

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

February 3, 2011

1:04 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Dan Saddler, Co-Chair
Representative Steve Thompson, Co-Chair
Representative Alan Austerman
Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Sharon Cissna
Representative Bob Miller

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Carl Gatto, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S): ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ALASKA'S MILITARY

- HEARD

DIVISION OF HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- HEARD

ALASKA MILITARY YOUTH ACADEMY

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

MAJOR GENERAL THOMAS KATKUS, Adjutant General/Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs
Ft. Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of Alaska's Military.

VERDIE BOWEN, Director of Veterans Affairs
Office of Veteran Affairs
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs

Ft. Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview and answered questions about veterans' affairs in Alaska.

COLONEL ROGER HOLL, Commander

Alaska State Defense Force

Ft. Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of the Alaska State Defense Force.

BRIGADIER GENERAL DEBORAH McMANUS, Assistant Adjutant General
Air Director

Alaska Air National Guard Commander

Alaska Air National Guard

Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs

Ft. Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview and answered questions about the Alaska Air National Guard.

MICHAEL O'HARE, Deputy Director

Division of Homeland Security/Emergency Management

Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs

Ft. Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview and answered questions about the Division of Homeland Security in Alaska.

McHUGH PIERRE, Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Staff

Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General

Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs

Ft. Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview on the Alaska Military Youth Academy.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:04:59 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DAN SADDLER called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. Representatives Saddler, Thompson, Miller, Lynn, and Austerman were present at the call to order. Representative Cissna arrived as the meeting was in progress.

[1:05:31 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SADDLER announced that the committee would first introduce themselves and share their interests for membership on the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN said that he had been on the committee for eight years. He confirmed that he was retired from the Air Force, and he shared his family history of membership in the military.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER stated that the concentration of military in his district afforded "a wonderful opportunity for me to serve the people who have already served me."

REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN reported on his interest for military matters in Alaska.

CO-CHAIR THOMPSON noted that he had served at Fort Wainwright in 1995, and had stayed in Alaska after his discharge. He reflected that the military was a major part of the economy in Alaska, and that it was "an honor to have the military in Alaska."

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER shared his personal and family history with the military, and pointed out that his district included Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER).

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA confirmed that she had previously served on the committee and she shared her family history of military service.

OVERVIEW(S): ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ALASKA'S MILITARY

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER announced that the first order of business would be an Overview on the Organizational Structure of Alaska's Military.

MAJOR GENERAL THOMAS KATKUS, Adjutant General/Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, detailed his military background. He described the five major pillars of the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), as serving cradle to grave: the Youth Challenge Program; the two military services, Alaska Army National Guard and Alaska Air National Guard; Emergency

Management; and the Office of Veteran Affairs. He directed attention to the 2010 Annual Report [Included in members' packets] as a summation of the department. He spoke about the military involvement with rescues. He pointed out that 4500 people served full time and part time, and he referenced the organization chart on page 5.

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VERDIE BOWEN, Director of Veterans Affairs, Office of Veteran Affairs, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, reported that there were currently 77,025 veterans with 89,000 dependents in Alaska. In addition, he stated that there were 28,936 active duty military and National Guard, with 37,742 dependents. He described the Yellow Ribbon Program, offered under the Alaska National Guard family services, which visited 161 communities throughout the state to provide information and assistance to veterans regarding benefits and entitlements earned while in service.

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MR. BOWEN indicated that this was the first time for this project and that it had reached 1000 veterans who were not aware of their benefits. He explained that, prior to the 1980's, veterans were discharged without being briefed about veteran benefits. He added that this program had assisted more than 400 family members of veterans, who were also eligible for benefits. He talked about the town hall meetings held in Juneau, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Bethel, Eagle River, Wasilla, Tok, Nome, and Ketchikan.

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MR. BOWEN briefed the committee on the second annual Veterans Summit, in Anchorage and Wasilla, which served an average of 300 veterans at each meeting. He explained that this was a venue for [veterans] post commanders to talk about veterans issues. He summarized that these summits recognized issues which needed to be brought to the forefront and on to the Alaska State Legislature, and that it also allowed for issue determinations to be made for state or federal responsibility.

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MR. BOWEN spoke about the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG), noting that the last two living members' packages had been presented to

the Army for an actual discharge. He defined that the Alaska Territorial Guard served from 1942 - 1947, and that the subsequent members were referred to as Guardsmen in the Territory of Alaska. He reported that 1201 ATG members had received federal discharges. He shared that staff had reviewed records and had found five guardsmen still due federal retirement benefits. In addition, there were 32 spouses eligible for survivor's benefits. He spoke about the Alaska National Guard Military Funeral Honors Teams, which perform the ceremonies for ATG veterans.

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REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked about the Stand Down services, and pointed to its positive effects.

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MR. BOWEN replied that the Office of Veterans Affairs supported two Stand Downs each year, in Fairbanks and Anchorage. He said that 461 meals were served at Stand Down 2010. He pointed out that the National Guard, the Alaska State Defense Force, the Navy Chiefs club, and the Veterans Affairs (VA) all worked together on this program. He shared that more than 60 organizations had offered their services.

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MR. BOWEN explained that the Veteran Service Officer (VSO) program helped veterans collect benefits when leaving active duty. He reported that the VSO program had helped veterans recoup \$35 million in previously denied payments. He stated that the 14,000 disabled Alaska veterans received more than \$150 million in annual compensation. He shared that veterans using the VSO increased their annual income from \$4000 to \$11,000. He pointed out that the Office of Veterans Affairs served 19,355 vets, and that Alaska had a 7 percent annual increase to its veteran population. He announced that there were five community based VA outpatient clinics working in partnership with the local health providers. He pointed out that the current post 911 GI bill, which was now automated, served 1280 students per month in the education system, compared to 300 students each month pre 911. He spoke about the new GI bill which would include trade programs, and would increase the educational programs to 3500 students per month.

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MR. BOWEN noted that there were more than 800 accredited educational programs, each of which had to be annually certified. He confirmed that the VA had finished building the community out base clinic in Juneau. He listed the clinic locations: Fairbanks, Wasilla, Kenai, Juneau, and Anchorage. Lastly, he declared that the Office of Veterans Affairs had processed 2800 VA certificates of eligibility for home loans in the past year.

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REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA spoke of the problem with senior care housing, noting the need for senior veterans' care which was closer to homes, and she asked for an update.

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MR. BOWEN referred to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Federal VA and the Indian Health Service, which allowed the veterans to use local Indian Health Services. He did not know of any rural housing to care for veterans.

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REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA reflected that the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee had just passed legislation for senior care housing, similar to assisted living. She opined that the VA could do something similar in rural communities.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN congratulated the Office of Veterans Affairs on the success of its Yellow Ribbon Program.

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MR. BOWEN, in response to Co-Chair Saddler, said that any additional revenue could best be used by the VSO program. He opined that this "gives us more bang for our buck."

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS ascertained that the Alaska Army National Guard had transitioned from its Cold War role of infantry centric to a high tech global deployment. He noted that training was now carried out "on a certified range, on a [sic]

active military base, and it's done in preparation for a mobilization." He spoke about the new armory in Bethel. He pointed out that the Alaska Army National Guard had transitioned to a military police structure, in support of the missile defense program. He noted that this military police training would serve Alaska in its search for law enforcement personnel. He announced that enrollment in the National Guard was possible at 17 years of age. He spoke about the Civil Support Team, which protected against hazardous material threats.

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS described the new equipment the National Guard had received. He discussed the various deployments, including infantry and aviation. He presented that recruitment was now focused on Alaska National Guard, not focusing on Army National Guard or Air National Guard. He confirmed that the Alaska National Guard was now a sponsor for the Iron Dog, and that a female Alaska National Guard race team had entered.

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS, in response to Representative Cissna, said that a lot of effort was being put into the war on drugs. He stated that the National Guard was offering itself as a role model and "a catalyst for people making right choices, the right choice is staying in school, right choice is staying away from drugs, alcohol, even tobacco." He noted that the National Guard recruiters tried to incentivize with opportunities.

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COLONEL ROGER HOLL, Commander, Alaska State Defense Force, shared that his background included serving in the US Marine Corps, attending law school, and coming to Alaska as a VISTA volunteer attorney. He stated that the vast majority of the Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF) had served in the military. He said "We're Alaskans helping other Alaskans." He defined the state defense force as "a reserve component designed to augment the National Guard and its mission." He declared that the defense force tried to utilize the skills and talents of its members. He referenced the Alaska State Defense Force pamphlet. [Included in members packets]

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COLONEL HOLL stated that the ASDF could "do some of the jobs for the National Guard to free them up to do what they do best." He declared that this professional relationship with the National Guard had resulted in better training opportunities for the ASDF. He spoke about the ASDF training in communications. He noted that there were medical personnel on ASDF. He announced that the ASDF staff was trained in incident command, Military Emergency Management Specialists, as well as basic skills in soldiering. He stated that the mission for ASDF had changed, but that it still worked to do what was necessary to help Alaska. He spoke of the ASDF assistance with events including Special Olympics and Operation Stand Down.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL DEBORAH McMANUS, Assistant Adjutant General Air Director, Alaska Air National Guard Commander, Alaska Air National Guard, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, reported that the Alaska Air National Guard was growing. She shared that the Alaska Air National Guard had two flying wings, located in Fairbanks and at JBER. She noted that, within these two flying wings, there were five flying units, which included tankers, rescue, helicopters, and C-130 tactical airlift. She directed attention to the fixed weapons systems, and the early warning systems. She announced that the Air National Guard was more important than ever, as it was an integral support to the military forces in Alaska, and she listed many of the support systems. She pointed out that in addition to defense missions, the Air National Guard deployed to Afghanistan, Guam, and Iraq. She talked about its rescue missions, and mentioned that there had been 64 missions this year. She noted the efforts by the late Senator Ted Stevens for the maintenance of rescue forces in Alaska. She expanded on the innovative readiness training program for reserves from throughout the United States. She reported that the Air National Guard brought more than \$200 million federal dollars to Alaska.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN asked for an update on the 49th Missile Defense Battalion.

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS clarified that the missile defense battalion in Fort Greely was still a functional, operational

defensive system, and was no longer a testing facility. He replied that the Kodiak launch complex provided the target.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN asked about the decision to build silos in Kodiak.

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS replied that when missiles aged out from the Fort Greely complex, they were transferred to Vandenberg, as the designated launch test site. He clarified that there were 1800 full time uniformed National Guard members in Alaska. He praised the record for support of the 168th Air Refueling Wing.

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CO-CHAIR THOMPSON asked if the deployment of National Guard reserves had any effect on retention, as this deployment often resulted in a large drop in pay for many professionals.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL McMANUS replied that she was not aware of any problems with retention.

DIVISION OF HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

[2:30:48 PM](#)

MICHAEL O'HARE, Deputy Director, Division of Homeland Security/Emergency Management, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, stated that the mission of the division was "to protect the lives and property of Alaskans affected by disasters." He clarified that they were the coordinating entity which supported the local communities to prepare, respond, and recover from any disaster. He spoke of the extensive planning and training exercises with the local communities and other state agencies. He noted that the division had 66 staff, and that Alaska was prepared for any sized event. He observed that work was still necessary for catastrophic event planning, training, and exercising, and that this would involve collaborative work groups. He referenced the 2010 Annual Report, and the Top Ten Activities listed.

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MR. O'HARE ascertained that as a disaster warranted, the Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management would organize the request for assistance in certain areas. He pointed to the "Ready Alaska" campaign which better prepared first responders.

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MR. O'HARE, in response to Representative Cissna, replied that his division regularly visited communities for work on emergency response and preparedness plans. He spoke about the incident command system, which planned the organizational structure during the chaos of an emergency. He confirmed that the leaders and emergency managers of small community were brought to Anchorage twice annually to train, plan, and share ideas for better preparedness.

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REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked about the possibility for coordination to ensure that everything was covered.

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MR. O'HARE replied that the primary focus was to the unserved and underserved communities.

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MR. O'HARE reflected that emergency communication responsibilities needed to be statewide; therefore, grant money was being invested to identify tactical, emergency communication packages to deploy to a community during an emergency. He declared that there was also youth training to build up the emergency management cadre.

ALASKA MILITARY YOUTH ACADEMY

[2:44:53 PM](#)

McHUGH PIERRE, Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Staff, Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, spoke about the close working relationship of DMVA with other state departments. He elaborated on the Alaska Military Youth Academy and the National Guard's Youth Challenge

Program. He pointed out that the program provided a stable, dependable environment for learning success and discipline. He clarified that a youth must be a dropout to enter the program. He described the 5 month resident program and the 12 month non-resident program, stating that it was voluntary. He pointed out that the program annually served about 500 youth, and that a high school diploma was available.

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REPRESENTATIVE MILLER asked about the state-wide communications system.

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MR. O'HARE replied that Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) was a component of the statewide communications, and that it encompassed the Alaska road system. He established that the Division of Homeland Security communications augmented the communications as required in a specific area. He clarified that its tactical packages would allow for communication with any radio system, any satellite telephone, and any telephone system.

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CO-CHAIR THOMPSON asked if ALMR would no longer be funded.

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MR. O'HARE, in response, said that there was a local, state, and Department of Defense (DOD) agreement for DOD to take responsibility of its areas, while the state and the local communities take responsibility for assuring that the network would exist.

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS, in response to Representative Austerman, clarified that Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation (AADC) would be moved to DMVA in July, 2011.

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REPRESENTATIVE AUSTERMAN asked if DMVA would now be presenting the AADC justifications for its \$40 million request, in addition to the \$80 million for bonding.

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS said that he was looking forward to the conversation and shared that this would only be the total if there was no federal funding available. He directed attention to its great prospect as an investment for generating money and job opportunities. He declared that he was still familiarizing himself with AADC.

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MR. PIERRE said that AADC was viewed as a low competition industry because only four states had these facilities. He listed its benefits to many communities.

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REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA stated that DMVA provided the opportunity to give communities an example of "how to do it right." She declared a need for sharing the information.

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MAJOR GENERAL KATKUS summarized the Alaska National Guard relationship with the active duty military, describing the two week period following the July 28, 2010 crash of the C-17 aircraft. He clarified that there had been a new JBER commander and a new third wing commander. There was a need for coordination between the Air and Army National Guard with active duty military, as there were questions of who was in charge, and he listed all the military and state departments which came together. He noted that during this time, there was also the air show at JBER, and the deployment of 75 Air National Guard to Iraq. He detailed the rescue mission for the C-17, and pointed out that the small plane carrying Senator Ted Stevens crashed near Dillingham, at this same time. The small plane crash had required a second helicopter to direct the rescue attempts, both rescues occurring in bad weather. He shared that the Coast Guard also came to help. He reported that, during the initial rescue attempt, a Blackhawk helicopter crashed, though fortunately with no injuries. A Chinook helicopter was then delivered from Montana to remove the upside down Blackhawk, while a C-130 hovered overhead to direct the maneuvers. He summarized the events:

All in all we had one hell of a response and, sir, that did not take coordination that you just pull out of thin air. That's how we work together... Alaska's a safer place for it.

[3:03:34 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 3:03 p.m.