

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

April 20, 2023

1:04 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Stanley Wright, Chair
Representative Laddie Shaw
Representative George Rauscher
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Cliff Groh
Representative Andrew Gray

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Ben Carpenter

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW(S) : ALASKA AIR NATIONAL GUARD

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 155

"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 155

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

SPONSOR(S) : REPRESENTATIVE(S) STAPP

04/10/23	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/10/23	(H)	MLV
04/20/23	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

BRIAN KILE, Brigadier General, Commander
Alaska Air National Guard
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the Alaska Air National Guard overview.

REPRESENTATIVE WILL STAPP
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As the prime sponsor, presented HB 155.

BRYCE WARD, Mayor
Fairbanks North Star Borough
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony on HB 155.

NOLAN KLOUDA, Executive Director
Center for Economic Development
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Economic Impacts of the Military in Alaska" during the hearing on HB 155.

HONOUR MILLER-AUSTIN, Staff
Representative Will Stapp
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Stapp, prime sponsor, provided the sectional analysis on HB 155 and answered questions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CHAIR STANLEY WRIGHT called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. Representatives Shaw, Saddler, and Wright were present at the call to order. Representatives Rauscher, Groh, and Gray arrived as the meeting was in progress.

OVERVIEW(S): Alaska Air National Guard

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CHAIR WRIGHT announced that the first order of business would be the Alaska Air National Guard overview.

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BRIAN KILE, Brigadier General, Commander, Alaska Air National Guard, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), presented a video recording about the Alaska Air National Guard (AK ANG) to the committee. He gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Overview of the Alaska Air National Guard" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. On slide 2, he explained that the overview would cover AK ANG's key leaders, organization, assets, personnel, and operations. He moved to slide 3 to outline AK ANG's organizational structure, stating that it is under the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA). He moved to slide 4 and slide 5 to outline the key leaders, assets, and personnel of AK ANG, 168th Wing. He stated that there are 825 airmen within the 168th Wing located at Eielson Air Force Base and 126 personnel at a geographically separated unit at the Clear Space Force Station. He explained that the main mission of the 168th Wing is aerial refueling, with eight KC-135 tankers. He said the guard is working toward being an "active association," which would grant it four more additional KC-135s and 230 active-duty air force. He said the guard would take ownership of the additional aircraft at the end of 2023.

BRIGADIER GENERAL KILE stated that another mission of the 168th Wing is space warning, which monitors above atmospheric air space for ballistic missiles, as well as for earth orbiting objects. He stated that DMVA and the Joint Force Headquarters of the AKANG are located at Joint Base Richardson. He said that the 176th Wing is located on the Elmendorf side of JBER. He explained that the 168th Wing monitors Alaska air space for aircraft and ballistic missiles. He said that the 144th Strategic Airlift Squadron has eight C-17s that can deliver personnel and equipment anywhere in the world, especially with support from the KC-135 refueling craft. He explained that also at JBER is the "Rescue Triad" which contains three rescue squadrons. He stated that the 212th Rescue Squadron contains para-rescuers, combat rescue officers, and survival specialists, while the other two squadrons deliver to rescue survivors on scene. He said the guard has 4 AC-130J Hercules aircrafts, which can conduct air drops, helicopter air refueling, and tactical air lifts. Further, the guard has 6 HH-60G Pave Hawks aircrafts. He moved to slide 6 and shared that 70 percent of AK ANG members work 24/7 during missions. These missions include air refueling, Alaska North American Aerospace Defense Command Region tanker alerts, missile warnings, strategic airlifts, search and rescue, and air defense.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER, concerning refueling missions, questioned whether the guard's KC-135s will be upgraded.

BRIGADIER GENERAL KILE explained that there is an effort to transition KC-135s to KC-46s; however, Alaska is not on the list to receive these. He commented that AK ANG is working through its national representatives to make Alaska part of the transition program. He shared that KC-135s were manufactured from 1958 to 1962, and an upgrade is needed.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KILE spoke about the guard's search and rescue operations. He explained that AK ANG works with the Alaska Rescue Coordination Center, located at JBER, which manages aviation and military rescues in Alaska. Further, the center works with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and serves as the coordinating unit with the Alaska State Troopers. For maritime search and rescue operations, AK ANG works with the U.S. Coast Guard District 17. He stated that the average annual mission count is about 100, and this has been since 1993. He noted the changes that technology has brought, for example, the use of satellite phones and tracking devices.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER acknowledged the current workforce challenges in Alaska. He questioned recruitment and retention in the guard.

BRIGADIER GENERAL KILE answered that the guard has a 90 percent fill rate, with 88 percent at Eielson and 92 percent at JBER. He said that nationally there is a lower percentage of those qualified to join service. In Alaska, of the 18 percent that are qualified to serve, a large portion are interested in active-duty service, but this takes them outside of the state. He said AKANG does attempt to recruit high school students, but the majority of the members are those that were transferred to Alaska, stayed in the state, and joined after active duty-service. He reported that yearly around 100 to 120 members transition from active duty to AKANG.

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CHAIR WRIGHT asked about the mission of the tankers that are coming to Alaska.

BRIGADIER GENERAL KILE answered that AK ANG has 8 aging KC-135 planes and will be getting four more. He explained that in a refueling mission, if an aircraft enters Alaska air space without a flight plan, AK ANG members must be able to respond at a moment's notice, and these members would live and sleep in a bunker at the airfield. He noted that there are complications, like the age of the aircraft and the below 40-degree weather, and these planes require many maintainers to keep them running. He said the guard is also seeking upgraded hanger space.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL KILE, in response to a question from Representative Gray, explained that the lack of qualified people to serve exists because of the [low] Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) scores, the drugs prescribed to individuals when they were young, and some disqualifying injuries. He said that the policies concerning tattoos are being adjusted. He said that overall, there are many health-related issues related to whether a person is qualified to enlist in the military.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY pointed out an article in the Military Times, as it had suggested electronic military records are making the recruitment issues around injuries worse. He acknowledged that he is not speaking on behalf of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). He offered his understanding that in the past recruiters had determined a person's ability to serve; however, now with electronic medical records, this does not exist.

BRIGADIER GENERAL KILE prefaced that he is not speaking for DoD. He said that tracking a person's medical records electronically, rather than via paper, would give more fidelity into someone's entry.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL BRIAN KILE, in response to a question from Representative Groh, spoke about ASVAB, which is a written standardized test that measures vocational skills, including reading, writing, and general mechanics. He stated that the military requires a minimum score on the test in order to enter service. He said he could not speak to why the scores are

lower, but he noted lower scores have become a barrier to some wishing to join the military, and fewer people are taking the test.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER referred to legislation that sought to expunge the record of minor misdemeanor marijuana possessions. He asked if such an act would inhibit or encourage enlistment.

BRIDGADIER GENERAL KILE, in response, confirmed that if a misdemeanor was expunged from the record of a minor, the military would not have a record of the misdemeanor; therefore, the record would not be cause for disqualification.

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The committee took an at-ease from 1:30 p.m. to 1:32 p.m.

HB 155-ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

[1:32:00 PM](#)

CHAIR WRIGHT announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 155, "An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

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REPRESENTATIVE WILL STAPP, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 155. He stated that his staff and invited testifiers would speak to the proposed legislation.

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BRYCE WARD, Mayor, Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), gave invited testimony on HB 155. He began by reviewing the military affairs offices in other states. He informed members that states with active and aggressive military affairs offices report gains in the economy due to focused attention on the defense industry. He explained that these offices originate from the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, and work in an advocacy role for the state's economy, as it relates to the military industry. He pointed out that officials in states who are able to work with their governors cite access and authority as an advantage of the commission. He explained that

other offices fulfill missions through cabinet level positions across state offices. He noted that some the offices have also been independent.

MR. WARD stated that HB 155 would create the Alaska Military Affairs Commission, which would be run through the governor's office. He stated that in conjunction with the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), the mission of the commission would be to facilitate communication between bases and activities of the surrounding community; provide a centralized resource for state officials, installation commanders, and business community members; provide outreach to troops, families, and the general public; help to prepare for future installation; address encroachment, transportation, as well as quality of life concerns of military families; boost the defense industry by increasing defense expenditures; and recruit local businesses in promoting the importance of the military to the state's well-being. He explained that the proposed commission would ensure that state and congressional leadership are coordinated in efforts to support the defense industry, as well as the state's military affairs as an enterprise. He pointed out the renewed focus on the Arctic and in Alaska, with developments in Arctic strategies being done in every branch of the military. He said that FNSB has been engaged in military discussions across the country, noting that the state has been absent from these conversations. He pointed out the abundance of military engagement in Alaska and stated that the borough alone is unable to entirely speak on the state's behalf. He said that this notably regards coastal issues.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked whether Mayor Ward believes HB 155 would alleviate housing needs.

MR. WARD responded that having a statewide coordinated effort would help alleviate such needs, and a statewide military affairs commission could help solve this.

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NOLAN KLOUDA, Executive Director, Center for Economic Development (CED), University of Alaska Anchorage, gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Economic Impacts of the Military in Alaska" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. On slide 1, he explained that from 2019 to 2021 CED led a "deep dive" look into the military in Alaska to understand

its impact on the state. He moved to slide 2 and said the presentation would provide the recommendations from this investigation, which include the proposed structure in HB 155. He moved to slide 3 and said that Alaska's seafood, tourism, mining, and oil and gas industries each have associations and groups that advocate on behalf of the industry and report on the number of jobs each industry has created. On slide 4, he showed that between 2019 and 2020 the oil and gas industry has created 77,600 jobs, the mining industry has created 9,200 jobs, and the seafood industry has created 58,700 jobs. Moving to slide 5, he pointed out that in this timeframe the military presence in Alaska had resulted in 58,000 total jobs, with 33,400 of these being civilian jobs. He stated that these numbers represent 1 in 10 civilian jobs and 1 in 6 total jobs in the state. He pointed out that this figure is bigger than any other industry, except oil and gas. He moved to slide 6 to show a breakdown of the jobs in the state associated with the military.

MR. KLOUDA moved to slide 7 to highlight the military's major economic impact in Interior Alaska, as one-third of all the jobs are tied to the military. He said the one-third figure represents just the military civilian jobs, and the ratio could be higher if accounting for direct military members. On slide 8, he said that 1 in every 10 jobs within the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna Borough area are tied to the military, with 30,000 total jobs. He continued that there is military spending in every borough of Alaska, with only one borough not having this spending in the last two to three years. He pointed out that the military has a large impact on Alaska but does not necessarily have advocacy on its own behalf.

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MR. KLOUDA moved to slide 9 and slide 10 to present suggestions from a consultant. It was recommended that a statewide military coalition/alliance be established through state legislation, while also creating an office of military affairs within the state government. He noted that HB 155 addresses this recommendation. He outlined that members of a military coalition/alliance should be identified by statute and/or appointed by the governor; represent military communities and associated constituencies; include private sector representation; meet regularly to discuss and act on the key issues impacting Alaska's military and defense sector; and build continuity between gubernatorial administrations.

MR. KLOUDA moved to slide 11 and outlined the coalition's mission and activities, which include: advocating to Congress and U.S. Department of Defense (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, while positioning Alaska to compete for new military missions and defense industries; and identifying public infrastructure needs by recommending programs that support the retention and expansion of military installations, missions, and the defense sector. In reference to Representative Gray's question as to whether the group would be able to address housing issues, he expressed the belief this coalition could be important in channeling a discussion around the needs of an installation or expanded mission.

MR. KLOUDA moved to slide 12 to further outline the coalition's proposed mission and activities, which include: reviewing state policies to support military installations and maximize economic benefits to local communities; making policy recommendations to improve the quality of life for uniformed service members, veterans, and their families; and expanding connections and collaboration between the state's businesses, universities, business organizations, and installations. He said that one of the other recommendations is that the proposed coalition should not be housed within the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs, but rather housed within the Office of the Governor or the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.

MR. KLOUDA, on slide 13, explained that the Arctic strategies implemented by DoD and the U.S. Coast Guard have many implications for Alaska. He recommended that work be done by the state to attract missions, such as having the home port of icebreakers be the state.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY, referring to slide 10, asked whether, in putting together the proposed military coalition, there would be room for geographic representation.

MR. KLOUDA answered that geographic representation would be important.

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REPRESENTATIVE STAPP suggested that Alaska stands at the precipice of a new geopolitical reality, as new threats emerge from Asia. He explained that the purpose of a military commission would include capitalizing on all DoD investments in Alaska. He maintained that the state would need the right tools and people in place to be able to capitalize on future opportunities, and Alaska should have a seat at the table in this process.

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HONOUR MILLER-AUSTIN, Staff, Representative Will Stapp, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Stapp, prime sponsor, gave the sectional analysis for HB 155 [copy included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1

- Establishes the Alaska Military Affairs Commission in the Office of the Governor
- Defines the Commission membership to include nine voting members.
- Sets (staggered) three-year member terms.
- Details Commission meetings, quorum rules, and authorizes per diem and travel expenses.
- Enumerates the duties of the Commission.

Section 2

- Sunsets the Alaska Military Affairs Commission on June 30, 2030.

Section 3

- Adds uncodified law regarding the initial terms of Alaska Military Affairs Commission members.

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MS. MILLER-AUSTIN, after being asked to clarify an acronym, explained that ACAST stands for Alaska Civilian Armed Services Team. She further explained that ACAST operates under Administrative Order 291, which was issued in 2017 under Governor Bill Walker.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked how the proposed Alaska Military Affairs Commission would fit in alongside the existing House

Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs, Joint Armed Services Committee, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Fairbanks Tiger Team, and Anchorage Chamber of Commerce's Military Affairs Committee.

REPRESENTATIVE STAPP answered that the purpose of HB 155 would be to unify all of these aspects. He said the proposed commission is modeled after the Fairbanks Tiger Team, and this concept would be taken statewide in order to create a unified approach, facilitating all the pieces in industrial and economic development. He elaborated that the committee would not only harness the economic and industrial potential of continued DoD investment, but it would also help ensure that a pathway toward civilian life in Alaska is created for those stationed in the state. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that there are other examples in the country, as the proposed commission would not be unique to Alaska, and the state is "behind the curve."

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CHAIR WRIGHT stated that he has worked across state lines with many individuals, and the proposed commission model is something that is critical in other states. He thanked the bill sponsor for drafting HB 155.

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MS. MILLER-AUSTIN addressed Representative Saddler's question and offered her understanding that other states have already established military affairs commissions.

REPRESENTATIVE STAPP added that states with large military installations already have systems set up. He pointed out that Alaska has the largest military presence in the country.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY expressed strong support for HB 155; however, he expressed concern about bringing a large amount of service members to Eielson Air Force Base.

REPRESENTATIVE STAPP responded that issues of housing at Eielson Air Force Base have not had statewide recognition. He explained that the geographical areas in the state are often not aware of issues in other regions in the state. He suggested that if the

proposed commission were in place, such a regional disparity would be dealt with at a statewide level.

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REPRESENTATIVE GROH expressed support for HB 155. He referred to language in the bill on page 2, lines 16 and 17, concerning members serving staggered terms. He expressed the understanding that the terms must start at different lengths in order to be considered staggered. He asked how this process would work.

REPRESENTATIVE STAPP expressed the understanding that all the members of the proposed commission would start at the same time, with reappointments done in a staggered fashion.

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CHAIR WRIGHT, from previous experience on boards and commissions, suggested that members would be appointed with either a two-year term or three-year term.

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REPRESENTATIVE GROH asked if this would mean that the person who appoints the members of the commission would select the term lengths.

MS. MILLER-AUSTIN directed attention to page 3, line 30 of the proposed legislation.

REPRESENTATIVE GROH pointed out that the commission would be set to meet quarterly, or as the chair directs. He asked if this would be adequate.

MS. MILLER-AUSTIN responded that meeting quarterly is adequate. She noted that there would be no limit on the number of times the commission could meet.

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MS. MILLER-AUSTIN, in response to Representative Gray, explained that the members would be chosen by the governor and could be reappointed.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked whether members could serve forever if governors kept reappointing them.

MS. MILLER-AUSTIN deferred to Representative Stapp.

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REPRESENTATIVE STAPP confirmed that the governor could reappoint members in perpetuity.

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REPRESENTATIVE SHAW likened reappointments to being a legislator; one could be elected forever, as long as the people he/she works for are happy.

[HB 155 was held over.]

[2:06:59 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.