

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

**November 6, 2023
State Capitol, Room 322
Santa Fe**

The fifth and final meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on November 6, 2023 at 10:12 a.m. in Room 322 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

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

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Andrea Reeb
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Rep. John Block
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Guest Legislator

Sen. Nancy Rodriguez

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Bill Drafter, LCS
Yessica Marquina, Intern, LCS

Minutes Approval

Because the committee will not meet again this year, the minutes for this meeting have not been officially approved by the committee.

Guests

The guest list is 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 the agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Monday, November 6

Welcome and Introductions (10:12 a.m.)

Representative Garcia welcomed members of the committee and audience. Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) — Forgotten Heroes Funeral (10:18 a.m.)

Edward Mendez, director, Benefits and Services, VSD, introduced Michael Valencia, VSD. Mr. Mendez said that the Forgotten Heroes Funeral program was started 13 years ago in Bernalillo County. Mr. Mendez presented a flag and flag box to Senator Pope in recognition of his participation in this year's ceremony on behalf of the VSD; Jamison Herrera, acting secretary for Veterans' Services; and the veterans of New Mexico.

Healing America's Heroes (10:38 a.m.)

Eddie Crain, founder, Healing America's Heroes, and Bob Wooley, former state representative, District 66, said that Healing America's Heroes was founded in 2014 in response to the large number of suicides of military members returning from combat. Healing America's Heroes helps veterans, first responders and their families to successfully reintegrate into society by providing calming adventure and recreational experiences. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%202%20Healing%20America's%20Heroes.pdf>.

Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) New Mexico Veterans Legacy Program (11:19 a.m.)

Steve Martinez, Ph.D., director, Veterans Legacy Grant Program, SFCC, said that the Veterans Legacy Grant Program, in partnership with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, commemorates New Mexico veterans through the sharing of their stories. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%203%20SFCC%20Veterans%20Legacy%20Program.pdf>.

Approval of Minutes (11:28 a.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, the committee approved the minutes of the July 6, 2023, September 6, 2023 and October 2, 2023 meetings.

Letter to United States Senator Tommy Tuberville (11:29 a.m.)

Committee members discussed the letter to be sent to United States Senator Tommy Tuberville regarding military promotions that was adopted at the October 2, 2023 meeting. Committee staff members noted that members who want to sign the letter should notify the staff immediately.

New Mexico National Guard (1:35 p.m.)

Brigadier General Miguel Aguilar, adjutant general, New Mexico National Guard, provided a brief overview of the New Mexico National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Academy and the Job ChalleNGe program. In addition, General Aguilar gave an overview of the National Guard's appropriation request and a budget comparison of fiscal years 2024 and 2025. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%204%20National%20Guard.pdf>.

Federal Honoring our PACT Act of 2022 Update (2:53 p.m.)

Larry Campos, congressional liaison, New Mexico VA Health Care System, said that the federal Honoring our PACT Act, also known as the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, was signed into law by President Joe Biden on August 10, 2022. The PACT Act is one of the largest benefits expansions in the history of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The law expands benefits and care to generations of veterans who have been exposed to toxic substances and their survivors. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%205%20Federal%20Honoring%20pur%20PACT%20Act%20of%202022%20Update.pdf>.

Public Comment (3:38 p.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

Consideration of Legislation for Endorsement (3:46 p.m.)

Committee members discussed legislation for endorsement and unanimously endorsed one piece of legislation. The endorsed legislation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%206%20Consideration%20of%20Legislation%20for%20Endorsement%20226826.1.pdf>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.