

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

**July 5, 2011  
New Mexico National Guard Armory  
600 Wyoming Blvd. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87123**

The second meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) for the 2011 interim was called to order by Senator David Ulibarri, co-chair, on Tuesday, July 5, at 9:35 a.m. at the New Mexico Army National Guard Armory in Albuquerque.

**Present**

Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair  
Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton  
Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Rep. Bob Wooley

**Absent**

Sen. Kent L. Cravens  
Sen. John Pinto

**Advisory Members**

Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros  
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.  
Sen. Timothy M. Keller  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

Sen. William F. Burt  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia  
Sen. Eric G. Griego  
Sen. Clinton D. Harden, Jr.  
Sen. William H. Payne

**Staff**

Pam Stokes  
Douglas Carver  
Rebecca Griego  
Andrew Pierce

**Guests**

The guest list is in the meeting file.

**Handouts**

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

**Tuesday, July 5**

**Welcome and Introduction**

The members of the committee introduced themselves, and staff members were introduced by Ms. Stokes, staff attorney, Legislative Council Service. Senator Ulibarri thanked the New Mexico Army National Guard for hosting the committee.

**New Mexico Veterans Administration (VA) Health Care System — Female Veterans Issues**

Carole Donsbach, R.N., M.P.H., manager, Women Veterans Program, New Mexico Veterans Administration Health Care System (NMVAHCS), and Diane T. Castillo, Ph.D., coordinator, Women's Stress Disorder Treatment Team, NMVAHCS, provided testimony concerning health care for female veterans. New Mexico is home to approximately 16,000 female veterans, 25 percent of whom have been identified through the NMVAHCS. The mission of the NMVAHCS is to promote and provide all health care services while developing an optimal continuum of health care services for female veterans. These services include mental, psychological, prenatal, preventative, oncological, diagnostic and rehabilitative health care. To facilitate these services the NMVAHCS provides a comprehensive health care clinic, devoted entirely to female veterans, to provide care in each of the aforementioned areas of health care. The comprehensive care clinic provides gender-specific facilities and care, and allows female veterans access to health care professionals trained and specialized in health care for female veterans. The NMVAHCS contracts with community health care providers to allow access for female veterans located in rural areas of the state and alleviate the burdens of veterans having to travel to receive health care.

Female veterans returning from current theaters of war are provided with comprehensive screening when they enroll into the NMVAHCS. This screening helps to identify and treat returning female veterans who may suffer from stress disorders related to combat or injuries related to sexual assault. The current issues facing New Mexico female veterans are homelessness and outreach. Homeless veterans have access to a walk-in clinic at the New Mexico VA health care center and to housing programs that allow veterans to have a private room and bathroom. Currently, the YWCA and veterans' centers in the state are in cooperation to provide housing assistance for female veterans with children. The NMVAHCS is currently undergoing outreach to promote the comprehensive care clinic available to female veterans and holds seminars to disseminate information to the veterans' community in the state.

The NMVAHCS provides a progressive mental health care system designed to promote social and occupational therapy. Statistically, female veterans returning from theaters of war develop stress-related disorders at higher rates than their male counterparts. Female veterans entering the mental health care system are screened for stress disorders, substance abuse, sexual abuse trauma and other non-military-related mental health diseases and impairments. The NMVAHCS provides female veterans who may need treatment for a mental disorder or stress-related trauma disorder (such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)) with cognitive and exposure therapies. These therapies have been shown to help female veterans begin to cope with and recover from the symptoms of PTSD and other stress-related disorders in as few 16 weeks,

although more severe cases may take a year or longer before a decrease in symptoms can be seen.

Dr. Castillo was asked for information regarding how female veterans are screened for PTSD and what factors make a veteran "at-risk" for being afflicted with PTSD. Dr. Castillo stated that multiple factors are weighed in evaluating someone who may be "at-risk" for PTSD or other traumatic stress disorders, but belonging to certain minority groups seems to make a patient more susceptible to developing traumatic stress disorders. In addition, certain factors of a patient's history will determine if the patient is at higher risk of developing traumatic stress disorders. Unfortunately, screening of individual patients cannot take place until the individual comes into the clinic to receive care. Outreach is a large focus area for NMVAHCS, and solutions for the access to veterans in rural areas continue to be implemented. In order to provide services to veterans living in rural areas, the NMVAHCS is utilizing teleconference video technology for private therapy sessions.

Ms. Donsbach was asked to share any information regarding whether female veterans, who suffer from stress-related disorders at a higher rate than male veterans, have a more difficult time transitioning back to the civilian work force. Ms. Donsbach responded that because female veterans suffer from stress-related disorders at higher rates than male veterans, it follows that those female veterans have a more difficult time transitioning into the civilian work force than do male veterans.

Because only 25 percent of female veterans in New Mexico are utilizing the NMVAHCS, the presenters were asked whether there are any outreach programs that are currently or prospectively planned to bring female veterans into the NMVAHCS. The presenters stated that members of the NMVAHCS travel throughout the state, holding seminars to inform female veterans of the services provided by the NMVAHCS and where to go to receive care. When female veterans do come into the NMVAHCS facilities, they undergo a thorough evaluation process and receive information regarding all services that are available to them and how they may take advantage of those services.

It was asked if there are any long-term care facilities for veterans in the state, and whether or not these facilities cater to female veterans. The presenters answered that there is a long-term care and retirement facility for veterans in Truth or Consequences and that all NMVAHCS staff and care providers receive training in gender-specific health care.

### **Minutes**

The committee approved the minutes from the first meeting of the MVAC with amendments that Representative Dodge should be removed from the roster because he was not a member of the committee at that time and that Senator Cisneros was present at the meeting.

### **Integration of Veterans**

Rose James, program director, New Mexico Veterans' Integration Center (NMVIC), provided testimony concerning the integration of homeless and returning veterans to New

Mexico community life. The vision of the NMVIC is to support veterans beyond the battlefield and to respond to the needs of veterans, especially those veterans who are homeless or experiencing a housing crisis. The NMVIC offers quality employment training, housing and supportive services based on a continuum of care to homeless veterans. Currently, the NMVIC is able to house single veterans who are required to comply with specific program guidelines and rules, including having been honorably discharged, abstaining from drug and alcohol use and having a support plan in place at the VA so that they may receive health care and be able to access other services provided by the VA. Residents at the NMVIC are also required to be willing to look for gainful employment or engage in constructive daily activities and to submit to random drug and alcohol testing. The NMVIC provides residents with counseling, job training and recreational activities during a two-year transitional period in which the ultimate goal is to integrate veterans into independent, communal living. In order to achieve its goals, the NMVIC cooperates with local community partners and private citizens and proprietors in taking donations, gathering food stores and providing quality employment training. The NMVIC is actively seeking to house its facilities in a permanent structure and to develop quality employment training programs for veterans within the community. The NMVIC is seeking to increase the number of beds available to homeless veterans from 50 to 100 and wishes to expand the program to offer emergency shelter to displaced veterans.

Ms. James was asked if there is a national network of veterans' integration centers through which to gain support for and knowledge about establishing and promulgating the NMVIC. Ms. James shared that she has been able to visit veterans' integration centers throughout the nation, specifically in Washington, D.C., Buffalo, New York, and San Antonio, Texas, and she is currently trying to model the NMVIC after the San Antonio veterans' integration center, which is run by GI Forum. Representative Anderson reminded the committee about the upcoming National Conference of State Legislatures legislative summit in San Antonio in August and expressed the desire for any member of the MVAC who attends that legislative summit to make a trip to tour the San Antonio veterans' integration center.

Ms. James was asked about which entities provide the majority of the NMVIC's funding and about the status of the search for a permanent structure. Ms. James stated that the main sources of funding for the NMVIC are per diem grants from the VA, contracts with the Veterans' Services Department (VSD) and donations from the community. The NMVIC is currently applying for more grants but has faced difficulties in raising funds due to the fiscal constraints affecting the nation. Ms. James informed the committee that the NMVIC is currently under lease at the Value Place Hotel in Albuquerque but that the NMVIC is actively searching for permanent facilities as it is trying to expand services to more veterans and would save a considerable amount of money by owning a facility. It was suggested that the NMVIC look into available state-owned lands upon which it may be able to build a new facility.

### **Veterans Business Incubator Program — Implementation of HM 59**

Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, state benefits and legislation affairs, VSD, and Brent Eastwood, division director, Office of International Trade, Economic Development Department, testified as to the development of a veterans business incubator program pursuant to House

Memorial 59 (HM 59). HM 59 commissioned the MVAC with studying the feasibility of creating or implementing a veterans business incubator program in New Mexico. The most efficient way to study the feasibility of developing a veterans business incubator program is to study other business incubator programs in the state. In doing the survey, a network of veteran-owned businesses can be formed to inform the public about the possibility of a veterans business incubator program and gauge interest throughout the state before undertaking steps to create an incubator. The survey could be done as part of a larger study, or an independent market analysis could be undertaken. The most sensible approach to implementing HM 59 is to conduct some sort of a pilot study and then report to the committee on the feasibility of implementing such programs.

The presenters were asked how veteran-owned businesses could find out about the program, if it is put in place. Mr. Martinez stated a network would be created, likely on the VSD web site. It was then asked how veteran-owned businesses will be identified, because the network is not now in place. Mr. Martinez stated that, for now, the best way to identify these businesses is by word-of-mouth.

Representative Anderson stated that the intent of HM 59 was to study whether or not a subset for veteran businesses could be carved out of already existing business incubator programs. It was the intent to study how the current business incubator programs are being used and if veterans can be given specific access to those incubator programs. The goal of the survey is to gauge the most responsible and cost-effective way to integrate a veterans business incubator program. The survey should provide enough information to gauge whether creating an additional separate business incubator program or creating a subset for veteran businesses in existing business incubator programs is the most feasible course of action.

It was asked if veterans wishing to open a business would have to travel to a centralized location or center to receive information about an incubator program or whether the veteran would be able to connect with these programs through other mechanisms. The presenters stated that an alternative goal of the survey would be to study different marketing and outreach programs and different types of public relation tools that may be used in conjunction with a business incubator program.

Representative Garcia expressed his wish to see a single resource that a veteran could access, specifically on the internet, to receive information on all veteran benefits in the state. Mr. Martinez stated that the VSD wants to be able to provide veterans with all information concerning veteran benefits throughout the state. The web site offered by the VSD is to become an "umbrella" covering all veteran-related topics and resources.

### **Kirtland Air Force Base — Update and Status**

Thomas F. Berardinelli, director of staff, 377th Air Base Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base (KAFB), provided testimony relevant to the status, economic impact and current operations underway at KAFB. KAFB has a large physical and economic presence in New Mexico and the greater Albuquerque area. Currently, KAFB covers 52,000 acres, houses many research and

development projects that assist in creating and implementing new technologies and has more than 100 mission partners. Missions include nuclear, space, directed energy, operational test and evaluation and special operations that are vital to the success of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and national security. KAFB has a large economic impact in the greater Albuquerque area and in the entire state, accounting for \$7.8 billion brought into the state by way of employment with the base and contracts with local contractors. According to a recent joint land use study, one in every 14 jobs in the state is attributed to the presence of the base. KAFB also devotes base resources, including equipment for science and technology, to educate students ranging from elementary science students to graduate level interns. It is the goal of KAFB to promote interest in the sciences to develop a pipeline of scientists and engineers for the country.

Currently, KAFB is undertaking assessment and evaluation of energy and environmental impacts of the base in order to be more conservation friendly in those areas. There is a plan to reduce KAFB's energy needs and better secure the supply of energy by developing renewables that are housed on the base. In addition, KAFB is undertaking major steps to rectify and clean the environmental damage caused by jet fuel leaks. It is the shared goal of KAFB and its stakeholders to remove the fuel and its dissolved constituents from the ground and ground water as quickly, safely and effectively as possible.

An inquiry was made into the fuel plume cleanup efforts, specifically the drilling of wells in order to assess and contain the plume. Mr. Berardinelli stated that almost all of the 113 planned wells have been drilled thus far, and all will be drilled and producing reportable information by February 2012. Once a well is dug, it takes time for the sediment to settle in order to get accurate readings so that the plume may be accurately characterized. It is the policy of the USAF to share with the public all information on the characterization of the plume, as well as information regarding all cleanup efforts.

Mr. Berardinelli was asked about the educational program offered by KAFB and how that program is undertaken, how local schools receive information about the project and what outreach to local schools is done in conjunction with the program. Mr. Berardinelli answered that the educational program is open to any school and any grade level. The program is located in Albuquerque on KAFB; thus, travel somewhat limits students from rural schools. Any teacher seeking information can go to the Air Force Research Laboratory La Luz Academy web site to get information. Knowledge of the program is widespread. The program is in its fifteenth year and currently serves approximately 4,000 primary and secondary students per year.

### **Public Comments**

Timothy Hale, secretary, VSD, addressed the committee about an upcoming female veterans conference in September that will focus on female veterans health issues. Secretary Hale expressed to the committee that the conference will enable the VSD to provide major outreach efforts to female veterans and all the veterans who attend.

### **Work Plan**

Representative Garcia informed the committee members that the committee is still

waiting to hear the availability of Mr. Drew Dix, which will determine whether or not the November 11, 2011 Silver City meeting will be held. The next meeting of the MVAC is scheduled to be held in Angel Fire on August 12, 2011.