

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

March 9, 2017

1:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Chris Tuck, Chair
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Vice Chair
Representative Justin Parish
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative George Rauscher
Representative Dan Saddler

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Lora Reinbold

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: AK VETERANS ADVISORY COUNCIL

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 150

"An Act relating to pay, allowances, and benefits for members of the organized militia."

- MOVED HB 150 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 150

SHORT TITLE: PAY, ALLOWANCES, BENEFITS FOR MILITIA MEM

SPONSOR(S): MILITARY & VETERANS' AFFAIRS

03/01/17	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/01/17	(H)	MLV, FIN
03/07/17	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/07/17	(H)	Heard & Held
03/07/17	(H)	MINUTE(MLV)
03/09/17	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

PAMELA BEALE, Chair
Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC)

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave an overview of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council.

PHILLIP HOKENSON, Member
Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke about veteran healthcare during the overview of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council.

SUELLYN WRIGHT NOVAK, Vice Chair
Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC)
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave an update of the Alaska Veterans Museum during the overview of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council.

VERDIE BOWEN, Director of Veterans Affairs
Office of Veteran Affairs
Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During the overview of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC), offered remarks about the operations of the council.

JAMES HASTINGS, Member
Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC)
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During the overview of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council, remarked on training and employment of veterans.

RONALD SIEBELS, Member
Alaska Veterans' Advisory Council (AVAC)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Talked about the Alaska Pioneer Homes during the overview during the overview of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council.

BRIAN DUFFY, Director
Administrative Services Division
Department of Military & Veterans Affairs (DMVA)
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 150.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:02:09 PM](#)

CHAIR CHRIS TUCK called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives LeDoux, Parish, and Tuck were present at the call to order. Representatives Spohnholz, Rauscher, and Saddler arrived as the meeting was in progress.

Presentation: AK Veterans Advisory Council

[1:02:52 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the first order of business would be a presentation by the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council.

[1:03:19 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK invited council members present to introduce themselves. They were: Robert "Ski" Marcinkowski (Fairbanks), William Sorrells (Eagle River), Phillip Hokenson (Fairbanks), Ronald Siebels (Anchorage), James Hastings (Wasilla), Steven Williams (Juneau), Ronald Huffman (Nome), Irene Washington (Bethel), Terrance Pardee (Haines), Gerald "Butch" Diotte (Wasilla), Suellyn Wright Novak, Vice Chair (Eagle River), and Pamela Beale Chair (Anchorage).

[1:04:16 PM](#)

PAMELA BEALE, Chair, Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC), gave an overview of the council. She paraphrased from a document [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The council consists of 13 members appointed by the governor. One or more persons appointed to the council will be from a veterans organization, one or more persons from a state agency that manages programs affecting veterans, and one or more persons from the general public who are familiar with veterans issues.

The council advises the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and, through the governor, other departments and agencies of the state on matters concerning state veterans, their dependents, and their survivors.

The council makes recommendations to the governor and the Department concerning the needs of and benefits for the state's veterans, for developing public and private partnerships to meet those needs, for providing information regarding veterans' benefits and services, for improving recognition of state veterans, and on other matters; and hold meetings and establish committees and internal procedures as necessary and appropriate to carry out its duties.

MS. BEALE listed some of AVAC's highlights since 2006: there is now a flag signifying veteran status on the Alaska driver's license and ID card; there are Purple Heart, gold star, and disabled veteran license plates; [there is availability of] education benefits for spouses and dependents of those who died on active duty; AVAC now has a designated seat on the Alaska Workforce Investment board (AWIB); and AVAC established a pioneer home which currently houses 117 veterans. She noted that AVAC has participated in several successful veteran summits across the state. She added that AVAC now has a section on a webpage for to allow the public to ask questions to the committee through the Office of Veteran Affairs.

MS. BEALE explained that the committee plans to continue to monitor the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare agreement. She remarked, "We also know that as of August 7, [2017], we will not have the Choice Program as it's been, so ... [there] will be some changes going on." She indicated that the council plans to consider VA benefits and any changes or additions to state benefits.

[1:07:50 PM](#)

PHILLIP HOKENSON, Member, Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC), gave an overview of veteran healthcare. He indicated that he also works for the VA and has worked in the healthcare arena with the Choice Program and with sharing agreements with the tribal healthcare organizations throughout the state. He stated that he does not know the status of the Choice Program after August 7, 2017. He offered his understanding that when the law came into effect, it fenced in the money for the VA and forced the VA in Alaska to use the Choice Program to purchase healthcare. He noted that there was trouble implementing the program initially, but now the [VA] has acclimated to it. He explained that the program is the primary method of purchasing care from private healthcare providers throughout the state.

MR. HOKENSON noted that he is not sure what veteran healthcare will look like after the funding runs out on August 7. He offered that hometown integrated healthcare services - the folks who know the veterans in Alaska and know the providers - will still be directly interfacing with veterans and providers and will be pushing out authorizations to community providers. He offered his belief that contractors will be doing the back-end work of paying the bills and completing the claim process. He stated that although he is unsure of all the details, he is confident the transition will be relatively painless.

1:10:15 PM

CHAIR TUCK asked how healthcare was funded before the Choice Program was instituted.

MR. HOKENSON explained that the Choice Program is based on the Alaska model [of funding]. Veteran healthcare in Alaska has a small, primary care-focused footprint, with one major clinic: a joint-venture hospital with the air force clinic at JBER and other outpatient clinics in Fairbanks, Kenai, and Juneau. He indicated that prior to the Choice Program, Alaska received station funding, and there weren't "different lines." The Choice Program came with certain stipulations for using the funding. One stipulation was that the VA would be a secondary payer when care was purchased in a community. He remarked, "There was money that was basically fenced into that pot." He relayed that there is still station funding; nothing has changed regarding the purchase of urgent emergency care in Alaska, but there is a different mechanism of funding.

1:12:16 PM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if there is a call center for "Vet's Choice" in Alaska.

MR. HOKENSON responded that the phone lines were recently transitioned. He described that a call center had been brought back into Alaska following a debacle with a contractor: TriWest [Healthcare Alliance] did not understand the specifics of healthcare within Alaska. He noted that the call center still exists for purchasing care, and there is now a call tree. The call tree goes through a regional call center to "free the hands of front-line employees" who take as many as 60 phone calls a day so that they can coordinate care.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarification on the call tree.

MR. HOKENSON explained that when someone calls the VA in Alaska, he/she is most likely referred to a call center, which Mr. Hokenson said he believes is in Walla Walla, [Washington]. Then, a phone operator directs the call to the appropriate person, such as a nurse or provider. This process is more efficient. He acknowledged that with implementing such changes, there will be "some hiccups." He offered his understanding that the VA has tried to reconcile any issues and fix problems.

1:14:51 PM

MS. BEALE stated that the council is working on five resolutions. She indicated that the council will need help implementing the resolutions.

1:15:32 PM

SUELLYN WRIGHT NOVAK, Vice Chair, Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC), gave an update of the Alaska Veterans Museum. She said that she is the Executive Director for the Alaska Veterans Museum. She stated that the effort for a museum started 16 years ago, and the museum will have been open for 6 years on April 17. She remarked, "It took 10 years to do a lot of branding and [for] people to realize who and what we were and what we were trying to do." The museum opened on Palm Sunday, April 17, 2011. Since then, the museum has won many awards, including: a Seymour Award from Visit Anchorage, for the best community organization, and the Dena'ina Service Award from the Downtown Partnership, for the best community team in Anchorage. She stated that the museum raised \$47,000 on the "Iron Dog" raffle, which was the most successful non-profit partner that the Iron Dog had ever had. She recounted:

If we sold 700 tickets, we were supposed to get about \$50,000. Well, we sold 800 tickets, but thanks to somebody in Fairbanks stealing the second prize, we kind of lost a little money. So, it is what it is.

MS. WRIGHT NOVAK explained that the museum has been active with various support groups and service organizations. The museum is working with the History Channel and PBS documentaries on a six-part mini-series on the Aleutian campaign and the Alaska scouts, and now the Discovery Channel is considering starting a similar project. She stated that the funds for the 75th anniversary of bombing at Dutch Harbor are being handled through [the museum's] 501(c)(3) status. The event will take place in Dutch Harbor, on

June 2-4, 2017, and the Discovery Channel and a Japanese film crew are anticipated to present. She summarized that the museum has been extremely active. She urged the committee to become members and said, "It's the best \$30 you'll ever spend. And when you're in Anchorage, it's the best \$3 you'll ever spend, but that's why, you see, you need to be a member - then you don't have to pay." She informed the committee that the museum is in the Blue Marketplace Mall, on the corner of 4th Avenue and D Street in Anchorage.

1:18:31 PM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked how a visit to the Alaska Veterans Museum fits into the typical itinerary of a traveler from the Outside, who is visiting Southcentral Alaska.

MS. NOVAK responded that the museum has done a good job in advertising and marketing "virtually everywhere." She stated that the museum is a "desired destination for American Legion Members," which gives the members benefits and gives the museum visibility. She noted that in the summertime, the museum sees up to 35 guests a day, but only sees 0 to 2 visitors per day in the winter. However, the museum had 65 visitors on Iditarod Saturday and received 71 extra donations, as she remarked, "because we put a ladder out front so people could crawl up on top to take pictures of the dogs."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for an explanation of how the support of veterans and volunteers contributes to the mission of the museum.

MS. NOVAK explained that it is an all-volunteer organization. She noted that veterans support the museum the most. She conveyed that the veteran service organizations ensure the museum has funding. She said the museum does [apply for] grants, but grants possible for a non-profit like the museum do not cover operating funds; funding from such grants covers only things like bringing up a traveling exhibit or building new exhibits. She stated that the museum has received funding from both the Atwood and Rasmussen foundations. She remarked, "For the most part, it is our veterans that support us, so that's why we are actively seeking your membership." She cited that alaskaveterans.org is where one could apply on line.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER identified that he is already a member. He asked what the physical plan is for the museum's exhibition material and space.

MS. NOVAK answered that the museum has a very full, 1,433 square foot, L-shaped room. She said, "If I were queen, I would take over the entire mall down there, or at least that back end." She explained that there might be a better plan: the museum is investigating co-locating with the Alaska Aviation Museum to share resources and expertise for museum studies and conservation. She said the museum is actively pursuing co-location and is developing the proposal. The draft proposal will be available by April and signed by June. She aired her hope to move to the Alaska Aviation Museum by the middle of October.

[1:22:40 PM](#)

VERDIE BOWEN, Director of Veterans Affairs, Office of Veteran Affairs, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), stated that he provides administrative and financial support to the [council]. He explained that he meets annually with the council to review current state laws that provide benefits for veterans and to review items of interest pointed out by veterans, such as the driver's license identification passed by Representative Saddler, which had been reviewed and supported by the council. He noted that the board has supported different issues with the Hmong [veterans]. He stated that the council is good at researching and reviewing items of interest for veterans, because council members are from communities all over Alaska, which brings a veteran, area-specific expertise to the council and to Alaska. He continued:

Sometimes it's hard ... to visualize what goes on along the [Yukon-Kuskokwim] (YK) Delta unless you've been out there. ... But if you ask Irene Washington, she can tell you instantaneously some of the issues that she faces within the Bethel region. You can do the same thing with Ron Huffman, in Nome, which has a whole different flavor of events. And then as you go into Haines, you have other issues that the veterans will be experiencing there, as well.

[1:24:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX thanked Mr. Bowen for mentioning the Hmong community. She asked what efforts are being made by AVAC or Congress to make sure the Hmong [veterans] are getting the benefits they were promised when they were fighting in the war

in Laos and Vietnam. She noted that the Hmong veterans haven't been formerly acknowledged as veterans.

MR. BOWEN stated that the Hmong license plate was supported by AVAC. He noted that last year, the council supported extending the veteran status to the Hmong onto the driver's license in recognition of the Hmong [veterans' service]. He stated that in 2012 and 2013, in Washington, D.C., his office worked to help the Hmong [veterans] receive the rights of access to burial in federal cemeteries. He noted that the bill has never made it out of committees, but Senator Murkowski has brought the bill forward several times. He said that those type of items are brought back before the council each year. He offered that some members of the council attend the Hmong memorial services held in May each year.

[1:26:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER listed many wars and conflicts that have occurred since the Vietnam War. He asked if the Office of Veteran Affairs can address the needs of veterans from more recent conflicts. He asked if there is anything helping or hindering the office from doing so.

MR. BOWEN explained that currently people serving in Iraq are between the ages of 18 and 60, because the National Guard is a frontline force; therefore, the office can't specify an age of veteran. He stated that the biggest issue the office faces with assisting returning veterans is that once a service member is out of service, it is very hard to get back into the VA. He said it is somewhat cyclic: After the Vietnam War, veterans either did not seek care or were treated poorly when they did seek care. Today, veterans are not treated poorly; they're treated very well. He indicated the DMVA tries to reach out to veterans with community events, but they often don't enroll. He stated that each veteran has his/her own personal reason for not enrolling.

MR. BOWEN recounted that he worked to get an individual into the VA system for three years. This individual paid for a surgery on his leg, which was injured in Iraq. After the individual got into the program and received his disability, he remarked, "Gosh, I wish I would have done that five years ago." Mr. Bowen described that comments made today mirror those made after the Vietnam War: veterans from current conflicts say all the people in the VA are from the Vietnam war; Vietnam veterans used to say all the people in the VA were World War II veterans. He stated

that those comments are not true - the ages of people in the VA vary from young to old, just like in the military.

[1:29:41 PM](#)

MS. BEALE asked if AVAC members could ask questions.

CHAIR TUCK said, "Sure."

[1:30:09 PM](#)

JAMES HASTINGS, Member, Alaska Veterans Advisory Council, identified that he has been part of the council since 2011 and has seen a lot of good things happen. He said that things change over time. He expressed that there has been some good legislation, and more is forthcoming. The council has been able to interface with the community and bring constituents' issues to the legislature. He stated that the council has kept its focus on the big picture, instead of being bogged down with individual concerns which can be dealt with through other systems. He explained that the council looks at the economic stimulus of the Alaska veteran and the transitioning military. He remarked:

We're still at a point where we import labor when we have a work-ready labor force prepared to step out of the uniform and go to work the next day. We work closely with the Department of Labor [& Workforce Development] at the state and the federal ... level. We've been able to ... utilize a lot of the step grants outside of just simply the union training.

MR. HASTINGS said the council has been fortunate in getting more generous acceptance of military training for credit with the [University of Alaska Anchorage] (UAA). He stated, "We have a workforce." He noted that 268 veterans per month transition out of some military component. The transition program at the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) meets weekly. About 30 percent of attendees say that they "want" to stay in Alaska, but only half of those "are going to" [stay]. He reported that when the attendees are asked whether they would stay if they had job training and could afford a home off-base, 70-80 percent say they would stay. He emphasized the importance of state training and employment program grants.

MR. HASTINGS reported that the Division of Employment Training Services is working with the council on federal grants that help

identify needs of members of the military and match them with employers. The employers make "pre-offers" in a process which is similar to enlisting in the military and is familiar to the veterans. He stated that this gives veterans the ability to forecast and make plans. He expressed that having a seamless transition is the goal; currently there is a break after veterans get out of the military. They must decide where they want to go to work and they must find home financing. Having a job lined up ahead of time, gives the military the ability to assuage unemployment, which is important to DoD.

[1:34:38 PM](#)

MR. HASTINGS acknowledged that homeless veterans need to be taken care of, but not without first making the effort to prevent veterans from getting to that point. He remarked:

Let's catch them in the uniform and say, "Hey, do you want to be an Alaskan for the rest of your life? Cause if you do, we've got a plan for you." And that's what the state's doing right now through our own funding and our federal funding.

MR. HASTINGS encouraged the committee to support any funding that deals with transitional employment, training, certification, and entrepreneurial [education]. He described that funding that helps make that American citizen an Alaska resident will lead to a greater Alaskan workforce. He stated that exporting Alaska's income has been reversed in some instances. He explained that there are now truck drivers who drive for three weeks at a time in the Lower 48 but live in Alaska. He reminded the committee that veterans and the military are an economic impulse for the state.

[1:35:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if "bumping up" military resumes has helped employees.

MR. HASTINGS said it has helped. He stated that the onus has been on the veteran to "speak civilian," but some companies have reversed that and have human resources staff who can "speak military." He noted that employers can overlook qualified personnel by not understanding military keywords in a resume. He expressed that veterans are also getting better at writing civilian resumes. He remarked:

We had 37 people on the Point Thomson build that were hand selected, still in uniform, that went through selected [a] training program, and went to work building Point Thomson, and we're starting again with ConocoPhillips [Alaska, Inc.] on the next ramp up.

MR. HASTINGS added that he has told ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc. that the military can find and train as many people as needed for the jobs.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER applauded Chair Tuck for the passage of a bill for veteran preference for private employers. He asked what things the committee could do to further help with job and skill training for veterans.

MR. HASTINGS responded that the council will be encouraging UAA with educational funding and the Technical Vocational Education Program (TVEP). He spoke of leveraging funds by encouraging a genuine acceptance of military training for credit. He asserted that there must be an individual breakdown on capabilities and potential.

[1:38:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH thanked the council for its work. He expressed that yesterday he introduced a bill which would direct the state to learn to "speak a little bit of military" by considering military experience in hiring and possibly allowing military experience to substitute for a four-year degree. He requested the council to work with him, review the bill, and offer feedback.

MR. HASTINGS responded that the council would love to help craft the bill language. He expressed that council members offer an advantage because of their years of military experience at every level. He remarked, "We want to be a part of this program. We want to be able to ... look at it line for line." He requested that the council be engaged in projects and ideas through working with the Office of Veteran Affairs. He said he has seen individuals who can build an entire city from the desert up, but can't get a job at Lowes' for various reasons. He characterized the bill [mentioned by Representative Parish] as good legislation. He stated that he understands the fiscal issue and the council is not looking for money, but he asked the committee to consider economic drivers such as property tax breaks. He explained that some resist such a tax break saying it would "break the borough." He noted that the sum of such a tax break

is not even \$10 million. He said that the return on investment for that \$10 million tax break results in veterans purchasing homes and raising families in Alaska, which easily replaces the funding.

[1:41:11 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK informed the committee and council that Representative Parish's bill would be heard in a week.

[1:41:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ mentioned the need for universities to be more welcoming institutions. She recalled that UAA was recognized as a veteran-friendly institution. She asked if Mr. Hastings still finds that to be true and asked if there are any barriers that need to be addressed.

MR. HASTINGS stated that he doesn't hear complaints of universities not working well with individuals, and he thinks it's a good relationship. He offered his understanding that the more generous a university is with its accreditation, the fewer dollars come through. He asked Mr. Bowen how many complaints he sees.

[1:42:17 PM](#)

MR. BOWEN said that the complaints received by his office are generally from transitioning credits between schools, such as from UAA to UAF. He explained that one university won't accept coursework from another, when the courses have the same book and syllabus.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ noted that this is a problem with having three separate accreditations. She explained that often the courses aren't identical; they are "just different enough." She stated that she is familiar with the kinds of complaints regarding transferring. She asked if there are any concerns about the admissions processes, support for veterans once they've been admitted, or providing appropriate services to current military students.

[1:43:45 PM](#)

MR. BOWEN responded the biggest issues are about counselors, returns of phone calls, or financial departments, and the complaints are not about the classroom side. He stated that

problems generally arise when processing government issue (GI) bill payments and getting the proper documents from the university back to the VA. He said that the Office of Veteran Affairs has expanded Mercedes Angerman's job title [of program coordinator] to add the state approving agency so that she can help with the education process in the state to reduce some of the issues between the university and the VA.

[1:44:46 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK added that he serves on the trustee board for the Alaska Electrical Apprenticeship School and is proud of the "Helmets to Hardhats" program. He noted that even though the program has been cut back, the program's standards still accept military students. He said the program does recognize their [DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty] (DD214). He said although some [credits] are difficult to apply to state licenses, the program applies a lot of the credit to continuing their education to get a license. He stated that the pillars of the program's motto are attitude, skills, and knowledge. He described that the military personnel - both in the Helmets to Hardhats program and outside of the program - have the pillars well established. He expressed that within the apprenticeship programs, military personnel tend to be the leaders, foremen, and project managers immediately after completing the program. He summarized that it's important to have veterans' hiring preference and programs like these for valuing military personnel's skills, teamwork, and ability to adapt and make decisions.

[1:46:30 PM](#)

RONALD SIEBELS, Member, Alaska Veterans' Advisory Council (AVAC), noted that he has previously worked with many of the committee members. He congratulated the committee for their support of veterans. He said that other states' veterans do not get support from their legislatures. He remarked, "In Alaska, we do have ears that listen."

MR. SIEBELS explained that he also serves on the Alaska Pioneer Home Advisory Board. He requested the committee spend time in the Alaska Pioneer Homes, which house veterans. He said that the veterans in the Alaska Pioneer Homes don't say a lot, they don't complain a lot or make phone calls, but they care. He asked the committee to talk to the residents and veterans in Alaska Pioneer Homes. He expressed that the Alaska Pioneer Homes are important for the state of Alaska; they are a much-

needed asset. He expressed his wish for more homes and more money to fund staff. He said Alaska Pioneer Homes give Alaska a good name. He urged the committee to do anything it can to help the Alaska Pioneer Homes.

[1:48:37 PM](#)

MS. BEALE stated all the council members have a passion for military. She thanked the committee for its time.

[1:49:12 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK thanked AVAC for its service, dedication, and volunteerism.

[1:49:23 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked what the committee could do for AVAC that would be the most beneficial.

[1:49:33 PM](#)

MS. BEALE answered that committee members consideration of AVAC's resolutions would be the most beneficial. She stated that having support to take a bill or resolution forward would help veterans. She remarked, "It may not be ... something of dollar value, but it's a value to each of us as a veteran, and each of the military members."

[1:50:43 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:51 p.m. to 1:59 p.m.

HB 150-PAY, ALLOWANCES, BENEFITS FOR MILITIA MEM

[1:58:49 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 150, "An Act relating to pay, allowances, and benefits for members of the organized militia."

CHAIR TUCK stated that HB 150 would authorize the same pay allowance and benefits for the organized militia, whether they are called into state active duty by the governor or adjutant general, or called to serve under federal active duty by the president.

[1:59:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER stated that he protests the bill being introduced as a committee bill. He said he thinks it is a good bill, he appreciates the indeterminate fiscal note, but he has some questions about the costs.

CHAIR TUCK reviewed the costs of HB 150. He explained that without knowing what natural disasters may happen in the future, determining set costs is difficult. He stated that the department detailed the costs of the 2015 "Sockeye Fire" under the current system, which required classification of all activities performed by any member of the organized militia under a call by the governor. The classification and payment are based on what other employees across the state get paid. He explained that an individual may be on as many as eight different pay scales in one day under the current system. He expressed that HB 150 would simplify the payments for the department. He detailed that under the current system, the cost of [the Sockeye Fire] was \$30,681.93, while under the new system, [the cost of the Sockeye Fire would have been] \$31,046.33.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarification on whether the pay listed on the "Sockeye Fire Spreadsheet" [included in the committee packet] is per hour or per day.

CHAIR TUCK answered that it is per day.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted that according to the spreadsheet, a corporal with 11 or more years of service would make \$17 more per day under the current system.

[2:02:08 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ explained that the difference in total salary paid under the current system and the proposed system in HB 150 for the 2015 Sockeye Fire is a net increase of \$364.40. She noted that the calculation does not account for the administrative cost-savings of the service members and department staff calculating multiple changes in work duty. She offered her intuition that the costs would result in a "net zero" after accounting for "the administrative simplicity that would be implemented."

[2:03:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER mentioned to "always label your numbers." He asked what the column header in the spreadsheet, labeled "What if 4+ years" means.

CHAIR TUCK offered his understanding that "years" refers to the years of experience per individual. He asked Mr. Brian Duffy if that is correct.

[2:03:56 PM](#)

BRIAN DUFFY, Director, Administrative Services Division, Department of Military & Veterans Affairs (DMVA), confirmed Chair Tuck was correct.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER again asked if the aforementioned column header assumes four years of service "in that rank."

MR. DUFFY answered that is correct. He stated that a captain at grade O-3 in military vernacular, who had over 11 years of service, would receive the rate listed in the top column based on rank and experience.

[2:04:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH expressed that HB 150 is a good bill that lifts an administrative burden from the state and individual service members, who have "better things to be doing than checking their watches before and after fighting a fire to estimate the amount of time that they're spending on a given task." He stated that he supports the bill. He thanked the chair for being gracious and "sharing the credit" by making the bill a committee bill.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER commented that HB 150 is indexed to the federal pay levels: If there is an increase in salary for a certain range across all the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), then the pay would also be increased in the state salaries.

[2:05:48 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK responded that is correct. He offered his experience that as a foreman, keeping time for all the different duties on a construction jobsite required a lot of time to document paperwork and took away from his time supervising the work. He speculated that the department would be more efficient without the detailed time cards and variable pay scales.

2:06:40 PM

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX moved to report HB 150 out of House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 150 was moved from committee.

2:07:27 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 2:07 p.m.