

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

**September 19, 2016
Carlsbad Museum and Art Center
418 West Fox Street
Carlsbad**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) was called to order by Senator Richard C. Martinez, co-chair, on September 19, 2016 at 9:15 a.m. at the Carlsbad Museum and Art Center.

Present

Sen. Richard C. Martinez, Co-Chair
Rep. Bob Wooley, Co-Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Randal S. Crowder

Absent

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

Advisory Members

Rep. Harry Garcia
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. John L. Zimmerman

Rep. David E. Adkins
Rep. Cathryn N. Brown
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Rep. Jim Dines
Rep. Rick Little
Sen. William H. Payne
Sen. John Pinto
Sen. William E. Sharer
Rep. Jim R. Trujillo

Staff

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

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

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

Monday, September 19

Call to Order

Senator Martinez called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. and asked members and staff to introduce themselves.

New Mexico State University Military and Veterans Programs

Hector Sanchez, director, New Mexico State University (NMSU) Military and Veterans Programs, was unable to attend, but Dr. John Gratton, president, NMSU Carlsbad, presented on his behalf. Dr. Gratton said that NMSU Carlsbad is focused on training its students to be ready to work right away after graduating and cited successful programs in potash mining, oil and gas production and nursing.

In response to a question, Dr. Gratton said that there are 25 to 50 veterans enrolled at NMSU Carlsbad, and the school has designated a person in the financial aid office to help veterans. Vicente Vargas, state director, NMSU Government Affairs, said that there are 880 veterans enrolled within the NMSU system and that the school has veteran programs at all of its satellite campuses. Dr. Gratton said that the biggest hurdle is not getting veterans to enroll, but all of the associated services required to keep veterans in school. Those services include health services, including mental health; financial aid; academic counseling; and academic intervention.

A committee member noted that the NMSU Carlsbad veteran program is hard to find on the website and suggested that a link be more visible. In response to a comment about outreach by NMSU and its satellite campuses to attract veterans to the school, a committee member asked about outreach to rural areas and noted that there are veterans in the member's district that live 100 miles away from any satellite campus. Dr. Gratton said that he would be interested in expanding NMSU's outreach, but that it is expensive and, currently, the funding is not sufficient.

Helicopter Installation at the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial Monument in Las Cruces

Representative Zimmerman showed five videos depicting the installation of an authentic Vietnam-era Huey helicopter. Representative Zimmerman said that the entire project was done with volunteer labor.

New Mexico Military Institute Update

Major General Jerry Grizzle, president/superintendent, New Mexico Military Institute (NMMI), provided an overview of the school. Because junior college students get financial aid, he said, schools compete for those students. NMMI has a 97 percent fill rate and much of that is due to the retention of high school students at NMMI who then enroll in the NMMI junior college. Retention, according to General Grizzle, is much easier than recruitment. There has also been an emphasis on increasing the number of female cadets at the school. General Grizzle said that women are better in leadership roles and in class, and they pay their bills more steadily.

NMMI has an impressive great international presence. General Grizzle said that parents around the world are looking for a great educational opportunity for their children in a safe environment. NMMI provides both. To conclude, General Grizzle discussed the high school and junior college football teams and said that Roger Staubach played at the school and will be speaking to the team at its next game.

A committee member asked how the school is able to maintain a 96 percent attendance rate. General Grizzle said that NMMI is a mandatory boarding school, and the biggest reason for the high attendance rate is that the school makes sure to get buy-in on the importance of being in class from each student and his or her parents before enrolling the student. Also, NMMI has an early warning system in place, so when an issue arises, the school can intervene quickly. If a student misses class, it is probably because the student did not do the homework. General Grizzle said that if the issue is dealt with right away, the student does not get too far behind and is able to catch up. That way, the problem does not persist.

Next, General Grizzle discussed NMMI's plans for construction. Because the school buildings are on state and national registries, NMMI cannot demolish and rebuild; rather, it must remodel the buildings, which is not always cost-efficient. Since the buildings were constructed before the school was coeducational, the women's areas, i.e., restrooms and locker rooms, are just separated out and repurposed spaces. Compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is also a challenge.

The school has its construction plans ready to go, and the only unknown is the displacement cost, which is the amount needed to lease facilities for use during construction. The displacement funding will come from NMMI's own \$5 million contribution to the project. If the construction bond passes in the November election, NMMI will start right away with the project.

Legislators lauded the school for the opportunities it provides for graduates and for the legislative scholarship, which pays for 50 percent of all costs for four years, not just tuition costs. General Grizzle said that currently there are 19 NMMI students on legislative scholarships. Legislators did mention that they would like some follow-up correspondence from the recipients of legislative scholarships, and General Grizzle said he would bring that to the attention of the appropriate staff member at NMMI.

New Mexico National Guard Update

Brigadier General Andrew E. Salas, adjutant general, New Mexico National Guard, said that budget cuts are affecting the New Mexico National Guard. In response, the guard is looking at divesting its operation in Tucumcari or Clayton. Those communities do not want that to happen, nor does the guard, but there is not enough money to keep operating in those locations.

General Salas said that the National Guard brings great value to the state, and that \$7 million from the state's General Fund actually leverages \$121 million in federal money.

The guard has also teamed with federal Department of Defense and Department of Energy facilities in the state to test new technologies, including radar that can see through dust and clouds, for example, to see changes in terrain as minor as a footprint.

Responding to a question, General Salas said that a lot of outreach is provided, both before and after deployment of personnel, to assist with preparation and readjustment for veterans. That outreach includes the families and the employers of the deployed.

General Salas noted that the New Mexico National Guard is the state's militia and its primary mission is to protect local citizenry. Law enforcement is first, with the national guard serving as backup. The presentation closed with a brief discussion of the Carlsbad Armory, which is owned by the State Armory Board of the Department of Military Affairs but leased to the New Mexico State Police Division of the Department of Public Safety.

Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell Veterans' Programs

Dr. John Madden, president, Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell (ENMUR), provided the committee with an overview of ENMUR, noting the school's population and makeup. He added that enrollment at the school is up.

Dr. Madden went on to discuss the school's Youth Challenge Program, which is conducted through a partnership with the New Mexico National Guard.

Dr. Madden said that ENMUR is using Walker Air Force Base, which was decommissioned in the 1960s, to involve the school in airplane and helicopter pilot training programs and helicopter mechanic training.

Jim Engelhard, grant activity director, ENMUR, talked about the school's Career Success Center and its Veteran Success Center. While the centers do not offer counseling, they do provide referrals to assist with housing, financial aid, post-9/11 G.I. benefits and non-degree program benefits, among other things. The Veteran Success Center is unfunded, but the school has used other resources and some replaced technology to keep it in operation.

Dr. Madden highlighted the school's program to train pilots. There are three levels of pilot training, private pilot training, instrument training and commercial training. Currently, private pilot training is in place at ENMUR. However, the obstacle to the other two types of training is not expertise, but a lack of planes. Currently, the school has no planes with retractable wheels, which all commercial planes use. The school is aggressively looking to purchase or lease such a plane.

According to Dr. Madden, the waiting list of students is so long that a new place, or even two, would be fully scheduled immediately upon acquisition. When asked about proprietary schools, and their cost versus the instruction they provide, Dr. Madden said that proprietary schools charge more than ENMUR and have a poor success rate.

Legislators' comments covered issues about improving the school's website usability, possible leads on available aircraft and job placement for pilots. Dr. Madden said that, on average, ENMUR flight students have three job offers by the time they graduate.

Upon a motion by Representative Alcon, seconded by Representative Wooley, and without objection, the minutes of the August 31 MVAC meeting were approved.

Southeast New Mexico Veteran's Transportation Network

Magil Duran, president, Southeast New Mexico Veteran's Transportation Network, said that the network started in 2008 when it paid a man with a van to drive Vietnam veterans to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in Albuquerque. The network grew and grew, first providing service to all veterans, not just Vietnam veterans, and currently serves all veterans with a medical appointment at any VA or community-based outpatient clinic.

Now the network is a 501(c)(3) organization and has several vans, including a handicap-accessible van that can accommodate three passengers. Nobody at Southeast New Mexico Veteran's Transportation Network gets paid, but the drivers that go to Albuquerque get \$10.00 to pay for their lunch. Often, one driver said, they end up buying lunch for the passengers out of the driver's own pocket. Mr. Duran said that the men and women who drive are proud to do so. Local organizations have been generous to the network, which functions purely from donations. Mr. Duran said that it does not seek, nor would it accept, government money, as it would likely have to sacrifice some of its autonomy.

In response to a committee member's question, Mr. Duran said that it takes \$60,000 to \$70,000 to purchase a van and handicap-retrofit it. Mr. Duran closed by saying that, while the network has a schedule to run vans between Roswell and Albuquerque, if a veteran needs to go on another day or to a different location, the network will transport the veteran.

Veterans' Cemetery

Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, Veterans' Services Department, and Tom Wagner, director, State Veterans' Cemetery Program, Veterans' Services Department, presented on the progress on the state's veterans' cemeteries. In Fort Stanton, the project is 80 percent done, and the target finish date is April, 2017.

In Carlsbad, the process to create a veterans' cemetery is stalled because the state does not own the property, and that is a requirement by the VA.

Roswell Veterans' Cemetery

Ruben Esquivel, grounds supervisor, Roswell Veterans' Cemetery, said that the project in Roswell started in 2014 with 20 acres next to another cemetery. After some tree removal and overcoming some flooding issues, the project to create the Roswell Veterans' Cemetery has progressed with volunteer labor and funding. Mr. Esquivel discussed burial options, the burial process and requirements for burial as a veteran's spouse.

A committee member noted that a veteran must have been separated from service with an other than dishonorable discharge in order to be buried, or have a spouse buried, in a veterans' cemetery. When a veteran's spouse predeceases the veteran, the spouse is still entitled to burial, but the VA does not purchase the headstone until the veteran dies, so the spouse gets a plaque until then.

One legislator mentioned that some funeral homes are having a problem getting flags provided by the VA for Native American veterans who choose to be buried on tribal land.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the committee adjourned at 2:00 p.m.