

**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.