

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

**July 22, 2019
Ruidoso Convention Center
Ruidoso**

The second meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, co-chair, on July 22, 2019 at 9:37 a.m. at the Ruidoso Convention Center in Ruidoso.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Co-Chair
Sen. Bill Tallman, Co-Chair
Rep. Rachel A. Black
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Absent

Advisory Members

Rep. Randal S. Crowder
Rep. Joy Garratt
Rep. Jane E. Powdrell-Culbert
Rep. G. Andrés Romero

Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Sen. Richard C. Martinez
Sen. William H. Payne

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Staff, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file.

Monday, July 22

Introduction

Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Military Retiree Income Tax Deduction

Rudolph Checkley, Veterans Leadership Council, discussed enactment of an income tax deduction for military retirement pay. He noted that several other states have such a deduction and explained that a bill has been introduced during the past several legislative sessions to provide a deduction to military retirees living in New Mexico. Mr. Checkley said that a tax deduction would help attract retirees to New Mexico, which could offset the cost of the deduction. However, he explained that the bill has died in each session, in part because fiscal analyses provided for the bill have painted the bill in an unfavorable light that might not be entirely accurate. Mr. Checkley pointed out that the last study on the fiscal impact of a tax deduction for military retirement pay had been performed in 2005 and that Arkansas used the data in that study to pass a 100% deduction for retirement pay. He suggested that a new study be performed and said that the Veterans Leadership Council has been working with the Arrowhead Center at New Mexico State University. Mr. Checkley indicated that a study would cost about \$35,000 and that the Veterans Leadership Council is looking for legislative sponsors for an appropriation.

White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) Update

Joel Giblin, physical scientist, WSMR, provided the committee with an update regarding WSMR's history and ongoing mission, noting that its size, airspace and climate offer significant advantages over other similar military installations. He discussed several of WSMR's critical missions and the existing technology that is in place to help support those missions. Mr. Giblin also discussed efforts to modernize more of the instrumentation at WSMR to better accommodate evolving technologies, as well as efforts to better align the installation with United States Army priorities.

Veterans Integration Centers (VIC)

Wendy Webber, development director, VIC, introduced Bobby Ehrig, chief financial officer, VIC, and gave a presentation on the VIC. Created in 2005 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the VIC has been helping veterans and their families. As a nonprofit, the VIC is able to offer immediate shelter to veterans and their families. Almost all VIC staff are veterans or family members of veterans. Mr. Ehrig said that in 2018, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development recorded a 2.8% increase in the homeless population within New Mexico and a 16.9% increase for homeless veterans, making it one of the highest percentages in the nation. The VIC has created multiple programs that have become models for how nonprofits and the community can work cohesively to address veteran homelessness. The VIC operates a program that addresses emergency, transitional and rapid housing options. Mr. Ehrig said that for those who are at risk of homelessness, the program can provide an avenue to avoid becoming homeless and address barriers that are keeping those veterans from having sustainable housing.

Ms. Webber gave the committee an overview of services that the VIC provides. The emergency housing program is underfunded but necessary in preventing homelessness, she said. The program is provided for seven days and enables staff to assess and determine next steps for the veteran. The transitional housing program is available for up to two years, and the program allows the veteran and the veteran's family up to four members to continue the process of achieving housing stability. The transitional housing program includes dealing with trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder, financial readiness, counseling and education as well as substance abuse treatment.

In response to questions from the committee, Mr. Ehrig stated the following:

- funding has decreased since 2012; in 2019, the VIC received zero dollars;
- a legislative funding request was not approved and there was no line-item veto;
- the Legislative Finance Committee rejected a proposal to request funding;
- women have the highest success rates in achieving housing stability; and
- funding is necessary to provide grants for housing opportunities.

Lincoln County Veterans' Issues

Doug Sabo, chapter service officer, Vietnam Veterans of America, expressed to the committee a concern about the lack of services available to veterans. Some of the concerns include transportation, medical care and financial assistance.

Eastern New Mexico University-Ruidoso (ENMU-Ruidoso) Veterans Services and Partnership with the Mescalero Apache Tribe

Coda Omness, director of community development, ENMU-Ruidoso, introduced Kelton Starr, education director, Mescalero Apache Tribe; Hank Hargis, coordinator of student services, ENMU-Ruidoso; and Dr. D. Ryan Carstens, president, ENMU-Ruidoso, who presented on the increase in course work with the Mescalero Apache Tribe. Degree trends include business administration and human resources, with marketing management being the most common degree sought. Dr. Carstens said that he wants to remodel a space to allow 10 students from the tribe to reside without having to drive to the main campus in Portales. Ms. Omness said that the program started two years ago to better serve tribal students and that there is a convocation held at the Inn of the Mountain Gods.

United Military Women of the SouthWest (UMWSW)

Karen Woods, president, UMWSW, said that the UMWSW strives to help all veterans in southern New Mexico. She said that the focus is on providing assistance, giving general information and assisting other community service organizations in southern New Mexico that also help veterans. Ms. Woods said that there is a flight pancake breakfast and an annual spaghetti dinner that raise funds for El Caldito Soup Kitchen in Las Cruces and the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. Ms. Woods provided the committee with a copy of a proclamation declaring June 14, 2019 as "Women Veterans Day".

Approval of Minutes

On a motion duly made, seconded and unanimously adopted, the minutes of the June 5, 2019 meeting were approved.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) — Field Services Division

Larry Campos, director, Field Services Division, VSD, introduced David Walker, bureau chief, Cemeteries and Memorials, VSD. Mr. Campos said that the VSD's mission is to provide the highest quality service and advocacy for the state's 158,994 veterans and their families. Mr. Campos said that there are 14 VSD field offices, each staffed by a veterans' service officer (VSO). Although the facility in Grants has closed, the VSD is exploring ways to reopen the facility. Mr. Campos said that a VSO must be accredited by the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers and that it takes two years to get certified. Currently, there are 20 VSOs in the state. According to Mr. Campos, some of the fiscal year (FY) 2020 program initiatives include:

- hiring a women veterans program manager;
- VSO training for pueblos and tribes;
- software upgrades; and
- a statewide outreach program.

One of the concerns that Mr. Campos mentioned is a need for additional VSOs, for which the estimated cost is \$300,000 plus \$50,000 for training. A VSO has to be sent to another state for training because training is not provided in New Mexico. He said that in FY 2019, field office visits totaled 22,859.

Mr. Walker gave a presentation to the committee on the Fort Stanton State Veterans Cemetery and the Fort Stanton Merchant Marine Cemetery. The Fort Stanton State Veterans Cemetery opened in November 2017. The first interment was conducted in December 2017, and there are currently 72 veterans and family members interred at the cemetery, he said. The Fort Stanton Merchant Marine Cemetery/Public Health Cemetery opened in 1899, and there are 2,014 merchant marines and their family members interred at the facility, Mr. Walker said, and added that there is a need for funding to help upgrade and maintain the facility.

Members of the committee and presenters discussed the following:

- a tax exemption on personal property and facilities where veterans services are provided;
- the Workforce Solutions Department provides assistance to veterans to remove barriers to employment, which is free of charge, and can assist in creating a business plans;
- VetraSpec is the veteran claims management software that is used by VSOs and state agencies; and
- there are VSOs with associate's degrees or bachelor's degrees, and some have master's degrees.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the committee adjourned at 3:52 p.m.