

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

March 9, 2010

1:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Carl Gatto, Chair
Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Jay Ramras
Representative Tammie Wilson
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch
Representative Scott Kawasaki

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative John Harris

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING: ADJUTANT GENERAL THOMAS KATKUS~
COMMISSIONER~ DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS

- ADVANCED

OVERVIEW: ALASKA STATE DEFENSE FORCE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

THOMAS KATKUS, Brigadier General
Commissioner/Adjutant General Appointee
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA)
Fort Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Department of
Military & Veterans' Affairs.

LARRY WOOD
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the confirmation hearing for Brigadier General Thomas Katkus, Commissioner/Adjutant General Appointee, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs.

MAJOR MICHAEL COONS, Executive Officer
1st Battalion, Central Command
49th Readiness Brigade
Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF)
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the confirmation hearing for Brigadier General Thomas Katkus, Commissioner/Adjutant General Appointee, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CHAIR CARL GATTO called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Present at the call to order were Representatives Gatto, Tammie Wilson, Ramras, and Buch. Representatives Lynn and Kawasaki arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING: ADJUTANT GENERAL THOMAS KATKUS,
COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS
OVERVIEW: ALASKA STATE DEFENSE FORCE

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CHAIR GATTO announced that the first order of business was the confirmation hearing for Brigadier General Thomas Katkus, Commissioner/Adjutant General Appointee, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs. Chair Gatto, in response to a request from the appointee, authorized concurrent testimony on the overview of the Alaska State Defense Force.

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THOMAS KATKUS, Brigadier General, Commissioner/Adjutant General Appointee, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, said he is fully qualified for the position and listed his educational and military qualifications as follows: federally recognized general officer; pending certificate of eligibility for a two-star position; graduate of the Army War College with a master's degree in Strategic Studies; 33 years of military service; an Alaskan resident; in good health; fully ready to serve. Brigadier General Katkus acknowledged that this confirmation

hearing may be his most difficult because he has been in charge of the Alaska National Guard since his appointment in November, and he has addressed a problem with the Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF), a small force within the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA). He began to explain the purpose of the ASDF and its relevancy to Alaska's security.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS explained the ASDF is an auxiliary police force that has served the state for 26 years with little recognition. In fact, the ASDF was formed under a constitutional statute that allows the governor to mobilize a militia such as the Alaska National Guard or a state defense force. He clarified that the National Guard Bureau directs how a state develops its defense force, thus the state defense force is under the governor's command, but is governed by the National Guard Bureau regulations.

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CHAIR GATTO asked whether the top of the sequence of command is the General of the Army, or the governor of Alaska.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS said the governor. He returned to the regulation and stressed that although the regulation goes directly to the authority of the army, there is a controlling statement that the regulation is specific and directive in nature. The chain of command is by the governor and through the adjutant general, or his authorized representative. At this time, similar to what active duty members and the National Guard have done, the ASDF is trying to transform and become relevant to the current threat environment in order to be a "force multiplier" in the safety security of the nation, the state, and its citizens. Brigadier General Katkus pointed out that the adjutant general is usually the senior officer in charge of the ASDF. However, an administrative order by a previous administration placed that duty with the deputy adjutant general, who is a state employee. Furthermore, the former adjutant general directed Brigadier General Katkus, then the assistant adjutant general, to "take charge of the state defense force, and basically organize it under their ... commander."

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CHAIR GATTO asked whether the assistant is the same as the deputy.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS responded that the deputy is the senior general officer of either service when the adjutant general is not present. In Alaska, there is an assistant adjutant general for the air guard, the army guard, and for space and missile defense. He continued to explain that Brigadier General Julio R. Banez, Assistant Adjutant General, Alaska Army National Guard, is a federal employee in a civilian job, thus cannot command the ASDF; therefore the duty passes to Brigadier General Deborah McManus, Assistant Adjutant General-Air, Alaska. She is a senior state employee and is well-qualified, but because she is not assigned to a land force there is a point of contention. He agreed with members of the ASDF who correctly note that the chain of command cannot fall to a federal officer; however, the regulation says that the adjutant general, and any National Guardsman in that capacity, is not considered a federal officer.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS, in response to Chair Gatto, said Deborah McManus' state title is the Division Director of the Alaska National Guard, Military Headquarters. He then explained the ASDF is a compassionate, volunteer, organization present throughout Alaska, and that has responded to fires, provided bridge security, and assisted with community events such as the Iditarod Sled Dog Race. He suggested there are two ways to look at a National Guard unit or a state defense force: (1) as a strategic reserve; (2) as an operational force. First responders such as fireman and police officers constitute an operational force; however, a strategic reserve is what the National Guard was before [the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001]. A strategic reserve requires a training period of 45-60 days and receives a lower level of funding. Brigadier General Katkus advised that the ASDF is an operational force, and often operates in a law enforcement capacity. The authorizing statute allows the governor to call to service a militia, or the National Guard, to serve as an auxiliary police force without special training or certification from the Alaska Police Standards Council, nor are they sworn police officers for the state. In fact, for the ASDF or a militia, the police powers come from the governor's call to duty.

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CHAIR GATTO asked whether ASDF members are sworn.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS clarified they are sworn members of the National Guard or the militia. He expressed his desire to move the ASDF to a strategic reserve level which would solve the problems of funding, training, and resourcing. By regulation, the ASDF should be 10-15 percent of the perceived unorganized militia in the event of a disaster. Therefore, if 1,500 people report to serve in a disaster, the ASDF should be about 10 percent, or 150 people, to serve throughout the state as a cadre to organize the militia. He described a new response system that is emerging in the U.S. in response to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive attacks. Because threats against the security of the state have changed in the years since the ASDF was formed, he recommended that the ASDF identify its mission, define its orders, find resources, and become properly trained. Brigadier General Katkus concluded that his vision is to change the ASDF from an operational, un-financed, and un-resourced force into a strategic reserve that has relevancy, and that can be applied to a problem in a deliberate and planned method. To accomplish this, the ASDF must also identify training opportunities around what the military does best. He assured the committee he does not want to dissolve the ASDF.

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REPRESENTATIVE BUCH thanked Brigadier General Katkus for his service. He pointed out that the ASDF's Strategic Goal 1 is to increase unit strength from 254 to 300, which is twice the number mentioned during the above testimony.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS explained that the Strategic Plan is adjustable. He acknowledged that the goal of 300 was published before the regulations were reviewed.

CHAIR GATTO asked for the source of the 1,500 people who would form the unorganized militia.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS surmised that many would be victims of the disaster.

CHAIR GATTO expressed his concern about the aftermath of a dirty bomb.

BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS stated that America is being prepared for man-made and natural disasters.

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REPRESENTATIVE TAMMIE WILSON asked whether the force of 1,500 could change in size.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS advised a larger force larger is almost unmanageable.

REPRESENTATIVE TAMMIE WILSON asked whether this would be an all-volunteer force.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS responded that funding would come from the disaster relief fund, and the pay-scale is that of state active duty. He then assured Chair Gatto that the Alaska military trains for the loss of airfields, railroads, roads, and other infrastructure. Brigadier General Katkus further advised that planning takes place for every scenario; for example, if active duty planes at Elmendorf Air Force Base were lost, replacements coming from out-of-state would be diverted to Anchorage International Airport, Fairbanks International Airport, Fort Wainwright Army Base, or Eielson Air Force Base. He cautioned that another concern regarding the ASDF is access. He described the response to an air incursion, and the roles of the various military defense agencies, many of which depend on the National Guard twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (24/7). In fact, in Alaska, the National Guard plays a critical component in ways it never has before, such as missile defense. Brigadier General Katkus relayed details of the recent rescue of a heart attack victim 50 miles from Clear Air Force Base, and the participation by the National Guard and active duty Army personnel who work together for search and rescue in Alaska. He remarked:

The state defense force is not going to be that robust, but the state defense force still has a play in this game. They are still a part of the security of Alaska, and they play a valuable part; they bring to the table an institutional knowledge, a skill set, and above all, a dedication and passion. The men and women of the state defense force ... are passionate individuals that really believe in selfless service, they work for free. They are out there and will do any task that you ask them to do It's imperative that we look for a way to make sure that they are relevant and how they fit in the picture.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KATKUS agreed with Chair Gatto that the rescue was a good training mission for parachute jumpers.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAMRAS expressed his admiration for the appointee's work ethic. Regarding the ASDF, he supported Brigadier General Katkus' efforts to bring the force into focus for the committee. He recalled speaking to members of the ASDF in Fairbanks who want their mission clarified.

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CHAIR GATTO stated that public testimony would not be taken on the overview, and returned attention to the confirmation hearing. He asked for public testimony on the confirmation.

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LARRY WOOD referred to written testimony that he had submitted to the committee regarding his attempts to obtain reports from the DMVA, and the response he had received from the Department of Law (DOL). Regarding the ASDF, he said the idea of a strategic reserve was specious, and placed the defense force in a position of impotence with little ability to assist the citizens of Alaska. He described his personal active duty service in 2006, when the defense force saved the Valdez Police Department, the Glennallen detachment of the Alaska State Troopers, and the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) manpower and money. Mr. Wood called attention to the following points: (1) the ASDF reports for duty the next day after it is requested; (2) the call-up time for

full-time forces is 12-24 hours, and the National Guard takes longer; (3) the state must pay for wages and equipment for federal troops, but ASDF members receive \$175 per day and supply their own equipment. In response to Chair Gatto, Mr. Wood said his written documents have been shared with the committee. He then recalled that in 11/2007, Brigadier General Katkus told him that he had never worked with the ASDF.

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CHAIR GATTO referred to an email and asked whether the email was the relevant document.

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MR. WOOD said the 2/2008 letter applies to a complaint Mr. Wood filed with the governor. He opined a comparison with a letter dated 7/22, from former Commissioner Craig Campbell, indicates the complaint was vindicated.

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MAJOR MICHAEL COONS, Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, Central Command, 49th Readiness Brigade, Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF), informed the committee he has served with the ASDF for nine years. Major Coons said the ASDF provides public safety at a price far less than any other agency. This is possible because the volunteers train without pay, and provide their own equipment and uniforms. ASDF members are only compensated when they are deployed in the service of the state, such as to the Yukon River Bridge, Hooper Bay, and the Willow and Valdez floods, where they received \$250-\$280 per day. Between deployments, members train without cost to the state. Major Coons opined Brigadier General Katkus has revised the mission of the ASDF to become the strategic reserve, and its cadre mission during a disaster is to train the unorganized militia. He has been assured that the National Guard will quickly respond to a disaster; however, its response must be approved by the federal government. He questioned how the militia can respond rapidly and effectively to affected communities during small and large disasters, or terrorist attacks. He also questioned which force is most cost-effective for small disasters, and pointed out that the state pays \$1 to every \$3 of federal funds to support the National Guard. The ASDF is responsible to the state, and is used as a lead element to mitigate small disasters and to serve at community events. In order to improve the public perception of the National Guard, he urged that the National Guard and the

ASDF force serve together at civic missions. Turning to the subject of funding, he informed the committee that the ASDF receives \$35,000 per year for operations, but nothing for recruitment, training, equipment, or administrative duties. As the DMVA is in charge of the National Guard, the Naval Militia, and the ASDF, he urged for the funding request to be channeled through the DMVA. He concluded that the ASDF will continue to provide a "huge bang for the buck" with support from the legislature, the adjutant general, and the governor, and stated his support for the appointee.

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REPRESENTATIVE TAMMIE WILSON made a motion to advance from committee the nomination of Brigadier General Thomas Katkus as commissioner for Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs.

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CHAIR GATTO asked whether there were any objections to the motion. There being none, the confirmation was advanced 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 1:47 p.m.