

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
Anchorage, Alaska  
October 14, 2015  
9:31 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Bob Herron, Chair  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Vice Chair  
Representative Jim Colver  
Representative Shelley Hughes  
Representative Bob Lynn  
Representative Max Gruenberg  
Representative Chris Tuck

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Representative David Talerico

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEW(S): DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS -  
DIVISION OF HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT; OFFICE OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS; ARMY NATIONAL GUARD; AIR NATIONAL GUARD;  
PRESENTATION ON HB 126; ALASKA STATE DEFENSE FORCE; ALASKA  
MILITARY YOUTH ACADEMY.

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

BOB DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner  
Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced overviews and presentations by various divisions of the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs.

MIKE O'HARE, Director  
Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided an overview of the Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management.

FORREST POWELL, Program Coordinator  
Office of Veterans Affairs  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the Office of Veterans Affairs.

COLONEL JOE STREFF, Commander  
Alaska Army National Guard  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an overview of the Alaska Army National Guard.

MAJOR MICHELLE EDWARDS, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel  
Alaska Army National Guard  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Assisted in the overview of the Alaska Army National Guard.

COLONEL KAREN MANSFIELD, Commander  
Alaska Air National Guard  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided an overview of the Alaska Air National Guard.

BRIGADIER GENERAL (ALASKA) ROGER HOLL, Commander  
Alaska State Defense Force  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

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

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN JAMES, Director of Training and Operations

Alaska State Defense Force  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered a question during the overview of the Alaska State Defense Force.

JAMES JONES, Deputy Director  
Alaska Military Youth Academy  
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs  
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided an overview of the Alaska Military Youth Academy.

ROBERT MCGILL  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of arming National Guard recruiters.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:31:31 AM](#)

**CHAIR BOB HERRON** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. Representatives Tuck, Lynn, Gruenberg, Hughes, Colver, and Herron were present at the call to order. Representative LeDoux arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### **OVERVIEW(S) DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

[9:32:07 AM](#)

CHAIR HERRON announced that the first order of business would be an introduction of the scheduled overviews and presentations by the deputy commissioner, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs.

[9:32:45 AM](#)

BOB DOEHL, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner/Adjutant General, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), began an overview of the DMVA, noting there would be a focus on the army and air component commanders and division directors regarding specifics of their programs, and answering questions. The department consists of service

components, the Air and Army National Guards, the Alaska State Defense Force, the Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, the Alaska Military Youth Academy, and the Office of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Doehl explained that much of DMVA's success is contingent on federal mission and federal resources; for example, approximately \$15 million in general funds is leveraged to bring in approximately \$500 million to the Alaska economy from the federal government. The overview would also cover more effective engagement in rural Alaska, which is a priority of DMVA and the Walker Administration. To implement programs, DMVA has three areas of priorities, beginning with Arctic Strategy. The Arctic is of vital national and state interest and DMVA encourages - through the National Defense Authorization Act - requiring the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to identify, resource, and fund a national strategy for the Arctic that makes sense for Alaskans and the nation. The second priority is engagement with all Alaska communities, rural and urban. The third priority is the growth of emergency preparedness capacity to cope with disasters, such as fires and storms, cost-effectively. Mr. Doehl pointed out all three priorities involve more effective engagement in rural Alaska, with which all divisions have been tasked.

[9:36:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked for a copy of U.S. Senator Sullivan's amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act [NDAA] and the status thereof.

MR. DOEHL said the amendment to section 1043 of the NDAA [FY2016 NDAA passed 10/7/15] requires DoD to develop an operations plan for the Arctic, identify forces to support the plan - such as land forces - and identify new funding. The amendment was introduced at committee, the bill was passed by Congress, and awaits the President's signature. However, he cautioned that the bill at this point may be vetoed due to differences between the executive and legislative branches of government on defense funding. In further response to Representative Gruenberg, he said the amendment was introduced in the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked whether there was a provision requiring the federal government to work with the DMVA and the Alaska National Guard.

MR. DOEHL explained that although that language is not in the amendment, consistent with the doctrine of operations plans, he

expected "that consultation to happen ... functionally because of the role DMVA - the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs - plays up here." In Alaska, DMVA owns the search and rescue forces of Alaska, and owns the air defense surveillance missions, thus the federal government would need to consult with DMVA.

CHAIR HERRON added that the committee can ask the deputy commissioner to request assurance from Senator Sullivan that there is a working relationship with the state.

[9:40:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG moved that [the committee request from Senator Sullivan an assurance in writing that articulates the understanding that there is a working relationship with DMVA]. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

[9:40:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES referred to DMVA's vision and asked whether there is a state and a federal mission that is carried out by DMVA.

MR. DOEHL responded that the federal mission applies when federal funds are received to execute a specific federal purpose. For example, the Army National Guard was funded to organize, train, and equip for deployment as a land component. Also, federal funds are provided for search and rescue and to watch for incursions into U.S. airspace, and the Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management receives Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant monies for disaster mitigation. The Office of Veterans Affairs receives federal money to provide transportation. One of the missions funded by the state is for the Alaska State Defense Force in order to help Alaskans in need. In addition, the Army National Guard used state funds for firefighting, and state money also provides for outreach events to veterans, which are needed because Alaska has more veterans per capita than any other state.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES surmised there is not one overarching mission.

MR. DOEHL explained it is difficult for one mission to encompass duties as diverse as the Alaska Military Youth Academy, preparing troops to assist in disaster response, and helping veterans.

[9:45:36 AM](#)

MIKE O'HARE, Director, Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, said the mission of the division is to coordinate critical services to protect lives and property from terrorism, and all other hazards, natural and manmade. To do so the division establishes a culture of preparedness, enabling a swift coordinated response leading to a rapid recovery. He said Alaska has experienced a difficult spring due to flooding, and a difficult summer with many wildfires and communities evacuated due to smoke and fire. He noted there were no fatalities related to fires, although a mudslide in Sitka took three lives. This fall has brought sea storms with hurricane-force winds. Also, this year, the division hosted and protected visitors to the international conference on the Arctic, and coordinated with security during [President Barack Obama's trip to Alaska]. Mr. O'Hare reiterated that the division is the lead disaster-coordinating agency in the state and partners with the National Guard, the Alaska State Defense Force and federal agencies such as the U.S. Coast Guard and DoD. For example, DoD provides individual readiness training that will be utilized in Newtok. Other partnerships are established with faith-based and nonprofit groups, as well as state and local agencies. Tribal partners such as the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) also help the division complete its mission, as do private sector organizations. He stated that the division has sixty employees in five sections. The operations section coordinates state resources and resources from outside Alaska if necessary. The division also assists communities to prepare for spring floods and local emergencies through outreach educational materials for individuals and families. He mentioned an awareness campaign called the Great Alaska Shake-out which teaches victims of an earthquake to drop, cover, and hold. The division's planning section provides Small Community Emergency Response Plans (SCERP) to every small community in Alaska. The planning section also provides disaster mitigation projects such as elevating houses to prevent flooding. Mr. O'Hare stressed that mitigation projects are a good investment compared to the costs incurred during a disaster. The division's disaster assistance section directs victims to state and federal grant programs to rebuild and recover. The fifth section is the administration and grant support section.

[9:56:11 AM](#)

CHAIR HERRON suggested legislators would benefit from having individual written disaster plans on hand.

MR. O'HARE offered to provide copies for members. In response to Representative Hughes, he confirmed that the earthquake exercises are provided primarily for school children, and approximately one hundred thousand school children are registered to participate.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES expressed her belief that more adults and businesses should be involved. She then asked whether FEMA has money available for medical and security units.

MR. O'HARE stated that Alaska Shield 2014 was successful, and the division partnered with the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) to get catastrophic medical kits; in fact, DHSS has received medical equipment and supply stations from its national counterparts. In further response to Representative Hughes, he said equipment and supplies are available at a moment's notice.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES recalled that during the Sockeye fire, some of the nonprofit agencies were "blocked" from helping. She suggested the emergency network needs to be improved.

MR. O'HARE agreed that donations must be coordinated and he has hired a donations management individual to focus on the efficient distribution of donations of every kind.

CHAIR HERRON requested to see the plan for the future of Newtok.

[10:01:28 AM](#)

MR. O'HARE said the division's focus is on rural engagement and resilience, and seeks to ensure that emergency response plans are up-to-date and appropriate for every rural community, along with providing more innovative mitigation opportunities. Regarding Newtok and Mertarvik, the state has applied for a federal community development block (CDBG) grant that could bring approximately \$225 million to communities affected by disasters from 2012-2014, including Newtok and Mertarvik. He said the grant will help finish the Newtok and Mertarvik project, and more information on the grant is available. Also, there will be a focus on the Arctic and the development of its critical infrastructure - such as ports and communications lines - which must adapt to climate change. In addition, the division

will work to enhance emergency management plans for each community.

[10:04:45 AM](#)

FORREST POWELL, Program Coordinator, Office of Veterans Affairs, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, informed the committee there are 73,397 recognized veterans in Alaska. The mission of the Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA) is to promote the awareness of eligible veterans, active duty, guard and reserve members, and their families and survivors, to receive from federal and state government all benefits to which they are entitled. The vision of OVA is to ensure that all veterans, active duty, guard, and reserve and their families understand that all benefits have been earned. The office's core values are to be held personally and professionally accountable to deliver America's promise to all eligible members, and to serve through courage, conviction, and on behalf of the values of integrity, compassion, commitment, selflessness, and teamwork. The office's goal is to serve Alaska, one veteran at a time. Mr. Powell said the foregoing drives OVA's 17 veteran service officers and 4 staff members to serve over 73,000 veterans and 154,000 dependents, plus active duty and guardsmen. In addition, OVA's full time staff members are members of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council, participate in state veteran's cemetery planning, manage the Alaska Territorial Guard program, and hold active duty discharges, which are copies of DD Form 214 discharge documents that are kept on file for future needs. Mr. Powell continued, noting that OVA staff members partner with over 250 tribal veterans' representatives, attend town hall meetings, attend indigent veterans' funerals, provide memorial grant funds, partner with veteran service officers, manage rural transportation grants, partner with the U.S. Veteran's Administration (VA) Homeless Veteran Outreach program, and partner with other agencies to prevent homelessness, thereby providing services to veterans and their families throughout Alaska. Additionally, OVA and its staff of 21 ensured the return of \$56 million to eligible veterans and family members. This is an ongoing annual amount that increases each year based on the increase in the number of veterans in the state who have been assessed with a 10 percent disability. An example of a 10 percent disability is tinnitus, which results in a payment of \$133.17. The office assists 57,989 veterans, active duty, reserve component members and their families with the processing of federal and state benefits claims.

[10:10:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES asked how many of the 73,000 veterans are "connecting with the services you provide, how many are untapped and probably aren't receiving [possible benefits]...?"

MR. POWELL said 34,000 of the 73,000 veterans need to be reached and brought into the system. In further response to Representative Hughes, he said the reasons why many veterans are not receiving benefits could be a lack of knowledge or a language barrier.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES surmised a similar percentage from an additional 34,000 veterans receiving benefits could result in \$20 million to \$30 million influx to Alaska's economy.

[10:13:04 AM](#)

MR. POWELL returned to the overview, noting that this year \$244 million was paid for disability compensation and pensions to veterans and their families in Alaska; therefore, if all 73,000 veterans were recognized in the VA Healthcare System, it would reduce strain on the medical community. From its budget of \$2.8 million, OVA transfers \$1,015,700 to the Veterans' Organization Grant program, which recognizes five service organizations - American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Vietnam Veterans of America. The grant pays for the seventeen OVA service officers, who are trained and accredited locally and nationally. As a term of the funding, service officers are required to travel to a minimum of two highly rural areas each month. Additional funding during the recent fire emergencies was obtained by the Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management. Mr. Powell stated that service organizations in Washington and Virginia are following Alaska's example of replacing service officers that are assigned by the state or county, with those assigned to service organizations. He returned to the topic of the VA Highly Rural Transportation Grant program (HRTG) and advised that Alaska received \$250,000, which was the amount of the highest award issued of the 26 states eligible for the program. With these funds between January and September, 2015, OVA reached over 5,901 veterans in highly rural transportation systems. Recipients were: Alaska Marine Highway System - Kodiak Island; Interior Alaska Bus Line - Denali; Inter-Island Ferry System - Prince of Wales and Hyder; Valley Movers - Matanuska-Susitna Valley; and AAA Alaska Cab - Kenai Peninsula. Ground transportation for three of the recipients totaled over 220,000 miles. Nautical miles for the

ferries totaled over 67,000 nautical miles. Another grant has been requested for this coming year in the same amount. Mr. Powell turned to the subject of safety, noting that the Stand Down Program provides direct assistance to veterans regarding homelessness, medical and dental screenings, employment assistance and other factors. These funds were provided to Unalaska, Homer, Soldotna, Kotzebue, and Nome. At annual events in Fairbanks and Anchorage, 2,500 veterans were reached in connection with local providers. There are over 250 trained tribal veterans' representatives, who are key to the success of reaching veterans in villages; in fact, Alaska has the largest veterans' volunteer corps in the nation. Since 2011, veterans and their families have been supported in their communities across Alaska. The transportation grants reach those who "would never venture out of their homes for our assistance." Agreements with DoD to provide assistance to the Alaska Territorial Guard continue, and although efforts to find, research, and issue discharges are difficult, the goal remains to provide discharge documents for each Alaska Territorial Guard veteran who was not provided documents in 1947. In response to Representative LeDoux, Mr. Powell said that Alaska Territorial Guard veterans are eligible for the same benefits as other veterans, thus the importance of having discharge papers.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX pointed out that many Hmong people live in Alaska and expressed her understanding that Hmong people who served the U.S. during the Vietnam War do not receive veterans' benefits. She asked what can be done.

[10:23:34 AM](#)

MR. DOEHL said that is correct. United States Senator Lisa Murkowski introduced a provision that would have allowed Hmong who served U.S. forces in Southeast Asia to be buried in veteran's cemeteries, but the measure did not pass, and there is no new related legislation pending. He suggested that the committee contact the Alaska congressional delegation if it wishes to support recognition for the Hmong forces. In further response to Representative LeDoux, he was unsure of what is preventing recognition of the Hmong forces, but it could be a variety of concerns including money, and the fact the Hmong forces did not swear an oath of allegiance to the U.S.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN suggested a resolution from the committee to the Alaska congressional delegation and others, stating its support of those who fought side-by-side, would be helpful.

MR. DOEHL expressed his agreement with a statement of support for those serving in past and present conflicts, such as the translators in Afghanistan who may seek immigration to the U.S.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX has heard from Hmong constituents that the military does not permit representatives to appear at Hmong Day recognition ceremonies.

MR. DOEHL assured Representative LeDoux that he would investigate and respond; however, the Alaska National Guard has sent representatives to every event to which they have been invited.

[10:28:21 AM](#)

MR. POWELL directed attention to the Alaska Frontier Honor Flights that are opportunities for WWII and Korean War veterans to visit war monuments in Washington, D.C. Two years ago, nonprofit organizations and corporations were encouraged to support this program. Alaska Territorial Guard members also have this opportunity. The OVA attends every welcome home event at the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, and he invited committee members to attend the arrival of veterans on 10/17/15.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES requested a copy of the veterans' service booklet for each legislator's office.

REPRESENTATIVE COLVER asked for the location of the seventeen service officers.

MR. POWELL said eight service officers are located in Anchorage, one is in Ketchikan, one is in Kenai, three are in Fairbanks, and two are in the Matanuska-Susitna valley. In further response to Representative Colver, he confirmed that two service officers were added two years ago.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES cautioned about the state budget challenges ahead, and encouraged OVA to more assertively connect with the 34,000 veterans who have not been reached.

[10:32:15 AM](#)

COLONEL JOE STREFF, Commander, Alaska Army National Guard, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, informed the committee the vision of the Alaska Army National Guard (Army Guard) is to be a diverse, trusted, and capable organization

ready to conduct unified land operations for the federal government and the state. Its mission is to maintain ready units and soldiers that are able to support the governor and Alaskans for domestic operations, while also ready to deploy worldwide in support of the national military strategy. The Army Guard focuses on four lines of effort: 1) provide a relevant, ready, and available force; 2) improve professionalism so that soldiers are experts in occupational skills, values, and leadership; 3) emerge as experts in the subject of Arctic domain; 4) partner and align with other agencies. From the federal perspective, this includes headquarters in Alaska, and within Alaska, work with the [Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, DMVA, and the Division of Forestry, Department of Natural Resources], local emergency management agencies, and local responders. The force structure includes two brigades: the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and the 38th Troop Command, and a joint forces headquarters, for a total of 1,850 soldiers. Within the brigade there is an aviation battalion with 20 Blackhawk helicopters, a reconnaissance and surveillance battalion, and a military police headquarters. Smaller units consist of engineers, signal, transportation, and maintenance. Colonel Streff advised that there will be significant conversions this year, changing the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade to a regional support group, and the reconnaissance and surveillance battalion to infantry. Colonel Streff stressed that while assigned in Alaska, guardsmen are in title 32 status of the U.S. Code, thus the Army Guard's chain of command includes the adjutant general and the governor. When deployed, guardsmen transition to title 10 status, and fall under the command of active duty authorities and the president. Further, as a National Guard, the force is funded by DoD and the National Guard Bureau; however, no federal funding is received to conduct the Army Guard's state mission. Key federal missions include: wartime readiness to mobilize, deploy, and operate in a theatre of war, and the ground missile defense mission at Fort Greely, operating as the nation's defenders against ballistic missile attack.

[10:36:29 AM](#)

MAJOR MICHELLE EDWARDS, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Alaska Army National Guard, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, said the Army Guard state mission is to provide emergency response at the request of civil authorities for emergencies such as flood relief, search and rescue, emergency housing, snow removal, and earthquakes. Also, it conducts firefighting, and mans a civil support team to assist in the

case of a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or explosive event, and provides nonemergency local and federal support. For example, during the [Conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic: Cooperation, Innovation, Engagement & Resilience (GLACIER) held 8/30-31/15], the Army Guard provided military police support to the Anchorage Police Department and the Alaska State Troopers, aviation support to the U.S. Secret Service, and refueling support to Marine One. The Army Guard also assists communities with military capabilities through the Innovative Readiness Program, and delivers medical care, builds infrastructure, and supplies veterinary care throughout the state. Major Edwards further described the Innovative Readiness Program and pointed out Alaska provides a challenging environment and unique training opportunities. Another mission is the state partnership program in which Alaska is partnered with Mongolia, and their forces are linked in a mutually beneficial relationship. This program is administered by the National Guard Bureau and executed by the adjutant general and DoD. Major Edwards relayed that the National Guard conducts military to military engagements, leverages relationships, and endeavors to facilitate broader interagency and corollary engagement spanning military, government, economic, educational, and social spheres. One challenge to the Army Guard is that standards for recruits have gone up; in fact, on a national basis, 70 percent of the recruit population aged 18-25 years do not qualify to join the military, thus Army Guard is working with the Alaska State Defense Force to provide opportunities for Alaskans to serve. Another challenge is that the reduction in state funds has reduced the number of armories from 80 to 18. Major Edwards concluded that the Army National Guard is filled with highly trained and motivated soldiers who volunteered to defend the U.S. Constitution and the State of Alaska. Members of the Army Guard are united in their resolve to be a diverse, trusted, and capable organization ready to accomplish its missions.

[10:40:33 AM](#)

CHAIR HERRON requested a tour of Fort Greely.

COLONEL STREFF agreed to arrange a tour. In further response to Chair Herron, he said during the [8/15 presidential visit to Alaska] security was "probably as intense as it gets."

CHAIR HERRON then asked whether barrier crimes made by youthful recruits contribute to the difficulties of recruits meeting the higher standards. He observed that the state and the federal

government wish to release many prisoners with relatively minor crimes, questioning whether those who make "silly mistakes," when underage, should be prevented from maturing and getting into the military.

MAJOR EDWARDS advised that some offenses, except for domestic violence, can be waived.

REPRESENTATIVE COLVER asked how the legislature can support the needs of the guard personnel at Fort Greely; for example, early on personnel did not have protection in the gun turret, and there are many interlinking commands at that facility which may create difficulties.

[10:44:39 AM](#)

COLONEL STREEF recalled the mission began in 2004, and said he would direct that question to the commanders of the 49th Missile Battalion and the 100th Missile Brigade in Colorado.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX restated her understanding that 25 percent of Alaskan youth are not eligible to be in the National Guard.

MAJOR EDWARDS clarified that nationally, 30 percent of those aged 18-25 years are not qualified.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX inquired as to what standards are not being met.

MAJOR EDWARDS responded that Alaska Army National Guard recruits must meet regular Army education standards, such as taking the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery (AFVAB) test and legal requirements.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked for more information on testing scores and other qualifications.

MAJOR EDWARDS explained that for each job in the Army certain scores are required; she offered to provide specific information on the basic and the in-depth requirements for specific jobs and for promotion to a higher rank. In further response to Representative LeDoux, she said a general equivalency diploma (GED) qualifies.

[10:47:39 AM](#)

MR. DOEHL stated that the administration realizes the federal standards are not the best for Alaska, and Governor Bill Walker has written to President Barack Obama with military-specific ideas to increase the opportunities and allow better participation across Alaska in the National Guard; in addition, Commissioner/Adjutant General Hummel will meet with Lieutenant General Kadavy, Director, Army National Guard, National Guard Bureau, in this regard. He said, "So, we've taken the initiative on that ... we're doing what makes sense for Alaska and America."

[10:48:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN cautioned that standards cannot be lowered as it is very significant to be a member of the regular military or one of the guard units. Standards cannot be let down as the responsibility is too high.

[10:49:14 AM](#)

COLONEL KAREN MANSFIELD, Commander, Alaska Air National Guard, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, informed the committee the term "federal" refers to the time that guardsmen are executing in title 10 status, and "nonfederal" is the time that guardsmen are executing in title 32 status. The vision for the Alaska Air National Guard (Air Guard) is to be a community-based force exceeding the standards of the most diverse, relevant, and resilient units in the nation. The Air Guard has four key efforts: to preserve capability and capacity by optimizing total force initiative; to ensure resourcing to meet operational needs; to champion force development opportunities to shape its leaders; and to expand its dual-use capability in support of state, community, and partners. Colonel Mansfield further explained that a wing is the standard organizational structure of the air component of active duty and reserve. Within a wing there are standard groups, one each for operations, maintenance, medical, and support. Within each of the two wings there are squadrons for communications, civil engineering, logistics readiness, security forces, and personnel support, all of which have special capabilities. Although the wings support the federal mission, while training, Alaska guardsmen fall under the command of the adjutant general and the governor. Colonel Mansfield clarified that some members of the Air Guard are engaged in federal missions full-time; in fact, approximately 40 percent of Alaska's 2,400 person force is full-time, and thus the state is more operationally engaged than guard units of other states. There are two Air Guard wings, the

168th is an air refueling wing with 820 members located on Eielson Air Force Base. The 168th has eight tankers and sixteen crews, operational, maintenance, mission support, and medical. This wing will be renamed due to the transition of the 213th Space Warning Squadron at Clear Air Station. Alaska guardsmen now comprise the operations crew at Clear Air Station, providing surveillance in federal status, and a tanker mission, operating every day. She stressed that Alaska has the busiest air tanker unit in the Air National Guard. There is also a new mission in civil engineering which is adding skilled personnel, and which is vital to the key effort of expanding dual-use capability for rural emergency responses in the state. In Anchorage, the 176th Wing is located on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) with a manned strength of fifteen hundred and five operational mission sets. The 144th Airlift Squadron has eight C-130 Hercules aircraft and sixteen crews, and will be deployed next year overseas. Within that wing there is the 249th Airlift Squadron which serves to continue towards total force initiatives. She noted that the Air Guard provides crews and maintenance components to fly and fix aircraft that are owned by active duty. The C-17 Globemaster is a large military transport aircraft that provides strategic lift capability to DoD. Remaining units in the wing are the 210th Rescue Squadron, the 212th Rescue Squadron, and the 211th Rescue Squadron, which are refueling aircraft. The foregoing provide the only long-range airborne search and rescue capability for Alaska and its surrounding waters, and also provide refueling for the U.S. Coast Guard.

[10:57:31 AM](#)

COLONEL MANSFIELD continued to describe the duties of rescue operations when requested by civil authorities. There are Air Guard members manning a rescue coordination center (RCC), located on JBER, which is also a 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, (24/7) mission. The rescue center coordinates all federal and civil calls for the state, and works with civil authorities, the Coast Guard, and the Alaska State Troopers to determine a response. Colonel Mansfield noted RCC requested Air Guard support 40 times and recorded 49 saves last year. Since 1994, there have been over 5,000 missions with 2,223 saves. Lastly, the Air Defense Squadron located on JBER is an airspace warning and surveillance squadron. In the event of an unknown or hostile aircraft approaching U.S. airspace, the Alaska Air Guard detects the track, directs the launch of a fighter, controls the intercept, refuels the fighter, and rescues the airmen if necessary. Federal missions supply well-trained personnel to

meet state needs including medical care, and she described several missions involving transportation and provisions for rural areas. Colonel Mansfield directed the committee's attention to additional information that was provided in the committee packet.

[10:59:23 AM](#)

CHAIR HERRON stated that Alaskans are proud of their Army and Air Guard, and asked why wings in Alaska have so many responsibilities.

COLONEL MANSFIELD explained that the operational orders of the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) require the responsibility to be in Alaska due to its strategic location. Strategic lift, tactical lift, and rescue must be in Alaska for the Pacific arena. In further response to Chair Herron, she said threats from Russia have increased on a gradual and continual basis over the past five to six years.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES asked whether the Air Guard plans to use unmanned aircraft systems for search and rescue purposes.

COLONEL MANSFIELD responded that is not on the horizon for the Air Guard; however, she will forward an inquiry to the Air Force and report back.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO stated there is a tremendous amount of activity at Eielson Air Force Base (AFB) with the expected arrival of F-35 aircraft. He asked whether the additional aircraft would expand the Air Guard's mission at Eielson AFB.

COLONEL MANSFIELD advised that generically, as with any new mission, active duty seeks to build associations, but whether there would be an association with the Air Guard in Alaska has not been determined.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO encouraged the committee to tour Clear Air Base, which he described as "absolutely phenomenal."

CHAIR HERRON requested a tour of Clear Air Base for members of the committee.

[11:04:09 AM](#)

MR. DOEHL turned attention to enabling legislation [HB 126 Code of Military Justice; Appeals, introduced in the First Session of the Twenty-Ninth Alaska State Legislature and currently held in the House Judiciary Standing Committee]. Mr. Doehl provided an update on behalf of Captain Forrest Dunbar, recalling that HB 126 passed from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs to the House Judiciary Standing Committee (HJUD) in April of 2015. The following four significant changes are expected: 1) the punitive article, which identifies what is a sanctioned offense, would now be in statute instead of in regulations in order to provide better checks and balances between the legislative and executive branches of government; 2) junior officers and junior enlisted soldiers demand the prosecution of some offenses such as sexual assault and driving under the influence (DUI) even when civilian prosecutors choose not to do so; 3) the scope of coverage would be expanded to 24/7; fix maximum punishments. He provided the committee with a written summary of the changes, noting that DMVA has been actively testing the legal aspects of the proposed provisions with positive results.

CHAIR HERRON, speaking from personal experience, expressed his appreciation of the change to expand military jurisdiction to 24/7.

[11:08:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX recognized Captain Dunbar's work on the proposed legislation. Speaking as chair of HJUD, she said she anticipates hearing the bill during [the Third Special Session of the First Session of the Twenty-Ninth Alaska State Legislature], although the bill could not be passed out of committee. Further, she opined the purpose of HB 126 was to give the leadership of the National Guard tools; however, tools are only as effective as the leadership of the guard. Representative LeDoux cautioned that although there is excellent leadership now, leadership can fail, and rules need to be in place "when things go wrong."

MR. DOEHL assured the committee that there is a commitment from the leadership of DMVA and Governor Walker to "full, engaged leadership addressing those things and making the hard calls ...."

[11:11:25 AM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL (ALASKA) ROGER HOLL, Commander, Alaska State Defense Force, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, informed the committee he was speaking on behalf of the volunteer men and women who serve in the Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF). The vision of ASDF is an Arctic strategy to expand throughout Alaska, and to expand its engagement as well. General Holl defined ASDF by its mission to train and equip an adequately organized military reserve - at the command of the governor - in order to augment the National Guard during state emergencies. Therefore, ASDF training for missions is aligned with the missions of the National Guard. The legal authority that creates a state defense force comes from the U.S. Constitution and in U.S. law, 32 U.S.C. 109, and they are regulated by National Guard Bureau regulation 10-4. Also, the Alaska State Constitution provides for a state defense force, and it is further identified by state military code. With a force of 86 volunteer soldiers, ASDF is about the same size of the defense forces of Oregon, Washington, and New Mexico. Volunteers are located in Fairbanks, Wasilla, Kenai, Valdez, Juneau, and at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage. General Holl said he was proud of ASDF volunteers because they care about Alaska and donate time for training, military education, community events, week-end drills, and military exercises; in fact, volunteers are required to complete training, attend monthly meetings and week-end drills, and they are subject to military discipline. Volunteers can be also be ordered into active duty, however, they are paid when in active status. The force is prohibited from receiving federal funding, and is a state entity. Recent changes to ASDF include increased training standards as a result of its close association with the joint operations center at JBER, thus ASDF is included in training, response, and the goals of DVMA.

[11:16:31 AM](#)

GENERAL HOLL stressed that ASDF now has a focus on radio and satellite communications skills, and he gave an example of its liaison work for the state during Operation Deep Dig in Cordova. Also, ASDF volunteers are trained in the following: joint operations center courses; anti-terrorism; officer candidate school; noncommissioned officer academy; incident command; emergency management. Training has been integrated with the National Guard in exercises such as Alaska Shield; in fact, 18 ASDF members were on state active duty during the summer fires in Alaska. The trend in ASDF is towards professionalism, creating standards, and creating a force capable of effectively augmenting the National Guard in support of civil authorities

for missions in Alaska. He pointed out that after disasters, a state infrastructure inspection is needed, therefore, ASDF created an engineering detachment consisting of professional engineers. In October of 2015, the State Guard Association of the U.S. (SGAUS) is sponsoring an engineering academy. General Holl noted that he is president of SGAUS, and that the association is creating tools to increase professionalism in all state defense forces in the areas of chaplaincy, engineering, medical resources, and law. Returning to state functions, he said ASDF provides shelter support for victims of disasters, responders, and for military exercises, and is proficient in field operations. The state-owned Alaska medical station is a portable hospital and, in 2014, ASDF provided doctors and nurses to the medical station, completed an inventory, provided communications, traffic control, and chaplaincy. As do typical military organizations, ASDF has personnel, intelligence, training, operations, logistics, communications, chaplaincy, a medical detachment, engineering, and an inspector general. Community engagement includes support for the Wounded Warriors Program, Special Olympics, Operation Stand Down, a scholarship program, and a color guard, all at no cost to the state. The Alaska State Defense Force has been recognized by earning a meritorious unit award, a soldier of the year award, a noncommissioned officer of the year award, requests for guidance from other defense forces, commendation medals, and bylines in publications.

[11:26:47 AM](#)

GENERAL HOLL turned to ASDF's future. In January, 2016, ASDF will support the National Guard Military Police Company. As a result of the forced reductions at the National Guard, ASDF will form the 49th military police detachment with qualified law enforcement officers to replace positions cut by the National Guard. Furthermore, ASDF is planning to expand and create new detachments in every region of rural Alaska because ASDF provides an economical approach for service to rural areas; for example, ASDF trains in existing armories or local operations centers at no additional cost. General Holl opined rural communities will take pride in ASDF because it has the following in common with the Alaska Territorial Guard: founded in 1984 by a WW11 veteran who was also an Alaska Native; uses the same logo; comprised of local volunteers; served Alaska for 31 years; focused on rural engagement; provides opportunities for young people to serve the state and develop leadership skills that can be utilized in the workplace.

11:32:10 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES expressed her belief that ASDF is a resource that should be strengthened. With budget challenges approaching, ASDF consists of highly professional volunteers who invest in their equipment and are not compensated for their time, and thus are a wonderful resource. She observed that the force has decreased in size and inquired about future recruiting.

GENERAL HOLL informed the committee that state defense forces were established on the cadre concept and after [the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001], ASDF grew in size. Although the roster was larger at that time, the roster now consists of members who meet military standards and are highly qualified. Currently, he is seeking to expand ASDF by developing new mission skills such as medical, engineering, and communications services which will be more helpful to the state and will attract new members. Rural engagement and the new military police detachment will also contribute to the expansion of ASDF's geographic size and roster.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES asked for specific goals.

GENERAL HOLL said the next five years will see an expansion in Bethel which will require resources to pay for communications equipment, uniforms, and training. He advised that the expansion would start with a small signals detachment of four or five volunteers.

11:40:07 AM

MR. DOEHL stressed how valuable highly trained personnel will be to DMVA and ASDF during a period of rural engagement and expansion.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES asked for comments on ASDF's current budget, and information regarding whether ASDF volunteers are armed. She expressed support for arming the defense force.

GENERAL HOLL responded that this year the budget was increased to \$50,000. Many ASDF expenses are reduced because it has the use of existing National Guard facilities - where utilities are paid - and during disasters other funding is available, thus the additional funding will enable new regions to be developed.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN asked for the total population of ASDF.

GENERAL HOLL said there are 86 officers and enlisted personnel, based on a cadre unit structure.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG asked for more information on the military police detachment.

GENERAL HOLL explained the detachment will be a new detachment, located at the Alcantra National Guard Armory in Wasilla. This is the location of the National Guard's military police battalion, which will be reduced in size to a company, and ASDF will augment the company. Force members that will be part of the military police detachment assigned to the National Guard Military Police Company will be those who meet the Alaska Police Standards Council requirements, one of which is to attend an academy. He recalled that after [the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001], all ASDF members were armed as constables - at a lesser standard - and under military command, which posed a liability. In further response to Representative Gruenberg, he said there will be four to five members in the detachment.

[11:47:18 AM](#)

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN JAMES, Director of Training and Operations, Alaska State Defense Force, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, in response to Representative Gruenberg, said he was developing a plan to establish the new detachment with three personnel to provide leadership, and in the near future adding about nine for a squad. In further response to Representative Gruenberg, he pointed out that ASDF is not part of the federal force and there are differences in employment status; however, if existing National Guard members of the military police battalion left the National Guard, they would be an excellent resource for the new detachment if they so choose.

MR. DOEHL offered that the National Guard military police personnel will have other positions available. In further response to Representative Gruenberg, he opined that there are appropriate provisions for them to explore.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES questioned whether the military police would be the only ASDF members who are armed.

GENERAL HOLL said only the military police will be armed now. He explained that ASDF reviews the needs of the state and changes in response to situations, such as the threat of an

imminent invasion. At this time, ASDF is responding to natural disasters.

REPRESENTATIVE HUGHES understood that training occurs with weapons thus members are ready if there is a need. She said Alaska should consider arming its defense force at all times as other states have.

11:50:53 AM

JAMES JONES, Deputy Director, Alaska Military Youth Academy, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, informed the committee the Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA) Challenge Program was established after a Rockefeller Foundation study in 1989 revealed that the drop-out population was a domestic threat to the U.S. In fact, as of 2013, approximately one million young men and women do not complete high school, which is 20 percent of those who begin high school. In response to the study, AMYA began operations 1/30/94 for the purpose of helping Alaska address its drop-out population. Mr. Jones said AMYA's mission statement is: The primary purpose of the Alaska Military Youth Academy is to help intervene in the lives of at-risk youth and provide graduates with values, skills, education, and self-discipline to succeed as adults. The academy deals with a population of approximately 4,000 drop-outs in Alaska. The program's vision is to be recognized as the premier educational institution within the state to attract, retain, and serve youth who are at-risk at not receiving a secondary education. Mr. Jones said it is known that if a young person does not complete his/her education, he/she becomes a "drain on society." Based on his experience with AMYA in the past 19 years, he relayed that new students are immediately exposed to a military style engagement in order to motivate them and expose them to a new environment. The environment at AMYA is quasi-military; it is not a boot camp, a juvenile justice facility, or a treatment facility, but the environment is designed to use the best practices of the military to help students engage in their future accomplishments without distractions. There is daily physical activity and education. The program runs for seventeen and one-half months, of which five months are in residence 24/7. On campus, there are medical services, educators, a certified graduate equivalency degree (GED) test center, and a Work-Keys Assessments testing site. All students may take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery in order to assess possible military service. Presently, there are 153 students on campus, and the classes that graduated in February and August performed over 21,000 hours of community service. The educational

component provides students the opportunity to obtain credit recovery or get a GED, although since 2014, a GED is harder to obtain. The academy ranks fifth of thirty-five challenge programs in the nation, and it is open to youth between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, who are without significant criminal history and are drug and alcohol free. Mr. Jones provided information about three successful graduates, noting that there have been 4,665 graduates over the life of the program.

[12:00:34 PM](#)

MR. DOEHL spoke in support of the academy.

CHAIR HERRON expressed his appreciation to the presenters.

[12:01:34 PM](#)

CHAIR HERRON [opened public testimony].

[12:02:30 PM](#)

ROBERT MCGILL recalled that four National Guardsmen were killed in Tennessee and since then Tennessee has armed its guardsmen. He informed the committee that the Alaska National Guard can be armed without new legislation, and he strongly supported arming guardsmen recruiters for their defense.

[12:04:26 PM](#)

CHAIR HERRON, after ascertaining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[12:04:41 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 12:04 p.m.