

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

**September 15, 2015
Alamogordo
September 16, 2015
White Sands Missile Range**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Bob Wooley, co-chair, on September 15, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. at the Willie Estrada Memorial Civic Center in Alamogordo.

Present

Sen. Richard C. Martinez, Co-Chair
Rep. Bob Wooley, Co-Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon (9/15)
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt (9/15)

Absent

Rep. George Dodge, Jr.
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton
Sen. Daniel A. Ivey-Soto

Advisory Members

Rep. Randal S. Crowder
Rep. Jim Dines
Rep. Rick Little
Rep. John L. Zimmerman

Rep. David E. Adkins
Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Sen. Michael Padilla
Sen. William H. Payne
Sen. John Pinto
Sen. William E. Sharer
Rep. Jim R. Trujillo

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

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Peter Kovnat, Staff Attorney, LCS
Erin Bond, Intern, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

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

Tuesday, September 15

Welcome

Susie Galea, mayor, Alamogordo, welcomed the committee and provided a brief overview of Alamogordo's relationship with the military. She noted that Alamogordo is close to three major military installations — Holloman Air Force Base (HAFB), White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) and Fort Bliss — and that there is also a National Guard armory in town. There are approximately 7,500 veterans in the community, and Alamogordo would like to see meaningful employment for them, as well as for the guard reservists.

Mayor Galea also stated that Alamogordo supports the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project (SunZia).

SunZia Southwest Transmission Project

Tom Wray, project manager for SunZia, and Daniel C. Hicks, former chief of staff, WSMR, updated the committee on SunZia's progress.

Mr. Wray informed the committee that SunZia is a 515-mile transmission project in New Mexico and Arizona designed to bring high-quality renewable energy to western markets. With commercial operation expected by 2020, the total capital cost of the project is estimated at \$2 billion. A declaratory order was obtained from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in May 2011, and First Wind, currently owned by SunEdison, signed a letter of intent for up to 1,500 megawatts of transmission capacity. The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a record of decision on January 23, 2015.

Prior to the BLM's decision, Mr. Wray informed the committee, a variety of route alternatives were studied between 2009 and 2014. The BLM-approved route, which can be seen in the posted handouts, was reached with the cooperation of many agencies. These include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) Energy Siting Clearinghouse, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Installations and Environment); U.S. Department of the Army, WSMR; U.S. Air Force, HAFB; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Bureau of Indian Affairs; and State Land Office.

The federal permitting process began in September 2008 with the submission of a BLM SF-299 right-of-way (ROW) application, although the concept emerged in the regional planning process starting in 2006. In May 2009, SunZia initiated scoping. The environmental impact statement was finalized in June 2013, while the environmental assessment with a finding of no new significant impacts was completed in December 2014. As previously mentioned, the record of decision was issued by the BLM in January 2015.

The record of decision was reached after SunZia agreed to terms set by the DOD. Under a hold harmless clause, SunZia will hold the United States government harmless against any tort claims should the transmission facility be damaged by military testing performed in the Northern

Call-Up Area. In a memorandum of agreement currently being drafted, SunZia also agreed to a micro-siting provision that allows the WSMR to review the final design and location of the project facilities within the Northern Call-Up Area, as well as noninterference and close coordination with WSMR testing activities and undergrounding up to three segments of line, accumulating to a total of five miles. The DOD states that these provisions will allow the WSMR to continue with current and known future test activities for the foreseeable future.

Currently, SunZia is working on state permitting in Arizona and New Mexico. The final design, ROW acquisition, procurement and construction will occur from 2016 to 2020. The project is expected to have its financial close in either 2017 or 2018, and cash on delivery should be achieved by 2020.

Mr. Hicks added that while the WSMR is interested in renewable resources and SunZia, there is concern that the flexibility to execute missions could be impaired. The WSMR understands that the compromise was reached at the highest federal levels and that some of the options given are expensive, but it wants to see the endeavor succeed.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members noted that:

- (1) SunZia's path could harm the WSMR's ability to do business, as well as interfere with ranching activities on private property, which in turn could affect the economies of surrounding communities and the state;
- (2) the path was selected at a federal level by the BLM and the DOD, which overshadows much of the state's authority; and
- (3) approximately half of the transmission line's capacity is spoken for and would go to Arizona and California.

Jicarilla Apache Nation Veterans Group

Lyle Atole, commander, and Adrian Julien, vice commander, Jicarilla Apache Nation Veterans Group, presented to the committee on the projects and concerns of veterans in the Jicarilla Apache Nation and surrounding communities.

Mr. Atole stated that the Jicarilla Apache Nation Veterans Group is a nonprofit service organization devoted to caring for and empowering Jicarilla Apache Nation veterans and their families. The group provides case management, advocacy, community outreach and education, as well as support and gratitude, with the vision of improving, preserving and defending the quality of life of all Jicarilla Apache Nation veterans and their families living in and around Dulce, New Mexico.

To increase awareness and give thanks to all who have honorably served, the Jicarilla Apache Nation has designated the third Friday of July as "Jicarilla Warriors Day". A free luncheon is provided to all veterans and their families, and the five oldest living veterans are given a Pendleton blanket with the group's logo and a plaque as a token of appreciation. Veteran

benefit coordinators from New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado are invited to set up booths and communicate with veterans. Attendance for the group has been growing every year, and it is considered a success.

Health care is one of the first concerns for the Jicarilla Apache Nation Veterans Group, Mr. Atole stated. While the Indian Health Service has done outreach to local veterans, many veterans will not communicate any physical or mental health needs. Inside the community, resources such as counseling are lacking; outside the community, services are more than an hour's drive away. Because of these issues, the group is looking for resources, such as transportation and counseling aids, to be brought back to the community.

Housing is also of great concern to the Jicarilla Apache Nation Veterans Group. The Jicarilla Apache Nation does have a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that would allow VA loans to be used to purchase a mobile home to be transported onto the reservation or to build a mobile home on a designated site. The group is currently researching businesses that would work with this type of loan, as well as researching what could help veterans obtain a loan for home renovations.

Mr. Atole also informed the committee that the Jicarilla Apache Nation Veterans Group would like to find funding for a veterans' center in Dulce. The group would like a multi-use building that could host monthly meetings, counseling sessions and community events, as well as display memorabilia from veterans' times of service.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members noted that:

- (1) legislation was introduced last session addressing the issue of home rehabilitation for veterans, with special language for Native Americans, since the processes are very different, but it failed to pass;
- (2) finding lenders willing to lend on reservations can be difficult because of uncertainty about the foreclosure process; and
- (3) the meetings are open to all veterans, regardless of race.

Veterans Integration Centers

Elinor Reiners, program director and chief executive director, Veterans Integration Centers (VIC), gave an overview of the VIC and its programs, as well as the future of the organization.

Of the 170,000 veterans residing in New Mexico, between 1,000 and 1,700 of them are homeless. Predictions indicate that the number will rise due to the economic slowdown awaiting returning troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Ms. Reiners reports that issues the VIC most often sees include substance abuse problems, alienation from friends and family, mental and physical health problems (including heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, posttraumatic stress disorder and military sexual trauma) and employability.

Over the past five years, the VIC has served an average of 140 veterans annually. The first program the VIC established was a transitional housing grant per diem (GPD), which provides single veterans with food, clothing, transportation and temporary housing in a caring environment with structure and discipline. Through the GPD program, the VIC coordinates with community partners to assist homeless veterans, or veterans at risk of becoming homeless, with medical care, housing, free legal aid and employment. The average number of people in a house is 42, with a maximum of 50; the average stay is six months; and the success rate is 70%.

To be admitted into the program, a variety of conditions must be met. A veteran's discharge from any branch of the armed services must be other than dishonorably discharged. The veteran must be clean and sober for at least 28 days and submit to a drug test, although Ms. Reiners stated that exceptions could be made in extreme circumstances. The veteran must comply with the VIC's alcohol-free and drug-free environment. If applicable, the veteran must enroll in a plan that includes weekly attendance at drug and/or alcohol outpatient support groups. The veteran must also lack fixed or permanent housing; be medically and mentally stable enough to live in a community setting; be willing to follow program goals and requirements, including actively searching for employment within the first 30 days of residency, if applicable; be able to transition to independent living in less than two years; be willing to engage in constructive daily activities; and provide proof of car insurance and registration and a valid driver's license, as applicable.

Transitional housing is located at the Value Place across from the VIC office in Albuquerque, where 50 efficiency apartment-type rooms are rented out to veterans. The rooms are checked twice a week, and participants must perform community service. Ms. Reiners said that the program was looking into a five- to 10-bed program in Santa Fe.

Also highlighted was Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program, which serves more than 240 families by assisting them with obtaining VA and other public benefits; providing case management for seeking employment, health care, housing, etc.; and supplying temporary financial assistance, such as time-limited payments for rent, utilities, moving expenses, security or utility deposits, transportation, child care and emergency services. Other programs include an emergency shelter, a food program, a thrift shop and a behavioral health support division.

Ms. Reiners identified several issues that the VIC has seen recently. Elderly veterans with mental health issues such as dementia, and thus who are too unstable for homeless programs provided by the VIC, are discharged from hospitals with nowhere to go and no family to help. VA protocol does not enroll them into medical facilities unless they have medical issues, so a VA social worker executive and Ms. Reiners have been working to develop a strategy. Additionally, veterans dealing with significant mental health issues who choose not to participate in VA programs by their own preference are released from the VA without a plan and often end up homeless. Because of these and other problems, Ms. Reiners informed the committee, Albuquerque needs a veterans home.

In the future, the VIC hopes to expand the number of people served from 50 to 200 and obtain its own facilities. The facilities, which have already been designed by an architect, would have academic classrooms, tutoring areas, a cafeteria, a common area for residents to cook, grooming areas, transportation and apartments.

Ms. Reiners also stated that the VIC could always use support, including donations of food, clothing, toiletries and miscellaneous kitchen and cleaning supplies. Monetary donations are also appreciated.

On questioning, Ms. Reiners and the committee members noted that:

- (1) due to the rural nature of most of the state, providing services to all veterans can be difficult, but organizations work together to reach as much of the state as possible;
- (2) when veterans leave transitional housing, they should have their own income and pay their own rent. The VIC may pay a security deposit and occasionally five to nine months of rent, but the VIC will try to wean veterans off of support;
- (3) the VIC, as well as many similar organizations, are federally restricted from repackaging donated foods because they lack the facilities required to do so. In the planned new building, the VIC will have the necessary facilities; and
- (4) the VIC does not have a place for veterans to "dry out", but many of their partners do, and the VIC will work with veterans to bring them into the program.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) Update

Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, VSD, reported to the committee on current projects at the VSD.

The VSD, in a joint initiative with the Aging and Long-Term Services Department (ALTSD) and the VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Albuquerque, is working to identify available beds for aging veterans under the federal Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 and ALTSD programs. The VSD is also working with the VAMC to move along contracts for local providers. Currently, the VAMC has 100 veterans in both hospice care and rehabilitation who are placed in community long-term care. Of the 240 veterans currently enrolled in home-based primary care, 97 are located in rural communities. Nineteen veterans have been placed in medical foster homes. Overall, there are 353 approved, paid caregivers in the state, 233 general caregivers and 24 applications pending in the caregivers support program.

The VSD is working through the Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot grant program to establish a call center to provide information and referrals for veterans across New Mexico seeking information on transportation, mental health services and medical services, as well as other services available to veterans. The department hopes to implement the plan by January 1, 2016.

Female veteran issues are also of concern to the VSD. A female veteran working group composed of both active duty servicewomen and veterans has been instituted. A survey to identify needs has also been developed and implemented.

On questioning, Deputy Secretary Martinez and the committee noted that:

(1) given that the average age to retire from the military is in the early forties and the average pension is approximately \$24,000 a year, having a military tax incentive could attract retirees who wish to join the work force or start businesses and keep those who retired in-state from moving elsewhere;

(2) female veterans often have more trouble obtaining many services and simple solutions, such as offering an alternative door to VA women's clinics, that could help alleviate some of the stress;

(3) the call center is designed to be an information-giving center, not an information-taking center, and businesses potentially being contracted with will provide a guarantee that a phone call would be answered in the first 10 seconds; and

(4) transportation for veterans can be difficult to find because volunteer drivers are in short supply, and state programs that stop at the border cannot go to the VA hospital in El Paso. The VSD is looking for private contractors who will carry both the veteran and the caregiver. The VA has purchased vans and will pay its own drivers.

Low-Income Veteran Home Repair and Home Modification

Rose Garcia and Mike Rudloff, executive director and housing rehabilitation program manager, respectively, of Tierra del Sol Housing Corporation, spoke to the committee on work done by Tierra del Sol on veterans' homes in southern New Mexico.

Tierra del Sol works in 21 counties in southern New Mexico and repairs homes, sewers and apartments for its clientele, many of whom are veterans. The organization would like to continue working for aging veterans who are retiring or are retired and own a home in need of maintenance. Senate Bill 109 from the 2015 regular session would have established a fund run by the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA) to provide necessary rehabilitation for homes occupied by low-income, honorably discharged veterans in New Mexico whose income does not exceed 60% of the area median income. Tierra del Sol and similar businesses would be able to compete for the money to rehabilitate homes as specified in the bill.

On questioning, the presenters and the committee members noted that:

(1) rehabilitations could include bathroom modification for handicapped individuals, door widening, ramp construction and roof construction, as well as new appliances, cabinets or countertops, on a case-by-case basis;

(2) while the program from Senate Bill 109 would allow for up to \$20,000 per house, other sources of funding would also be used, such as grants from the Home Depot and bank loans;

(3) Tierra Del Sol is a 501(c)(3) corporation that would contract out the work to New Mexico-licensed and -insured subcontractors, who would find an advertisement requesting bids in a newspaper;

(4) approximately 14 other agencies would compete for the funds from Senate Bill 109, and the fund would be administered by the MFA, which would approve an application package; and

(5) while there are funds that veterans could currently access at the MFA, they must compete with the general public for them.

Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded and unanimously adopted, the minutes from the August 18, 2015 meeting were approved.

Public Comment

Darron Williams spoke to the committee on Foxhole Homes, a not-for-profit corporation looking to develop low-carbon, sustainable earthships with a community approach for homeless veterans. Foxhole Homes would use a 100-acre plot to house 40 to 60 veterans with a professional staff that would help residents develop skills and teach them about sustainable agriculture.

Billy Armijo spoke to the committee on the need for transportation for the 70,000 veterans in the southern half of New Mexico. Volunteer programs require long hours of driving for the volunteers, who are often retirees themselves, and require a significant investment in gas money. He also invited the committee to listen to his radio program, "Legacy Watch Veterans Hour", for more information on current concerns for veterans.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 5:00 p.m. Mr. Fleetwood reminded members that the committee meeting would reconvene the following day at the WSMR entry gate.

Wednesday, September 16

Tour of WSMR

The committee toured the WSMR.

Adjournment

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