

**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.