

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

**September 3, 2024
David J. Flores Veterans Center
720 Lake Drive
Santa Rosa**

The second meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on September 3, 2024 at 10:05 a.m. at the David J. Flores Veterans Center in Santa Rosa.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez

Advisory Members

Rep. John Block
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Andrea Reeb
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Domenica Nieto, Research Assistant, LCS

Guests

The guest list in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the

"Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Tuesday, September 3

Welcome and Introductions (10:05 a.m.)

Representative Garcia welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves.

David J. Flores Veterans Center (10:15 a.m.)

Andrew Sanchez, director, David J. Flores Veterans Center, welcomed the committee and provided information on the veterans center. Sergeant Major Lloyd Griego provided insight into Santa Rosa's involvement with the veterans center and discussed how financial assistance from the legislature would allow for enhancements to the center. Former State Representative George Dodge, Jr., discussed the transition of the center from being a hospital and recognized Representative Alan T. Martinez's involvement with the creation of the center. Former Representative Dodge invited the committee to tour the center's museum and Wall of Honor.

Veterans Services' Department (VSD) Update (10:36 a.m.)

Brigadier General Jamison Herrera, secretary, VSD, and Edward Mendez, director, State Benefits Division, VSD, provided updates. Brigadier General Herrera discussed the status of state veteran cemeteries, which includes building a fourth cemetery in Carlsbad and community shelters at the Angel Fire State Veteran Cemetery for winter services, and he mentioned the work that the VSD has done to upgrade the veterans service officers (VSOs), placing them into a social worker job classification, which allows them to be paid as much as or more than federal VSOs. Additionally, the VSD has upgraded and reclassified cemetery staff positions to more accurately reflect the cost of living and assist with retention.

New Mexico Veteran Leadership Council (11:23 a.m.)

Martin Gallegos, representative for the New Mexico Veteran Leadership Council, discussed an initiative that is being worked on at the national level that involves those who employ National Guard members, especially during deployment. The federal RECRUIT Act of 2021, which did not pass, would have provided relief for employers through a tax incentive. The initiative is continuing with the current Congress. He provided examples of federal and state legislation to the committee. He additionally stated that the New Mexico National Guard is struggling with recruitment partly due to the enactment of the Opportunity Scholarship Act in 2022, which took away the New Mexico National Guard's primary recruitment tool. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=9/3/2024&ItemNumber=2>.

Veterans Integration Centers and Veteran Homelessness (1:00 p.m.)

Brock Wolff, chief executive officer, Veterans Integration Centers (VIC), discussed how the VIC will be moving veterans into a new campus on September 23, 2024 that is able to house up to 42 veterans and their families. He also discussed the difficulty of obtaining the capital

outlay money that the VIC was awarded in 2023 to purchase specific needs, such as furniture. Additionally, Mr. Wolff spoke on the second phase of the new campus. This phase will bring all of the agency into one facility, providing more resources for veterans and their families.

Military Base Planning Commission (1:22 p.m.)

Paul Cassidy, vice chair, Military Base Planning Commission, provided information on the mission of the planning commission, which is to keep the governor informed on issues relating to various military bases. Additionally, the commission works closely with New Mexico's congressional delegation. Mr. Cassidy discussed the funding that the state has received from the United States Department of Defense (DOD) and how the commission has used the funding. He said that military installations across the state contribute more than 52,000 jobs, \$2.8 billion in annual labor income and \$14 billion in economic activity. The DOD and the United States Air Force have generated report cards to compare how different states are treating military families to aid in retention, describing that it is used as a tool to award new missions to communities. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=9/3/2024&ItemNumber=5>.

The DOD's Defense-State Liaison Office (1:34 p.m.)

Kelli May Douglas, Pacific Southwest regional liaison, Defense-State Liaison Office, DOD, discussed working with state policymakers on solutions focused on military families. Ms. Douglas emphasized the importance of K-12 education and licensure for military families, highlighting that since 2012, the office has helped pass 1,275 pieces of related legislation or policy in various states, many of which have been passed in New Mexico. She spoke about interstate licensing compacts and the benefits they would provide not only for military spouses but for others, as well. Ms. Douglas discussed interpersonal violence, such as domestic violence, that may occur within the military and how military protective orders can be used as evidence. Additionally, Ms. Douglas spoke about the struggles that occur with special education transfers for military students. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=9/3/2024&ItemNumber=4>.

Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB) (2:13 p.m.)

Colonel Michael J. Power, commander, 377th Air Base Wing, and installation commander, Kirtland AFB, and Colonel Jason K. Okumura, commander, 377th Mission Support Group, Kirtland AFB, discussed the strengths and weaknesses they encounter within the community. Specifically, the colonels discussed the Air Force Exceptional Family Member Plan, which provides support to military family members, including those with special needs. Colonel Power stated that there is a 25% rejection rate from the Exceptional Family Member Plan for families moving to Albuquerque due to lack of resources. Colonel Okumura then spoke about the success of House Bill 302 (2024), which translated into military ratings, allowing for more successful recruitment. Additionally, Colonel Okumura referenced the difficulties the base has with supporting new military families who may have specific needs that Kirtland or

Albuquerque may not have the resources to provide, specifically in regard to education for young children.

Representative Sariñana made a motion to write a letter to the Public Education Department in reference to the Purple Star School Program. Representative Alcon seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Approval of the Minutes (2:32 p.m.)

On a motion made, seconded and approved, the committee adopted the minutes of the June 17, 2024 meeting.

Kirtland Partnership Committee (2:34 p.m.)

Megan DeLaRosa, interim executive director, Kirtland Partnership Committee, discussed the role of the committee in supporting, preserving and growing Kirtland AFB and the committee's successes. The committee received funding during the 2024 legislative session that is now being used on a development named MaxQ@Kirtland. She discussed a United States Air Force air tanker base that became operational in April that was able to distribute water for the Ruidoso fires. Additionally, Ms. DeLaRosa mentioned that the Kirtland Partnership Committee hosts the Kirtland Community Sustainability Committee, which works with Bernalillo County, the state, Cibola National Forest and others. She emphasized the importance of the report cards previously mentioned by Mr. Cassidy, on which the DOD is now basing decisions in regard to quality of life issues. Child care efforts are another focus of the committee, having worked with Central New Mexico Community College and the City of Albuquerque to host a child care fair to enhance child care services for the Kirtland community. Ms. DeLaRosa also spoke about opening a child care facility at Kirtland AFB.

Cannon AFB Update (2:43 p.m.)

Colonel Robert Johnston, commander, 27th Special Operations Wing, Cannon Air Force Base, and Mike Morris, mayor, City of Clovis, presented on project updates, upcoming legislation and economic growth in relation to Cannon AFB. Mayor Morris began by discussing the Armed Forces Support Committee, which had not been active for years, that he brought back to Cannon AFB. That committee brings governing bodies together to provide quarterly reports and updates about Cannon AFB. He discussed proposed legislation that would create a grant program for defense communities in the state.

Colonel Johnston discussed initiatives such as the Sentinel Landscape Project and emphasized that the base is working closely with eastern New Mexico communities. Due to a lack of specialty medical care, four out of every 10 airmen who receive orders to Cannon AFB are denied. Therefore, Colonel Johnston discussed current initiatives to enhance the availability of specialty medical care. Mayor Morris discussed additional funding that Cannon AFB could use through a grant program. Additionally, the colonel discussed the Sendero housing project, an off-base apartment complex that only houses airmen.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.