veterans' Services Department (VSD) and reviewed various subsets of the approximately 180,000 veterans in the state representing 9.4 percent of the population, including 7,000 of whom that are homeless. He identified the economic value and other characteristics of veterans in New Mexico. There are 30,000 veterans

of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan living in New Mexico. The issues of women veterans and Native American veterans have unique needs and are often unaware of their military benefits. The department has initiated special outreach efforts for these target groups and other veteran populations.

Current initiatives at the VSD address health care, education, business development, outreach and legacy. The incidence of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is growing. The department recommends the establishment of a veterans' wellness center to help address this problem. Homelessness is often linked to these disorders, which could be addressed by the development of integration centers statewide. The department has identified a need for educational outreach to inform veterans of their GI bill benefits that are currently greatly under-utilized in the state. The VSD is partnering with the Workforce Solutions Department, chambers of commerce and other entities to develop veteran enterprise training and support to promote employment and business development opportunities for veterans. Secretary Garcia noted that the federal Small Business Administration has approached New Mexico to fund an effort to replicate the state's efforts in this area nationwide.

The top two needs for veterans are long-term care and memorials and monuments. New Mexico is just beginning to recognize the rich military history in the state. Las Cruces has been chosen as the location for a veterans and military museum. Veteran wellness, homelessness, long-term care, outreach and the retired military tax exemption were identified as challenges faced by the VSD.

Following the presentation, committee members asked questions and made comments regarding Secretary Garcia's presentation. The committee expressed a desire to extend the term to address the many issues raised by the secretary. Among the priorities the committee identified are the following areas:

- collaboration to facilitate veterans who need to travel long distances to receive health care services and the challenges of providing services in rural areas;
- the urgent need for veterans' long-term care services;
- efforts to address the issues of women veterans;
- the importance of remembering and celebrating the state's military history and honoring military retirees;
- the extent of homeless veterans and the availability and use of housing vouchers to address homelessness;
- expression of appreciation for the work of the VSD;
- a request for committee consideration of a "hero's health card" to facilitate access to nonveterans' hospitals and other health facilities;
- whether lung cancer is more prevalent among veterans and the need for early lung cancer detection efforts;
- opportunities to promote a statewide veterans' volunteer program;
- a desire for improvements to the VSD web site;

- recognition that some issues are federal in nature; the state can assist in promoting action at the federal level;
- recognition that poor coordination exists between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans' Affairs in Washington, D.C.;
- the potential for the use of alternative treatment modalities and a wellness center to treat PTSD and other behavioral health disorders; and
- a request for a list of veterans' benefits currently available in the state.

### **Discussion of Work Plan and Meeting Location Possibilities**

Mr. Lara reviewed the proposed work plan for the committee, highlighting topics to be covered and including some items mentioned by Secretary Garcia in the previous presentation. He reminded committee members that the statute requires a major focus on federal as well as state issues, and that both military issues and veterans issues must be covered. Mr. Lara also reminded the committee that any changes to the proposed calendar would need to be approved by the New Mexico Legislative Council.

The committee discussed the multiple potential conflicts with other committee meetings and the difficulty in avoiding those conflicts. Regarding military issues, the committee discussed visiting all the military installations in New Mexico and the possibility for having base tours occur the day before a meeting; the importance of the establishment of the "Tacos" and the F-16 mission for the New Mexico National Guard; and military family issues, including the quality of base schools.

The committee directed staff to include in the various meeting agendas the topics that follow:

- education and family support programs;
- a status report on the Truth or Consequences Fort Bayard facilities;
- women in the military and women veterans;
- invite the Cannon Air Force Base commander to present in Angel Fire or Santa Fe; and
- the Senate Memorial 74 report by the Administrative Office of the Courts, the VSD and the Department of Military Affairs.

By general consensus, the committee approved the locations and dates for committee hearings as follows:

- July 17, 2009 in Angel Fire;
- September 2, 2009 in Albuquerque, possibly at Kirtland Air Force Base and the Veterans Administration Hospital or the National Atomic Museum;
- October 15-16, 2009 in Alamogordo, possibly at Holloman Air Force Base and White Sands Missile Range; and
- November 30, 2009 in Santa Fe.

### **Department of Military Affairs Presentation (Priority Initiatives)**

Col. John Baca, chief of staff of the Army National Guard, with George Gintett and Larry Montoya, presented the federal, state and community missions of the New Mexico National Guard (NMNG), with coverage statewide. The governor is the commander-in-chief of the NMNG. Col. Baca highlighted the heroic efforts of the military in defending the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan; 5,300 soldiers and airmen have been deployed all over the world since September 11, 2001. He reviewed the number of personnel currently deployed. The guard has 28 armories in the state and Col. Baca invited the committee to visit one or more of them. Troops have also been deployed stateside to disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the floods in Hatch, New Mexico. The NMNG is involved in community life through mentoring youth, especially those with drug and alcohol problems. The NMNG is currently involved in schools with drug reduction programs and a "stay on track" program and has volunteer coaches in five schools. In Roswell, the NMNG is conducting a very successful youth challenge program for at-risk youth. Col. Baca identified the positive economic impact of the NMNG, which works to support the proud legacy of the NMNG in the state and to properly recognize and honor those who have served in the military.

Committee members expressed personal and genuine appreciation for the service to their country of the soldiers in the NMNG.

#### **Office of Military and Base Planning and Support Presentation (Priorities)**

General Hanson Scott, director, Office of Military and Base Planning and Support, described the office and the creation of it by executive order of the governor. The office serves to advise the governor and keep him informed of issues regarding bases in the state. He described the military installations in the state, including their primary missions. He reviewed actions taken by the office prior to, during and after the 2005 round of base realignments and closures. The office conducted an economic impact analysis and worked with the legislature to enact a gross receipts tax deduction for military research and development. General Scott has worked with cities in southern New Mexico to enhance collaboration with military installations in land use planning activities.

Cannon Air Force Base was recommended for closure by the federal Department of Defense; however, the office was successful in identifying a new mission for the base, thereby keeping it open. Current activities include collaborations and agreements to develop successful interfaces between bases and communities statewide. The office has worked on developing a cyberspace command base, coordination between bases regarding airspace use, a national youth mission working group, the burgeoning growth of wind turbines in the state and the potential for establishing a western regional partnership among California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico. He stated that all of New Mexico's military installations are in a state of transition. Priorities of the office were identified, including potential legislation for the 2010 legislative session. Members of the office and the steering committee were identified.

Committee members thanked General Scott for his presentation and asked for continued support to keep the legislature informed of the issues and the impact of actions being considered.

### **Presentation of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Impact**

Ms. Wells provided an overview of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) as it relates to military and veterans' issues. The Department of Defense was appropriated about \$7.4 billion for upgrades to facilities such as hospitals, child development centers, warrior transition complexes and housing. Approximately \$101 million of the total is slated for New Mexico for those purposes. The Department of Veterans' Affairs was appropriated about \$1.4 billion, of which only \$5 million is slated for use in New Mexico. Ms. Wells did note that veterans' organizations are eligible to compete for grants made available through ARRA.

The committee thanked Ms. Wells for her presentation and asked to be updated as necessary.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business before the committee, the first meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 2009 interim was adjourned at 3:33 p.m.

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

**July 17, 2009  
Angel Fire Resort  
Angel Fire**

The second meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 2009 interim was called to order by Senator David Ulibarri, co-chair, on Friday, July 17, 2009, at 9:10 a.m. at the Angel Fire Resort in Angel Fire. The committee was convened as a subcommittee.

**Present**

Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair  
Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair  
Rep. Nathan P. Cote  
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton

**Absent**

Rep. Elias Barela  
Sen. Eric G. Griego  
Sen. John Pinto  
Sen. William E. Sharer

**Advisory Members**

Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Sen. Dianna J. Duran  
Rep. Karen E. Giannini

Sen. Rod Adair  
Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia  
Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez  
Rep. Kathy A. McCoy  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

**Guest Legislators**

Rep. Andrew J. Barreras

**Staff**

Damian Lara  
Karen Wells  
Michael Calderon

**Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

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

**Friday, July 17**

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Senator Ulibarri made welcoming remarks and invited the members and staff to introduce themselves. Representative Garcia was asked to chair the remainder of the meeting. Larry Leahy, mayor of Angel Fire, introduced Charles (Chuck) E. Howe, mayor pro tem, and other members of the city council and welcomed the committee to Angel Fire. Mr. Howe gave each committee member a commemorative coin that depicts the chapel at the Vietnam Memorial.

## **September 2, 2009 Meeting Location**

Kenny Montoya, adjutant general, Department of Military Affairs, made brief comments about activities in which the Army National Guard has been recently engaged, including conducting rescues in Silver City and on Wheeler Peak, the youth challenge program and a summer camp. He described current and future deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. He invited the committee to hold the September meeting at the National Guard Armory in Albuquerque and to tour the 150th Fighter Wing at Kirtland Air Force Base.

Committee members expressed interest in the number of guard members in combat duty and the frequency of deployment in other activities outside of the state. Approximately 25 percent of guard members are out of the state at any one time. Once they return, guard members remain in the state for three years before being redeployed. The mission of those deployed to Afghanistan was described.

## **Veterans' Wellness Center (HM 39 and SM 29)**

John Garcia, secretary of veterans' services, discussed the Veterans' Services Department's efforts to define wellness for veterans in response to House Memorial 39 and Senate Memorial 29. The department uses the World Health Organization's definition of health to guide the development of new and alternative activities to promote well-being, wholeness and wellness. Secretary Garcia described the necessary elements of programs that serve survivors of trauma. A wide array of modalities should be offered in any wellness program. He described a vision for a wellness treatment center that could be developed within a destination resort for veterans. Angel Fire was identified as a community desiring to be known as a veteran-friendly location and as a potential site for the center.

Marianne Pratt, chief executive officer, Angel Fire Area Economic Development Group, further described the community's desire to develop a comprehensive healing and wellness facility in Angel Fire. The economic development strategic plan includes a number of elements targeted to veterans. Mr. Howe described a feasibility study regarding the establishment of such a center. The group, together with the David Westphall Veterans' Foundation, is planning a retreat for veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that will include Native American healing methods, acupuncture, massage, counseling and other healing modalities in addition to recreational activities. The retreat will serve as a pilot for broader implementation in the community in the future.

Following the presentation, committee members revealed personal knowledge of constituents in need of such services and acknowledged the importance of this endeavor. The therapeutic value of recreational activities was recognized. Questions were asked about progress toward the described goals and the level of community support. The Vietnam Memorial in Truth or Consequences was highlighted. The long-term nature of PTSD was identified, suggesting a need for long-term treatment.

Jose Griego offered public comment regarding curricula being offered at Northern New Mexico College, including a degree in integrated health studies. The college has also established a retreat program at the El Rito campus for veterans to utilize these modalities of service. Mr. Griego noted that \$4 million of unused GI bill benefits are available. Sadhu Singh Khalsa also offered a public comment supporting the idea of New Mexico as a place where veterans from all over the nation could come to receive state-of-the-art interventions to treat PTSD. Secretary Garcia noted that once the federal Veterans Administration (VA) recognizes a facility or program such as that being described here, it becomes a covered benefit. Barbara Thorne, a retired Army nurse, commented about services available through the VA and the need for better publicity about the availability of services.

The committee directed staff to write a letter to the New Mexico congressional delegation making it aware of the wellness center study.

### **Cannon Air Force Base Mission and Community Planning**

Colonel Stephen A. Clark, wing commander, testified regarding the United States Air Force special operations forces at Cannon Air Force Base. The mission of the base includes mobility, close air support, precision employment, forward presence and engagement, information services, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations and precision strike capability. He identified the sophisticated and various aircraft and that are housed at the base as well as their functions and locations around the world in which they are deployed. He reviewed the base programmatic organizational chart. Future plans involve having a presence of over 100 types of aircraft and over \$5 billion in assets. Personnel growth is anticipated to grow from just over 3,300 to more than 4,700 people, not including families or contracted staff, and could be significantly more, depending on the growth in number of aircraft at the base. Between \$500 million and \$600 million in construction is currently underway, including plans for housing and a community center to serve military families as well as military construction. Base personnel have developed an integrated system of services and supports to meet the needs of the military families that reside there. This kind of concern for the families and their lifestyles enhances Colonel Clark's ability to ensure that the mission of the base is met. Colonel Clark described a sexual assault and prevention program that has been instituted. He emphasized the base goal of returning active duty military personnel to civilian status in a better state than when they entered military service. The base has two child development centers. Teachers in the school system are apprised of the base mission and the ways in which they can best support the military children attending school there.

Committee members had questions and comments for Colonel Clark regarding the need for affordable housing and collaboration with the City of Clovis to address the educational needs of the families. Colonel Clark invited members to visit the base.

### **Military and Veterans' Commemoration**

Committee members were transported by bus to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park, where David J. Simon, director, State Parks Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, and Thomas Turnbull, park ranger, conducted a tour. The park was originally developed by Victor Westphall to honor his son who was killed in action in Vietnam along with 15 other soldiers. The memorial was the first of its kind in the nation, preceding the Vietnam Veterans National Memorial in Washington, D.C. The memorial was run by the Westphall Foundation until 2005, when it was dedicated as the thirty-third state park in New Mexico. The park is undergoing renovations to expand, repair and improve the interactive exhibits and museum to elevate the site to national standards.

### **Veteran and Family Support Services**

Following a lunch break, Linda Roebuck Homer, director, Interagency Behavioral Health Collaborative, made brief introductory comments regarding the veterans' family support services (VFSS) program. The VFSS program, which began in 2007 as a pilot program in Rio Rancho, has now been expanded to Gallup and Farmington. It is hoped that the program can become statewide. Ms. Roebuck Homer introduced Deborah Altschul, evaluator of the program, and Hoyt Roberson, clinical supervisor, VFSS, Presbyterian Medical Services (PMS). Ms. Altschul presented an overview of the program, which is designed to provide triage, case management and referral of behavioral health services to veterans, active duty military and their families. Statistics were presented regarding the population served, the types of services provided and referrals made. The program works collaboratively with the VA to provide telehealth, jail diversion and other types of support and services. Most of the recipients of services seek help for treatment of PTSD. Training of behavioral health providers has been conducted. PMS is working hard to ensure long-term sustainability of the program.

Mr. Roberson provided specific details about the nature of the program and characteristics of recipients of services, particularly those suffering from PTSD. He highlighted outreach efforts that are conducted with assistance from the Veterans' Services Department, the VA and the Army National Guard to ensure that the recipients do not feel stigmatized by seeking help. Vignettes described typical clients who needed help not only to deal with problems, but to access services, including the needs of families. Cultural competency is a very important aspect of the program. Many of the PMS program staff are themselves veterans. Mr. Roberson described clinical and evaluative steps that must now be taken to continue to grow and build the program.

Following the presentation, committee members asked questions and made comments regarding funding needs, interaction with the VA, oversight activities, the nature and function of the collaborative, other potential partners and the particular needs of homeless veterans. Secretary Garcia recognized Ms. Roebuck Homer and applauded the program. He highlighted

the need for a veterans' court, an idea that will be presented to the committee at a later time. Clarification was sought regarding the availability of housing vouchers for certain veterans. The need far exceeds the number of available vouchers. A committee member expressed an interest in establishing a veterans' housing authority.

### **Summary of State and Federal Benefits for Veterans**

Alan Martinez, director, State Benefits Division, Veterans' Services Department, described the disabled veterans access pass, a program that grants free admission to state parks for veterans who are 50 percent or more disabled. Mr. Simon added that three-day camping vouchers are also provided to these veterans. Approximately 10 percent of veterans are utilizing this pass. The New Mexico state parks are working together with the Veterans' Services Department to develop a comprehensive outdoor wellness program for veterans. Ideas and suggestions from committee members were invited.

Questions were asked about funding needs, the extent of handicapped access at state parks, methods of tracking veterans and the benefits to which they are entitled and the potential for abuse of passes. A request was made for a comprehensive list of all benefits that are provided or are available to veterans in New Mexico. Mr. Martinez stated that a brochure is being updated and will be provided to committee members. Ms. Thorne stated that she is a veteran who has lived in New Mexico for more than five years and that she has no idea what specific New Mexico benefits are available.

### **Status of Proposals to Increase Cost Sharing in TRICARE**

Pamela Garcia, constituent liaison, Office of U.S. Representative Ben Ray Lujan, read a letter from U.S. Representative Lujan that recognized the importance of TRICARE health insurance for veterans. The Military Providers Protection Act, a bill he co-sponsored to protect TRICARE benefits for veterans, was described.

Agnes Cardenas-Oakley, education and training director, Veterans' Services Department, presented information regarding the federal Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, a new educational benefit program for those who have served on active duty in the military on or after September 11, 2001. The department is proactively working to encourage all veterans to access these educational benefits. Veterans can receive tuition assistance, a housing allowance and a book stipend. The amount received is calculated based on the amount of active duty service since September 11, 2001.

Senator Ulibarri suggested that the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee write a letter of support to the New Mexico congressional delegation in support of the veterans' wellness center concept. Secretary Garcia welcomed the idea and further requested that the governor receive a copy of the letter. If there is no objection, the letter will be sent. Representative Garcia asked that copies of HM 39 and SM 29 also be sent.

### **Public Comment**

Gene Sisneros, a retired Marine general, spoke in favor of expanding telehealth services for veterans' and asked the committee to support VA funding for a handicapped-accessible facility to accommodate telehealth equipment in Raton.

Greg Sparks, a retired Marine, testified about a veterans' advisory group that has been formed by U.S. Representative Lujan of which Mr. Sparks and General Sisneros are members. Transportation and other expenses for veterans who need to go out of town to receive needed services at the VA in Albuquerque is an issue that the advisory group has been discussing. Secretary Garcia noted that if a veteran needs to stay overnight for medical purposes, the VA has hotel vouchers to cover the cost of the room. The issues raised by both men are federal issues; however, Mr. Garcia hopes to better integrate state programs with federal programs and to develop new programs to fill gaps in service.

Diana McWilliams, director, Santa Fe Rape Crisis and Trauma Center, noted that the center received an appropriation for services to veterans. She will commit some of the appropriation to be used in support of the wellness retreat.

Jonathon Cartland expressed gratitude for all the committee is doing to serve veterans. He resides in El Rito, New Mexico, which has established a committee to explore veterans' educational needs.

Upon a motion by Senator Ulibarri, seconded by Representative Garcia, the committee approved without objection the minutes from the May 2009 meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee.

There being no further business, the committee adjourned at 4:20 p.m.

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

**September 2, 2009  
New Mexico National Guard Armory  
600 Wyoming Blvd., NE, Albuquerque**

The third meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 2009 interim was called to order by Senator David Ulibarri, co-chair, on Wednesday, September 2, 2009, at 9:10 a.m. in the New Mexico National Guard Armory at 600 Wyoming Blvd. NE in Albuquerque.

**Present**

Sen. David Ulibarri, co-chair  
Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, co-chair  
Rep. Elias Barela  
Rep. Nathan P. Cote  
Sen. Eric G. Griego  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez  
Sen. John Pinto

**Absent**

Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton  
Sen. William E. Sharer

**Advisory Members**

Sen. Rod Adair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Sen. Dianna J. Duran  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia  
Rep. Karen E. Giannini  
Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Rep. Kathy A. McCoy  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

Sen. William H. Payne

**Guest Legislators**

Rep. Andrew J. Barreras  
Sen. Timothy M. Keller

**Staff**

Damian Lara, Staff Attorney, Legislative Council Service (LCS)  
Karen Wells, Researcher, LCS

**Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

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

## **Wednesday, September 2**

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves. Senator Keller, in whose district the committee meeting was held, made welcoming remarks. Colonel Brian Baca, New Mexico National Guard, welcomed the committee to the New Mexico National Guard Armory, noting that the room in which the committee was meeting was part of a brand new addition. He showed a brief video highlighting accomplishments of the New Mexico National Guard.

### **Health Care Access for Veterans**

Dr. Meghan B. Gerety, M.D., chief of staff, New Mexico Veterans Affairs Health Care System (NMVAHCS), Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, offered information regarding the quality and accessibility of health care services for veterans in New Mexico. The NMVAHCS provides a full range of primary and tertiary health care services to veterans throughout the state and is a leader in the provision of rural health care services. The Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center is part of the NMVAHCS. Dr. Gerety discussed the range of services available through the NMVAHCS and highlighted some of the leading programs and high-tech services that are available. NMVAHCS dental services utilize a diagnostic, computer-aided manufacturing system that reduces the need for extensive travel to receive dental services and provides painless dentistry. A robotic surgery program allows a veteran to leave the hospital sooner following surgery. A cochlear implant program was instituted in April 2008. The NMVAHCS operates a pain clinic utilizing a multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of pain and incorporates cutting-edge pain management techniques. The treatment of mental health disorders has been enhanced in several program areas, recognizing increased needs as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A women veterans health program acknowledges the unique gender-specific needs of women in the military. Special attention has been given to epilepsy with the establishment of the Southwest VA Epilepsy Centers of Excellence, aimed at delivering care to veterans with both traumatic brain injury and epilepsy. Dr. Gerety testified that the NMVAHCS is very excited about advances in lung cancer research made possible by the addition of Dr. Jenny Mao from the University of California at Los Angeles as the new section chief of pulmonary and critical care. The NMVAHCS is proud of its accomplishments in telehealth and home telehealth, including collaboration with Project ECHO. Outreach, case management and care coordination initiatives ensure that veterans can easily enroll in, and be served by, the NMVAHCS. Dr. Gerety described special programs in Gallup, Rio Rancho and annex facilities. Options are available for veterans to be reimbursed for travel and lodging for those who must travel a great distance to receive care.

Committee members complimented Dr. Gerety and the NMVAHCS for their work and their ability to see veteran patients and fill prescriptions on a timely basis. Clarification was

sought regarding the number and location of clinics serving veterans in New Mexico, eligibility for travel reimbursement and the extent of collaboration with the United States Air Force.

A recommendation was made that the VA medical center consider using the "old" Miners Colfax Medical Center (MCMC) for their clinic in Raton because the current clinic there is very small. An invitation was made for the VA medical center to tour the MCMC for consideration of future uses of the facility.

Opportunities and barriers to collaboration with the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center were identified. Questions were asked about efforts to ensure an adequate supply of physicians, progress to establish a Fisher House on Kirtland Air Force Base and methods to assure accuracy of data and information in telehealth and home telehealth programs. Dr. Gerety clarified that the expansion was underway to provide capacity beyond that of building a Fisher House. Members asked for additional information about the pain management program, the qualifications of pain management providers and the extent of resources available for mental health and substance abuse services. More detail was requested regarding the supportive housing voucher program; the number of veterans utilizing the vouchers; and the extent of utilization of specialty versus primary health care clinics such as the women veterans health program.

Specifics were asked regarding current and future uses of telehealth, and Dr. Gerety was encouraged to continue to actively pursue greater collaboration with Project ECHO. A request was made for additional information regarding the project to be provided to the committee.

Concern was expressed regarding the length of time it takes to be seen in the emergency department of the VA medical center, particularly to receive mental health services. The committee raised a concern regarding the interface between veterans returning from foreign wars with post-traumatic stress disorder, mental health disorders and increased criminal activity. Clarification was sought regarding the effectiveness of programs of outreach to veterans returning to New Mexico. The committee also expressed concern regarding the time it takes for incoming telephone calls to be answered. Interest was expressed in seeking to increase the number of rural clinics serving veterans and in pursuing contracts with federally qualified health centers. The committee raised concerns regarding the incidence and reasons for the over-prescribing of narcotics to treat pain. Dr. Gerety indicated that while NMVAHCS did provide more pain medication than the national average, it is a common perception that pain medication is underprescribed. Moreover, her office has received congressional complaints for reducing pain medications. It is not known whether the amounts of narcotics being prescribed are appropriate; the NMVAHCS is studying the issue.

A request was made for Dr. Gerety to provide a directory to the committee of key contacts at the NMVAHCS. Kara Catton subsequently provided the following information: the number for the New Mexico VA Health Care System is (505) 265-1711 (local) or toll free at 1-800-465-8262. There are two patient advocates: Betty Vallejos at extension 2686 and Zane Wells at extension 2612. For beneficiary travel inquiries, contact Frank Olivas at

extension 4708. For inquiries about the DAV transportation program, contact Lupe Cruz at (505) 256-2821 (local direct-dial) or extension 2821 after calling the 1-800 number.

### **Long-Term Care and Brain Injury Services for Veterans**

Fred Schaum, liaison to the Veterans' Services Department and the Aging and Long-Term Services Department (ALTSD) brought greetings to the committee from Cindy Padilla, secretary of aging and long-term services. Kimberly Austin-Oser, division director, Elderly and Disability Services Division, ALTSD, introduced members of ALTSD staff who work with brain injury programs and services. The ALTSD has numerous programs for brain-injured individuals; although no programs are specifically targeted to veterans, all programs serving the brain injured are available to veterans. Ms. Austin-Oser described the Traumatic Brain Injury Trust Fund program, which provides short-term, non-Medicaid-funded service coordination, crisis intervention services and life skills coaching. She highlighted the *Mi Via* program, which is a Medicaid waiver allowing brain-injured individuals to self-direct their care and remain at home versus living in an institutional setting. She described the coordination of long-term services (CoLTS) program, the Aging and Disability Resource Center and a video that highlights the effects of brain injury on individuals and families.

Committee members had questions and raised concerns about the possibility of developing veteran-specific services, the length of time it takes for an eligible person to receive services, the problems that arise due to a lack of funding and the inadequacy of sufficient slots to serve current needs. A request was made for a direct contact person to answer further committee questions. Mr. Schaum described the ALTSD social services directory and other significant outreach efforts that are directed to veterans. He volunteered to be the contact person for additional follow-up with committee members.

### **Commissioning of the USS *New Mexico***

Dick Brown, chair, USS *New Mexico* Commissioning Committee, provided an overview of the process to name a submarine after the State of New Mexico. Captain Mark Prokopius, commanding officer, USS *New Mexico*, thanked the committee for the invitation and expressed his pleasure at being in the state. He described the status of the submarine and crew and the steps necessary to "go active". A formal commissioning ceremony is planned for a future time in Norfolk, Virginia, which will be the only submarine commissioning ceremony the U.S. Navy (USN) will conduct this year. The ceremony will put the spotlight on New Mexico in a substantial way. Mr. Brown asked the committee for its support for this ceremony and all the planned activities.

Committee members expressed gratitude for the great honor bestowed upon the state by this commissioning.

Upon a motion by Senator Ulibarri, seconded by Representative Cote, the committee approved without objection to request approval from the Legislative Council for the committee to participate in the ceremony and receive per diem for attending that event.

Upon a motion by Senator Ulibarri, seconded by Representative Cote, the committee approved without objection to send a letter to Rear Admiral William Hilarides, USN program executive officer, submarines, requesting that the commissioning of the USS *New Mexico SSN-779* be held prior to the 2010 legislative session.

Upon a motion by Representative Cote, seconded by Representative Garcia, the committee approved without objection to send a letter to Governor Richardson requesting that either he or the lieutenant Governor attend the commissioning of the *USS New Mexico SSN-779*.

Upon a motion by Senator Griego, seconded by Representative Cote, the committee approved without objection to request a certificate of recognition for the USS *New Mexico SSN-779* and have it presented at the commissioning.

### **Veterans' Home: Long-Term Services for Veterans**

Lori Montgomery, administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, offered information about the home, which is the only state veteran's home dedicated to serving honorably discharged veterans, spouses of veterans and Gold Star parents. She provided statistics regarding the number of people being served, the number on a waiting list, the admission criteria, updates on planned expansions, financing needs to complete building expansions and maintenance, staffing needs and budget issues in this currently tight economy.

Questions were asked about the cost to veterans to live at the home, whether any beds are or could be dedicated for residents with Alzheimer's disease, clarification regarding the availability of federal matching funds and whether the home will benefit from any federal stimulus funds.

### **Veterans Integration Center**

Larry J. Campos, state veterans coordinator, Workforce Solutions Department, provided statistics about the number of homeless veterans in the state. Mr. Campos is chair of the board of the New Mexico Veterans Integration Center, which exists to address the needs of these homeless veterans. The center is the only program of its kind in the nation. The program provides employment training, housing and support services to assist homeless veterans to transition into community life. The center currently has a 60 percent success rate. The center collaborates with and makes referrals to a vast network of providers. The center is in the process of moving to a new location, which involves a partnership with Value Place hotel. In the future, the center hopes to expand from its current capacity to a capacity of at least 200 beds. The center is a nonprofit organization that works closely with the Veterans' Services Department. A brief video was shown describing program.

Committee members expressed dismay that prisoners are treated better than veterans in some cases and admitted that they had no idea that conditions were so bad for homeless veterans. Questions were asked about sources of funding, ways in which state support could be made available through capital outlay and ways in which the center could obtain a van with the support of the committee. A request was made for information on the specific needs of the center.

The committee was generally in favor of providing support to the center in any way possible. The committee asked about the process of identifying all of the benefits for which a homeless veteran could qualify and what it would take to gain the trust of veterans who are not willing to access the services to which they are entitled. Questions were asked about the value of partnerships with organizations such as Goodwill Industries and whether individuals making donations to these organizations can designate them for distribution to the center. Many members expressed gratitude for the work of the center.

### **Lung Cancer Screening Program for Veterans**

John Cousins, president and CEO, Biomoda, described a program that operates in partnership with New Mexico State University (NMSU) to screen New Mexican veterans who are at high risk for lung cancer. Richard Cervantes, vice president of research and economic development, NMSU, offered comments about that partnership. Numerous program partners were identified, as was demographic information about the composition of the veterans recruited to be screened. The program has been very successful in identifying early-stage lung cancer in the participants who have been screened.

Committee members asked questions regarding ongoing funding needs, patient privacy and methods for ensuring that veterans who screen positive for lung cancer receive appropriate follow-up care. Clarification was sought regarding the incidence of lung cancer found as a result of this screening program and how New Mexico compares to other states. Interest was expressed in expanding the study.

### **New Mexico National Guard Missions/New Mission 150th Fighter Wing**

Colonel Brian Baca updated the committee about the current extent of deployments and efforts to assist state police in confiscating marijuana plants in Madrid, New Mexico.

Colonel Francis K. Carillo provided a slide show regarding the 150th Fighter Wing of the New Mexico Air National Guard. He began with a historical overview of the service provided by the wing. He described the aircraft in place to support the federal mission and to remain in readiness for deployment. The organization of the wing was described, and future plans for the wing were identified. In order to retain the integrity of the wing, it will divest large numbers of fourth generation fighters while still retaining its wing structure and expeditionary nature. The wing will position itself to host F-352s, which are multi-role fighters. New Mexico is well situated for this type of mission. Other options for the future include becoming a training site for C-130 aircraft or associating with an F-22 unit at Holloman Air Force Base. The Air National Guard is seeking federal legislative support to extend this wing for one more year.

Questions and comments from the committee concerned border patrol missions, the time frame for transitioning to another mission and the need for the legislature to stand behind the wing and its continued presence in New Mexico. General Hanson Scott, director, Office of Military Base Planning and Support, was invited to make comments about this topic. The committee requested an update on the status of the federal legislation that would extend the wing. Antonio Sandoval, constituent liaison to Congressman Martin Heinrich, provided the

update. House and Senate versions are in conference, with all members of the New Mexico delegation in support. Mr. Sandoval noted that both an authorization bill and an appropriation bill will be needed.

Upon a motion by Senator Ulibarri, seconded by Representative Cote, the committee approved, without objection, to send a letter from the committee to key members of Congress requesting the continuation of the mission of the 150th Fighter Wing.

Additional details were requested regarding the current deployments, including where in New Mexico they come from, the number of soldiers lost and the nature of the work they are doing in Afghanistan.

### **Kirtland Air Force Base Mission and Community Planning**

Thomas F. Berardinelli, executive director, 377th Air Base Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base, presented an overview of the numbers of personnel, the mission, the partners and the economic impact of Kirtland on the nation and the state. Kirtland employs over 20,000 people and occupies more than 51,000 acres. The base has an estimated economic impact of \$5.6 billion, 54 percent of which is local. The base's primary mission is to ensure safe, secure and reliable nuclear weapons to support the nation. The 377th Air Base Wing trains and deploys airmen in support of combatant commanders and has more than 100 mission partners conducting space research, supporting Sandia National Laboratories and ensuring defense threat reduction, in addition to completing the wing's many flying missions. Mr. Berardinelli recognized a number of community partners and programs anchored by the Kirtland Partnership Committee.

Kirtland is anticipating significant growth both in military construction and in military personnel, which will result in a substantial economic impact to the state totaling an estimated \$215 million over the next few years. Military construction projects currently underway were identified. Kirtland collaborates with many partners to identify and promote priority projects. Also identified were program subcontracted dollars that benefit small businesses in Albuquerque and the state.

Kirtland is beginning its fifth year in privatized housing on the base, for which the base is recognized nationally. Areas of the base that could be leased to private developers have been identified. Kirtland is aggressively dealing with a fuel leak to avoid further contamination of ground water. A joint land use initiative is underway to help the base and community develop in ways that will benefit both.

Mr. Berardinelli identified several education initiatives that Kirtland is pursuing to prepare local students for advanced degrees in science and mathematics. The base has made significant investments in schools from kindergarten through college, targeting teachers as well as students. Since its inception 14 years ago, this initiative has touched 42,000 students from 326 schools in 76 districts, including charter, private and home schools in New Mexico.

Committee members expressed thanks and appreciation for the work Kirtland is doing,

and the impact it is having. The committee asked questions regarding the organization and structure of the Air Force on the base, educational opportunities for the airmen and the importance of the Science and Technology Center on the base. The committee expressed concern that New Mexico is not actively pursuing uranium mining and nuclear energy. A request was made to provide the committee with the process by which schools participate in the educational component of the base.

**Public Comment**

Don Arnold, national chief of staff for the United States Volunteers Services, was joined by Alan Martinez, Veterans' Services Department. Mr. Arnold announced that his organization has been asked to host the annual Military and Veterans Appreciation Day, September 24 at the State Fair. He thanked the committee for its interest and passion for veterans and the military. He extended an invitation to the committee to attend the events and activities of the annual Military and Veterans Appreciation Day, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

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

**November 9, 2009  
American Legion Post 10, Las Cruces, NM**

**November 10, 2009  
Sgt. Willie Estrada Memorial, Alamogordo, NM**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 2009 interim was called to order by Representative Thomas A. Garcia, co-chair, on Monday, November 9, 2009, at 10:20 a.m. at the American Legion Post 10 in Las Cruces. A voting quorum was present.

**Present**

Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair  
Rep. Nathan P. Cote  
Sen. Eric G. Griego (11/09)  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez (11/09)  
Sen. John Pinto

**Absent**

Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair  
Rep. Elias Barela  
Rep. Diane Miller Hamilton  
Sen. William E. Sharer

**Advisory Members**

Sen. Rod Adair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Sen. Dianna J. Duran  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia (11/09)  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

Rep. Karen E. Giannini  
Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Rep. Kathy A. McCoy

**Other Legislators**

Rep. Andrew J. Barreras (11/09)  
Rep. Jeff Steinborn (11/09)  
Rep. Gloria C. Vaughn (11/10)

(Attendance dates are noted for those members not present for the entire meeting.)

**Staff**

Damian Lara, Staff Attorney, Legislative Council Service (LCS)  
Karen Wells, Researcher, LCS

## **Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

## **Handouts**

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

## **Monday, November 9**

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves. Ken Miyagishima, mayor, Las Cruces, welcomed everyone to Las Cruces. Members of the audience introduced themselves. Representative Garcia invited Representative Steinborn to serve as the honorary chair for the morning.

### **Mission of the Vet Center in Southern New Mexico**

Guy McCommon, team leader, vet center, described the center as a Veterans Administration (VA) center providing readjustment and counseling services. There are 290 such vet centers around the U.S., which provide counseling services for Vietnam veterans who do not wish to take advantage of services available at the VA hospital. Initially, vet centers were "drop-in" locations providing peer-to-peer counseling. Currently, vet centers are professionally and clinically staffed. He directed the attention of the committee to a new mobile vet center that is one of only 50 in the U.S.; mobile vet centers are intended to serve rural communities. This mobile vet center has the capability to be converted into an emergency response vehicle in the event of a natural or other widespread disaster. He invited committee members to tour the mobile vet center. He described the mission and effectiveness of the vet center and the mobile vet center. Committee members were provided with a sample outreach flyer.

Committee members acknowledged the wide geographical area for which the vet center is responsible and asked what priority areas of southern New Mexico the mobile vet center will serve. A schedule is being developed to provide the greatest access to veterans. Committee members noted that many veterans make long drives monthly to receive counseling services in Albuquerque. Mr. McCommon noted that in Las Cruces, volunteer veterans bring veterans in need of counseling to the vet center, and he expressed a desire to establish this mechanism elsewhere in the region. He noted the importance of veterans having the same counselor on an ongoing basis. Randy Reynolds, county coordinator for the VA clinic, was invited to join Mr. McCommon to answer questions regarding transportation services. Questions were asked about substance abuse treatment. The vet center does not provide substance abuse treatment; however, veterans in need of those services are referred to appropriate locations. Clarification was asked about sexual trauma and how it is identified. Generally, this information is self-disclosed; the vet center employs one counselor who is certified as a sexual trauma counselor. Observations were made about periods of service to one's country that do not qualify for consideration for services; Mr. McCommon noted that the qualifying periods of service are determined nationally.

Representative Garcia moved, and Representative Cote seconded, a motion that members provide the names of the omitted periods of service to Mr. Lara, and that Mr. Lara write a letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs, with copies to the congressional delegation, requesting the inclusion of these periods. The motion was adopted. A question was asked about the percentage of veterans being served who are in the criminal justice system and how the vet center works with them. Identification of these veterans is part of the outreach efforts. The vet center is working through the magistrate courts in Las Cruces. El Paso recently started a veterans' court. A committee member noted the effectiveness of veterans' courts and a hope that funding will be found in the future for veterans' courts in New Mexico. Clarification was sought regarding group counseling; counseling groups are conducted in Silver City and Truth or Consequences. It is hoped that more groups will be conducted in outlying areas as the mobile vet center is deployed.

Representative Garcia requested a moment of silence to honor the loss of Tony Carrasco, a New Mexico soldier who was killed in Iraq last week.

### **Veteran Homelessness**

Pamela Angell, executive director, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH), introduced Thomas Hazzel, executive director, Las Cruces Housing Authority, and Kim Whitman, an intern with the MVCH who is also a veteran. Ms. Whitman identified the services provided by the MVCH, including intensive case management and a day shelter in addition to housing. She provided statistics about the number of veterans served and the type of services most utilized. The mission of the MVCH is to provide a safe, stable and supportive home while also providing tools to become self-sufficient members of the community. Ms. Angell discussed the fragile funding for this transitional housing program. The MVCH was recently awarded a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs grant of \$180,750 that is dependent upon state capital outlay matching funds. The funding will be used to renovate and construct apartments to house homeless veterans. Ms. Angell urged committee members to protect the capital outlay funding. She also identified ongoing needs for volunteer mentors, donated household goods and training and employment opportunities for the veterans. Mr. Hazzell added details about the capital outlay funding and the ability of the MVCH to use the funds. He emphasized the importance of keeping this funding in place, noting that housing vouchers to allow homeless veterans to obtain permanent housing are dependent on this capital outlay funding.

Committee members asked whether family needs as well as veterans' needs are being addressed. The MVCH is primarily for veterans who are not in family situations; however, the MVCH coordinates with other housing programs that do serve families. The difficulty of protecting the requested capital outlay funds was discussed. The importance of working to eliminate homelessness among veterans was recognized. Clarification was sought regarding the percent of domestic abuse victims who are males. It is difficult to know, as victims of abuse are reluctant to self-disclose; but it is a figure that is hoped to be identified. Committee members acknowledged that housing for veterans is a serious problem statewide and stated their hope that capital outlay for veterans could be protected.

## **Veterans Museum**

Committee members were transported to the proposed site of the New Mexico veterans museum and to lunch at the Veterans Park.

Following lunch, the chair asked for approval of the minutes, with an amendment to reflect a recommendation that the VA Medical Center consider using the Miners' Colfax Medical Center (MCMC) in Raton as a VA clinic, and an invitation to the VA Medical Center to tour the MCMC to assess the potential for future uses of the facility. The minutes were approved as amended with no objection.

Colonel Joseph Long, U.S.M.C. (ret.), briefed the committee on the plans to build a veterans museum in Las Cruces. He provided the legislative history of the project and identified the mission of the museum, which is to honor and pay tribute to the service of New Mexico's veterans and to tell the story of New Mexico's rich military history. The process for and ultimate selection of a site was described. Funding will come from a variety of sources, including federal contributions and private funding sources and a hope for continued support from the New Mexico Legislature.

Committee members asked questions and made comments about elements of planning of the museum and exhibits to include in the historical story that is told. A desire was expressed to include the story of the Navajo Code Talkers, as well as the role played by the Irish in the Mexican-American War. Colonel Long noted that about one-half of the rough riders came from New Mexico. Those present in the audience who have been actively involved in the project were publicly thanked.

## **Higher Education for Military Personnel — GI Bills**

Roberta Derlin, Ph.D., associate vice president for student success, New Mexico State University (NMSU), presented information about educational opportunities available to military students and veterans. Over 1,000 active duty military and veterans are enrolled in these programs at NMSU.

Eva Armijo, coordinator for student and veterans affairs, NMSU, noted challenges in the administration of these programs, including a lack of awareness of benefits available to veterans, processing of reimbursements, processing of post-9/11 certifications and the reporting fee.

Lieutenant Colonel Elise Wheeler, A.S.A.F. (ret.), director, Veterans Resource Center, clarified some information regarding these challenges and provided additional information from the perspective of the University of New Mexico (UNM). The \$7.00 processing fee is not sufficient to cover the costs of the programs.

Committee members noted that the GI bill has become much more complicated and comprehensive than it used to be. Active duty military are entitled to different benefits than are veterans; money to support these opportunities by and large goes to the universities. It is a very

complicated system now. Since the institution of the post-9/11 GI bill, participation has grown substantially. UNM has seen a 27 percent increase since last year in post-9/11 GI bill applicants.

Senator Griego made a motion to write a letter to request members of New Mexico's congressional delegation to assist with resolving the fee and implementation challenges brought to the committee's attention today. Senator Pinto seconded the motion. Representative Garcia requested that the motion be altered to ask for the committee to work with the presenters to craft the letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs and copy the congressional delegation. Senator Griego accepted the amendment. The motion was unanimously endorsed.

Further questions were asked about who is eligible for GI bill assistance, the kind of degrees being sought and how this educational opportunity has benefited veterans in the long term. The panel members noted the importance of retention in school and graduation from school for GI bill participants. Lieutenant Colonel Wheeler described her center as one that is dedicated to assisting veterans in transition to identify the resources that will help them the most. She thanked the committee members for their support and the passage of legislation that provides resident tuition support for veterans. She gets calls routinely from the rest of the country on how to replicate the program. A question was asked about ways to administratively simplify these programs and to make it easier for students to transfer from one school to another.

### **Public Comment**

Arturo Terrazas, legislative assistant to Congressman Harry Teague, read a statement from Congressman Teague that thanked the committee and lauded the efforts of servicemen and servicewomen in New Mexico. The statement noted that he is a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, which gives him a unique opportunity to address issues concerning the military and veterans. Congressman Teague has a special concern for the issue of homelessness among veterans, and he noted that he introduced a bill, HR 2504, to increase funding for programs that seek to eradicate homelessness among veterans. Another measure he introduced is HR 3906, which seeks to strengthen the ability of veterans to obtain home loans and funding waivers that are invulnerable to recall to active duty.

Jeronimo Del Bosque, Marine Corps League, described honor guard services the league provides at funerals on request. The league is underfunded at only \$50.00 per funeral. He asked for the committee's support to increase the funding. The chair moved that legislation be drafted for the November 30 meeting to meet Mr. Del Bosque's request. The motion passed unanimously.

Delano Garcia testified that Las Cruces stands to lose \$4 million in capital outlay funding intended for improvements to the local National Guard armory.

Margaret Markham urged the committee to be sure that capital outlay requests provide the flexibility to allow for construction for a second story or to add a wing. She noted that recently, a veterans summit was held that was devoted to mental illness among veterans and the

military; a second week was devoted to homelessness. She encouraged the committee to obtain the congressional record of these proceedings.

Melanie Goodman, field representative, U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman's office, noted that emergency advance payments have been authorized to deal with the backlog on approving the post-9/11 GI bill benefits. Also, telephone outreach has been occurring to inform veterans of their benefits. Senator Bingaman is working on legislation to improve the accessibility and amounts of funding for educational benefits for veterans. The Veterans' Services Department (VSD) and the Higher Education Department (HED) should be actively working together to develop that plan. President Obama's budget calls for rural health services for the VA, telemedicine and other supports for rural clinics.

Captain Walter Baker, U.S.N. (ret.), wondered why the motion regarding GI bills was delayed until the next meeting. Representative Garcia clarified the issue for Captain Baker; the motion was approved.

Kevin Dansila thanked everyone and provided some additional comments regarding the proposed museum. He then noted that the veterans' transition shelter is one of only two veterans' shelters in the state, and he urged the committee to support funding for it. He urged support for a tax provision to increase taxes less than one percent of one cent to be dedicated to veterans' concerns.

The committee left Las Cruces at 3:10 p.m. to tour the White Sands Missile Range (WSMR). Committee members were briefed about the primary testing mission of the WSMR and the multiple uses of the area by the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force, the German Air Force and the U.S. Navy. Projects of particular interest include SunZia, which is seeking to extend a power grid across New Mexico. The WSMR is working to ensure that new power lines do not interfere with its testing mission. The WSMR also supports the development of the spaceport, a system of regionalization to ensure collaboration and the cooperation of all the partners that use the area and preparation to receive troops and families who are part of an engineering brigade that will be housed at Fort Bliss in El Paso. The WSMR will not be receiving the heavy combat tank brigade, which would have required housing and support services for an additional 10,000 troops and their families.

## **Tuesday, November 10**

The chair called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. at the Sergeant Willie Estrada Civic Center in Alamogordo. Committee members and staff introduced themselves. The chair recognized representatives of Senator Bingaman's office and Representative Teague's office and family members of the namesake of the building. Representative Cote was invited to chair the meeting.

## **Welcome**

Ed Cole, city commissioner, Alamogordo, welcomed the committee to Alamogordo. He acknowledged several members of the community who were involved in the naming of the Civic Center after Sergeant Estrada. Seth Noriega, a cousin, played a brief audio tribute to the life of Sergeant Estrada. A certificate honoring Sergeant Estrada's life and military accomplishments was presented to Pete Estrada, Connie Estrada Coggins and other surviving members of the family by Representative Cote, Representative Vaughn and Senator Duran. The chair read the certificate out loud. Representative Cote was invited to chair the committee.

## **Interstate Compact for Military Kids**

Jim Rickle, regional liaison, military families, Department of Defense (DoD), and Dale Van Detter, DoD, presented information regarding legislation that was introduced and almost passed the state legislature to support military families that are transferred to New Mexico. He described 10 key areas covered in an interstate compact that the DoD feels belongs with the states rather than the federal government. The DoD is developing best practices of states in these 10 areas, which will be transmitted to the National Governors' Association. Mr. Rickle described the history of the interstate compact, which was developed in a partnership between the DoD and the Council of State Governments (CSG). The four major areas stressed in the compact are educational eligibility, enrollment, placement and graduation and focusing on transition issues when military families are transferred from one state to another. So far, 26 states have adopted the compact. He described the process to get the compact adopted in New Mexico, which was introduced in the First Session of the 2009 Legislature, passed the house and all senate committees, but died on the senate floor without coming to a vote. Efforts will be made to reintroduce the bill in the New Mexico Legislature. Representative Cote, who sponsored the bill, announced that he believes this bill will be part of the governor's message for the 2010 session.

The vice president of the Alamogordo Board of Education applauded the efforts of the DoD and the state legislature to get this compact established in New Mexico. Clarification was sought and provided regarding how all school districts would be informed of the elements of the compact.

Representative Vaughn was invited to chair the committee.

## **4-H's Operation Military Kids**

Frank Hodnett, department head, 4-H Youth Development Program, NMSU, described the contents of 4-H program clubs. Critical elements include opportunities for youth to experience belonging, independence, mastery and generosity. Operation Military Kids (OMK) is a new program in his department. It is not limited to Army youth; it welcomes military youth from any branch of the military. He identified numerous partners that participated in the development of the program. The components of OMK are hero packs, speak out for military kids, mobile technology labs and Ready, Set, Go! trainings, each of which was described in detail. The overarching focus is raising awareness and forming networks of support for military

youth. The Military 4-H Club Grant program is another program that Mr. Hodnett oversees. It involves an effort to establish 4-H clubs on all military bases in the state.

Committee members asked questions regarding the mobile technology labs and where they are located. The labs will be available statewide.

### **Holloman Air Force Base: 49th Fighter Wing Mission and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles**

Colonel Jeffrey L. Harrigion, wing commander, Holloman Air Force Base (HAFB), provided an overview of the mission of HAFB. "Team Holloman" partner units were identified. The mission of the 49th Fighter Wing is to be combat-ready at all times. Current capabilities were described, which include two air transportable clinics. Pilots and sensor operators are trained at HAFB. Most troops are deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. Colonel Harrigion described the structure and organization of the base. The historical significance of the base was described. Priorities of the 49th Fighter Wing include readiness, development and care of the air personnel and their families, infrastructure and engagement, each of which was described in detail. He emphasized the interest of the chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force, who is helping to promote the importance of military families and the interstate compact. He stated that HAFB accounts for 60 percent of the population of the Alamogordo area, including military personnel and dependents, civilian employees, retirees and German military personnel and dependents. The economic impact on the area amounts to \$1.1 million per day. Additional programs include a primate research facility, weather balloon operations and collaboration with the German Air Force.

Senator Duran was invited to chair this portion of the committee. She introduced Colonel Hansen Scott. She thanked the Committee of 50 for the reception it hosted the previous evening. Clarification was sought regarding the number of HAFB children enrolled in the local schools and what the anticipated growth will be. A comment was offered about housing at HAFB, which is much improved. Colonel Harrigion noted that HAFB is working with General Scott on identifying the impact of proposed power lines. A request was made to receive copies of communications regarding the concerns and issues arising from the power line proposal. An update on this issue was requested for the next committee meeting. A question was asked about the support and help being provided to families of personnel who are deployed. The Airman Family Readiness Center has an active program of events and services that are targeted to these families. A calendar is published monthly publicizing all of this. Questions were raised regarding efforts that are extended to retirees who remain in the area. A program to meet their needs is still in place and apparently working well. Clarification was sought about how HAFB is compensated by the German Air Force. A question was asked about the readiness of HAFB to incorporate a squadron of F22s into base operations should it be selected to receive them. Colonel Harrigion believes that HAFB has a very good chance of this.

Drew Stout, constituent services representative, read a statement from Congressman Teague. A question was asked about the potential for a field office to be established in Alamogordo.

Representative Cote was asked to chair the committee.

#### **46th Test Group**

Colonel Tom Currie, commander, briefed the committee on the mission and vision of the 46th Test Group, which is co-located in the WSMR, Kirtland Air Force Base and HAFB. The group employs 413 personnel and contributes \$90 million per year to the business economy of the area. The missions of the 586th Flight Test Squadron, the 746th Test Squadron, the 781st Test Squadron and the 846th Test Squadron were identified, with the unique contributions of each highlighted. Emerging capabilities of each squadron were identified. The 46th Test Group is responsible for coordinating and scheduling all U.S. Air Force programs conducted at the WSMR. Colonel Currie noted that 45 percent of all the missions at the WSMR are air force missions. High power microwaves and directed laser energy are anticipated to be used in weapons in the coming decade; work is being done on multiple fronts to prepare for this capability. Colonel Currie believes that southern New Mexico is the optimal location to conduct this testing.

Committee members asked for clarification regarding the capability of the cruise missile simulator at the 586th Flight Test Squadron. Clarification was also sought about the purpose of tests involving jamming of global positioning system (GPS) signals. A question was asked about the level of interest from television and film companies. Some commercial work is done, and the media is invited to observe this; Colonel Currie is not aware of any other interest.

#### **Public Comment**

Diane Monrey, a veteran, testified about limitations to educational benefits and the realization that these benefits are not lifetime benefits. She has worked hard and went to a vo-tech school that she self-funded, but her life is a struggle. Her employment is unstable, and she recognizes the need for more education. Representative Garcia suggested that the letter the committee approved yesterday address this issue. He moved this; it was seconded and unanimously adopted.

Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, VSD, noted that a constitutional amendment will be on the ballot to extend educational benefits for veterans.

Senator Duran brought the committee members' attention to written public comment that was distributed and noted that Mr. Martinez is already working on it.

#### **Troop Deployment and Medical Screening**

Colonel Christine A. Sautter, Medical Commander, Fort Bliss, discussed the medical standards for deployment of soldiers. The comprehensive process takes about three days and involves a checklist for most of the medical services provided. A pre-deployment health assessment questionnaire is utilized, covering medical, dental, psychological and prescription drug information. Appropriate referrals are made as requested. Soldiers are carefully evaluated to determine if a soldier is deployable. Case management services are available. Hearing tests

and dental exams are required of all soldiers upon return from deployment. An intensive post-deployment health assessment is performed. A brain injury questionnaire is administered with referral to the brain injury center as needed. A 180-day post-deployment period allows for late disclosure of post-deployment issues.

Committee members asked about the timing of a transition into the VA system; this can occur at any point post-deployment. Clarification was asked about tests for HIV and the ability to detain someone who should not be deployed. A soldier who wants to be deployed can override a recommendation that the soldier not be deployed. A committee member asked whether a soldier is paid during this pre- and post-assessment period. A question was asked about pre- and post-deployment brain injury assessment; a computerized evaluation is now being completed on all active duty military to establish a baseline of information. So far, the post-deployment evaluation is not routinely done, but it is moving in that direction.

Delano Garcia, National Guard, described its system of pre- and post-deployment. A question was asked about the percentage of deployments that go through Fort Bliss; approximately 60,000 troops were processed in the past year at Fort Bliss.

Representative Garcia thanked the presenters, the members and the staff. He reminded members that legislative requests need to be submitted to Mr. Lara no later than November 23 in order to be drafted by the November 30 meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

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

**November 30, 2009  
Room 311, State Capitol  
Santa Fe**

The fifth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) for the 2009 interim was called to order by Representative Thomas A. Garcia on Monday, November 30, 2009, at 9:10 a.m. in Room 311 of the State Capitol. A quorum was present.

**Present**

Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair  
Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair  
Rep. Elias Barela  
Rep. Nathan P. Cote  
Sen. Eric G. Griego  
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton

**Absent**

Sen. John Pinto  
Sen. William E. Sharer

**Advisory Members**

Sen. Rod Adair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Sen. Dianna J. Duran  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia  
Rep. Karen E. Giannini  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Rep. Kathy A. McCoy  
Sen. William H. Payne

**Guest Legislator**

Rep. Andrew J. Barerras

**Staff**

Damian Lara, Staff Attorney, Legislative Council Service (LCS)  
Karen Wells, Researcher, LCS

**Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

**Handouts**

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

**Monday, November 30**

**Welcome and Introductions**

Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves.

**Veterans Exposed to Uranium — Status Update**

Heidi Kapfl, bureau chief, Epidemiology and Response Division, Department of Health, provided some background regarding the radioactivity of depleted uranium (DU) and identified both civilian and military uses for DU. Military exposure to DU began in 1991, when the military began to use DU on a widespread basis during the Gulf War. Studies of the health effects of DU on veterans began in 1993. Funding for development of a testing protocol was provided by the legislature in 2007.

Committee members asked questions regarding the primary region of New Mexico from which tested veterans came, and they requested clarification regarding baseline information that might now be available to determine the uranium concentration in drinking water. Questions were asked about special treatment of the Grants Mineral Belt. A history is being taken of individual veterans tested to differentiate between natural uranium exposure, from such sources as drinking water, and military exposure. Clarification was sought regarding standards for DU in drinking water and who monitors that concentration. It was noted that these standards apply to public sources of drinking water, but that private wells may exceed those levels. When unsafe levels of DU are discovered in private wells, recommendations are made to users of those wells to use bottled water for drinking. One member expressed great concern about the number of private wells with unsafe levels of DU. Clarification was sought regarding the order in which testing occurs; volunteers to be tested are identified first, and then the water they use is tested. A question was asked about the part of the state in which DU is most prevalent; exposure is highest in areas where there are pockets of uranium. Concern was expressed regarding DU that is being brought back to the state and the problem of secondary exposure to family members.

**Senate Memorial 74: Veterans' Court**

Peter Bochert, statewide drug court coordinator, Administrative Office of the Courts, provided an overview of the requirements of Senate Memorial 74, which requested a study of the feasibility of starting a drug court in New Mexico. He acknowledged Senator Griego as the sponsor of the memorial. He noted that veterans' courts are based on the model of drug courts, which are well-researched and well-established in the U.S. and in New Mexico. He described drug courts, their composition and the effectiveness of the model. He identified the special needs of veterans, the projected caseloads and the feasibility for developing veterans' courts in New Mexico.

Delano Garcia, government affairs and legislative liaison, Department of Military Affairs, spoke to the needs of the National Guard. Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, Veterans' Services Department (VSD), also spoke in support of the development of veterans' courts in New Mexico.

Committee members expressed support for the concept. It was noted that the memorial seems to focus on veterans who have experienced combat, but other dangerous situations have been faced by many veterans who might benefit from such a program. An observation was made that veterans might be better served by integration into the behavioral health system and that others besides veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mr. Bochert identified differences between drug courts and the proposed veterans' court in addressing mental health issues. Each court seeks to identify the underlying issues that are driving repeat criminal activity. Mr. Garcia clarified that the recommendation is not to establish a separate, new program but to provide education to existing courts regarding the unique needs of military personnel and veterans. It was noted that awareness of PTSD is relatively new. There are many veterans of Vietnam, for example, who are not aware that they suffered from PTSD. This effort is intended to raise awareness so that veterans can get the treatment they need. Mr. Martinez noted that PTSD is not the only problem; brain injury is also on the rise, and treatment of the two conditions is quite different. Clarification was sought about the experience of other states with veterans' courts and whether other models of treatment are, or could be, just as effective. There is significant interest in veterans' courts at the federal level as well as in numerous states. Federal sources of funding were identified. Chris Burmeister, PMS Veterans and Family Support Services, provided a clinical perspective, and he spoke to the importance of early intervention to keep soldiers out of the criminal justice system. Committee members noted that the goal of the memorial was not to single out veterans for favored treatment but rather to recognize and deal with some unique needs. Appreciation was expressed for the report that was provided and the groundwork it lays for the future. A question was asked about the number of repeat deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan and how this differs from previous wars. It is recognized that the National Guard is now the primary source of personnel being deployed. Clarification was sought regarding the incidence of heroin addiction among veterans who were in combat in Afghanistan. Substance abuse is a large problem, but heroin addiction does not appear to be more prominent than abuse of alcohol and other addictive substances. A question was asked about the extent of outreach to jails and prisons. Mr. Martinez stated that this is occurring to ensure that veterans receive services for which they are eligible upon release. It was recommended that this effort be expanded. The chair suggested that the presenters work with the health center in Angel Fire to facilitate coordination between two valuable programs.

James P. White, newly appointed state representative from District 20 in Albuquerque, was recognized from the audience.

### **House Memorial 21: Isleta All-Purpose Center**

Joe Jaramillo, Pueblo of Isleta, described plans for a new center that the pueblo hopes to establish to accommodate Native American veterans.

Ulysses Abeita, Pueblo of Isleta, provided additional detail regarding the desire for a new veterans center at the pueblo, including the condition of the current center, the estimated cost and location of a new center and how the center will be utilized. The goal of the center is to address the needs of Native American veterans in four counties. Land has been donated for this purpose.

Representative Barela spoke as sponsor of the memorial, indicating the need for the VSD to work together with the Pueblo of Isleta to determine the need for such a center. Mr. Martinez stated that the VSD has met with this group on three occasions. It is very interested in the concept and would like to enhance staffing to ensure access to services at the VA hospital.

Committee members noted that the availability of capital outlay for such a project is extremely limited at this time. Private and pueblo funding may be available; federal funding will also be sought. Clarification was sought regarding the extent of planning that has already been accomplished, opportunities for phasing in such a project and the number of services that could be funded through the VA hospital. It was noted that \$25,000 of capital outlay funding has already been expended. The estimated cost to complete the project is approximately \$3 million. It was noted that the project could serve Native Americans statewide. The critical importance of federal support to fund such a project was identified.

Senator Griego made a motion that the congressional delegation be asked to support this effort financially. The chair asked whether the senator desired a letter or a memorial. John M. Garcia, secretary of veterans' services, noted that other pueblos also want to build veterans centers to serve the 19,000 veterans statewide. He recommended that a memorial or letter be directed through the VSD to look at earmark money or stimulus money to support this effort statewide. Senator Griego suggested that a letter should precede a memorial. It was noted that the center would need to be owned by the pueblo in order to receive any state money. Mr. Abeita stated that the pueblo is working with tribal attorneys to develop a memorandum of understanding regarding ownership of the center. A question was asked about the availability of transportation from the proposed center into Albuquerque to receive services. Representative Garcia recommended that the motion be limited at present to a letter from the committee to the congressional delegation. Senator Griego accepted that suggestion. Representative Barela seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

A question was asked about the process for voting on proposed legislation later in the afternoon. Representative Garcia said he will recognize all committee members' votes unless there is disagreement, at which time only voting members will be recognized.

### **House Memorial 39 and Senate Memorial 29: Veterans' Health and Healing Center Near Angel Fire; Senate Memorial 31: Acupuncture for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Chuck Howe, mayor pro tempore, Village of Angel Fire, gave the committee a report on two memorials calling for a feasibility study of a veterans' health and healing center near Angel Fire, New Mexico. The village elected to conduct an actual retreat as a way of demonstrating the effectiveness of, and the need for, health and healing activities for veterans. New Mexico has 89,000 veterans, many of whom are suffering from PTSD. The retreat, which had participation from both the state VSD and the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) was conducted for 11 couples and was based on a Native American holistic model. The retreat made a profound difference in the lives of all participants. The village has nine more retreats planned.

Secretary Garcia stated that the VSD supports the development of a national health and healing center, which would be the first of its kind in the nation. The VSD is committed to the project. The governor is behind the project as well. Mr. Howe identified multiple partners with which the village is working to expand this project. Funding will be sought from federal, state and private sources to continue the effort. He hopes to build a permanent building to house the retreats in the future. When completed, the project is anticipated to yield unlimited economic benefits to the state as well as health benefits to the veterans who participate. A privately built hotel will be leased to conduct the retreats.

Questions were asked about the difference in funding needs for the hotel and the health and healing retreats. Some funding streams are currently being explored. Ongoing operational funding is also being identified. A question was asked about the potential for the use of telemedicine and coordination with Project ECHO. Strong support was expressed for going forward with the project. Recognition was given to Angel Fire as the ideal location for the center. Mary Ann Pratt, head of the Angel Fire Economic Development Group, provided clarification regarding the differences between nonprofit organizations and foundations and the reasons for choosing a nonprofit status for this project. Clarification was sought regarding how female veterans with PTSD will be served by this program and by what means counselors are certified to be providers in the program. Legislation may be needed to expand a counselor's scope of practice for this purpose. A request was made for an update on progress toward a "Fischer House". This project requires both the DVA and Kirtland Air Force Base to submit applications to the Fischer Foundation in time for consideration during the 2010 funding cycle. Clarification was sought regarding the total cost to conduct a retreat. The importance of making a clear argument for housing this project in Angel Fire was highlighted. A request was made for the Village of Angel Fire to share with the committee the work it has done to identify New Mexico veterans with photos that have been shared with the director of the national Vietnam memorial. It was noted that the MVAC can only support the wellness center. Representative Garcia made a motion, which was seconded by Senator Garcia, to support the wellness center with a memorial; the motion passed unanimously.

### **Consideration of Legislation**

A bill clarifying child custody for active duty military personnel was endorsed. At the request of Representative Cote, Representative Barela will sponsor this measure. This bill would ensure that active duty military personnel do not lose parental custody while they are deployed and are unavailable due to military orders. Representative Barela noted the importance of establishing parental responsibilities. Concern was expressed regarding the need to require parenting plans that involve both parents and the need to protect the custody of a service member's children when that service member is in combat. It was noted that this is a primary issue of the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). The governor likewise supports this measure.

A bill providing for free fishing or small game licenses for military on leave was endorsed. This bill would allow the small game and fish license fees to be waived for resident military personnel on leave. Representative Garcia will sponsor this measure.

The committee endorsed a bill providing a discount on hunting and fishing licenses for resident military personnel stationed in New Mexico. Representative Martinez will sponsor the measure.

A bill that would provide for military honors at funerals of resident veterans, by reimbursing local veterans organization up to \$100 for the cost, was considered by the committee. There was discussion regarding whether the amount to be reimbursed was sufficient. It was noted that the VSD currently uses all the money appropriated for this purpose. A motion to amend the amount up to \$200 passed. A concern was expressed that the language in the bill was not ideal. A motion to simplify and amend the statute that limits the current amount to \$50.00 also passed. Because the specified statute was not identified, the endorsement was made in concept only.

The Educational Interstate Compact for Military Kids was endorsed. This bill is the educational interstate compact requested by the DOD that went through the house and senate but died on the senate floor as time ran out. Twenty-six states now have this compact. The Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) will also consider endorsing this measure. The bill would allow a child to have a smoother transition into a new school when the child's military parent is transferred. If the LESC endorses the measure, Representative Cote will carry the bill for that committee, and Senator Garcia will carry the bill for the MVAC.

A bill creating the Veterans' National Cemetery Fund was endorsed. The bill will allow the VSD to capture dollars for that purpose when a tax filer checks off a box dedicating funds for that purpose. Representative Sandoval will carry the measure.

A property tax exemption for veterans' organizations was endorsed. This amendment to the constitution will provide a tax exemption for property of a veterans' organization. Representative Steinborn will carry this measure.

A House Joint Memorial to study military credit and articulation was endorsed. This memorial requests a study of the benefits and feasibility of establishing uniform standards for accepting military college credit and articulation in all colleges and universities in New Mexico. Representative Cote recommended a change to include that the LESC and the Higher Education Department conduct that study. The change was accepted without objection. Representative Cote will carry the measure.

A House Joint Memorial recognizing the commissioning of the USS *New Mexico* was endorsed. This memorial recognizes the commissioning of a Virginia-class submarine. Representative Anderson will carry this measure.

A bill reauthorizing the statutory creation of the MVAC and a house memorial requesting the continuation of the MVAC were endorsed. Representative Garcia will carry the memorial and Senator Ulibarri will carry the bill.

A bill protecting veterans' disability payments from creditors was endorsed. The bill attempts to conform New Mexico law to existing federal law regarding veteran disability payments. The bill would exempt veteran disability payments or benefits awarded for a service-connected disability from liability claims, levy or seizure. Additionally, veterans' payments for service-connected disabilities will be exempt from garnishment. The committee expressed concerns about conflicts with other portions of the New Mexico statutes and the all-encompassing language in the garnishment sections. The bill was amended to clarify this, and the amendment adopted without objection. Representative Anderson will carry this measure.

The minutes for the fourth MVAC meeting were approved. A letter to U.S. Secretary of Veterans' Affairs Erik K. Shinseki was presented for the committee's approval. The letter was approved as written without objection.

### **Public Comment**

Joe Cannopy and others presented the results of a study regarding the positive economic impact of military bases in New Mexico.

Dave Cooley, a Air Force veteran, brought to the committee's attention some data regarding the economic value that retired military personnel bring to New Mexico. In 2001, military retirees in New Mexico had a combined economic impact of \$1.5 billion because of their retirement pay, second-career incomes, other family income, social security and other revenues.

Many states exempt retirees from taxation of their retirement income. Demographics were presented regarding the nature of retired military personnel. If New Mexico were to exempt retired military income, these retirees would be motivated to move to the state, which would benefit business and create jobs. Mr. Cooley asked the MVAC to look at the data carefully.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

## ENDORSED LEGISLATION