

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

April 13, 2021

1:03 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Chris Tuck, Chair  
Representative Andi Story  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Representative Matt Claman  
Representative George Rauscher  
Representative Laddie Shaw  
Representative David Nelson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 144

"An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 144

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) HOPKINS

03/20/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/20/21	(H)	MLV, FIN
04/13/21	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE GRIER HOPKINS

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 144.

NOLAN KLOUDA, Director

Center for Economic Development

University of Alaska  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information and answered questions on HB 144.

BRYCE WARD, Mayor  
Fairbanks North Star Borough  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided information and answered questions on HB 144.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:03:48 PM](#)

**CHAIR CHRIS TUCK** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Representatives Shaw, Rauscher, Claman, Nelson, and Tuck were present at the call to order. Representatives Tarr and Story arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### **HB 144-ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION**

[1:04:43 PM](#)

**CHAIR TUCK** announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 144 "An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

[1:04:56 PM](#)

**REPRESENTATIVE GRIER HOPKINS**, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 144, which creates the Alaska Military Affairs Commission (AMAC). He offered a history on the conception of this bill, saying that the inspiration came about in the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) in 2010. The mayor created the "Tiger Team," a varied group of civilian stakeholders, in order to prepare the city for the arrival of an F-35 squadron, he said. He explained that the city wanted to know how to put its best foot forward and how to advocate for the community to make sure that the Department of Defense (DoD) knew that Fairbanks was the right place to house the squadron. He informed the committee members that trying to get the F-35 squadron into Fairbanks was the largest economic development effort the city had seen in years. He shared that as the Tiger Team has continued to be in existence, Fairbanks has continued

to reap benefits, for both the military community and for the economy, bringing many more military projects to [FNSB].

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS stated that the goal of HB 144 is to create a Tiger Team at a state-wide level. He said that that effort would allow the state to have a long-term plan for what the state is going to do when it comes to military development in the Arctic and across the state, and he advised the effort should span administrations and include different levels of government. He noted that the Army and the Air Force recently released their first set of Arctic strategies. He opined that this is important timing for the state because as the polar ice opens and Russia's and China's aggressions continue, Alaska's role will only increase on the national front, due to the state's strategic location. He argued that the state has to be ready for these developments, so the DoD decides it is best housed in Alaska, rather than other states. He said Alaska needs to advocate for itself and offer what communities can put forward at a local level, [such as] chambers of commerce, hospitals, and public safety for new deployments.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS stated that HB 144 would bring impacted and proactive parts of Alaska together to create a commission for long-term planning, so community and business voices could be heard. He argued that Alaska's economic future can only be strengthened by these developments coming to Alaska, as the state continues to play its role in national security in the Pacific area. With the new Arctic strategies, he reiterated that the bill is perfectly timed. He then offered a timeline for the bill's presentation and testimony in the committee.

[1:10:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS led the committee members through the bill packet, beginning with the sponsor statement. He informed the committee that many states across the country have established military affairs commissions. He said he believed 23 states had them, many of which had been created in the last five years. He shared that there is opportunity for [military] growth in Alaska. He pointed out a number of economic impact points in the second paragraph of his sponsor statement. He stated that HB 144 creates the commission and also gives it a number of new powers, such as how [Alaska] prepares for new bases and infrastructure needs. The commission would also recommend methods to improve private and public employment opportunities, he stated. He explained that Alaska is renowned for its support of the military - welcoming them, being ready

for them, and having services that bring military service and their family members into the community, as opposed to just on the base, which is outside of the community. He stated that the commission would work to advocate for the state in matters relating to military expansion and decision making, by emphasizing the state's strategic location, infrastructure, and community support.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS walked the committee members through the bill. He explained that Section 1 would establish the Alaska Military Affairs Commission in the Office of the Governor and then gave committee members an overview of the commission's membership structure. He said the lieutenant governor would chair the commission, the adjutant general of the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMVA) or the adjutant general's designee and the commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED) or the commissioner's designee would also have seats. Additionally, he said three members would be mayors, or their designees, who would be nominated by municipal organizations and appointed by the governor.

[1:14:34 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[1:15:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS continued, sharing that there would be six non-voting members that would include the congressional delegation, to ensure coordination with the federal level [of government]. He highlighted the seventh duty of the commission in the bill, to "prepare and maintain a strategic plan." He explained that that would be a living document which would be housed within the governor's office and would continue to develop through different administrations.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS moved on to Section 2 of the bill, explaining that the commission would be housed within the boards and commissions, with a sunset date of June 30, 2029. He presented the fiscal note, which came from the governor's office. He said the fiscal note includes costs of travel and added that two of the four meetings would be in person. The other fiscal note would be a full-time special assistant to the commission, which was proposed by the governor's office. Representative Hopkins said he hoped [the position] would be

paired down in committee so not as to increase the [state] budget.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS discussed the economic impact of military spending in Alaska, directing attention to a research summary entitled "AK Defense Spending." He mentioned defense contracts for construction, administrative services for running the bases, and the personnel and number of jobs. He pointed out two charts on the next page, showing the monetary impacts on different regions of the state, and said nearly every region is impacted by military spending.

[1:18:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS presented a comparison on different military affairs commissions. He used this to show the potential improvements from the existing structures in Alaska. He stated that the first column has what is proposed in HB 144, and the next column is the Alaska Civilian Armed Services Team (ACAST) from Administrative Order No. 291 from 2017. He argued that ACAST doesn't have quite the community and economic development outlook that the AMAC would be providing. The last column is the Joint Armed Services Committee, which would not be impacted by this legislation. He acknowledged that a number of other legislators have put a lot of work into JASC and clarified that he does not want to remove it from statute. He said it has its own mission, which is outside of what AMAC would be looking at.

[1:19:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SHAW pointed to the existence of [the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (AVAC)] and asked why the duties in question could not be addressed by AVAC.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked if [Representative Shaw's question pertained to] AMAC or ACAST, because ACAST is housed within DMVA.

REPRESENTATIVE SHAW clarified that he was saying there is already a council that exists with 12 members that deals with military and veterans affairs under DMVA. He was looking at the reasoning why Alaska needed a new commission and could not blend the structure of HB 144 with the existing commission that already [deals with] military affairs around the state.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS answered that the point of HB 144 is to give municipalities and business communities a strong voice as stakeholders in the economic development and to make sure [the council] is proactively advocating for Alaska and bringing in expanded missions and the infrastructure that is needed. He shared that [AMAC would be] looking at it from a drastically different perspective from that which ACAST and the Joint Armed Services Committee have put forward.

[1:20:53 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked if this had been run past the governor, if it was at the request of the governor, and whether the governor supported [HB 144].

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS answered that the bill draft was run past the Office of the Governor to make sure that his office had some input. He shared that the first draft of the bill had a 22-member committee, and his office worked with the Office of the Governor to pair it down to the people who are currently listed in the commission. He remarked that while he can't speak for the Office of the Governor, the current draft [of the bill] is what resulted from working with that office.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked if the DMVA had been contacted, and whether HB 144 had been run by them for approval.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS replied that his office worked with the Office of the Governor for the draft of the bill, and the current draft of the bill clarifies membership and direction of the commission. He said, "We have not received any opposition from them at all."

[1:22:47 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK pointed out that the fiscal note is from the Office of the Governor, with allocation to the Office of the Lieutenant Governor; therefore, he offered his understanding that "the staff and travel" would be from the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, not from DMVA.

[1:22:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON observed that ACAST and AMAC had similar powers and duties. He asked if it would be easier to amend ACAST rather than create a new commission, or if Representative Hopkins did not see ACAST working in this scope.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS acknowledged that there were some crossovers but argued that one of the important ways other states had used this [type of committee was the] long term planning structure. He further stated that ACAST was just an administrative order; however, he acknowledged that since it was created four years ago, it has a decent history. He said one of the main points of AMAC would be long-term planning over multiple administrations and making sure that the communities and municipalities have a stronger voice. [It is important that] the legislature has the ability to establish this commission, not through an administrative order that the legislature doesn't have the ability to amend, he stated.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS continued his response directing attention to the strategic plan mentioned under number seven in the "Powers and Duties" section [on page three of the Comparisons of Provisions chart] of the AMAC [column], arguing that it would be a living document rather than an annual report to the legislature. He said the document could be amended at various times. He said the way that AMAC would provide recommendations for action would go far beyond what ACAST does. This would give recommendations to the congressional delegation, the governor, the legislature, and to communities, he explained, a power that ACAST currently does not have.

[1:24:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON followed up asking if Representative Hopkins did not see ACAST and the Joint Armed Services Committee accomplishing the goals that he assigned to AMAC.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS told Representative Nelson his understanding was correct. He said he believed that Alaska needs a long-term, multi-level economic look at the impacts of new bases and structures and the Army's and the Air Force's strategic decisions. He stated that the Joint Armed Services Committee is based on ensuring that [the legislature] doesn't run into issues with base realignment and closures (BRACs) and is less community driven and more legislative driven, as 10 members are from the legislature themselves.

[1:26:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR offered her experience as the Joint Armed Services Committee co-chair, sharing that she was engaged in early conversations with Mr. Klouda and Senator Revak about the

idea [in HB 144] that the military is a sector of the [Alaska] economy. She suggested that when thinking about mining and oil and gas, military should be considered in terms of the economic impact, because it is not just the federal dollars that come in; there is also a compounding effect in the [Alaska] economy. In terms of the conversation about what differentiates it from other existing organizations, that was her big takeaway. She stated that bringing the business sector into [AMAC] seemed to be the real advantage of this kind of framework.

[1:27:14 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK noted that a lot has been done in the legislature to accommodate the military over the years. He recalled an economic development partnership in the Fairbanks area, as well as [construction of] malls to support the areas around the base[s]. He also believed the legislature accomplished some work regarding gun ranges over massive acreages of land [for military benefit]. He recalled Representative Hopkins' acknowledgement of Alaska as a strategic location and questioned how much competition [the state] had with other bases. He remarked that there has been resounding support for the military, and [HB 114] would be a way of furthering that support.

[1:28:16 PM](#)

NOLAN KLOUDA, Director, Center for Economic Development (CED), University of Alaska, provided information and answered questions on HB 144. He gave a PowerPoint presentation to the committee members, entitled "Economic Impacts of the Military in Alaska" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He explained that he would overview military economic impact and share some of the background and recommendations from a project of CED's that helped produce the current concept and some of the thinking behind HB 144 and AMAC.

MR. KLOUDA moved to slide 2 in his presentation and informed the committee that CED has been working on an effort called the Alaska Defense Industry Resilience Initiative since 2019. He explained that the initiative's major goal was trying to identify many of the challenges that go on with the military in Alaska, especially with regard to vendors and contractors that are in the defense space, but also to understand community sensitivities to changes in defense activity, including those economic impacts. He stated that CED wanted to figure out how to help defense-related vendors and contractors, and also wanted

to do some work to lay the groundwork for a state-wide strategy or approach on the military in Alaska.

1:30:05 PM

MR. KLOUDA presented slide 3 and discussed the impact of statehood on military in Alaska, which he argued was one of the major impacts. He expounded on that, sharing that in the 1950s, the impetus behind statehood was the fact that Alaska was important in the Cold War as a major part of the bulwark against the Soviet Union. At one point in the 1950s almost half of the state's population was tied to the military, between being active-duty service members, civilian DoD employees, contractors, or the dependent family members, he said. Before the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay, he continued, the military played the role in Alaska that oil plays now, as the main backbone and driver of the state economy.

MR. KLOUDA moved along to slide 4. He stated that legacy is still seen today in much of the state's infrastructure and big projects. Many were built with a military need behind them or upgraded or improved with a military justification behind them, he shared. He offered a number of examples, citing the ports of Seward, Valdez, and Whittier, the Alcan Highway, research institutes from the University of Alaska (UA), airports around the state, telecommunications systems, and more. He argued that the economic foundation laid by the military made Alaska the place that it is today, both as a state and as part of the rest of the United States.

1:31:39 PM

MR. KLOUDA presented slides 5 through 8. He fast-forwarded to the present day and stated that the state's leading industries do a good job of telling their stories economically with how many jobs each creates. He stated that these are all major sources of employment in Alaska. He referred to slide 6 and stated that oil and gas supplies over 77,600 jobs, and even more if one considers the impact on state government. He also credited mining, seafood, and tourism as big job creators.

MR. KLOUDA argued that there is often a missing piece that causes individuals to overlook the military, noting that there is not an organized body that is advocating for the military, telling the military's story, and being a source of information for what is going on with it.

MR. KLOUDA moved onto slide 7 and said part of CED's work was to take a look at what CED knew about military spending in Alaska, which is largely contracts and payroll, and run it through an economic model to see how many jobs that creates in Alaska. He then shared the model's results tallying about 58,000 total jobs, as shown on slide 7. Most of the employment numbers CED talks about are civilian jobs, so when taking out the active-duty jobs, Mr. Klouda found there were about 33,000 civilian jobs created by the military. That is 1 in 10 civilian jobs, he observed, leaving out the active-duty service members who are also employed and contributing to the economy, which would make the number 1 in 6 total jobs. He argued that no industry makes this impact other than oil and gas. He noted that fisheries may have more jobs total, but many of those are seasonal and several of them are [filled by] non-resident[s]. He said that [military] jobs pay more [than other sectors] in Alaska.

MR. KLOUDA argued that this is a major job creator for the state. He then referenced the economist Mouhcine Guettabi from the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). He said CED worked with Dr. Guettabi on part of its work, and he used a different method to factor job creation from the military, and that by Dr. Geuttabi's estimates the numbers should be much higher. That means military may be creating upwards of 70,000 jobs in the state.

[1:34:19 PM](#)

MR. KLOUDA turned to slide 9 in the presentation, which showed how the jobs break down. The first column was direct DoD payroll, showing 29,706 jobs. He explained that that is active duty, civilian DoD employees, and United States Coast Guard (USCG) employees, as well as members of the reserves and the National Guard. The next bar on the graph was for contractor employment, which he said represented the first tier of contract spending at a conservative number of over 10,000 [jobs]. The next bar on the graph represented second and third-tier spending, which he explained was when contracted businesses and employees spend money in the economy which creates additional jobs. He said [when added together] this gave the total number of jobs of about 58,000 total.

MR. KLOUDA turned to slides 10 and 11 and said another way to look at this is regionally. He said that in the Interior of Alaska, the job impacts are especially important. About one-third of all civilian jobs are in the Interior, specifically FNSB, Denali Borough, and the Southeast Fairbanks census area

because those areas include the Fort Greely, Clear Air Force Station, Eielson Air Force Base, and Fort Wainwright. The number is even higher when counting active-duty service members. These numbers illustrate that this region of the state's main economic anchor is the military, he stated.

MR. KLOUDA said military jobs are not isolated to the Interior. About 1 in 10 [civilian jobs are military related in] Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna ("Mat-Su") together. He explained that the two functioned as a combined economic unit, and even though the bases are within the municipal boundaries [of Anchorage], many personnel, contractors, and employees are in the Mat-Su Valley. He reiterated that within the region, about 10 percent of civilian jobs, 30,000 total jobs in the Anchorage and Mat-Su area [are military related].

MR. KLOUDA stated that in other parts of the state, because of the size of the population it is a little bit harder to do the modeling for the employment impact. In Southeast Alaska there is a huge presence from the Coast Guard and from other branches of service as well, he shared. In Kodiak, Southwest Alaska, and the Aleutians there are also fairly large impacts from the military. In some of [CED's] work it was found that in the last three years there was only one borough or census area in the state that there was not any military spending that took place there. He concluded that it is something that effects all parts of the state to one degree or another.

[1:37:08 PM](#)

MR. KLOUDA continued onto slide 12, which presented the consulting team's suggestions. He explained that in addition to the economic impact piece, one of the aspects of CED's work was overseeing a contract through a request for proposal (RFP) process with a consultant agency called TIP Strategies. He shared that TIP was hired to look at models around the country for what states can do to enhance and strengthen their military presence, especially relating to economic impacts to help create a stronger economy and economic ties to the military. He said that TIP Strategies focused its recommendations around two pieces. One was the establishment of a military coalition or alliance through state legislation specifically, and AMAC fits these recommendations closely. The other was to establish an office of military affairs within the state government, which would be more of an executive office. He said he would not speak to the second recommendation, but it is a potentially valuable complementary piece.

[1:38:13 PM](#)

MR. KLOUDA dug into the coalition concept that helped to inform the current legislation over the next few unnumbered slides of his presentation. He shared that the consultants recommended a few points about what the body should look like, the first of which is that members should be identified in statute and appointed by the governor. He stated this is important [to ensure] continuity between administrations, since ACAST exists as an administrative order and under varied administrations.

MR. KLOUDA stated that representing military communities is important. He also mentioned private sector representation, because of the large contracting base and other kinds of business impacts. He advised that the commission should meet regularly to discuss and act on key issues and build continuity between administrations.

[1:39:19 PM](#)

MR. KLOUDA presented the next slide about the mission and activities, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ☐ Advocating to Congress and DoD in support of Alaska's military installations, missions, and defense sector
- ☐ Advising the Governor and the Legislature on defense and military issues in the state
- ☐ Developing strategies to protect the state's existing military missions and positioning Alaska to compete for new and expanded military missions and defense industries
- ☐ Identifying public infrastructure needs and recommending state community grant assistance programs to support the retention and expansion of military installations, missions, and defense sector

MR. KLOUDA expanded on the contents of the slide, explaining that in some cases the military is considering basing missions and personnel in many different places, and there is competition between places to host a new mission or a new expanded military presence. He argued that if a state isn't competing, that puts the state at a disadvantage, because advocacy is important. In addressing the advisory role, he stated that ACAST is generally focused on making recommendations to the commissioner of DMVA to

the adjutant general and the governor, but not necessarily the legislature.

[1:40:38 PM](#)

MR. KLOUDA presented the last slide which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ☐ Reviewing state policies to support military installations and maximize economic benefits to local communities (e.g., land use, transportation, noise restrictions);
- ☐ Making policy recommendations to improve the quality of life for Uniformed Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families (e.g., housing, professional licensing reciprocity, education, workforce training); and
- ☐ Expanding connections and collaboration between the state's businesses, universities, business organizations, and installations.

MR. KLOUDA elaborated that about one third of military spouses need a state level license or certification [to work in their field]. He explained that many states don't have a streamlined way to get those people relicensed, which factors into [the military's] decision making. He argued there isn't a body in [Alaska's] state government that works on collaboration, especially in regard to commercial aspects of the military.

MR. KLOUDA responded to earlier comments in the meeting about ACAST. He added that he gave a similar presentation to ACAST a few months ago, and ACAST co-chairs General Randy "Church" Kee, who is retired and works for the university, and Bill Popp, from the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, are both supportive of the idea of a more expansive type of a body that can do a bit more to advance economic development with the military. He then recommended those two individuals as a source of information for the committee.

[1:42:50 PM](#)

MR. KLOUDA said those are the main two points that he wanted to mention, and he is happy to take questions. He also mentioned that he believed the committee members had been paying attention to DoD's strategy in regard to the Arctic. He noted the Army and Air Force each have an arctic strategy. Both branches say they recognize that the Arctic is a domain for great power competition between the United States, Russia, and China, and

that dynamic justifies a stronger military presence in Alaska, he stated. It behooves Alaska, he suggested, to think proactively about what that means for the state, and how to derive the most value from it.

[1:43:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER said that he noticed a lot of redundancy with all of the programs.

CHAIR TUCK suggested Representative Rauscher's was asking what would make AMAC unique.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER named the Joint Armed Services Committee, ACAST, DoD, and DMVA, and he remarked that a large percentage of what this program is trying to accomplish is already [addressed by the other organizations]; therefore, he does not see the actual need for the proposed commission.

[1:46:44 PM](#)

MR. KLOUDA stated that on paper, there is the Joint Armed Services Committee, which performs an important function, but it generally meets once per year and has a mission specifically of preventing BRAC, rather than a broad mission of perusing more proactive opportunities. So, he continued, the Joint Armed Services Committee is good and serves a purpose, but it doesn't fulfill "this" purpose. He said that the adjutant general of DMVA has said economic development aspects of the military is something that DMVA is not equipped to do. He stated that in the course of [preparing this plan], members of DMVA, JASC, and the ACAST group were consulted, so the recommendation to form [AMAC] was to provide a missing piece. He said that on paper, there are many groups, but in reality, there is a vacuum when it comes to the state having one body that is the main focal point for military and commercial aspects that flow from an economic development aspect.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked for specific examples of failures in the past that the proposed commission would prevent going forward. He clarified that he was not speaking against the proposed commission.

[1:49:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR shared that she served on the Joint Armed Services Committee, both as member and co-chair, and she echoed

the previous speaker's comment that with only one meeting a year, the Joint Armed Services Committee is limited in its activities. She pointed out that when the Alaska Defense Forum took place, the Joint Armed Services Committee was one of the co-sponsors of it and organized a round table, which in her experience was the only time the joint committee has done something outside of [its annual meeting]. She stated that the Joint Armed Services Committee does not have the resources or the membership to do what is being proposed for the commission.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR shared that in an annual report, [she and her co-chair] had recommended that the statute that enacted the Joint Armed Services Committee be reviewed, because many things have changed overtime. She said maybe right now is the right time to rethink all the pieces and how they fit together, but the Joint Armed Services Committee, in her experience, has never taken on discussion about any of the economic pieces or supporting the military sector in Alaska.

[1:52:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS responded to Representative Rauscher's question. He acknowledged that [the different entities] can look similar. When it comes to the goal and drive of the membership, [being] proactive [about the] economic well-being and growth of the state [is] the main driver for the creation of the AMAC under HB 144 and is an entirely different mission and goal when compared to the Joint Armed Services Committee, with its legislative and military membership. Being proactive, trying to find ways to make sure Alaska's best foot is put forward, and being ready to support the families of military members and veterans would be something unique to AMAC.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked Representative Tarr if there was any way [the legislature] could expand the directive of the Joint Armed Services Committee, and the number of times it could meet, so it could take on [more].

[1:53:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR commented that Representative Shaw could also speak to the question, since he is also on the Joint Armed Services Committee. She replied that the big difference she saw is the joint committee has \$10,000 to stretch over two years. She explained that a little was used to be a sponsor of the Alaska Defense Forum recently, but primarily that budget is so that when the Joint Armed Services Committee holds its annual

meeting, the members from outside of Juneau can attend. It typically covers [the members'] flight, hotel, and food. She said in order to take on the tasks of the proposed commission, the Joint Armed Services Committee would need a full-time staff person, statutes would have to be amended, and the joint committee would have to consider how to [provide] the resources to operate.

[1:55:06 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK shared that he also served on Joint Armed Services Committee during the Alaska Defense Forum. He commented that Jeff Steppe was working with the mayor [of Fairbanks] at the time, and he continued on to help put [the defense forum] together and now serves as staff at the legislature.

[1:55:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SHAW made comments relative to the direction HB 144 was going. He recounted that early on he felt his question was very well answered by Representative Hopkins, because the key part to this bill that the Joint Armed Services Committee, ACAST, and [AVAC] does not carry is the social and economic landscape. He said the Alaska Defense Forum deals with defense statewide, and ACAST is primarily a civilian armed services team. He shared that he thought the importance and value of [HB 144] is relative to the social and economic landscape of the state, and the strength that this bill gives to bringing together the different defense sectors of the state and the civilian community [together]. Representative Shaw pointed out that a report had been done by CED, which doesn't even have a direct military connection. But, he argued, that is the focus and value of HB 144. Having worked across the military community for 20 years, Representative Shaw said he could see how something like this would be such a huge benefit because Alaska has so many DoD dollars coming into the state, and so much potential for growth in the state within DMVA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department. He said now that he has the insight to the bill, he can see why the key part of this legislation exists.

[1:57:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY commented that she thought the point would be that collaboration was productive between these groups, because they each have a unique niche.

[1:58:26 PM](#)

BRYCE WARD, Mayor, Fairbanks North Star Borough, provided information and answered questions on HB 144. He began his presentation by stating that the creation of AMAC is needed to facilitate better coordination between administration, legislature, and local governments across the state. He concurred with many of the comments Mr. Klouda had made, as well as the bill sponsor Representative Hopkins, [who did] a wonderful job of explaining the benefits of the bill.

MAYOR WARD spoke to the specifics of how FNSB has been able to utilize something similar to this in the local community. He recalled Representative Hopkins having talked about the Tiger Team, which coordinates efforts between the local businesses and local leadership between cities and the borough, as well as connects with state leaders and the congressional delegation. This team has been an incredible tool in leveraging strategic locations in the Interior and statewide to benefit the nation's defense. He shared that many conversations over the past few years on FNSB's work with the Association of Defense Communities (ADC) have looked to military affairs commissions across the United States as powerful ways to be able to drive some of these agendas and policy at a statewide level to benefit the state. He listed a few ways that a military affairs commission would benefit the state. He said it would be proactive and lean into issues before they become something undesirable by the community or state, and it could lean into some of those positive-facing decisions and mission potential for when DoD is looking for potential communities to fulfil its mission for the nation's defense.

MAYOR WARD offered that one thing FNSB noticed with the local Tiger Team is that the military is really interested in fulfilling its mission in communities that support [the military]. He said that Alaska's ability to come together as a state and as strong local communities to provide support for the mission of defense while supporting the families of the service members as they come into the communities has been incredibly powerful.

[2:01:29 PM](#)

MAYOR WARD said one of the things FNSB has also noticed over that last year or two is that the DoD is looking at quality of life for their military members and the military families. He explained that DoD has begun basing its decisions on metrics

such as education, reciprocity, and other aspects of quality of life, such as what kinds of opportunities are available for family members when they are in a particular community. He argued that being able to look at these issues from a statewide perspective speaks to not only Alaska's ability to support DoD's mission of defending the United States, but also to its capacity to support the military families that come along with the soldiers and airmen. Being able to have that comprehensive perspective is important, he emphasized, and he thinks it is something the state has been missing.

MAYOR WARD said it's hard to believe he has served almost nine years in some capacity as a mayor, six years with the City of North Pole and coming up on three years with FNSB. He shared that he has worked with three different governors and three different governor's task forces. He said he believes ACAST is the current model that the state has. He recounted that his first experience with that was with the Alaska Military Force Advocacy Team (AMFAST), under Governor Sean Parnell. He stated that those committees, when used to their full potential, are effective. He said AMFAST was able to the move forward the Tanana River Bridge, as Representative Hopkins mentioned, [as well as moving] other strategic projects across the state of Alaska such as securing the F-16 mission [in FNSB] and working on the F-35 mission with the newer executive order commissions through the Office of the Governor. One of the things he had noticed in his time in local office, he shared, was that with every change in administration there is a huge loss of momentum from those executive order committees. He said this is because every new governor wants to put new people on and set a new direction. Many times, if one looks at the work that has come out of those committees, he argued, after a year or two they pick back up the same projects, but with the loss of a year or two [of progress].

MAYOR WARD said he looks at a legislatively authorized commission as being the key to establishing consistency between state agencies, the legislature, and local communities. He said he thinks there are some opportunities for efficiency between the different agencies, because it will take coordination between the governor's office and the legislature to make those things happen. He argued that having a military affairs commission that is legislatively authorized gives the greatest chance for success in moving items forward. His final comment was that the nation's defense is strongest when [the government] supports the nation's defense families with strong communities and strong strategies. He felt that HB 144 is the best

opportunity the legislature can do to move things forward and be supportive in the future.

[2:05:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked Mayor Ward if he had ever served on the ACAST team.

MAYOR WARD replied that he has not served on any of the governors' task forces.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked whether, if AMAC were to pass, Mayor Ward would stand down the Tiger Team.

MAYOR WARD answered that he has no intent on disbanding the local Tiger Team effort. Many of the projects that FNSB is working on are very specific to the FNSB community. However, he stated that he does look forward to the ability to coordinate with a statewide operation on these different issues being dealt with, whether locally or on a statewide level. He said he sees [the Tiger Team] as being supportive of AMAC, not competitive.

[2:06:43 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SHAW shared his concern about the bill is the cost of the personnel services. He said every commission that he has seen such as the Joint Armed Services Committee or the Veterans Affairs Council generally can thrive among itself without a \$124,000 position. He said he would like to move forward with a possible amendment to delete the position and allow the commission to run its own program debt free. He commented that everyone is trying to cut the budget, and if there is any chance to make this commission viable and still gain the strength within itself, it would make a big difference.

[2:07:52 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK commented that he does not know how many boards the commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development must serve on, but the commission proposed under HB 144 would be an additional obligation. [The House Special Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs] is trying to make it so the lieutenant governor has the ability to chair the commission. He said he agrees that [the state] is in a fiscally tight situation, and it is difficult to add personnel, but [it is also important] to make sure this commission succeeds. He

stated that he was unsure what the best balance was at this point.

CHAIR TUCK asked if the bill sponsor had spoken with Kris Curtis, Legislative Auditor with the Legislative Audit Division, on the eight-year time frame. He commented that the legislature is trying to balance out when commissions sunset so there is not too much burden on the division at one time. He clarified that he had no opposition to eight years but wanted to be sure it would not be better served at six or seven years.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS replied that he was happy to work on that. He said the bill described eight years, because it is the general cycle when looking at audits. He also commented to Representatives Nelson and Shaw that he wanted to make sure the commission has the staff it needs to be able to function well to keep the long-term plan happening, but at the same time using a full-time employee that is in place instead of creating another one.

[HB 144 was held over]

[2:10:15 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 2:10 p.m.