

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

January 23, 2001

8:05 a.m.

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Overview of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

TAPES

TAPE 01-5, Sides A & B

TAPE 01-6, Side A

CALL TO ORDER

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN COGHILL, Chair, convened the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 8:05 a.m.

PRESENT

Committee members present were Representatives Coghill, James, Hayes, Fate, Stevens, and Wilson.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

MAJOR GENERAL PHILLIP E. OATES, Adjutant General/Commissioner, Department of Military and Veteran's Affairs, introduced himself. He said that he had been commissioned as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army from Infantry Officer Candidate School in February 1970 and had graduated from the U.S. Army War College in 1991. He said he concluded his active Army career as Chief of Staff for the Alaskan Command at Elmendorf Air Force Base. He was appointed as Adjutant General of the Alaska National Guard on February 1, 1999.

GENERAL OATES explained that the department is divided into several divisions that include the Office of Veterans Affairs, Public Affairs Office, Alaska Army National Guard, Alaska Air National Guard, Alaska Division of Emergency Services, Alaska State Defense Force, Alaska Naval Militia, Alaska Military Youth Academy, and Division of Administrative Services.

GENERAL OATES talked about the Alaska Air National Guard (ANG), the different squadrons within the unit, and the important roles they play in the Pacific region on behalf of the U.S. Armed Forces. He explained that the missions of the ANG are to (a)

participate in local, state, and national programs that add value to America; (b) protect life and property and preserve peace, order, and public safety; and (c) support U.S. national security objectives. He said there are 641 full-time members and 1,261 part-time members of the ANG. General Oates pointed out in the Committee members' packets the fall issue of the "National Guard Review," which featured an interview with General Oates about Alaska's strategic significance in national security and the needs of ANG to fulfill those responsibilities.

GENERAL OATES then discussed the Air Force Space Command proposal to transfer the Space Surveillance and Ballistic Missile Warning System at Clear Air Force Base to the Alaska National Guard. He said the transfer would require no additional state funding and would bring 90 federally funded Air Guard positions to Interior Alaska. He said the proposal is under review by the Air Force, and the four-year transition is expected to begin later this year.

GENERAL OATES mentioned that the department had recently created a staff position to monitor federal development of the National Defense System that could result in Alaska being the site of the National Defense Ballistic Missile System. He said he had recently hired a former legislative staff member, Chris Nelson, for the position. He said Alaska is the only location that could provide protection to all fifty states from incoming missile attacks.

GENERAL OATES introduced Dave Liebersbach, Director, Division of Emergency Services, and asked him to give an overview of the division.

MR. LIEBERSBACH said he became director of the division in February 1999. Previously, he had been the division's chief of staff since October 1996. He explained that the Alaska Division of Emergency Services is responsible for coordinating all phases of emergency management in the State of Alaska. The division aids victims of all kinds of disasters ranging from floods and forest fires to the recent Western Alaska fisheries crisis. He said the most recent activities of the division involved monitoring of the state during the turn of the calendar from 1999 to 2000. He said the transition proved to be uneventful, but the division was ready to respond to any emergencies that might have occurred.

MR. LIEBERSBACH also mentioned that the old Emergency Broadcast System for alerting the public of disasters had been replaced in

January 1998 by a new system that consists of a network of broadcast stations across the nation and across the state. Alerts pass from station to station and onto the air automatically, without human intervention. The State Division of Emergency Services activates the alerts, and the system is designed to alert only the areas that could be affected, so as not to alarm others.

TIM JONES, Director, Alaska Military Youth Academy, explained that in 1993, Congress had passed legislation to establish ten pilot programs to give a second chance to 16-18 year-old "at risk" youth who were not going to school and had not earned a high school diploma. A pilot program was funded for Alaska, and in January 1994, 43 young men and women started the program. As of September 2000, 900 Alaskan youth have graduated from the academy. In December 1997, the academy received its secondary school accreditation from the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, and in January 1998, the Academy became a Microsoft Authorized Academic Training Program site.

MR. JONES said the mission of the academy is to help young Alaskans who are headed for a grim and perhaps criminal future by giving them a second chance to gain self-confidence and become solid citizens, contributing positively to their state and local communities.

MR. JONES said the criteria for an applicant is that he or she is 16 to 18 years old; is out of school and has not earned a high school diploma or completion certificate; is not involved in any legal entanglements; is committed to being drug, alcohol and tobacco free while enrolled; and can physically and mentally handle a military-style training program similar to boot camp. The military youth academy is located at Fort Richardson and uses Army training facilities, including the obstacle courses.

MR. JONES said the program is a tremendous asset to Alaska. He said that 55 percent of the graduates are now paying their way in society by holding permanent jobs. He said that of those people in Alaska prisons today, 85 percent have no high school diploma. About 25 percent of those youth accepted at the academy have been involved with the juvenile justice system. He believes the state can save millions of dollars in incarceration costs by educating youth that otherwise might become prison inmates.

MR. JONES said the federal government fully funded the program during its pilot stage, but now the academy is looking for

funding to keep the program going. He said there is a non-profit corporation being formed to raise money for the academy, which needs about \$4 million a year for operating expenses.

GENERAL OATES concluded the presentation by thanking the House State Affairs Standing Committee and by describing the joint efforts of his department and the Department of Administration to establish a veterans wing of the Pioneers Home. He said they are working with the Veterans Administration to tap federal funds and utilize the empty beds in the Pioneers Home facilities for Alaskan veterans. He asked the committee's help in supporting legislation that will be introduced by the governor to change the name of the Alaska Pioneers Home to the Alaska Pioneers and Veterans Home, and the Alaska Pioneers Home Advisory Board to the Alaska Pioneers and Veterans' Home Advisory Board. It also revises statutes to accommodate the establishment of veterans preference for filling unoccupied beds in the Pioneers Home facilities.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

COMMITTEE ACTION

The committee took no action.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR COGHILL adjourned the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 9:45 a.m.

NOTE: The meeting was recorded and handwritten log notes were taken. A copy of the tape(s) and log notes may be obtained by contacting the House Records Office at State Capitol, Room 3, Juneau, Alaska 99801 (mailing address) (907) 465-2214, and after adjournment of the second session of the Twenty-Second Alaska State Legislature this information may be obtained by contacting the Legislative Reference Library at (907) 465-3808.