

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

April 3, 2012

1:05 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**

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 20

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

- MOVED SCR 20 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 16

Urging the United States Congress to approve legislation allowing members of the military to receive promised retirement benefits.

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SCR 20

SHORT TITLE: DECORATION OF HONOR

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) WIELECHOWSKI

02/01/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/01/12	(S)	STA
02/07/12	(S)	STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
02/07/12	(S)	Moved SCR 20 Out of Committee
02/07/12	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
02/08/12	(S)	STA RPT 5DP
02/08/12	(S)	DP: WIELECHOWSKI, KOOKESH, PASKVAN, MEYER, GIESSEL

02/10/12 (S) BEFORE THE SENATE ON FINAL PASSAGE  
02/10/12 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)  
02/10/12 (S) VERSION: SCR 20  
02/13/12 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/13/12 (H) MLV  
04/03/12 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120

BILL: SJR 16

SHORT TITLE: MILITARY PENSIONS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) WIELECHOWSKI

02/03/12 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/03/12 (S) STA  
02/09/12 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205  
02/09/12 (S) Moved SJR 16 Out of Committee  
02/09/12 (S) MINUTE(STA)  
02/10/12 (S) STA RPT 5DP  
02/10/12 (S) DP: WIELECHOWSKI, KOOKESH, PASKVAN,  
MEYER, GIESSEL  
02/15/12 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)  
02/15/12 (S) VERSION: SJR 16  
02/17/12 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/17/12 (H) MLV  
04/03/12 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As sponsor, introduced SCR 20 and SJR 16.

MCHUGH PIERRE, Deputy Commissioner  
Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Fort Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SCR 20 and SJR 16.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

1:05:03 PM

**CO-CHAIR DAN SADDLER** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Representatives Saddler, Miller, Lynn, and Austerman were present at the call to order. Representatives Thompson and Cissna arrived as the meeting was in progress.

SCR 20-DECORATION OF HONOR

1:06:18 PM

CO-CHAIR SADDLER announced that the first order of business would be SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 20, Relating to awarding the Alaska Decoration of Honor to certain members of the military.

1:06:29 PM

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI, Alaska State Legislature, informed the committee SCR 20 is a decoration of honor resolution - the first of which was established in 2007 - to award military service members from Alaska, or those deployed while stationed in Alaska, who were killed in action or in support of combat action. This year the resolution awards the decoration of honor to 25 individuals who were killed in the line of duty while honorably serving the state and the country during 2010-2011. He explained the legislature must authorize the award by resolution so the decoration can be presented to the recipients' survivors. In 2008, the legislature awarded the decoration to 171 individuals for service from statehood up to 2008.

1:07:27 PM

CO-CHAIR SADDLER asked how the decorations will be awarded.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI expressed his hope that the Joint Armed Services Committee will hold a ceremony as has been done in the past. In further response to Co-Chair Saddler, he said he was unaware if names need to be added for 2012.

1:09:02 PM

CO-CHAIR SADDLER opened public testimony on SCR 20.

1:09:24 PM

MCHUGH PIERRE, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), expressed the department's support of SCR 20, and described its responsibility to provide an accurate list of names.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN advised Mr. Pierre to inform the sponsor if others who are eligible for the decoration become known, as an amendment to add a name can be introduced on the House floor.

MR. PIERRE expressed his confidence in the accuracy of the list.

[1:11:10 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SADDLER asked whether other states have similar memoriam citations for service members.

MR. PIERRE estimated five or six other states have something similar.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER asked for a definition of "killed in action," and how the names are attained.

MR. PIERRE explained the intent of the legislation was to honor those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of freedom. An effort was made to be inclusive, and there is a case pending that may allow death by suicide to be recognized. Otherwise, all deployed soldiers, airmen, marines and sailors, National Guard members, reservists, and Coast Guard members, who were born and raised in Alaska, stationed in Alaska, or deployed from Alaska and died overseas, are included. The department is notified of the death of any military member who has ties to Alaska by the personnel division of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

[1:14:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER recalled there was a test pilot who crashed and died after take-off from Eielson Air Force Base.

MR. PIERRE advised the pilot was not eligible, because he was not deployed. In response to Representative Lynn, he said an armed services member who was wounded in combat overseas and subsequently died after returning to the U.S. is eligible.

[1:16:07 PM](#)

Co-Chair Saddler, after determining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[1:16:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON moved to report SCR 20 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, SCR 20 was reported from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

[1:16:52 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:16 p.m. to 1:18 p.m.

### **SJR 16-MILITARY PENSIONS**

[1:18:51 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SADDLER announced that the final order of business would be SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 16, Urging the United States Congress to approve legislation allowing members of the military to receive promised retirement benefits.

[1:19:02 PM](#)

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI, Alaska State Legislature, explained SJR 16 came about after the Defense Business Board, U. S. Department of Defense (DoD), suggested a plan to convert military retirement from the current 20-year vesting system to a retirement system similar to a 401(k) arrangement. He acknowledged that an appropriate retirement system for military service members can be a controversial issue; however, this resolution simply asks that all service members should be allowed to maintain the retirement system they were promised at the time they signed up for service. Currently, a military service member who serves for 20 years can retire with a percentage of their pension, thus this resolution is about keeping promises made to active duty military members. He noted that in the committee packet was a copy of a bill in Congress sponsored by Congressman Don Young which supports this issue. Senator Wielechowski advised that Alaska has thousands of active duty military members and constituents in his district support the resolution.

[1:21:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN declared a conflict of interest.

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER objected.

CO-CHAIR SADDLER indicated Representative Lynn would be required to vote.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN said he supports the resolution, explaining that those who enlisted should get what they were promised and, in effect, they have a contract with the federal government.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI agreed.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON observed that one who joined the military at 17 years of age and served 35 years would be required to wait several more years for their retirement. He said, "This isn't the way that we're supposed to do things in the United States."

[1:23:29 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SADDLER opened public testimony.

[1:23:47 PM](#)

MCHUGH PIERRE, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), said the department strongly supports the resolution. Within DMVA, there are 1,800 full-time National Guard members, of which 800 are of active guard and reserve (AGR) status, are paid in active duty status, and are eligible for all benefits. The department believes the commitments made to these members should be honored and they should receive the retirement package promised to them at the time they joined the military.

CO-CHAIR SADDLER understood the concern of the DoD about the cost of retirement for military members, and whether those who serve less than 20 years should have some benefit.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN observed a service member with a disability can retire earlier.

[1:26:19 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SADDLER held over SJR 16.

[1:26:48 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:26 p.m.