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Inaugural ACAST meeting kick-starts discussions on Alaska's military competitiveness

SEPTEMBER 11, 2018 ANCHORAGE - The Alaska Civilian-Armed Services Team (ACAST) met for the first time last week to begin strategizing ways to make Alaska more attractive to federal defense agencies.

Governor Bill Walker created ACAST as an advisory body to help Alaska grow military investment, hoping to expand and attract missions that improve national security and contribute to Alaska's economy. The effort is a recognition of longstanding defense investments in Alaska, and increased competition from other states to call themselves home to U.S. military bases and assets.

"From World War II onward, Alaska's strategic position has always been a key component of our nation's defense, and the men and women of the U.S. military have literally built parts of this state, such as the Alaska Canada Highway," said Major General Laurie Hummel, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. "But as the world changes, and particularly here in the fast-changing Arctic, we need to take thoughtful steps to continue to be at the forefront of our nation's defense and, as a state, to continue to reap the benefits from those economic investments."

Department of Defense spending makes up a larger proportion of Alaska's GDP than in all but two other states, equal to about \$3,840 per Alaskan each year.

"We're incredibly proud of the strong presence the armed services maintain in Alaska, and the relationship we share," Governor Walker said. "It's good for our communities, it's good for our schools, and it's good for our country. We're serious about keeping that relationship growing."

"As we learned during the threat to downsize the 4-25, aka the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) of the 25th Infantry Division stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson, a few years ago here in Anchorage, a lot of the time, decisions come down to basic dollars and cents," said Bill Popp, ACAST co-chair and President and CEO of Anchorage Economic Development Corporation. "We have our strategic location, and we have great communities, but we need to be more competitive with other states on the costs for housing, labor, and energy."

“Recent investments, such as the Air Force’s decision to base two squadrons of F-35s at Eielson Air Force Base are a good sign that decision makers in the Pentagon continue to think of Alaska as the point of the spear, but we can still situate ourselves as better partners and take advantage of more opportunities in other areas such as training and Arctic response,” stated MG Randy “Church” Kee (USAF Ret.), ACAST co-chair and Arctic Domain Awareness Center Executive Director.

In addition to Commissioner Hummel, and co-chairs Bill Popp and Randy “Church” Kee, the nine-member board includes a geographically diverse group of Alaskans and veterans from all four Department of Defense branches of service and the U.S. Coast Guard. The Administrative Order and complete roster are available here: <https://gov.alaska.gov/services/boards-and-commissions/fact-sheet/?board=514>

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