

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND
VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

April 2, 2002
3:16 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Mike Chenault, Chair
Representative Beverly Masek
Representative Lisa Murkowski
Representative Joe Green
Representative Sharon Cissna

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Pete Kott
Representative Joe Hayes

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

Alaska Air National Guard, Brigadier General

James K. Robinson, Colonel - Fort Richardson
Timothy W. Scott, Colonel - Eielson Air Force Base
Gene L. Ramsey, Colonel - Kulis Air National Guard Base

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Space and Missile Defense, Brigadier General

James L. Welch, Colonel - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

PREVIOUS ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES K. ROBINSON, Colonel, Appointee
as Brigadier General
Alaska Air National Guard
Fort Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee to the position of Brigadier General in the Alaska Air National Guard, offered a brief summation of his new duties and answered questions.

TIMOTHY W. SCOTT, Colonel, Appointee
as Brigadier General
Alaska Air National Guard
Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee to the position of Brigadier General in the Alaska Air National Guard, discussed his new duties and Kulis Air National Guard Base, where he will be stationed.

GENE L. RAMSEY, Colonel, Appointee
as Brigadier General
Alaska Air National Guard
Kulis Air National Guard Base, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee to the position of Brigadier General in the Alaska Air National Guard, discussed his new position at Kulis Air National Guard Base and answered questions.

JAMES L. WELCH, Colonel, Appointee
as Brigadier General
Space and Missile Defense
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee to the position of Brigadier General for Space and Missile Defense, discussed his new position and answered questions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 02-18, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIR MIKE CHENAULT called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 3:16 p.m. Representatives Chenault, Masek, Green, and Hayes were present at the call to order. Representative Murkowski arrived immediately thereafter.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

Alaska Air National Guard, Brigadier General
Space and Missile Defense, Brigadier General

Number 0071

CHAIR CHENAULT brought before the committee the appointments of Colonel James K. Robinson, Colonel Timothy W. Scott, and Colonel Gene L. Ramsey to the position of Brigadier General in the Alaska Air National Guard, and the appointment of Colonel James L. Welch to the position of Brigadier General for Space and Missile Defense. [Packets contained biographical information on all four appointees.]

Number 0175

JAMES K. ROBINSON, Colonel, Appointee as Brigadier General, Alaska Air National Guard, explained that there are two flying wings and other assorted activities. As chief of staff, he would coordinate staff work for the adjutant general and the assistant adjutant general "for air." He said the wings generally are self-sustaining, and that there will be a look forward at future missions and projects for the next 10-30 years.

Number 0363

TIMOTHY W. SCOTT, Colonel, Appointee as Brigadier General, Alaska Air National Guard, explained that currently he is wing commander of the 168th [Air Refueling Wing]. He offered the vision of Major General Oates that - if confirmed "for a star" - he will be moved to the 176th wing at Kulis Air National Guard Base, a stand-alone wing with about 13,000 people, compared with 750 people where he is now [at Eielson Air Force Base].

COLONEL SCOTT, in response to questions from Representative Green, suggested the need to look at more than biological and chemical-weapons issues [for homeland security]; this includes looking at natural disasters, since Alaska is earthquake-prone and has more miles of coastline than the continental U.S. He said this mission is already being performed admirably. In further response, he highlighted the need to look at Alaska as a whole. Noting the relatively small population of about 650,000, he said that for the missions currently performed by the Air National Guard, it is about at maximum capability now, based on the number of people to draw from.

Number 0650

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN offered his understanding that there will be interfacing with the regular Air Force, the CAP [Civil Air

Patrol], and so forth. He asked how well the pieces fit together.

COLONEL SCOTT replied that it's part of the evolving homeland defense, which [will be] off to a good start by just having a common radio frequency bandwidth and communications system. Needed in addition will be an overarching superstructure to combine all these forces - and, if possible, enough money.

Number 0773

GENE L. RAMSEY, Colonel, Appointee as Brigadier General, Alaska Air National Guard, told members that Major General Oates envisions that Colonel Ramsey will be the next 176th wing commander at Kulis Air National Guard Base, beginning July 13, when the current commander retires. For him, it will be a short-term position, since [Colonel Scott] will have the position in the long term. Envisioned after that is that Colonel Ramsey will go to the "assistant adjutant general air position." He lauded the 176th for having two missions so ideally tailored to Alaska, noting that the airlift squadron can respond to disasters; for example, when a generator building burns down in a village, the wing can haul a new generator to the village the next day.

COLONEL RAMSEY mentioned rescues of more than 500 people, 498 of whom were Alaskans. He said [the guard] is a nice fit in a state with bad weather and great distances to cover. He said he is fond of telling high school students that the Alaska [Air National Guard] is the best kept secret in the state, since it has a lot to offer young people, including pilot training, technical training, aircraft mechanics, and so forth. He pointed out that much is being asked of traditional guardsmen and employers in the next year or two.

Number 1036

REPRESENTATIVE MURKOWSKI asked to hear about recruitment and retention, and whether the guard is getting numbers of Alaskans sufficient to meet missions in Alaska.

COLONEL RAMSEY responded:

We have one of the most productive, active recruiting staffs in the entire national guard. The nationwide average ... is perhaps something like two or three recruits per month per recruiter - and our recruiters

double, triple, quadruple that production. We believe Alaska's a transitory-type place. And an analysis was done, and most air guardians have about a 10 percent annual turnover, and we believe ours is more like 16 percent. And we don't know if it's because many of our members might be a dependent of an active-duty person - and when it comes time for them to rotate, they take their ... spouse with them.

There's also the issue of ... prior-service active-duty people getting off duty at Elmendorf [Air Force Base] or Fort [Richardson] or Eielson, joining us, and after a couple of years, they really miss the grannies and the family back home, and maybe the warmer weather, and they end up leaving us. And there's not much we can do about that. So we ... continually recruit - a lot of ... throughput.

And it's interesting that, if you think about the base, we're talking 18-year-olds to 35-year-olds. We're talking about people that can pass a physical, people that don't have a criminal record. And so the 600,000 Alaskan pool shrinks relatively rapidly when you put all the prerequisites in there.

Number 1214

COLONEL RAMSEY continued:

We have failed miserably at Alaska Native recruiting. The air guard tends to be a Railbelt operation - Anchorage and Fairbanks. And we've tried our darnedest, and it's difficult ... to induce people to come in from the villages to Anchorage. And we [have] just more work to do in that area. We want to mirror our surroundings - our community - and ... our Alaska Native membership is not near the surrounding community. And we know Anchorage is the largest Native village ... in the state, but still ... we have to make better inroads there.

One idea was to ask some of the elders to "partnership" with us and the university, and select some bright kids to go to college, and then we would promise to commission them and get them a set of silver wings and give them a skill like being a pilot. ... And we still have work to do ... to see a plan

like that through. But ... that's something we'd like to try to do.

But, by and large, as Colonel Robinson said, we have enough people to do the current tasking. We're hovering at the 93-percentile rate. ... We have "x" number of billets authorized, and our wing ... has 93 percent of those filled currently. So we're doing OK. It's very difficult, though.

Number 1304

COLONEL ROBINSON responded to Representative Murkowski as well. He explained that recruitment is aimed at people 18 to 35 years old who are coming out of high school or active duty. However, the pool of people with exposure to the military, which has provided the best success, has been shrinking, and 70 percent of 18-year-olds who graduate from high school go to college.

COLONEL ROBINSON noted that one successful program has been the tuition waiver at UAA [University of Alaska Anchorage] whereby a member in good standing in the guard receives a free college education; in return, the state gets a highly trained individual who most likely will stay in Alaska because of having some connection, and who most likely will stay in school or else will have to pay the money back.

REPRESENTATIVE MURKOWSKI called the foregoing a wonderful program and expressed hope for its continued funding. She extended appreciation to the appointees for the work the air guard has done by going into communities, providing drug education and inspiration for staying drug-free, remaining in school, and getting good grades.

COLONEL RAMSEY pointed out that Colonel Robinson learned to fly in the air guard and now is a captain for Alaska Airlines. He also noted that 2002 is the 50th anniversary for the air guard.

Number 1631

REPRESENTATIVE MURKOWSKI suggested it would be appropriate for this committee to sponsor a citation recognizing that. [Concurrence was expressed by several members.]

Number 1662

JAMES L. WELCH, Colonel, Appointee as Brigadier General, Space and Missile Defense, told members he will be the first in his job. He suggested Alaska is in a good position geographically to participate in the test bed [for missile defense] and any deployment. He mentioned leveraging the situation and contracts that have been let, and related the vision of Major General Oates that the Army National Guard, along with the Air National Guard, will operate that facility.

COLONEL WELCH said many things must be done to get into position. He cited labor issues, for example, to ensure that Alaskans have first shot at jobs and are in position to get them. Although his job will focus primarily on the military side, Colonel Welch said he'll be working at the University of Alaska and the [Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation], as well as with people in Greely and Fairbanks, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs, the congressional delegation, and others, to try to choreograph this to meet some or all of the goals. He said there will be a dynamic series of events, and that the test bed will be in position in 2004. He suggested his duties will change as the situation changes.

Number 1869

REPRESENTATIVE MURKOWSKI surmised that Colonel Welch's role would be as liaison with the military.

COLONEL WELCH affirmed that. He said Major General Oates' current vision is that Colonel Welch will work the military side and Chris Nelson the civilian side, in government relations. In response to further questions, he said others will work with him; once his own position is firmed up, more people will be brought in and focus on it. He added that the number of people working on the issue will depend on what is going on at that particular time. Saying it's already late, he emphasized the need for a strategy and approach that is focused, and that everyone work together. Returning attention to recruitment and the \$250,000 a year provided [by the legislature to pay tuition for members of the guard], he pointed out that jobs [for the missile defense system] will require some technical education.

Number 2054

REPRESENTATIVE MURKOWSKI suggested the need to have Alaskans poised, when a big project such as the missile defense system is coming on line, to be trained at the appropriate time. She said

information about timing for this new system, for example, would be invaluable to all Alaskans.

COLONEL WELCH concurred. He noted that if a job requires 2,000 welders, however, it doesn't make sense to train that many Alaskans as welders, since there won't be an ongoing need for so many in the state. He highlighted the necessity of looking at the long term.

Number 2202

COLONEL WELCH, in response to questions from Representative Green, said [Mr. Nelson] will work with communications, talking to corporations and other businesses, for example, and conveying the message of what skills will be needed. Acknowledging that either he or Mr. Nelson may end up working for the other, Colonel Welch said that either way, the message will be the same: "Here's how we understand it. Here are the challenges." Colonel Welch pointed out that the challenges will be significant because of Alaska's demographics and so forth. He noted that he's a traditional guardsman and expects to use six to eight days a month on this, which his employer, BP, has provided flexibility for him to do, whereas [Mr. Nelson] is a full-time employee. Colonel Welch emphasized that his own primary focus will be ensuring that there's a plan to get people into those jobs, in order to put the Army National Guard in a position to operate the facility.

Number 2323

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN followed up on Colonel Welch's comments about welders, agreeing it is a need in the state but is cyclic. He asked whether there is any possibility - other than emergencies - for offsetting those cycles so that fewer welders could be used, but could be [employed] all the time.

COLONEL WELCH pointed out the difficulty of getting even one oil company to do that.

Number 2369

REPRESENTATIVE HAYES asked how many jobs are expected, and how long it will be before full implementation.

COLONEL WELCH answered that under the current scenario, the [U.S. Army] Corps of Engineers is responsible for building such facilities. He said the guard wouldn't operate it until

deployment. However, the decision to deploy hasn't been made. He noted that while some people in the active military share that vision of having the guard operate the facility, others envision either no role or a partial role for the guard.

COLONEL WELCH reported that if [the guard] gets that mission, he understands that the expectation is 400 people at [Fort] Greely. Some would be full-time guardsmen, supplemented by M-day [the day on which mobilization is to begin] soldiers; there would be work occurring day and night, with a minimum of two shifts and possibly three or four crews. There also would be security, maintenance, and a need to address fire and other issues. He added that this is premature because deployment may go from 4 to 50 silos, for example, which will make a lot of difference in the installation and a little difference in the operation.

Number 2492

REPRESENTATIVE MURKOWSKI asked whether this addition for the guard is viewed as positive for recruitment purposes.

COLONEL WELCH said yes, noting that many of the best people in the guard are interested because it is new and will have a large impact on the state. He opined that people realize this is the most important project the nation has embarked upon, since a missile [from North Korea, for example] could not be stopped with a submarine, for example. He said the question is how to leverage it when trying to attract smart, young people from all over Alaska to the guard, and expressed the need for confidence that the guard will, indeed, have that mission. He added that it's "out a couple of years," however.

Number 2590

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN referred to problems related by Colonel Robinson about increasing the number of Native Alaskans who join. He asked what the legislature can do to help with recruitment.

COLONEL WELCH said he'd commanded the 1st Battalion at Nome, and that there are no better soldiers than the Alaska scouts there. He told members that all the legislature can do is to allocate resources. He noted that [then-Governor Knowles] appointed Colonel Austin as liaison to the Kotzebue-Nome region, which has done some good. In addition, there is an "elder sergeant-major concept" for which the legislature provided funds to pay someone

up to 24 days a year, to his recollection, which he said has been very helpful.

COLONEL WELCH pointed out how different it is trying to convince someone from a remote village to join, as opposed to someone from Wasilla who can drive home at night. He emphasized the desire to get the message across that tuition can be paid, and suggested having sponsor families in Anchorage, for example. He emphasized the need for some stimulus in order to change behavior, and acknowledged that it likely will require a multi-pronged approach.

CHAIR CHENAULT asked if anyone else wished to testify; there was no response. He thanked the appointees.

Number 2795

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN moved to forward the names of [Colonel James K. Robinson, Colonel Timothy W. Scott, Colonel Gene L. Ramsey, and Colonel James L. Welch] to the joint session of the House and Senate for confirmation. There being no objection, the confirmations of Colonel Robinson, Colonel Scott, Colonel Ramsey, and Colonel Welch were advanced from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

The committee took an at-ease at 4:00 p.m. and was called back to order at 4:02 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Number 2865

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 4:03 p.m.