

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
JOINT ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

March 26, 2024

3:20 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Co-Chair  
Representative Laddie Shaw, Co-Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski  
Senator Mike Shower  
Senator Kelly Merrick  
Senator Forrest Dunbar  
Representative Stanley Wright  
Representative Jamie Allard  
Representative Cliff Groh

**PUBLIC MEMBERS PRESENT**

Colonel Tim Jones - retired - Fairbanks (via teleconference)  
Colonel Bob Dole - retired - Anchorage  
Colonel George Vakalis - retired - Anchorage (via teleconference)

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Mike Prax

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: UPDATE ON MILITARY ACTIVITY IN ALASKA

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CRAIG FLEENER, Deputy Director  
Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an update for the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies.

TERRENCE SHANIGAN, Strategic Worker  
Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on a presentation update for the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL DAVID NAHOM, Commander  
Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense (NORAD) Region  
Alaskan Command  
Eleventh Air Force (11 AF)  
Joint-Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an update for the Alaskan Command (ALCOM), the Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command (ANR), and the Eleventh Air Force (11 AF).

BRIGADIER GENERAL THOMAS BURKE, Deputy Commander for Support  
11th Airborne Division 'Arctic Angels'  
U.S. Army  
Joint-Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an update for the 11th Airborne Division "Arctic Angels."

CAPTAIN JOHN COLE, District 17  
Chief of Staff  
U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an update for the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

REAR ADMIRAL MARK SUCATO, Commander  
Navy Region Northwest  
Silverdale, Washington

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an update for the Navy Region Northwest.

MAJOR GENERAL TORRENCE SAXE, Adjutant General  
Alaska National Guard  
Fort Richardson, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented an update for the Alaska National Guard and DMVA.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:20:50 PM](#)

**CO-CHAIR SCOTT KAWASAKI** called the Joint Armed Services Committee meeting to order at 3:20 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Wielechowski, Shower, Merrick, Dunbar, and Co-Chair Kawasaki; Representatives Wright, Allard, Groh, and Co-

Chair Shaw; and public members Colonel Jones, Colonel Dole, and Colonel Vakalis

**PRESENTATION: UPDATE ON MILITARY ACTIVITY IN ALASKA**

[3:22:49 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the presentation Update on Military Activity in Alaska.

[3:23:28 PM](#)

CRAIG FLEENER, Deputy Director, Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, Anchorage, Alaska, presented an update for the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies. He introduced himself.

[3:23:52 PM](#)

TERRENCE SHANIGAN, Strategic Worker, Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, Anchorage, Alaska, testified on the update for the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies. He introduced himself.

[3:24:06 PM](#)

MR. FLEENER moved to slides 1 - 2 and spoke to Arctic security and global partnerships:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Security Cooperation in and across the Arctic Security Through Global Partnerships**

DoD Regional Centers for Security Studies (RCs) are international venues for bilateral and multilateral research, communication, exchange of ideas, and training involving U.S. and foreign military, civilian, and nongovernmental participants, utilizing their unique academic forums to build strong, sustainable international networks of security leaders. RCs are unique among institutional capacity building (ICB) providers, as they target a primarily multilateral, inter-ministerial, senior-level audience.

**WHO**

- Allies and Partners
- Department of Defense
- U.S. Government Interagency Industry
- Non-Governmental Organizations

- Academia and Think Tanks

#### **WHAT**

- Education Courses
- Workshops
- Field Programs
- Research Conferences
- Digital Programming
- Fellowships
- Alumni
- Dialogues

#### **WHY**

- Encourage and enable partner nations to apply capabilities and capacity, provide access, and/or support US interests.

MR. FLEENER stated that the Ted Stevens Center is a new regional center within the Department of Defense, one of six regional centers. He mentioned their visit to Juneau to introduce the center, discuss its mission, and explore potential collaborations with colleagues. The Ted Stevens Center is aligned with the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD NORTHCOM) and has additional connections with the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) due to their interests in the Arctic. The other five regional centers include the Marshall Center in Germany, the Asia-Pacific Center in Hawaii, the Near East South Asia Center in North Africa and the Levant, the Africa Center in Washington, DC, and the William J. Perry Center focusing on South America. The center aims to serve as an international venue for bilateral and multilateral research, education, and communication with a focus on the Arctic and subarctic regions. He emphasized their goal of fostering a peaceful and prosperous Arctic, aligning with Alaska's interests.

[3:26:13 PM](#)

MR. FLEENER moved to slide 3 and detailed supporting activities:

#### **Supporting Activities**

- Facilitate strategic dialogue in, across and about the Arctic through seminars, conferences, and workshops
- Arctic Field Programs

- Digital Programming
  - Practitioner focused research and analysis
  - Journal of Arctic and Climate Security Studies (JACSS)
  - Support to various multinational research efforts  
Lines of Effort Innovation & Experimentation
  - Arctic focused courses designed for security practitioners Arctic & Climate Security Dilemmas and tailored on-site primers
  - IDE Fellows Program
1. Advanced Arctic awareness
  2. Advanced DoD Arctic priorities
  3. Reinforced rules-based order in the Arctic
  4. Effective support to Deterrence
  5. Impacts of climate change in the Arctic region understood and implemented/integrated into defense plans

MR. FLEENER highlighted the center's flagship course, the Arctic Region Security Orientation Course, which has over 1,500 alumni. This five-day program serves as an "Arctic 101" for those unfamiliar with Arctic issues, covering topics such as the legal frontier, Arctic governance, tribal and First Nations' involvement, climate change, military activities, and allied relationships. The center received direction from the Secretary of Defense to professionalize Arctic knowledge through this course, aiming to provide a foundational understanding of the Arctic's complexities. He described the desired outcomes, which include advancing Arctic awareness, aligning with Department of Defense priorities, reinforcing the rules-based order in the Arctic, and understanding climate change's impact on Arctic security. He acknowledged the acute effects of climate change on national security infrastructure, affecting not only the Arctic but also regions like Alaska, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Greenland. The Ted Stevens Center is here to support the work of the legislature, recognizing the overlap between the Department of Defense's activities and the State of Alaska's interests. As an Alaskan native from Fort Yukon, he expressed a commitment to fostering collaboration with the legislature and administration to achieve broader DoD objectives of maintaining a peaceful and secure Arctic. He noted the importance of supporting entities such as 11 AF, the National Guard, and NORAD NORTHCOM's commander.

[3:29:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WRIGHT asked whether he has had an opportunity to work with the National Guard, noting that they have a significant presence in rural Alaska. He expressed the importance of not missing such an opportunity.

[3:30:13 PM](#)

MR. FLEENER replied that he is currently in the Alaska National Guard, with 34 years of service as of this October. He acknowledged having an internal connection with the National Guard, though distinct from his connection to the Department of Defense (DOD). He confirmed that the Ted Stevens Center is working closely with the National Guard on the creation of a position within the center for a National Guard representative to collaborate regularly. This will ensure that the needs and priorities of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) and The Adjutant General (TAG) are addressed. He suggested that the greatest Arctic expertise in Alaska is found within the National Guard, particularly the 168th Wing, where personnel have extensive experience operating in harsh Arctic conditions. While the rest of the military is developing these skills, the long-term, sustainable expertise in the National Guard remains crucial to their efforts.

[3:31:46 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SHAW invited Lieutenant General David Nahom to present an update for the Alaskan Command (ALCOM), the Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command (ANR), and the Eleventh Air Force (11 AF).

[3:32:21 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL DAVID NAHOM, Commander, Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense (NORAD) Region, Alaskan Command, Eleventh Air Force (11 AF), Joint-Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), Anchorage, Alaska, presented an update on the Alaskan Command (ALCOM), the Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command (ANR), and 11 AF. He stated that his replacement was announced yesterday and will arrive this summer. His two-year tenure will conclude in the second week of August. He noted that Major General, soon to be Lieutenant General, Case Cunningham from the Warfare Centers is a good friend and will be an excellent successor in Alaska. He expressed anticipation for welcoming General Cunningham upon his arrival in Alaska this summer.

[3:33:00 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM moved to slide 2 and spoke to national defense conditions. He stated that 11 AF serves as a force

provider and, under the new NORTHCOM commander, General Gregory Guillot, plays a critical role in homeland defense for the U.S. and Canada in the "high north." He reflected on the past year, highlighting the appearance of a combined China and Russian surface action group in Alaskan waters over the summer, which emphasized the region's strategic importance. He noted that, in the future, Alaska's defense will need to address not only Russian but also increasing Chinese activities. General Guillot indicated in recent testimony that Chinese aircraft might soon join Russian counterparts in the Alaska Air Defense Identification Zone and waters. He referred to a recent encounter between an Alaskan F-35 and Russia's top-line fighter, the Su-35, during the Ice Exercise (ICEX) event, an activity that garnered significant Russian interest. He clarified that what was perceived as an F-16 flyby for ICEX scientists was actually a precautionary measure against potential Russian activity. The F-16 squadron recently transitioned from the 18th Aggressors to the 18th Fighter Interceptor Squadron in early February. This change reflects a shift in homeland defense strategy for the high north, focusing on maximizing the F-16s' value for alert and defense operations. This marks the establishment of the first fighter interceptor squadron in 32 years, reintroducing the nomenclature from the Cold War era. The squadron is now trained and equipped to remain in Alaska should conflicts arise elsewhere, providing strategic flexibility.

[3:36:20 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM moved to slide 3 and explained the mission's vision. He recounted an event he attended with Scott Kirby, President Biden's advisor, who emphasized the importance of clearly communicating a mission in three points, nine seconds, and 27 words or less. Inspired by this advice, he challenged all 11 AF wings to adopt this concise approach, and they succeeded. He then articulated his own mission in three key elements: defending the homeland, projecting air power worldwide, and ensuring airmen are Arctic-ready, which also includes their families. He summarized the mission as "defend, project, ready," encapsulating the essence of their work in Alaska and ANR.

[3:37:17 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM moved to slide 4 and spoke to ongoing initiatives. He emphasized the evolving global threat conditions and the need for corresponding changes in military operations. He noted that he has witnessed significant changes since his two-year tenure. Instead, the rapid changes in global dynamics, particularly in threat conditions, necessitated the operational

shifts. The current global environment is vastly different from previous years, requiring updated strategies and approaches to address the new challenges. The aggressive behavior and unpredictability of Russia, combined with China's growing capabilities and its government's willingness to coordinate with Russia in the Arctic, have necessitated a shift in strategy. Past approaches, particularly those used in the last decade, are no longer effective. He noted a crucial shift from a joint operations area (JOA) to an Alaska theater operations framework. This change allows for broader coordination with Northern Command components and expands operational capabilities in Alaska's contingency scenarios. If the U.S. were to engage in large-scale war, Alaska is on the forefront and has a land component called Army North with its headquarters in San Antonio, Texas. There has been an increase in activity in the Special Operations Command North (SOCNORTH), and it is expected to continually increase. The shift also brings greater involvement from the Naval Forces Northern Command, (NAVNORTH), (SOCNORTH), Marine Forces Northern Command (MARFORCOM), and Air Forces Northern (AFNORTH). There is an air force component for the homeland. However, they were previously blocked due to the Joint Operations Area (JOA) despite their capabilities in the High North region. This is a key component to understanding how this region and the entire state shape defense operations.

[3:39:40 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM noted that large-scale air and ground power will remain. Two other countries have purchased the F-35 within the past year, including Finland and Canada, particularly for its Arctic capabilities. The F-35 has adapted to Arctic operations largely due to the efforts of Alaskan airmen. The aircraft's success in harsh conditions, demonstrated during operation Thule Greenland in the middle of winter, underscores Alaska's key role in Air Force operations. He discussed the challenges posed by the dual command structure in Alaska, where the Pacific installations are within Northern Command's territory. This has historically caused Alaska to be overlooked, leading to operational issues and high turnover rates. However, efforts are underway to give him more control over readiness and operations in Alaska, which will be finalized before the upcoming exercise, Valiant Shield (VS) 2024. He praised the success of the recent exercise, where new concepts in managing homeland forces were tested. These advancements are crucial for future preparedness, ensuring Alaska's ability to respond to emerging threats.

[3:42:01 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM moved to slide 5 and outlined ongoing initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills and readiness of airmen in Alaska. He noted that the Air Force is closely following the Army's lead in clothing and training, as the Army has been more effective in these areas. To better equip airmen for Arctic operations, they are adopting some of the Army's clothing to improve their ability to operate and maintain aircraft in the region. He described the launch of an Arctic skills class, which has already trained over 400 airmen. Previously, only aviators underwent Arctic survival school, but now every airman stationed in Alaska will go through this two-day training. The course includes spending a night outdoors and learning essential skills for not just surviving, but thriving in the Arctic. This covers driving in snow, handling emergencies like being stranded in a ditch, and enjoying the outdoors safely. The class has received positive feedback, and it is helping build resilience among the airmen and their families. There is an increased focus on regular campaigning, with the expectation of seeing more Northern Command components operating and conducting missions in the region.

[3:43:23 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM moved to slide 6 and introduced the concept of "below zero medicine" as an integral part of the Arctic skills training. He praised the medics at Elmendorf, describing their groundbreaking work in providing medical care in sub-zero environments as both game-changing and cutting-edge on a global scale. He played a video to further illustrate their efforts, highlighting how the knowledge and techniques developed in Alaska could benefit operations not just in the Arctic, but in other locations as well. He expressed his admiration for the collaborative efforts between the Army, Marines, and other branches involved in the below zero medicine initiative. Remarkable advancements are being made in Arctic medical practices, and this expertise is being shared and implemented throughout Alaska.

[3:46:37 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM moved to slide 7 and spoke to challenges with housing and funding. He addressed several challenges faced in Fairbanks, especially regarding housing and community integration. He noted that additional funding from appropriations this year has enabled the start of dormitory construction and other projects in Fairbanks and at JBER. However, housing remains a significant issue. He expressed concern about the lack of a cohesive community on base in Fairbanks, where many airmen are dispersed throughout the

borough, often struggling to find suitable living arrangements. Fairbanks can be challenging for newcomers from outside Alaska, and having a strong base community is crucial for morale and integration. The recent closure of the second on-base school at Eielson Air Force Base (AFB) by the Fairbanks school board has adversely affected the community. As he prepares to hand over his responsibilities, he emphasized the need to improve the sense of community for airmen in Fairbanks, as the current situation is impacting the ability to attract and retain families. He observed a troubling trend of leaders arriving without their families and stressed the importance of addressing these issues collaboratively.

[3:48:03 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM moved to slide 8 and described the anticipated outlook for the future. He said collaboration with the National Guard, the Army, and the congressional delegation has been crucial in advancing important projects in Alaska. Many projects secured funding this year for design and review, and the focus will now shift to further development. The runway extension project at JBER is progressing well and will significantly impact air traffic in the Anchorage Bowl, with a new north-south flow designed by the FAA. This change is expected to benefit the local community. In disaster response, a new formalized approach is being established with the National Guard. A one-star general from the Alaska Guard will serve as his deputy commander, creating a dual-status command structure to enhance coordination between federal and state responses during emergencies. The appointment is anticipated to occur in the coming month, pending legal formalities, and is expected to strengthen emergency response efforts. He spoke to the significant challenges posed by adversaries such as China and Russia. He emphasized the critical role Alaska plays in national defense, noting that air power stationed in Alaska is essential for future military operations. The need to adapt and make necessary, albeit uncomfortable, changes is crucial for maintaining both homeland security and the ability to project power. He praised Alaskans for their exceptional support of the military, contrasting it with other locations he has served. Despite some challenges in Fairbanks, he expressed confidence in overcoming them through collective effort. He underscored the importance of supporting military personnel and their families, particularly those on the front lines who will be crucial in any future conflict.

[3:51:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD expressed concern over issues affecting military families, particularly the closure of schools on Eielson AFB. Reflecting on her own service, she noted certain areas that were impacted including pay, food, mail, and family. She highlighted the closure of the junior high and potentially the only high school on base, asking what steps have been taken to address this. Although acknowledging the transition of leadership, she inquired how she and others could assist in mitigating the impact of these closures on military families.

[3:52:35 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM explained that efforts are underway to address the recent decision to close the schools on Eielson Air Force Base. He noted that the closure, which was voted on with a 5-1 decision, has only recently become official, and they are now conducting necessary background work and reviewing grants from the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). Although the closure will take effect in the next term, General Nahom stressed that he plans to tackle the issue before his departure in a few months, as it will occur under his leadership.

[3:53:23 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD inquired about the impact the school closures will have on military families stationed at Eielson AFB. She emphasized that while some may downplay the distance to alternative schools, citing one only 11 miles away, this distance poses a significant challenge for families, including those with a deployed spouse. She expressed concern about the potential negative effect on morale, especially given the harsh Alaskan weather. She asked how the closures will affect military personnel and their families, considering these unique circumstances.

[3:53:57 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM shared an example of a military family whose son will be attending his fourth high school next year, highlighting the frequent relocations and challenges faced by military families. He reiterated the difficulties posed by the school closures, noting that the 11-mile commute to the alternative school could take 30 to 45 minutes during winter months. Many military families, unfamiliar with Alaska's harsh conditions, are unprepared for such challenges. He pointed out that many of these families, especially younger enlisted members, rely on dual incomes, with both parents often serving. The closure will significantly burden families stationed at Eielson AFB, affecting school commutes, childcare, and after-

school programs, making daily life more difficult for those already coping with frequent relocations.

[3:54:56 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD expressed her concern that the school closures will create additional hardships for military families. She invited General Nahom to collaborate on finding a solution.

[3:55:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GROH raised concerns about education and housing for military families, particularly those stationed at JBER. He noted that while elementary students are typically educated on base, junior high and high school students attend schools off base, such as Bartlett and Central Middle School. A colonel had pointed out the broader issue of declining school quality in Alaska. Groh explained that many military members come from districts with capped class sizes, often at 22 students, and are alarmed to find class sizes of 30 or more in Alaska. He asked whether the overall decline in education standards, linked to long-term planning issues in Alaska's school system, has negatively impacted military families stationed there.

[3:56:35 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM acknowledged that while he does not have a direct role in education funding, he is aware of parents' concerns regarding increased class sizes in schools. He recognized the challenges faced by schools but noted that, overall, experiences have been positive in the region. Many families relocating to Alaska often seek to maintain their children's enrollment in schools, such as Bartlett and Eagle River, highlighting that some families go to great lengths to stay until their children complete their education. He expressed a commitment to ensuring that military families have a positive schooling experience, emphasizing the overall quality of education they receive.

[3:57:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GROH inquired about ongoing housing issues faced by military members at JBER and throughout Fairbanks. He referenced a conversation with a colonel who indicated that some military personnel are living as far away as Homer in search of affordable and desirable housing for their families. This situation poses significant challenges not only for the families but also for mission effectiveness, given the considerable distance from JBER. He expressed a desire to discuss potential solutions to improve housing options and create a better housing situation for military members around JBER.

[3:58:21 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM acknowledged the housing challenges at JBER, noting that while the situation is not as severe as in the Fairbanks area, affordability remains a significant issue. He is actively addressing this concern with the Air Force and the Department of Defense, emphasizing the need for military personnel, including airmen and soldiers, to receive better financial support to cope with the high cost of living in Alaska. Recent cuts to cost-of-living adjustments have exacerbated the issue. New arrivals from warmer states, like Georgia, face additional expenses—averaging around \$5,300 for families moving to Fairbanks for necessities such as snow tires and winter clothing. Unfortunately, enlisted personnel often go without these essentials due to insufficient pay. Because of COLA, many are forced to live further away in places like Palmer to find suitable housing, which complicates their daily commutes, especially during harsh winter conditions. He reiterated the importance of improving housing access and increasing pay for military families to ensure they can afford the necessities of living in Alaska.

[4:00:19 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI emphasized that one of the committee's mandates is to oversee the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, particularly as it pertains to military bases in Alaska. He referenced his involvement in the successful community effort during the 2005 BRAC process concerning Eielson Air Force Base. He raised concerns that the closure of schools at Eielson could potentially make the base more vulnerable to future BRAC evaluations, questioning how the reduction in educational facilities might impact the base's standing and attractiveness in any forthcoming BRAC discussions.

[4:00:47 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM expressed confidence in the strategic importance of Eielson AFB given its unique capabilities for air training, particularly due to its proximity to extensive air-to-ground and air-to-air ranges that are unparalleled worldwide. As the U.S. faces growing challenges from China, the ability to train at a high level in such an environment is invaluable. However, he stressed the need to consider the welfare of military families when assessing the base's future. He urged Air Force leaders to prioritize family support alongside operational capabilities, citing the current limitations, such as a smaller commissary and challenges in accessing housing. He acknowledged the functionality of the F-35s stationed at Eielson AFB, but

underscored that family conditions must improve to maintain morale and operational effectiveness. He recounted an interaction with a spouse who faced harsh winter conditions while managing household responsibilities, noting the adjustment difficulties faced by families unfamiliar with Alaska's climate. He conveyed a strong commitment to ensuring that family needs are addressed, as they are crucial for the success of the mission at Eielson AFB.

[4:03:03 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER acknowledged the busy schedules of military personnel and expressed gratitude for their time and commitment to attending the meeting. He emphasized the importance of recognizing their efforts, especially given the increasingly dangerous global climate and the challenges facing active-duty members today. He highlighted that these circumstances make their service particularly commendable. He raised a question directed at all military representatives about potential actions the state could take to support military operations and personnel. Shower referenced a past initiative where the state allocated \$200 million to enhance the deep-water port, underscoring its strategic importance for military and economic purposes. He encouraged military leaders to identify any specific needs or opportunities for state support, either during the meeting or at a later date, to facilitate better collaboration between state and federal entities.

[4:05:17 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM emphasized the significance of fostering a sense of community among military families, drawing from his personal experience during a tour in Korea, where he formed lasting friendships with fellow service members. Shared recreational spaces and activities on base were vital in creating strong community bonds, which are currently lacking. He expressed concern that the closure of schools contributes to the diminished sense of community in Fairbanks. Nahom highlighted the need for collaborative efforts to address this issue, emphasizing that while financial resources are important, what might be more impactful is community support for military families, especially in the Fairbanks area. Many service members come from warmer climates, making the transition to life near the Arctic Circle particularly challenging. He said his goal is to ensure that these families not only survive but thrive in their new environment.

[4:06:31 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR expressed disappointment regarding the school closures at Eielson Air Force Base raised concerns regarding the number of service members who have died by suicide and inquired about the initiatives and changes being implemented this year, and in the future, to address mental health issues within the military. He emphasized the critical need for effective strategies to support the mental well-being of service members and prevent further tragedies.

[4:06:57 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM stated that the military continually addresses mental health issues among service members, acknowledging the broader societal challenges as well. He highlighted various programs, including "True North," and mentioned pilot initiatives that serve as models for the rest of the service. A significant focus is on improving living conditions for enlisted personnel, particularly through the dormitory project aimed at providing better housing and fostering a sense of community. In extreme winter conditions, inadequate facilities can exacerbate isolation and mental health issues. He expressed concern for the mental wellbeing of service members' families, emphasizing the challenges in accessing mental health services, which often just aren't there and require telehealth options or travel. He reiterated the need for ongoing efforts to address these critical issues effectively.

[4:09:01 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR shared insights from a discussion with a member of Senator Murkowski's staff regarding the dormitory project. He noted that while initiatives like providing free internet access in dormitories may seem beneficial, they could inadvertently contribute to increased isolation among service members. He expressed interest in exploring programs that promote communal spaces, encouraging service members to leave their rooms and interact with one another, thereby fostering a sense of community.

[4:09:34 PM](#)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL NAHOM acknowledged the importance of community spaces in the new dormitories, so service members have the opportunity to engage with one another. He shared that during conversations with young airmen, he often asks about their weekend activities and encourages them to find something they love to do outside of work, especially outdoors. Many airmen find enjoyment in outdoor pursuits in Alaska. He suggested that engaging in activities like fishing, hiking, and snow machining can help service members foster a sense of

community. He stressed the necessity of providing more opportunities for these outdoor experiences to enhance morale and connection among airmen as well as getting them used to the Alaskan environment, which is new and very harsh to many of them.

[4:11:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI invited Brigadier General Thomas Burke to present an update for the U.S. Army.

[4:11:36 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL THOMAS BURKE, Deputy Commander for Support, U.S. Army, 11th Airborne Division 'Arctic Angels,' Joint-Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, presented an update for the U.S. Army. He emphasized the significance of jointness within military operations in Alaska, as highlighted in a motivational video presented. He thanked the committee for the opportunity to discuss the division's mission and contributions to the Army in Alaska, the Arctic region, and beyond, and noted the division's split between Fort Wainwright and JBER. He expressed gratitude for the committee's support, which is vital for soldiers and their families. He acknowledged the state's efforts to foster a sense of belonging for military personnel and their families during their assignments in Alaska.

[4:13:08 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE moved to slide 2 and spoke to exercises planned globally and in the state. He said 11th Airborne Division has had a busy year and is set to support 19 exercises worldwide and here in Alaska, particularly focusing on the joint Pacific multinational readiness center. The division, split between JBER and Fort Wainwright, plays a vital role in generating readiness for the theater army and the Indo-Pacific region, alongside allies and partners in the Arctic. With over 11,000 soldiers assigned, the 11th Airborne Division is dedicated to honing warfighting skills to provide deterrence options amid rising competition with China and Russia. A key aspect of this deterrence is remaining globally responsive, trained, and ready. The 11th Airborne Division maintains readiness through extensive training in Alaska and participation in various exercises. Notably, in 2023, the division concluded seven major exercises in Alaska, Mongolia, Malaysia, Australia, and Japan, strengthening long-standing partnerships and enhancing interoperability. In addition to working with Canada, the division is actively building relationships with Arctic nations such as Norway and Sweden, recognizing the unique Arctic capabilities of the 11th Airborne Division. Collaborations also

extend to Germany, Italy, and Finland to learn best practices in cold weather operations. This emphasizes the division's unique operational capabilities across a wide range of geographic, environmental, and climatic extremes.

[4:15:27 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE moved to slide 3 and detailed an exercise completed by JPMRC. He said JPMRC 2402 concluded in February, marking the most successful iteration to date. The primary objective was to conduct a division-level mission in the Arctic, training in extreme cold weather conditions. All assigned and supporting units participated, including both infantry brigades, the Support Battalion, and the two aviation units stationed at Fort Wainwright. JPMRC was designed to train soldiers in movement, shooting, communication, medical support, and sustainment while operating across vast diverse terrains. The exercise faced challenging temperatures, starting at negative 40 to negative 50 degrees Fahrenheit, and reaching up to plus 40 degrees, with winds of up to 50 knots. This environment rigorously tested the 11th Airborne Division operational capabilities, with over 8,000 soldiers engaged in extreme cold weather training both in the interior and above the Arctic Circle. The operations allowed the division to collaborate with various community and tribal organizations, enhancing its understanding of Arctic operations and strengthening relationships with local communities. He expressed commitment to exploring future training operations in this regard. It is crucial to incorporate joint and foreign partners into rotations to build interoperability and understand how cold weather allies train and operate. As partnerships across the Arctic and Indo-Pacific regions expand, he expressed anticipation for growth in both the number and scale of these collaborations, which poses a significant concern for the Russian and Chinese governments, which are closely monitoring the activities of this division in Alaska and globally.

[4:17:43 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE moved to slide 4 and spoke to developments in the 11th Airborne Division:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Continuous Transformation**

- Building capabilities Aligning Alaska's active-duty aviation battalions under 11th ABN
- Delivering readiness

- Becoming a fully operational, deployable division
- Cultivating innovation Testing, creating, and refining solutions to operating in extreme cold
- Experimenting and learning War Game in January and Arctic Warfare Summit in March

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE stated that the division is continuously transforming through various efforts, particularly in building capabilities. The 11th Airborne Division is undergoing significant changes aimed at informing the Army on how to best align and equip forces to ensure readiness and combat credibility. Improvements and refinements in the force structure in Alaska are expected over the next several months. A notable development will be the establishment of an Arctic Aviation Command at Fort Wainwright, formalizing the command structure for the two aviation battalions located there. Given the unique and acute challenges faced by aviation units in Alaska, it is essential for aviators to report directly to the 11th Airborne Division rather than to units in Hawaii or Washington State. The Army recognizes the increasing importance of these aviation battalions to missions, and the division is excited to officially assign them under its command. In pursuit of innovation, the division is actively testing and creating solutions to the challenges of operating in extreme cold weather and mountainous terrain. The division is learning from Alaska Natives, Arctic partner nations, and other military services to refine equipment and procedures. Observing young soldiers adapt to and overcome harsh weather conditions and difficult terrain has been inspiring. With the conclusion of JPMRC, the division is focused on capturing lessons learned to integrate into future training events and support the Army's transformation efforts. Recently, a board game exercise in Carlisle evaluated the division's structure to identify resource requirements for future operations. Last week, the division hosted its inaugural Arctic Warfare Symposium at Fort Wainwright, fostering in-depth discussions and knowledge exchanges with several allied and partner nations.

[4:21:00 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE moved to slide 5 and detailed construction in Fort Wainwright. He emphasized the critical importance of the 11th Airborne Division to the Army. With the assistance of congressional appropriations, the Army has allocated significant funding to address pressing construction needs. Key projects include a new child development center, which will be the largest in the Army's inventory and will feature additional space for indoor playtime. A new community

activity center and an aquatic center are in development and targeted to open this fall. Additionally, plans are underway for a new barracks and a fitness annex, including an indoor internet facility. These investments are substantial and reflect the Army's commitment to supporting soldiers stationed in Alaska.

[4:21:53 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE moved to slide 6 and explained soldier readiness. He stated that the Army's ability to maintain a ready combat formation is the number one priority, emphasizing that caring for soldiers and their families underpins their continued success. In response to Senator Dunbar's question regarding suicide reduction across the force, he outlined the mission 100 program, which mandates that every soldier in the division receives annual wellness counseling. This program focuses on fostering positive connections, building cohesive teams, and strengthening bonds between soldiers, their leaders, and their families. This initiative has proven successful and aligns with one of the Chief of Staff of the Army's top priorities: strengthening the profession. To achieve this, the 11th Airborne Division actively promotes esprit de corps through shared experiences, such as participating in events like hiking Crow Pass or conducting airborne operations, which help build resilient and adaptive soldiers. He emphasized the importance of involving families in the soldiers' experiences, citing a summer event called "Spouse in B.E.E.," which mirrors the Army's Expert Infantryman Badge and Expert Soldier Badge events. This event saw hundreds of spouses and children engaging in activities like races, map reading, reconnaissance, and calisthenics, providing them with a glimpse of the skills soldiers develop.

[4:23:53 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE moved to slide 7 and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss the recent activities and developments within the 11th Airborne Division. The division has gained momentum over the past few years, especially since he joined in July of last year. The division is currently experiencing growth in both capacity and capability, setting a positive trajectory for future initiatives.

[4:24:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI mentioned that he represents the district covering the Fort Wainwright installation. He spoke about the activities at the base and the involvement of military families. Significant progress was made with the construction of new facilities and housing, particularly benefiting families who relocated there. Reflecting on the past decade, he expressed

satisfaction with the improvements. He shared his experience visiting the JPMRC, where personnel were tested in extreme cold, reaching negative 50 degrees. The participation of Arctic nation representatives included the Finns, Swedes, and Mongolians, some of whom were unaccustomed to such cold.

[4:25:33 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER asked about efforts to address challenges faced by military spouses when transferring their ability to work after relocating to Alaska. He noted that this issue has made it difficult for some military members to move to the state if their spouse is unable to find employment. While some progress has been made, including federal partnerships, he emphasized the importance of continued feedback. He asked if improvements have been made and wondered what further actions could be taken to support military families, acknowledging that the well-being of families plays a significant role in supporting military members.

[4:26:12 PM](#)

BRIGADIER GENERAL BURKE acknowledged the significant impact of efforts to streamline the process for military spouses to obtain temporary licenses, describing it as incredibly helpful. As progress is made toward permanent licensing, this has been a game-changing development for spouses. The most positive inroads have been made in this area and requested continued support and further streamlining of the licensing process.

[4:26:49 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI noted that he, Senator Shower, and Tammy Peralta were instrumental in streamlining the licensing process for military spouses. He mentioned that Representative Groh is currently working on establishing a military Help Desk, a one-stop shop to assist soldiers and their families as they transition to life in Alaska. He invited Captain John Cole to present an update for the U.S. Coast Guard.

[4:27:54 PM](#)

CAPTAIN JOHN COLE, Chief of Staff, District 17, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Juneau, Alaska presented an update for the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). He mentioned that he is representing the district commander, who was unable to attend the committee meeting. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to present an overview of the Coast Guard's achievements, challenges, and priorities in Alaska over the past year. He highlighted the dedication of the Coast Guard personnel who work to protect the nation's maritime interests and ensure the safety and security of Alaska's waters

and citizens. Throughout the year, the Coast Guard faced numerous challenges, including natural disaster responses, search and rescue missions, border protection, and maritime law enforcement. He emphasized the critical role of collaboration, noting their partnerships with 226 tribal partners, federal and state agencies, military services such as Alaska Command, and the Canadian Coast Guard and Department of Fisheries and Oceans. By leveraging these partnerships, the Coast Guard continues to support its mission of safeguarding the nation's maritime domain in Alaska.

[4:29:35 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE moved to slide 2 and presented recent highlights for USCG:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**This past year, the Coast Guard in Alaska...**

- Saved/Assisted 1,013 Individuals
- Saved \$71.5 M in Property
- Inspected 3,146 Vessels
- Inspected 400 Facilities
- Responded to 85 Oil Spills

CAPTAIN COLE spoke to the vital role USCG plays in ensuring the safety and security of Alaska's waterways, particularly given the state's challenging environment. Over the past year, the Coast Guard in Alaska saved over 280 lives and assisted 730 individuals through 874 search and rescue missions. These efforts demonstrate the dedication and skill of Coast Guard personnel, who risk their lives to rescue those in distress on the water and in remote areas. In addition to life-saving missions, the Coast Guard helped protect over \$71 million in property from loss or damage. The Coast Guard's presence ensures assistance for stranded vessels or those in peril from natural disasters, and protects valuable resources. The Coast Guard also plays a critical role in ensuring compliance with safety regulations. Last year, the Coast Guard conducted 1,579 commercial fishing vessel exams and more than 1,500 commercial vessel inspections across Alaska, helping prevent accidents and marine casualties. Responding to oil spills is another key mission. Alaska's pristine waters are environmentally sensitive, and the Coast Guard responded to 85 oil spills last year, minimizing environmental impact and protecting crucial habitats. These statistics underscore the Coast Guard's commitment to

saving lives, protecting property, ensuring safety compliance, and responding to environmental disasters.

[4:31:44 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE moved to slide 3 and spoke to noteworthy operations in 2023. He stated that domestic fisheries enforcement and search and rescue will remain foundational for the Coast Guard's response efforts. The relevance of national security missions has increased in Alaska's waters, with the operation of national security cutters, aircraft, and icebreakers enhancing their presence in the Arctic. One significant event was a Russian naval missile exercise last fall within the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) north of the international waters known as the "donut hole." While such military operations are lawful in international waters, the U.S. remains vigilant to protecting its interests in the surrounding areas. On September 11, the Coast Guard received a Russian navigational warning related to missile operations in the Bering Sea. In response, the Coast Guard promptly notified the domestic fishing fleet and repositioned the cutter Kimball to the northern Bering Sea, near U.S. fishing vessels operating in the area. During this event, U.S. fishing vessels continued their legal operations in the Bering Sea while the cutter was present, ensuring safety and compliance. He discussed the Coast Guard's role in addressing an incident involving the Panamanian-flagged vessel *Genius Star 11*, which reported a fire in its cargo hold while transporting lithium-ion batteries from Vietnam to San Diego. The fire occurred several hundred miles off Dutch Harbor, which was designated as the vessel's port for repairs. The Coast Guard took critical actions, directing the vessel to remain offshore while assessments were conducted to ensure all fires were extinguished and no re-ignition hazards were present. A firefighting team equipped with remote sensors confirmed the fires were out, and a C-130 transported an inert gas generator to the vessel for additional safety measures. A team of air monitoring specialists was deployed from California to assess atmospheric conditions. Once all hazards were mitigated in coordination with local leadership, the vessel was allowed to dock at the municipal pier in Alaska, where it repackaged all damaged batteries in specialized containers to prevent future incidents. Almost two months later, the Coast Guard certified *Genius Star 11* as compliant with all U.S. and flag state regulations, allowing it to moor in San Diego on February 11. This incident underscored the hazards of transporting new energy technology across open oceans, but the Coast Guard's actions demonstrated their capability to respond effectively to

emergencies in remote locations, ensuring the protection of human life and the environment.

[4:35:23 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE moved to slide 4 and detailed investments in Alaska:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Investing in Alaska**

- MH-60 Helicopter Transition
- Fast Response Cutters
- \$620 Million Allocated for Infrastructure

CAPTAIN COLE said Coast Guard operations in District 17 received significant funding, with changes underway to enhance assets and facilities. The district is redesigning its operational footprint to integrate new assets and facilities effectively. One key change involves Air Station Kodiak, which will divest its fleet of four legacy MH-65 helicopters in 2024, transitioning to the MH-60 helicopters. Training for new crews on the MH-60 is already in progress, with the transition expected to complete in 2025. This initiative aims to ensure continuous and predictable operations across Alaska, drawing on valuable lessons from previous transitions. This transition will enhance rotary wing coverage in the Arctic, Prince William Sound, and the Bering Sea. In the near term, it will enable Air Station Kodiak to rapidly achieve full operational capability in 2025 with the addition of three new helicopters.

[4:36:39 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE said Alaska will benefit from the increased range and de-icing capability of the helicopter, as well as the integration of shore-based ship capable operations across the state will improve operational availability and responsiveness. The Coast Guard is also actively developing vessels for Arctic operations, including the high-priority Polar Security Cutter (PSC), which will be capable of heavy icebreaking in both the Arctic and Antarctic, while other cutters operate seasonally in non-ice conditions. The Home Porting Plan includes two patrol boats in Kodiak, one in Seward, one in Sitka, and two in Ketchikan. Every Coast Guard mission begins and ends at a shore facility, so he expressed the importance of discussing major infrastructure. Nearly \$620 million in appropriations is aimed at strengthening the Coast Guard's presence in Alaska. At Base Kodiak, which is the operational hub in Alaska, over \$400

million is being invested to enhance operational capabilities, including a new fuel pier, vessel berths, housing, and utilities and support services. These improvements will accommodate new patrol boats and offshore patrol cutters, along with new housing to enhance living conditions for Coast Guard personnel and their families. In Seward and Sitka, the Coast Guard is designing and constructing infrastructure necessary for the deployment of patrol boats to support search and rescue, law enforcement, and maritime security operations. The Commandant of the Coast Guard is committed to home porting a commercially available icebreaker in Juneau. While current facilities can accommodate such a ship for short visits, home porting will require further investment. The Coast Guard will continue to collaborate with the city of Juneau to address the needs of service members, including housing, medical care, and childcare for the hundreds of new Coast Guard personnel expected to join the community.

[4:39:08 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE moved to slide 5 and spoke to workforce operations. He addressed the competitive landscape for talent that the Coast Guard faces, particularly in Alaska, where the service is currently 10 percent below its authorized strength—one of the largest workforce shortages in the Coast Guard's 233-year history. While the shortage is expected to grow throughout 2024, its impact in Alaska remains minimal, affecting only five personnel. Efforts are underway to enhance recruiting and retention, along with making risk-based adjustments to operations to maintain mission delivery. Priorities include life-saving missions, national security, and the protection of the marine transportation system. Coast Guard personnel live and work in nearly a dozen coastal Alaskan towns, experiencing the same challenges faced by the communities they serve. The most significant issues impacting service members and their families in Alaska are access to affordable housing, adequate healthcare, and quality education. He provided an update on a helicopter crash that occurred on November 13, involving one of the MH-60 helicopters from Air Station Sitka, CG 6016, which crashed on Reed Island during a nighttime search and rescue mission. All four crew members on board were released from the hospital, and he expressed gratitude for the rapid response and professional skills demonstrated by the Alaska Wildlife Troopers and Petersburg Fire and Rescue during this critical incident. He reported that the Air Station Sitka has received a backfill airframe and is now fully mission capable with its complete complement of helicopters.

[4:40:55 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE moved to slide 6 and explained the importance of partnerships. He expressed gratitude for the unwavering dedication and commitment of Coast Guard personnel. The partnerships established within the service and with tribal, federal, defense, state, and international allies have been instrumental in achieving goals and providing valuable services to the maritime community across Alaska. Looking ahead, he conveyed confidence that continued teamwork and resilience will help navigate any challenges that may arise.

[4:41:38 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI asked for a status update on the icebreaker that was included in the recently passed congressional budget. He asked if any additional information is available beyond what was reported on MSNBC news.

[4:41:49 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE asked whether he is referring to the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) or the commercial icebreaker.

[4:41:55 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI clarified that he believes this is in reference to the icebreaker related to the \$1.2 trillion congressional appropriations bill that just passed, which is not the commercial icebreaker.

[4:42:09 PM](#)

CAPTAIN COLE replied that while he does not have all the details for FY 24, the submission for FY 25 will be included in the President's budget currently under consideration by U.S. Congress. No funding has been submitted for this year because the focus is on continuing the build of the PSC, which represents a significant investment and is the first of its kind for the U.S. since the early 1970s.

[4:42:38 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI noted that Alaska has more coastline than the rest of the country combined and noted that it covers a large portion of territory.

[4:43:03 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SHAW introduced Rear Admiral Mark Sucato, Commander of the Navy Region Northwest. He invited him to present an update for the Navy Region Northwest.

[4:43:20 PM](#)

REAR ADMIRAL MARK SUCATO, Commander, Navy Region Northwest, Silverdale, Washington, presented an update for the Navy Region Northwest. He expressed hope that his presence marks a new beginning in revitalizing the Navy's relationship with Alaska.

[4:44:15 PM](#)

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO moved to slide 2 and described Northwest responsibilities:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **Northwest Area of Responsibility**

- 11 States
- Navy's third-largest fleet concentration area
- Puget Sound Navy presence since 1841
- 4 major installations, 16 Navy Operational Support Centers, 79 sites
- 51 miles of installation shoreline
- 200+ supported commands, all states
- 79,323 Acres
- Socioeconomically infuses
- \$13.5+ billion annually

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO said the Navy's mission focuses on deterring aggression, responding to crises, and engaging in high-end maritime conflict, as demonstrated by recent events in the Black Sea and Red Sea. With 90 percent of the world's trade transported by sea, he emphasized the Navy's commitment to preserving access to these critical global commons. Navy shore facilities and installations in the northwestern U.S. include nearly 100 installations, four of which are major sites around Puget Sound, along with various reserve centers and 79 sites throughout the region, including many in Alaska.

[4:45:17 PM](#)

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO moved to slide 3 and spoke to operational capabilities. He noted that all Navy operational forces, as depicted on the slide, are stationed in the Pacific Northwest. Within the past year, all of them have operated in Alaska. This significant presence encompasses various forms of naval activity over Alaskan waters and within its inland areas. He explained the term "fleet concentration area," referring to the collection of basins that are in reasonable proximity to each other. The Pacific Northwest is home to the world's third-largest fleet concentration area, consisting of approximately 45,000 service

members. He noted that the figures shown on the slide fluctuate daily, underscoring the importance of this operational capacity for the nation.

4:46:30 PM

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO moved to slide 4 and spoke to the U.S. Navy's presence in Alaska:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **U.S. Navy in Alaska**

The U.S. Navy continues to have a presence and interest in Alaska, and regularly visits the state and the Gulf of Alaska for various projects and critical training activities.

- Biennial Northern Edge Exercise
- Gulf of Alaska Training
- Site remediation and clean-up work at several former Navy sites in Alaska
- Community Engagement, Event Participation
  - Alaska Marine Science Symposium, Jan. 29 - Feb. 2, 2024
  - Alaska Forum on the Environment, Feb. 5-9, 2024
  - Next: ComFish, Apr. 11-12

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO stated that the Navy maintains a consistent yet subtle presence in Alaska. He cited the recent Chinese and Russian incursions into U.S. waters in 2023, which prompted a response from multiple Navy destroyers from the Pacific Northwest. This capability allows naval forces, particularly aircraft carriers, to transit vast distances quickly and project power globally. He cited the northern edge exercise, supported by Pacific Air Forces and other services, which took place in the Gulf of Alaska and involved a significant number of aircraft and vessels. Environmental considerations play a crucial role in these operations, as the Gulf of Alaska is covered by the Northwest Training Range Environmental Impact Statement. The Navy has implemented a larger maneuver area to minimize conflicts with fishing activities and has established additional airspace and sea space restrictions regarding the use of explosives and active sonar. He mentioned collaborative research with the National Marine Fisheries Service to assess sonar's effects on marine life, indicating that, aside from herring, no significant effects were found. The Navy is also engaged in

environmental remediation of sites dating back to World War II and the Cold War, including PFAS sites in the Northwest. He spoke to the Navy's commitment to increasing its presence in Alaska, noting participation in local events and a desire from communities for more engagement and they have responded with increased activity and visits. It recognizes Alaska's significance to national and maritime interests, emphasizing that the U.S. is a maritime country heavily reliant on trade and ocean resources.

[4:51:25 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER acknowledged that most senior officers would generally support increased funding and infrastructure if affordable. However, he focused specifically on the northern side of Alaska, particularly regarding discussions around pipeline development and the potential for refueling facilities as commercial traffic increases in Arctic waters. He noted the constraints imposed by the current administration on development and asked how the Navy views the establishment of such facilities as strategic stop points for refueling, especially in relation to patrolling the region and addressing the needs of naval operations. He highlighted the importance of having these facilities available for Navy ships, such as destroyers, that require fuel for extended operations in the Arctic.

[4:52:48 PM](#)

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO replied that it would depend on specific components. However, the Navy's primary mission is to protect U.S. interests in global trade routes, particularly as environmental changes in the high north may increase trade along northern Alaska. While the Navy does not currently have plans to establish a base on the north side of Alaska, the potential for increased operations in the area would necessitate logistical support and the development of logistical hubs to ensure access and security in these emerging trade routes.

[4:53:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WRIGHT expressed satisfaction with the increased Navy presence in Alaska and emphasized the state's significance. His main question centered on whether the Navy plans to establish a permanent home in Alaska.

[4:54:07 PM](#)

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO replied that the Navy does not plan to construct or rebuild a major installation in Alaska. While existing ports serve as logistical hubs for ships and submarines, the decision to establish a base would hinge on

evaluating the logistics involved and whether the benefits would outweigh the costs. He emphasized that logistical efficiency is a key consideration in such decisions.

[4:55:07 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER expressed the importance of addressing concerns about nuclear power, particularly in the context of potential micro nuclear reactors as power sources in Alaska. Drawing a comparison to established nuclear technologies, he noted that the Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier operates with advanced reactors capable of generating approximately 650 megawatts, sufficient to power a significant area like South Central Alaska. He emphasized that the Navy has safely operated nuclear technology for a long time and urged military leaders to communicate this safety record to Alaskans. He asked whether he has any recommendations on informing Alaskans regarding nuclear energy to alleviate fears and encourage the public to consider it as a viable power source.

[4:56:35 PM](#)

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO emphasized that the U.S. Navy boasts nearly 75 years of unblemished success and safety in operating nuclear power. He assured that the technology and expertise necessary for safe nuclear operations are well-established in the country. The Navy continually trains personnel in these practices, highlighting that the capability to utilize nuclear power safely is firmly within America's reach.

[4:57:14 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR SHAW noted that Rear Admiral Sucato has a son in line to soon earn his Navy SEAL Trident. He stated that this continuation of service within the family is recognized and highly valued.

[4:57:33 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI inquired about the ongoing discussions regarding the importation of LNG to South Central Alaska, specifically about the potential vulnerabilities associated with sourcing it. He questioned the feasibility of obtaining liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the spot market or other sources within the Pacific Rim, seeking any comments on this matter.

[4:58:03 PM](#)

REAR ADMIRAL SUCATO replied that he does not have a specific opinion on the importation of LNG since it is not a topic that he is personally familiar with.

[4:58:29 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI invited Major General Torrence Saxe to present an update for the Army National Guard and DMVA.

[4:59:04 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL TORRENCE SAXE, Adjutant General, Alaska National Guard, Fort Richardson, Alaska, presented an update for the Alaska National Guard and DMVA. He presented a video that explained the mission of the Army National Guard.

[5:02:40 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 35 and discussed Alaska National Guard's recruiting and retention efforts. He noted that the retention rate is healthy at approximately 95 to 98 percent. While acknowledging the importance of maintaining personnel, he emphasized pride in the current management of soldiers and airmen. Addressing past concerns regarding sexual assault and organizational culture, he stated that significant changes have been made, with a focus on accountability throughout the command structure. He emphasized that it is everyone's responsibility in the chain of command to address issues promptly and support affected individuals and families. Regarding 24/7 missions, he expressed the need for support as certain active guard reserve positions may be at risk, which could impact the capacity to conduct critical operations like civilian search and rescue in Western Alaska. He highlighted the unique role of the Alaska National Guard, which maintains nearly all 24/7 missions, except for fighter operations. He underscored the urgency of the situation and the importance of support from the community and leadership to ensure the continuity of these essential missions.

[5:05:04 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 36 and spoke to an image comparing Chinese and American forces in 1999. He noted that the presentation materials were not intended to create alarm but to convey his concerns regarding security dynamics in Alaska, particularly in relation to OPACOM and Northern Command. He noted the complexity of the command structure, with sometimes two four-star generals responsible for the state, raising questions about whether missions are considered home or away. To illustrate his point, he presented a graphic comparing the state of American and Chinese forces in 1999, with American forces represented in blue and Chinese forces in red. He indicated that this comparison serves to highlight the significant changes in military capabilities and positioning since the late 1990s.

[5:05:39 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 37 and spoke to an image comparing Chinese and American forces at present. He emphasized that while the presentation does not include allies, it is crucial to recognize the dramatic changes in the security landscape. The fundamental question regarding Alaska is whether it serves primarily as a launching pad to the west or as a defensive position, asserting that it should fulfill both roles. He acknowledged the widespread belief that Alaska is the most strategically significant location on the planet, agreeing with this sentiment. To illustrate the importance of this perspective, he referenced the 2018 Anchorage earthquake, questioning the purpose of the Port of Anchorage—whether to evacuate people or to facilitate essential supplies like baby formula. He stressed the need for ongoing discussions at all levels about the true purpose of Alaska, highlighting the necessity of defending its residents as a priority that deserves greater focus.

[5:06:40 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 38 and spoke to an image comparing projected Chinese and American forces in 2025. He pointed out the dramatic changes depicted in the slide dated 2025, emphasizing that these developments are imminent. He stated that while he does not intend to be alarmist, he aims to illustrate the evolving security situation within their area of responsibility, noting an increase in both conventional and unconventional aircraft. The National Guard plays a significant role in national security, particularly regarding potential threats from Russia, China, and North Korea. Much of the nuclear chain of command would involve National Guardsmen, with operations tied to clear communication and coordination between various centers, including a warning center in Colorado and Fort Greely. He remarked on the unusual nature of such close operational definitions for a National Guard, illustrating the critical responsibilities they hold in these security dynamics.

[5:07:36 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 14 and explained a possible mission scenario. He referenced General Nahom's remarks regarding the possibility of a Russian incursion, noting that such events occur frequently. Nearly the entire operational chain for Alaska Command in NORTHCOM would fall under a National Guard mission in such scenarios. He underscored the seriousness of the situation, asserting the importance of ensuring the National Guard's capability to continue its missions effectively for the state's security.

[5:07:59 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 15 and showcased deployment locations on a map. He noted that many individuals in the state are often surprised to learn that the National Guard does, in fact, deploy. To illustrate this, he presented a map demonstrating the various locations to which both the Army and Air Force components of the National Guard have been deployed over the years. On any given day, there are typically dozens to hundreds of personnel from the National Guard outside the state on deployments, underscoring the breadth of their operational commitment.

[5:08:27 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slides 16 - 17 and spoke to rural operations and recruitment in Alaska. He emphasized the importance of having operational capabilities throughout Alaska, so the National Guard reflects the state's diverse communities. Recruiting from all areas is crucial to achieve this goal. He provided an example of the response to Typhoon Murbach, highlighting that local residents were the first to respond effectively. He stressed the need for troops to be stationed in various locations to ensure quick response times in emergencies. Additionally, he shared images of a commissary run in Bethel, illustrating outreach efforts to veterans in remote areas, which have positively impacted recruitment. New recruits from western Alaska represent a bright spot in their recruitment efforts. The National Guard's response to Typhoon Murbach marked the largest off-road response in Alaska in about four decades. The mission involved extensive helicopter use across numerous small communities, fostering connections between Alaskans. Feedback from local residents was overwhelmingly positive, with two key messages: gratitude for the National Guard's presence and surprise at the amount of food the troops eat.

[5:10:36 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 18 and explained the pay structure. He emphasized the importance of prioritizing the troops, noting that while pay has improved, there is always room for further enhancement. The pay section has expanded from two to six personnel to better serve the needs of the troops. He stressed the significance of maintaining a strong command team dedicated to ensuring timely payment and overall troop welfare. Acknowledging the transient nature of military service, he conveyed that the lasting legacy should focus on understanding the mission: the commitment to serve the troops, not just personal ambitions.

[5:11:18 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 19 and highlighted key developments over the past year, with a focus on female veterans. He said Women's Veterans Day, celebrated in 2023 and set to return in 2024, marks a significant initiative. A major accomplishment was the renaming of Alaska's Veteran's Affairs (VA) clinic to honor Colonel Rasmussen. With approximately 10,000 female veterans in the state, and around 6,000 receiving services from the CDA alone, there is a strong commitment to enhancing support for this demographic. Notably, the Alaska VA clinic is distinguished by having a sexual trauma unit, making it the only one of its kind in the nation, reinforcing the dedication to assisting those in need.

[5:12:13 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slides 20 - 21 and announced the recent dedication of the Bethel Armory in honor of a retired National Guardsman, a prominent community leader known for his significant contributions over the years. He spoke to the importance of building connections across the state and said that it's crucial for him and his team to establish relationships before a crisis arises, rather than introducing themselves during one. He reflected on his visit to Bethel five years ago, highlighting the positive impact the individual has had on the community and the state.

[5:12:53 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 22 and recounted his earlier visit to Kodiak, where he honored Daniel Harmon, a soldier who served as a long-range reconnaissance patrol infantryman during the Vietnam War. He shared the story of his bravery during an ambush, where, despite being shot, he heroically rescued a fellow soldier, ensuring that individual survived. The soldier's legacy lives on through his son, who was present at the emotional event attended by approximately 30 family members at the Kodiak armory. He expressed gratitude for the sacrifices Mr. Harmon made and the contributions of his family throughout the years.

[5:13:49 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 23 and spoke to a historical rescue operation from 1955, where a Navy plane encountered two Russian fighters near Gambel. After being fired upon, the plane caught fire and crashed due to the lack of a runway. The crew and local Alaska scouts witnessed the incident, which resulted in a significant fireball. Despite the danger of Russian

aircraft flying overhead, the scouts bravely commandeered boats to launch a rescue mission. They successfully saved 11 surviving crew members and transported them back to Gamble, eventually bringing them to Elmendorf for medical attention. He highlighted the courage and quick action of those involved in the rescue operation.

[5:14:34 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE moved to slide 24 and recognized Corporal Bruce Boolowong, the last remaining member of the crew involved in the 1955 rescue operation. He noted that the heroism displayed by Captain Boolowong and his fellow crew members was honored with a personal medal presentation. He emphasized the importance of sharing these stories to recognize the sacrifices of those who came before and contributed to their current circumstances.

[5:15:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD mentioned the estimated number of women registered with the VA is about 3,000 and requested that the office verify this information.

[5:15:21 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAX replied that he was informed today that the number of registered women is 6,000 but offered to verify this statistic.

[5:15:44 PM](#)

SENATOR SHOWER asked about the potential of the KC-46 and F-35 moving forward with the National Guard.

[5:15:52 PM](#)

MAJOR GENERAL SAXE stated the National Guard would not be going into the fighter business and is currently at capacity with 24/7 missions. He expressed appreciation for the strong relationship with active-duty personnel, emphasizing mutual respect and teamwork. Addressing the future of the KC-46, he highlighted the need for this aircraft, likening the current tankers to driving an 80-year-old car in Alaska. He cited an initiative to maintain the KC-135 until 2060, while also striving to incorporate the KC-46 into their operations through a Total Force Initiative (TFI). He noted that this effort has been on his professional agenda since stepping into his previous role as Commander for the 168th Wing at Eielson AFB. He suggested that residents in the Fairbanks area are often knowledgeable about the KC-46. He recalled the potential BRAC discussions from years past, noting

the overall supportive attitude towards the military throughout the entire state.

[5:18:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KAWASAKI remarked that this is likely the first time a representative from the Navy has presented before the committee. He expressed a desire to see more Navy presentations in the future.

[5:19:13 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Joint Armed Services Committee meeting at 5:19 p.m.