

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

February 4, 2010

9:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bill Wielechowski, Co-Chair
Representative Nancy Dahlstrom, Co-Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Lesil McGuire
Senator Joe Paskvan
Senator Fred Dyson
Representative Charisse Millett
Representative Jay Ramras
Representative Pete Petersen

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative John Harris

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator John Coghill

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

Briefing: Military in Alaska
Briefing: Alaska National Guard

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

LIEUTENANT GENERAL DANA T. ATKINS

Commander of Alaskan Command

Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense (NORAD) Command Region
Joint Task Force Alaska and 11th Air Force

POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered a briefing on the military in Alaska.

BRIGADIER GENERAL THOMAS KATKUS

Adjutant General, Alaska National Guard and

Commissioner, Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered a briefing on the Alaska National Guard.

ACTION NARRATIVE

9:04:55 AM

CO-CHAIR BILL WIELECHOWSKI called the Joint Armed Services Committee meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Dyson and Wielechowski, Representatives Buch, Peterson, and Dahlstrom. Public member, Lieutenant General Tom Case, retired, was also present.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI announced the first order of business would be to hear the Alaskan Command briefing.

9:05:41 AM

LIEUTENANT GENERAL DANA T. ATKINS, Commander of Alaskan Command, Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense (NORAD) Command Region, Joint Task Force Alaska and 11th Air Force, reminded the committee that this is his second opportunity to brief the committee. He and his wife are pleased to say that they have changed their residency status and consider Alaska to be their home.

CO-CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI recognized that Senator Coghill had joined the committee and that JASC public members Chick Wallace and General Jacob Lestenkof were online.

GENERAL ATKINS advised that he would cover the following topics:

- Joint base initiative Elmendorf-Richardson
- Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex
- Alaska military deployments
- Elmendorf F-15 divestiture
- Theater security cooperation
- Russian long-range aviation
- Military construction
- Arctic Care 2010
- Arctic Edge 2010
- Caring for our service members

9:11:59 AM

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson - General Atkins said this is 1 of 12 installations nationwide that were mandated to consolidate. In January 2010 initial operation capability was designated and full operations are expected by October. "We have been told that we are the best at putting these two installations together." He explained that when he arrived two years ago he put together an enterprise team with subject-matter experts in all the areas of the consolidation. The goal has been to make the transition as transparent as possible. The only change that should be apparent is the address, which will now have the JBER designation. Support services including medical, logistics, administrative, police, firefighting, and civil engineering will come together under a wing construct because the Air Force is the executive agent of this joint base.

Effective October 1, 2010 approximately 1,200 employees, most of whom are civilian and contract employees of the U.S. Army, will transfer into the U.S. Air Force labor force. Entitlements, seniority, and opportunity for upward mobility will transfer for all but 12 appropriated fund employees. These particular employees are affected by a federal law that says that they cannot have the same opportunity as a non-appropriated fund employee. Hopefully this inequity will be addressed through a reasonable amendment to that law. When complete the consolidation will result in an additional 180 employees, but as the construct matures efficiencies will be found. In particular, resource savings will probably be gained in certain contracts.

January 8, 2010 the joint base newspaper began publication. A strong marketing campaign has helped to ensure that everyone knows what's going on. Town hall meetings are held biweekly and in particular include groups that believe that they are at risk under the joint base construct. He said he has promised that storefronts will not be changed; it's the administrative enterprise behind that will change. He noted that Elmendorf gained senior leadership in the consolidation because 2 additional groups were stood up under the third wing construct.

The ribbon cutting ceremony will take place June 24, 2010 in the mobility center and legislators will be invited.

[9:20:16 AM](#)

Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex (JPARC) - General Atkins described this as the single most important initiative in Alaska. What Alaska offers the nation with respect to training and exercises and the ability to prepare combatants for

contingency operations worldwide is unparalleled. The training environment continues to improve. Currently Alaska is the only area in the U.S. that allows all domains of warfare to be executed without encroachment.

Last year Congress authorized additional resources to do a broad environmental impact study for JPARC. All the services were brought together to talk about what they envision the optimum training and exercise to be for today and for 20 years from now. Based on that charette, a master plan is being put together and should be complete in April, 2010. The intent is to get the service chiefs to make incremental sustained capital investments in the training environment in Alaska over a 15-20 year period. The dividend is probably 10 years from now, but by then Alaska will be the training destination. He said this is a difficult challenge, but he is optimistic. "If I could ask anything of this body, it's to continue to participate with us as we build this out."

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Alaska Deployments - General Atkins reported that major combat brigades from Alaska have been involved in Iraq and Afghanistan. One recently returned home to Fort Wainwright and the other is on its way back to Fort Richardson. Last year about 40 percent of the forces stationed in Alaska were deployed and almost all were in harm's way. With the commitment to provide additional resources to Afghanistan, Alaska forces will probably be part of that contribution.

Plans this year for the Air Force include moving a second F-22 Squadron to Guam. The 19th Fighter Squadron will go to Hawaii and participate in an exercise with Thailand. In addition, small increments of Army combat capability will be deployed globally. Planned deployments do change and certainly did in January 2010 when the Alaska Guard forces were asked to help support relief operations in Haiti. But the good news in that story is that Alaska has demonstrated that it is the benchmark for U.S. total force integration. Within 50 hours of the call, the Alaska Guard had 4 airplanes in and out of Port au Prince.

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Elmendorf F-15 Divestiture - Major Atkins said that combat Air Force has been directed to draw down about 250 legacy platforms, predominantly the F-15 force, starting April 1, 2010 and ending October 1, 2010. When that announcement was made, Congress asked

the Air Force to conduct a study and report back on what's going on. That report is due by April 1, but at this point plans to divest the squadron are on track. Overall, the initiative will affect about 40 pilots and 220 support and maintenance personnel. Many of the individuals at Elmendorf who are in support and maintenance will stay unless their training is specific to the F-15. Because the Air Force can't absorb pilots as quickly as they will be released, some pilots will come to Alaska to work in the air operations center in a staff position.

Ultimately, the fighters that will be used in the execution of the Alaska NORAD region mission will be the 2 F-22 Squadrons. There are 40 in the 2 squadrons and both are operation-ready and going. "Not a bad news story, but certainly it is a small decrement in our force presence at Elmendorf."

[9:34:19 AM](#)

Theater Security Cooperation - Major Atkins said that the F-22 continues to be a great news story. There have been decisions to reduce the program, but this aircraft is very capable and is a platform that the nation can be proud of possessing. Even better is the fact that a great portion of that capability is resident in Alaska.

[9:36:08 AM](#)

Russian Long-Range Aviation - Major Atkins reported that in 2009 there was a slight increase in the number of missions flown over 2008 numbers. Based on open source reporting, he predicted that the number of operations in 2010 will be similar to those in 2009. Open source reporting shares what the military leadership in Russia is saying about its long-range aviation. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Drik with the Russian Air Force said:

We are now performing air patrols over the waters of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Northern Arctic oceans and also the Black Sea. The Russian aviation and nuclear renaissance was newly triggered a couple of years ago...the Russian Air Force has flown constant missions there since then.

This quote underscores their intent to continue to fly aggressively within North America, Asia/Pacific and Europe. The "flight tracks" of their long-range aviation shows a great deal of Arctic and Bering Sea intrusion. Probably the most notable track follows a line just south of the Aleutian Chain and in the

vicinity of Kodiak Island. This is the first time in 17 years that the Russians have flown that specific route. What this means is unclear, but just two days before this occurrence, open source reporting said that the Russian Air Force would fly this profile.

Russian long-range aviation is problematic here in Alaska primarily because the warnings are no longer 24 to 48 hours out. Their competency has improved to the extent that they do night flights, aerial refueling, and almost everything out of a main operating base. Now one of the first indications may come from a long-range radar site that is actually painting an unknown radar track. This could be problematic if it means that air refueling needs to increase because tanker capability in Alaska is somewhat limited with the 168th refueling wing at Eielson.

MAJOR ATKINS said the following quote by Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Drik is partly true. Russia follows international protocols, but they don't file flight plans or talk to FAA controllers.

All flights of the air force's planes are conducted in strict compliance with the international rules on the use of airspace over neutral waters without violating other states' borders.

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FY09-FY10 Military Construction - Major Atkins reported that capital investments in infrastructure for both the Air Force and the Army were about \$411 million in FY09 and \$401 million in FY10. In FY09 the stimulus bill provided \$144 million to fund 157 projects, many of which were quality of life or shovel-ready. Some of the larger projects include the child development center at Fort Richardson; the Warrior in Transition Complexes at Fort Richardson and Fort Wainwright; the railhead operations facility at Fort Wainwright; the F-22 7- and 8-weather shelters and the health clinic at Elmendorf Air Force Base; and family housing and Arctic Utilidor repair at Eielson Air force Base.

With the integration of Kulis Air National Guard onto Elmendorf, the infrastructure build-out continues. The rescue squadron with H-16 helicopters is expected to move soon and the C-130 transition unit will follow in about a year. Finally, all services have been asked to seek alternative energy solutions and efficiencies. To that end, a wind turbine was hastily installed at Tin City in 2009, but software issues have prevented power from flowing to the grid. The stimulus bill

provided \$12 million to install 3 additional wind turbines and for those more time will be spent to first identify the best site locations. Ultimately these wind turbines will pay off because it's very expensive to ship fuel to these long-range radar sites.

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Arctic Care 2010 - Major Atkins said that Arctic Care 2010 will take place in Kotzebue and will include veterinary, medical, dental, and optical services. Last year the focus was cultural and the Pacific Band conducted band programs for the villages. That received positive feedback so it will be repeated this year. This is a total force contribution.

[9:50:40 AM](#)

Arctic Edge 2010 - Major Atkins said, "This becomes the capstone exercise for me as a commander in Alaska this year." Arctic Edge 2010 includes the following:

- Full-scale exercise with Team Alaska April 26 to May 1, 2010.
- Links to Alaska Shield 2010, Vigilant Guard 2010 exercises.
- Improved capacity to manage a widespread natural disaster.
- Validate authorities, strategies, plans, policies, procedures, and protocols.
- Explore long-term recovery in follow-on Table Top exercises.

Alaska is the only state that is doing this at this level with the number and diversity of participants. The list is extensive and cross-jurisdictional. "Ultimately, we believe we'll gain a lot of lessons learned and we'll be able to share those lessons with other states and certainly through the federal emergency management agency itself." Planning began nearly two years ago and interagency cooperation has been outstanding. There will be a demonstration day for emergency response and legislators will be invited.

[9:53:49 AM](#)

Caring for Servicemembers - Major Atkins said it's an important responsibility for all the services to take care of their members, particularly for those who have witnessed more trauma in the conflict of war than most people can't imagine. The DoD-VA Joint Venture Hospital on Elmendorf is a proud

accomplishment. It has been recognized 2 years running as the best hospital in the Air Force. The venture will become even more important when the new VA hospital opens later this spring bringing two major medical provider enterprises together. Also noteworthy was a ground breaking last year for Fisher House. It's a 22-room house where families of patients can stay at no charge. Part of the Fisher House construct is to establish an endowment so that the house can be sustained over time. There's been remarkable community participation in this initiative. The hospital is also bringing in additional capacity and competency to address the specific issues of the combatants who are returning. This includes post-traumatic stress disorders, traumatic brain injuries, and sleep apneas.

SENATOR HUGGINS joined the meeting.

[9:58:32 AM](#)

Additional Topics:

- **F-35 joint strike fighter basing** - Major Atkins noted that there was some misunderstanding over an announcement on F-35 basing decisions about bed-down locations for training. This is significantly different than what would be done for an operational wing and he would hope that Alaska continues to compete very favorably for basing in the future with the F-35.
- **King Salmon forward operating location and Eareckson Air Station rescoping** - Major Atkins explained that the operating contract at King Salmon will likely be adjusted down from \$7 million to about \$3.5 million because it's now used as a divert base. Refueling assets make it possible to work out of the main operating bases. The snow removal contract will continue to be honored so that the runway is accessible year around.
A review team is looking at Eareckson Air Station the same way because the power plant at Eareckson is ready for a \$65 million recapitalization. They are working on this with Air Force Space Command, which operates the Cobra Dane Radar System in that location.
- **Civilian access to military training areas** - Major Atkins said he is committed to do a better job planning and scheduling so that hunters in the area will have unfettered access to the range during hunting season. The miscommunication last year was regrettable. He thanked legislators for tempering the emotions.
- **Ballistic missile defense at Clear Air Station** - Major Atkins reported that the director of the Missile Defense

Agency recently announced his decision to start upgrading the Clear radar in 2011 rather than 2013 as originally planned. This \$220 million investment will include upgrades to the radar and the supporting infrastructure.

- **Delta Junction windmills** - Major Atkins informed the committee that an independent energy developer in the area wants to put up 10 windmills. He said they are working with the developer and the FAA to identify any operational implications of locating the towers because some windmills cause Doppler shift, which affects radar targets. He said he believes that DoD and OSD needs to address this from a national perspective.
- **Native Alaskan Partnership** - Major Atkins noted that by law he is mandated to have certain professional venues with Native Alaskans. These have been very rewarding and have helped to resolve issues without litigation.

[10:04:42 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS related that the Safari Club International and the NRA are looking for servicemembers who have sacrificed for their country and would like to be sponsored on an African safari or other opportunities.

GENERAL ATKINS said Lieutenant Colonel Mark Hoffmeister would be a natural liaison for this. He is a Purple Heart recipient and Wounded Warrior who knows wounded soldiers and their families.

SENATOR HUGGINS thanked him for the suggestion and then asked how he sources jet fuel and other petroleum products.

GENERAL ATKINS replied the aviation fuel for Eielson comes from the refinery in Fairbanks while Elmendorf is largely supplied by container shipments into the Port of Anchorage. He added that Alaskan Command has a unique interest in finding alternative energy sources like coal to liquids. The B-52 bomber fleet currently uses synthetic fuels and perhaps fighter aircraft will too at some point.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI recognized that Senator McGuire and Representative Ramras had joined the committee.

CO-CHAIR DAHLSTROM expressed pleasure that Alaska is being recognized as a very important part of the U.S. military. She thanked General Atkins for his service to the state and country.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI concurred.

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GENERAL CASE commended General Atkins for his efforts on the multi-year plan to build up the strategic range complex and his support to the space mission.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked General Atkins to introduce his staff.

GENERAL ATKINS introduced Captain Matt VanGilder, aide-de-camp; Captain Julie Gration, Air Force Reservist and legislative liaison; Chief Bob Moore, Command Chief Master Sergeant, Eleventh Air Force; and Uriah Orland, Alaskan Command public affairs officer.

Alaska National Guard Briefing

[10:14:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI announced the next order of business would be to hear an Alaska National Guard Briefing by Brigadier General Katkus.

BRIGADIER GENERAL THOMAS KATKUS, Adjutant General, Alaska National Guard, and Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, introduced himself; Matt Shell, assistant chief of staff for the Army National Guard; Colonel Tim DeHaas, chief of staff for the Army National Guard; Command Sergeant Major Gordon Choate, and Major Joe Lion.

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GENERAL KATKUS advised that he would cover the following topics:

- Membership
- History
- Alaska Air National Guard
- Alaska Army National Guard
- Space and Missile Defense
- Emergency Services and Exercises
- Recruiting and Retention
- Troop and Family Support
- Summary

Membership - General Katkus said Alaska ranks solidly with respect to National Guard participation. It has 5.4 National Guard members per 1,000 in population while the national average is 1.5 per 1,000. It's tied for 5th among all 50 states,

territories, and the District of Columbia. "These are your members in your districts, your constituents who have stepped forward, chosen to wear a uniform while still probably making a house payment and...meeting the demands of other employment, and with the operational tempo that we have right now with deployments."

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History - General Katkus explained that the Alaska National Guard has roots in the Alaska Territorial Guard. Although that was federal service, it was a homeland defense mission at its best. From 1942 to 1947 young men and women from Alaska stepped forward to fill a void in a Cold War footing. In 1977 when he joined the National Guard it was still a Cold War footing. We were considered forward deployed, already in battle space, and facing the threat of the Soviet Union across the Bering Sea. At that time the Air National Guard was basically a 4 ship unit with 275 members. They were moving from C-123s into the first 130s.

Alaska Air National Guard - General Katkus reported that the Alaska Air National Guard now has 2 Wings and over 2,000 members. The primary weapons systems in the Air Guard include:

- The C-17, which is the Cadillac lift in the Air Force today.
- KC-135 Tanker aircraft, which are over 50 years old, have been repeatedly rebuilt and are still very relevant today.
- C-130s, which continue to provide support and are a major player throughout the Pacific theatre.
- The Rescue Coordination Center, which has probably touched every family living in Alaska in some way. It coordinates all response to any type of civilian air crash and any other need for search and rescue.
- HC-130, HH-60 and GA Rescue Squadrons, which are always on the front page of newspapers and are constantly out there and engaged in pulling Alaskans to safety.
- The Air Control Squadron, which is just as important but is seldom seen. This group plays a critical role in General Atkin's operation and the defense of the nation.
- The BRAC move of Kulis Air Force Base to Elmendorf Air Force Base is going very well. There's already a Guard presence on Elmendorf and people are seeing that it's not a bad deal. The facilities are starting to come together and are located on the north side of the airfield and people are already starting to recognize that footprint as

their own. The para-rescue facility will be finished in April and it is probably one of the nicest of its kind in the nation. By September 2011 the Wing will move en masse and will be in budget and on time. The attitude of the members is positive.

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The operational relevance of the Alaska Air National Guard includes the following:

- The Air Control Squadron (ACS) is comprised of 150 Air National Guardsmen, 128 of which are active duty. They control communications between the National Command authority, NORAD, and the sensors. The ACS is the asset that provides the command and control to allow the F-22s to get out on, for example, the Russian intercept that General Atkins briefed.
- Rescue forces are National Guard assets that are on 24/7. If an aircraft that is intercepting has an emergency, it's the National Guard para-rescuers that respond to assist.
- KC-135s of the 168th Wing keep the 11th Air Force fueled 24/7. It's easy to see the relevancy of the Air National Guard and the interrelationship he has with General Atkins.
- The C-17 is fully integrated with U.S. Air Force. Alaska Air National Guardsmen flew these aircraft to Haiti alongside active duty members.
- The BRAC move is a good recruitment opportunity because the National Guard will be put in front of a lot of active duty members, which will be a draw for those who want to stay in Alaska in the National Guard.
- The C-130 continues to provide active support doing everything from delivering Santa Claus to helping out with Haiti. They continue to deploy in support of Afghanistan and Iraq, that they provide state emergency assets for emergency response throughout the state.

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Alaska Army National Guard - Currently the one brigade has over 1850 members. About half are preparing for a potential deployment in 2012. This advance preparation provides predictability for families and employers, but it also changes drill schedules and attendance. Every effort is made to ensure that drills are battle focused training.

The Aviation Unit continues to be called upon. Current assets include 20 UH-60Ls, 2 of which are signed out to the active duty. This summer a company of about 120 men and women will be deployed to a theatre that is currently identified as Iraq. Last summer 8 were sent to Kosovo.

The Civil Support Team continues to provide the domestic response capability for chemical, biological, radioactive, nuclear, or explosive events. With the Air Force BRAC move, the maintenance facility that will be left behind on Kulis will be turned over to the Civil Support Team, which will move off Fort Richardson to the airport. There it will be incorporated into the airport plans and will also be able to facilitate training with local fire departments and also have immediate access to their biggest customer, the Anchorage International Airport.

To support the mission at Fort Greely, they've received authorization for military police occupational specialties. In Alaska this means the potential pool of candidates to recruit into the National Guard is doubled. As infantry they were unable to recruit females around the state. With the military police MOS they can now recruit females at the detachment level, which means they don't have to travel as far and they can be engaged in the organization. Also in the military police construct, you can start into that military occupational specialty at age 17 as opposed to 21 for state Troopers.

An Airborne Company in the Infantry is coming on in Bethel and they are trying to capitalize on that. There are still quite a few military occupational specialties in the Infantry area that were there with the transformation from the Alaska Scouts. Those folks that are not going to move into a military police specialty or some other area, the next qualifier is the skill identifier of jumping out of an airplane 5 times. Some of the folks aren't too excited about that but with the right motivation and leadership this will be very exciting. They recently approved the contract for a new \$20 million readiness center to be built in the Bethel area next to the current aviation hanger. It's located on the airfield and provides better security for the airfield itself in the time of domestic issues. It's a great new direction for Bethel.

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The operational relevance of the Alaska Army National Guard includes the following:

- The Alaska Army National Guard will continue to deploy. It has the relevancy of the MPs to support the missile defense and it continues to capitalize on what new recruits do well. They can play Xbox and they are able to communicate using the latest technologies. The Battlefield Surveillance Brigade is a technical capability to the battlefield commander in theatre, which is an asset that will provide relevancy for years to come.

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Space and Missile Defense - General Katkus said Alaska has two separate missile defense facilities. One is the Army National Guard ground-based missile defense system located at Fort Greely. It is the only intercontinental ballistic missile system defending America, its friends, and territories. The system is currently authorized for 206 positions, but over 226 men and women are on site. In the 5 years it's been under development, it's become a more attractive mission.

The second is an Air National Guard mission at Clear Air Force Station. At that station they run a space sensor that helps to detect anything in space that might be a threat to satellites or the space shuttle. Approximately 100 men and women serve full time at that facility.

GENERAL KATKUS concurred with General Atkins that the Army has plans to move its sensor from Shemya to Clear and that it will include about \$220 million in upgrades.

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Emergency services and exercises - General Katkus explained that Vigilant Guard-10 is closely tied to Alaska Shield and Arctic Edge. This is the Alaska National Guard's opportunity to test mutual aid compacts that are used in times of disaster. This very relevant exercise tests a scenario that should be similar to the 1964 earthquake. This will test just how far the National Guard has come in responding to domestic disasters.

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Recruiting and retention - General Katkus said he looks forward to combining the recruiters from the Air Guard and the Army Guard into a single unit at the adjutant general level. This will provide great opportunities for the Alaska National Guard in terms of advertizing and branding. He presented a case to the

National Guard Bureau asking to become a sponsor to the Iron Dog Snow Machine Race since Alaska doesn't have NASCAR. It made sense to capitalize on the very popular winter sport of snow machining. The National Bureau provided about \$250,000 for that initiative. It's also an opportunity for communications specialists and the Battlefield Surveillance Brigade to man checkpoints and track snow machines. Putting these men and women on a snow machine will be adventure training and will provide them with bragging rights they won't forget. The helicopters flying around will brand the National Guard in a very positive manner. It's a worthwhile investment. Last year National Guard Sergeant Alexie mushed in the Iditarod and this year the Guard is sponsoring races that lead up to the Iditarod. This helps to brand and show that the men and women in the Guard are supporting communities.

GENERAL KATKUS reported that in the last 20 months the Air National Guard has been on the move. It has restructured and moved to Elmendorf and their end-strength has increased from 80 percent to about 92 percent. The Alaska Army National Guard has been similarly successful. It's at 115 percent of its recruitment goal and plans to get to their end-strength goal. People are joining in spite of the fact that the nation is at war. There are great incentives and opportunities. He noted that the hunting and fishing license program for servicemembers has been very popular and a real bonus thanking members for their service.

SENATOR PASKVAN joined the meeting.

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Troop and family support - General Katkus said the National Guard takes a holistic approach to recruitment; it recruits the family along with the soldier. The resiliency program is an effort to change the culture in the military. It requires an attitude change that starts at the command level. He said he believes that ultimately it will do very well. The program is about teaching members to also look out for themselves as opposed to only looking out for the organization. At the command level you make sure your soldiers and airmen can adjust to operational tempos, to changes in their family that occur during deployment, and to demanding schedules. It's a recognition that these men and women are in it for the long run, not for the sprint.

GENERAL KATKUS explained that the family readiness program employs 43 members and has a \$2 million budget. Family support takes care of soldiers and airmen and also provides role models and mentors for youth. It provides opportunities to keep kids on track when their parents are deployed or engaged in National Guard activities. Help is also extended to elders. The Funeral Honors Team participated in 150 funerals statewide just this year. They provided final honors to members and veterans at the request of the family. It's a humbling but critical assignment that demonstrates a commitment to take care of members, potential members, and retired members.

Strong Bonds are enrichment programs for families and marriages that are run by the chaplain services. They reach out to ensure that the family environment and marriages remain strong. They engage and try to help address the stresses involved with multiple deployments or the work that servicemembers do. Similarly, the Yellow Ribbon Program is modeled to reach out to members after deployment to see what changes have occurred in their lives. The idea is to reach out, touch, and ask about issues and potentially get ahead of those mental, health, and financial issues.

GENERAL KATKUS emphasized the importance of recognizing and thanking all military members when they return home. "I would encourage everyone, not only people in the political leadership, but everyone in the communities." He invited everyone to attend the Freedom Salute for the Army and the Hometown Hero Salute for the Air Guard. "That's where we parade our great men and women who have served...and we present them with tokens of appreciation and we say 'Thank you.' We don't miss that opportunity," he stated. It's a great opportunity for the public to participate too, he added.

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Summary - General Katkus said the Alaska National Guard has certainly come a long way since he joined as an E-3 and he's proud that he can be in uniform today and be a part of the U.S. military. "There's no better job in America than in service to this country currently." He displayed a short video to demonstrate the new attitude in the military.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI, speaking on behalf of the committee, thanked General Katkus and all servicemembers and veterans for their service.

REPRESENTATIVE RAMRAS spoke of touring the Ketchikan National Guard facility and highlighted their need for a Blackhawk landing pad to respond to emergencies in the region. He noted that he didn't talk about the Military Youth Academy and asked if he would touch on the subject. Finally, he asked General Katkus to tell how he started as an E-3 and moved up through the ranks to become adjutant general because it's a relevant and inspiring story.

GENERAL KATKUS explained that the Military Youth Academy wasn't part of the brief because he focused on the military and not the DMV overall. He continued to explain that his motivation for joining the National Guard as an E-3 was so that he could jump out of airplanes. In subsequent National Guard annual training he was encouraged to enter law enforcement. He learned that in the National Guard he could have a career and also be involved in the military. He retired from law enforcement after 21 years and went fulltime in the National Guard after having moved up the ranks in both organizations. I worked fulltime with counter-drug and got to take military assets and support the same folks I was working with previously except that now I had Black Hawks and more manpower, he said. Suddenly I was the most popular retiree around, but it was also a great recruitment example, he added. After working counter-drug he had an opportunity in missile defense in the Army Guard and now is in the adjutant general position. Both law enforcement and the National Guard have been great careers, he said.

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SENATOR MCGUIRE mentioned a potential cutoff of survivor benefits and asked what's left in the Alaska Territorial Guard journey.

GENERAL KATKUS said great efforts have been made to recognize the more than 6,000 members who served in the Alaska Territorial Guard. This includes getting military discharges and the benefits that the discharge provides. The emphasis lagged initially after the recognition in 2000 that 5 years of service was critical. General Campbell passed along the responsibility to actively engage those members. This initiative increased the number of applicants from ATG members or their families and they have been recognized. It hasn't been an easy, but all the roadblocks have been addressed. Probably the best success story is the members that were due payment on the first of February and through the efforts of Verdie Bowen, they have been paid. At this point there are 20 some surviving members, but it's still

critical to identify all the family members so that they can receive the recognition and documentation to pass on to future generations. There's great initiative for this and that's one of the great thing about the military, it takes care of all its members, even after retirement and after death.

[10:53:31 AM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said we recognize the sacrifices that are made by all military members and if there are things that the committee can do to help, please don't hesitate to ask.

GENERAL KATKUS said in that regard he would ask everyone who sees a servicemember in uniform to stop and say thank you. You have no idea what that means to a young soldier or airman who may have never before been thanked personally for anything, he said.

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There being no further business to come before the Joint Armed Services Committee, Co-Chair Wielechowski adjourned the meeting at 10:54 a.m.