

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

February 24, 2009

1:06 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Carl Gatto, Chair  
Representative John Harris  
Representative Bob Lynn  
Representative Kurt Olson  
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch  
Representative Scott Kawasaki

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Jay Ramras

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 7

Relating to awarding the Alaska Decoration of Honor to certain members of the military.

- MOVED HCR 7 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10

Urging the United States Congress to improve health care for veterans.

- MOVED CSHJR 10(MLV) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 16

Relating to federal procurement preferences for small businesses in the state that are owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans.

- MOVED HJR 16 OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HCR 7

SHORT TITLE: DECORATION OF HONOR

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) DAHLSTROM

02/11/09	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/11/09	(H)	MLV
02/24/09	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HJR 10

SHORT TITLE: VETERANS' HEALTH CARE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) GUTTENBERG

01/30/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/30/09 (H) MLV, STA, HSS  
02/24/09 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HJR 16

SHORT TITLE: DISABLED VETERANS PROCUREMENT PREFERENCE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) GATTO

02/09/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/09/09 (H) MLV, L&C  
02/24/09 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

LAURA PIERRE, Staff  
Representative Nancy Dahlstrom  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HCR 7 on behalf of  
Representative Dahlstrom, prime sponsor.

CHRIS REID, Intern  
Representative David Guttenberg  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HJR 10 on behalf of  
Representative Guttenberg, prime sponsor.

SHELLEY HUGHES, Government Affairs Director  
Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HJR 10.

MCHUGH PIERRE, Legislative Liaison  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA)  
Fort Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered a question during the hearing on  
HJR 10.

SANDRA WILSON, Staff  
Representative Carl Gatto  
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HJR 16 on behalf of Representative Gatto, prime sponsor.

AMBER SAWYER

Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HJR 16.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:06:25 PM](#)

**CHAIR CARL GATTO** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:06 p.m. Representatives Gatto, Lynn, Olson, and Buch were present at the call to order. Representatives Kawasaki and Harris arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### HCR 7 - DECORATION OF HONOR

CHAIR GATTO announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 7, Relating to awarding the Alaska Decoration of Honor to certain members of the military.

[1:07:32 PM](#)

LAURA PIERRE, staff to Representative Nancy Dahlstrom, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HCR 7 on behalf of Representative Dahlstrom, prime sponsor. She explained that in 2007, the legislature created the Decoration of Honor medal to be given to the next of kin of a member of the military, stationed in Alaska, who was killed in action. House Concurrent Resolution 7 adds the names of six individuals who were killed during the period between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2008. If passed, each of their families will receive a medal at the ceremony in Anchorage on May 23, 2009.

[1:08:31 PM](#)

CHAIR GATTO noted that members' packets include the names of 171 individuals previously approved to receive the medal.

MS. PIERRE said the resolution adds six names to that list.

[1:09:30 PM](#)

CHAIR GATTO, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HCR 7.

[1:10:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HARRIS moved to report HCR 7 out of committee with individual recommendations and [zero] fiscal note. There being no objection, HCR 7 was reported from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

[1:10:25 PM](#)

HJR 10 - VETERANS' HEALTH CARE

CHAIR GATTO announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10, Urging the United States Congress to improve health care for veterans.

[1:10:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HJR 10, Version 26-LS0313\E, Bailey, 2/24/09, as the work draft. There being no objection, Version E was before the committee.

[1:11:20 PM](#)

CHRIS REID, intern to Representative David Guttenberg, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HJR 10 on behalf of Representative Guttenberg, prime sponsor. Ms. Reid said HJR 10 encourages the U.S. Congress to improve health care for U. S. veterans. Although there are many programs available for veterans, the existing programs need improvement, especially for veterans living in rural areas of Alaska. Furthermore, HJR 10 encourages the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to partner with community health care services. She addressed the changes in Version E of the resolution and explained the fifth "Whereas" now includes a reference to "post-traumatic stress syndrome." In addition, after research indicated that having a VA hospital in Alaska would require all veterans to travel there for care, even though it may be better for veterans to remain in their communities with family, the reference to a VA hospital was deleted from the sixth "Whereas." Ms. Reid then pointed out that the last nine "Whereas" clauses have been incorporated into HJR 10 with the recommendation of Shelley Hughes, Government Affairs Director, Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA).

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SHELLEY HUGHES, Government Affairs Director, Alaska Primary Care Association, informed the committee that her husband is a Vietnam veteran and her son served three tours in Iraq. She then relayed that clinics across the state are caring for veterans in outlying areas who do not have access to their earned health care. The criteria for approval of veteran's travel prevent veterans from obtaining health care in veteran facilities; therefore, community clinics are providing care without reimbursement. The APCA is trying to resolve this problem, but progress is slow and mired in federal red tape. She explained that the APCA is of the opinion that there needs to be collaboration at the federal level between the VA, community health centers, and Tribal health clinics. For example, one of the barriers has been the VA's use of the Computerized Patient Records System (CPRS). Ms. Hughes also emphasized the need for health care for current returning veterans and for aging veterans with increasing health needs. She reiterated her agency's support of the resolution.

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REPRESENTATIVE BUCH, noting that a new VA facility is under construction at Elmendorf Air Force Base, asked how that facility would be defined, and also asked for its functions and capabilities.

1:18:26 PM

MCHUGH PIERRE, Legislative Liaison, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, explained that the new facility is a veteran's hospital/clinic, but is not a full-scale hospital like those in the Lower 48. The facility will be joined by the existing new base hospital that serves Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson Army Base service members. The two facilities will be connected via a sky bridge in order to share care. Mr. Pierre pointed out the new facility is the first of its kind in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH offered his understanding the VA is recognized as a leader in medical recordkeeping; in fact, because of the transient nature of its patients, it has established and maintained a quality recordkeeping system. He noted his personal experience with the VA and acknowledged the success of that component. He disclosed a possible conflict of interest in that he has been a beneficiary of services through

the VA. Representative Buch opined the issue is not only finding veterans, but informing them of the connections already available in the state.

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CHAIR GATTO, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HJR 10.

1:22:46 PM

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI made a motion to adopt Amendment 1, which read [original punctuation provided]:

Page 2, lines 5 and 6, following "services for Alaska's veterans,"

Delete: "but Alaska remains [one] of three states that does not have a veteran's hospital that provides acute care inpatient services"

Page 2, line 23, following "Alaska Native health system"

Delete: ", which is"

Insert: "and Community Health Centers, which are"

Page 2, line 25, following "Alaska Native health"

Delete: "system's"

Insert: "system and Community Health Centers'"

Page 3, line 25, following "the existing"

Delete: "community"

Insert: "Community Health Center"

Page 3, lines 28 and 29, following "with individual"

Delete: "community or tribal health centers"

Insert: "Community Health Centers or tribal clinics"

Page 3, line 30, following "Whereas"

Delete: "community"

Insert: "Community Health Centers"

Page 4, lines 1 and 2, following "and populations"

Delete: "and to uninsured and underinsured individuals, low-income families, veterans, seniors, seasonal workers, and non-English speaking individuals"

Insert: "including veterans who do not reside in the vicinity of a VA health care facil[ility]"

Page 4, line 18, following "quality health care, including"

Insert: "at Community Health Centers,"

Page 4, line 18, following "substance abuse treatment centers,"

Delete: "and"

Page 4, line 19, following "tribal health organizations"

Insert: ["] and other appropriate local providers"

REPRESENTATIVE HARRIS objected.

REPRESENTATIVE KAWASAKI, after reading Amendment 1, explained that Amendment 1 is a technical clean up in nature.

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MS. REID said [Amendment 1] is important and works with the original resolution.

[1:26:20 PM](#)

MS. HUGHES added that the APCA supports Amendment 1.

CHAIR GATTO, after stating that the objection had been removed, announced that Amendment 1 was adopted.

[1:26:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HARRIS moved to report the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HJR 10, Version 26-LS0313\E, Bailey, 2/24/09, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHJR 10(MLV) was reported from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

HJR 16 - DISABLED VETERANS PROCUREMENT PREFERENCE

[1:27:03 PM](#)

CHAIR GATTO announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 16, Relating to federal procurement preferences for small businesses in the state that are owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans.

[1:27:52 PM](#)

SANDRA WILSON, staff to Representative Carl Gatto, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HJR 16 on behalf of Representative Gatto, prime sponsor. Ms. Wilson informed the committee that currently there is a federal law that stipulates 3 percent of federal contracts must be granted to disabled veteran-owned small businesses. However, but full compliance has not been achieved.

CHAIR GATTO added that the [resolution] encourages the state to honor the federal government's requirement.

MS. WILSON concurred that the resolution asks why federal entities within the State of Alaska have not been following the 3 percent procurement preference.

CHAIR GATTO further explained that veterans, who were unable to establish businesses because they were deployed in service to their country, deserve "a 3 percent edge" upon their return.

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AMBER SAWYER said that her boyfriend is currently in Iraq and she expressed her support of HJR 16. She currently serves with

Susitna Valley Post 35 of the American Legion Auxiliary and characterized it as "amazing" to see the veterans on Veteran's Day. There are plenty of disabled veterans who already have enough difficulties to deal with, such as medical problems and educational problems. Ms. Sawyer shared that her father, who is a disabled veteran, asked her to testify and thank the sponsor for this resolution.

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CHAIR GATTO, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HJR 16.

[1:33:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HARRIS moved to report HJR 16 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HJR 16 was reported from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

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#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:34 p.m.