

MINUTES
STATE OF NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON MILITARY AND VETERAN AFFAIRS
301 Centennial Mall South, PO Box 95083, Lincoln, NE 68509-5083
November 3, 2023 - 1:00 p.m. - 301 Centennial Mall South, 4th Floor, NDVA

The Commission on Military and Veteran Affairs (Commission) met on November 3, 2023, at 1:00 p.m. at the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs (NDVA), 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Commissioners present (voting members):

Major General Craig Strong, Adjutant General of the Nebraska National Guard
John Hilgert, Director, Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs
Tami Thompson, 1st Congressional District
Dan Donovan, 2nd Congressional District
David Bloomfield, 3rd Congressional District

Commissioners present (nonvoting, ex officio members):

Jon Lokamas, Veterans' Program Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Labor
Rick Evans, Chair, State Committee Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve
Colonel Patrick Kolesiak 55th Wing Designee
Brigadier General David Preisman, U.S. Strategic Command Designee
Colonel Matthew Sattler, 557th Weather Wing Designee

Commissioners excused (voting member):

K.C. Belitz, Director, Nebraska Department of Economic Development

Commissioner representative present (nonvoting):

Joe Lauber, representing the Nebraska Department of Economic Development

I. CALL TO ORDER – LOCATION OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. and the location of the Open Meetings Act in the room was identified by Phil O'Donnell, Military Affairs Liaison.

II. ROLL CALL

Strong, Hilgert, Thompson, Donovan, Bloomfield, Lokamas, Evans, Kolesiak, Preisman, and Sattler were present. Additionally, Joe Lauber was present representing the Nebraska Department of Economic Development in a nonvoting status.

III. APPROVAL OF JUNE 1, 2023, COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – Action/Vote

Moved by Hilgert and seconded by Bloomfield to approve the June 1, 2023, Commission meeting minutes. Voting Aye: Strong, Hilgert, Thompson, Donovan, and Bloomfield. Motion carried.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

No member of the public addressed the Commission.

V. U.S. SPACE COMMAND BASING UPDATE – Military Affairs Liaison

O'Donnell provided a timeline and key updates regarding the potential move of U.S. Space Command from Colorado to Alabama. Moving forward O'Donnell intends to continue to monitor the implementation of the decision. Monitoring the key FY24 priorities of the Defense-State Liaison Office and any updates to the Support of Military Family assessments for Nebraska continue to be important for the Commission.

VI. MILITARY BASE DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT UPDATE – Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

Jenifer Acierno, NDVA Agency Legal Counsel, presented an update regarding the Military Base Development and Support Fund (MBSDF) describing the administration and implementation of the MBSDF pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute §55-901.

The application remains available on the NDVA web site. As of the date of the meeting, NDVA received no MBSDF applications, however, Ms. Acierno speculated that it could be due to the newness of the program. She is aware of some facilities working with private and public entities to build “front side processes” to develop program nominations.

Evans noted he expects an Offutt Air Force Base application reasonably soon. COL Kolesiak commented they are looking at two projects and the base is making sure donations are legally suitable for the Air Force accept.

Hilgert noted the original appropriation was envisioned as a matching fund to attract the Space Command HQ to Nebraska. The legislature continued its commitment to support the armed forces inside Nebraska by supporting the MBSDF and is a model for the nation.

Hilgert and Acierno both noted there is no expiration date and the funds are included in the upcoming biennial budget.

VII. GROUND BASED STRATEGIC DETERRENT DEPLOYMENT UPDATE – Military Affairs Liaison

O'Donnell provided key updates regarding the Sentinel project in western Nebraska. He noted that in June 2023, U.S. Senators, including U.S. Senators Deb Fischer and Pete Ricketts, introduced legislation to provide multiyear procurement authority for LGM-35A Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles. In October, the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) hosted a government contracting conference in Scottsbluff with a focus on regional military construction and contracting. There is some press reporting suggesting delays in the program.

Evans noted in meetings with NBDC staff, they have some Department of Defense funds available to assist small businesses to meet project requirements. He also noted the project will likely be a challenge in Western Nebraska finding the required number of vendors.

VIII. FOREIGN INVESTMENT NEAR MILITARY INSTALLATIONS UPDATE –

Military Affairs Liaison

O'Donnell noted the issue of foreign investments has been discussed recently by the Association of Defense Communities, the Nebraska Legislature's Agriculture Committee and the University of Nebraska Center for Agricultural Profitability.

As a follow to the June 1, 2023 meeting, O'Donnell reached out to the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center which drafted a policy analysis and messaging proposal for the Commission. O'Donnell recommended two lines of effort. First, discern what Nebraska Revised Statutes apply to these issues. Second, develop a messaging strategy tailored to specific audiences.

Potential next steps include reaching out to the Agriculture Committee to share current findings and research. Additionally, the Commission could identify funding and resources to move forward with the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center's proposal.

Commissioners discussed their concerns of foreign entities owning land near military installations including both Offutt AFB and land identified for future Sentential missile facilities in central and western Nebraska. Commissioners also noted that protecting the operational security of Nebraska military installations is a critical task. They noted that perhaps the current work of the Agricultural Committees on foreign ownership of agricultural land could expand to include ownership around military facilities when a potential bill was drafted. It was noted that the federal government was also developing legislation to address the issue.

Ultimately, the Committee decided to engage the governor's policy research office and potentially the Agricultural Committee to share findings.

IX. DELIBERATION – DRAFT CONTENT FOR A LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF FUTURE MILITARY MISSIONS AND DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ACTIVITIES IN NEBRASKA PURSUANT TO DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION DELINEATED IN NEB. REV. STAT. §55-602

O'Donnell provided the Commission with an update on the draft Legislative Resolution (LR) content that the Commission approved in December, 2022. In March, that LR content was reviewed and approved by the Governor's Policy Research Office and shared with a State Senator for possible introduction. An updated May 30, 2023 version of the LR reflects additions and draft content changes for possible reintroduction the 2nd Regular Session of the 108th Legislature.

X. RECOMMENDED CONTENT FOR A LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF FUTURE MILITARY MISSIONS AND DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ACTIVITIES IN NEBRASKA – Action/Vote

Moved by Bloomfield and seconded by Hilgert to recommend content for a legislative resolution in support of military missions and Department of Defense activities in Nebraska. Voting Aye: Strong, Hilgert, Thompson, Donovan, and Bloomfield. Motion carried.

XI. PRESENTATION – COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT AS REQUIRED BY NEB. REV. STAT. §55-602, RECOMMENDATIONS, COURSES OF ACTION

Dr. Eric Thompson and Dr. Mitch Herian presented the Economic Impact of Nebraska Military Assets For FY 2023. Herian highlighted two special studies. The first special study estimated an employment number associated with Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs contract spending in Nebraska. The second special study surveyed county veteran service officers of learning more about county budgets and county support for the county veterans service officers. Commissioners discussed areas for future research including a survey of veterans in Nebraska to assess their level of satisfaction and knowledge of available benefits.

XII. PROPOSED CHANGES AND SUBMISSION OF THE COMMISSION REPORT AS REQUIRED BY NEB. REV. STAT. §55-606 – Action/Vote

After discussion concerning updating one of the four recommendations made by the report, Commissioner Thompson moved to approve the report and seconded by Donovan to proposed changes and submission of the Commission report as required by Neb. Rev. Stat. §55-606. Voting Aye: Strong, Hilgert, Thompson, Donovan, and Bloomfield. Motion carried.

XIII. VETERANS’ PROGRAM COORDINATOR REPORT AS REQUIRED BY NEB. REV. STAT. §48-203 – Veterans’ Program Coordinator

Statute 48-203 requires the veterans program coordinator with the Nebraska Department of Labor present an annual report to the commission. John Lokamas provided a synopsis of veteran’s service providers in the Department of Labor. The Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOPs) specialists work directly with qualified veterans on resumes, mock interviews, and job search techniques. Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs) work directly with employers to advocate for hiring veterans. Additionally, there are consolidated positions in the smaller populations who perform both those roles.

Current manning levels throughout the State of Nebraska:

- Scottsbluff- (1) DVOP/LVER
- North Platte- (1) DVOP/LVER (New)
- Grand Island- (1) DVOP
- Hastings- (1) LVER
- Beatrice- (1) DVOP/LVER
- Lincoln- (1) DVOP
- Omaha- (2) DVOP’S (Both New)
- Norfolk- (1) DVOP, (1) LVER (New)

Lastly, Lokamas discussed the extremely low unemployment rate both nationally (3.8%) and in Nebraska (2.7%) and showed veteran unemployment in Nebraska (2.4%) was below both.

XIV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Each Commissioner present was given the opportunity to make comments.

XV. MOTION TO ADJOURN – Action/Vote

Moved by Hilgert and seconded by Bohac to adjourn. Voting Aye: Bohac, Hilgert, Thompson, Donovan, and Bloomfield. Motion carried. Adjourned at 2:13 p.m.