

31 January 2021



Alaska Civilian-Armed Services Team (ACAST) Meeting Summary 3 Dec 2020

The below is a written summary of the ACAST meeting held on 3 December 2020, via Zoom Teleconference. Note, details are included in the Zoom meeting recording sent via email.

Attendees included:

Thomas J. Barrett, VADM, USCG (Ret), Mr. Craig Christenson, Deputy Commissioner, State of Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (representing Maj. Gen. (AK) Torrence W. Saxe), Randy "Church" Kee, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret), Mr., Bill Popp, Mr. Stanley Wright, Mr. John Whiddon, Mr. Tim Jones, Mr. Carl Uchytel, Mr. Joshua Church and new member, Mr. Dan Cole.

Unable to join:

Douglas Goodwin

Additional participants included:

DMVA Special Assistant Stanley Wright, DMVA member Gina Ritacco, Mr. Jason Roe (ADAC) (in order to assist Co-chair Kee in recording meeting notes).

Discussions.

Meeting was called to order by ACAST Co-Chair, Bill Popp

- Brief review of the associated read ahead and noted that both the agenda and read ahead are informal working papers and intended only to facilitate discussions of ACAST. Unless so reflected the contents of working papers do not reflect any particular member of ACAST or any particular organization or entity associated of ACAST participants.
- Reminded that Co-Chairs will alternate chairing meetings.
- Also noted was that ACAST remains a volunteer pro-bono advisory activity, and participants serve as appointed by the Governor of the State of Alaska in accordance with the Administrative Order 291 establishing ACAST by then State of Alaska Governor, Bill Walker.
- Reference order: <https://gov.alaska.gov/admin-orders/administrative-order-no-291/>

Conducted Order of Business:

- 1) Co-Chair Popp welcomed new ACAST appointment, Mr. Dan Cole. CWO-4 USN (Ret), Past District Captain, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary



- 2) Co-Chair Popp acknowledged ACAST reappointments:
 - a) VADM (Ret) Tom Barrett
 - b) Mr. Tim Jones
 - c) Co-Chair Church Kee
- 3) Co-Chair invited DMVA Deputy Commissioner to provide an update from DMVA and the Alaska National Guard, which included a discussion on the following:
 - a) Alaska National Guard supported elections conducted on 3 November 2020 and has continued COVID 19 contact tracing activities across the State.
 - b) DMVA Deputy Commissioner noted that it was a setback the State of Alaska's bid to win the basing of HQ U.S. Space Command has failed, as Anchorage was not included in the list of finalists for the relocation of this new headquarters. Accordingly, ACAST should table efforts that continue to advocate in basing HQ USSPACECOM in the Anchorage area.
 - i) ACAST deliberated if there was a potential for U.S. Space Force to place a component Headquarters in Alaska (similar to 11th Air Force). Further inquiries will be made.
 - c) Military dependent licensure remains an unresolved problem and one that will require re-engagement with the State of Alaska Legislature starting in new year. ACAST co-chairs noted this will reflect in ACAST Annual Report for 2020 and will be pressed in detail at the planned 29 January 2021 meeting.
 - d) Acknowledged the need to continue pressing for basing of KC-46 air refueling aircraft at Eielson AFB (and such basing should be seen as additive numbers of platforms, not as a replacement of existing KC-135 aircraft).
 - e) Provide DMVA an advocacy memo for Clear Air Force Station construction, following the sending of a Clear AFS flyer (subsequently provided by Mr. Wright).
 - f) Discussed the landslide at Haines as a result of significant rainstorm. As a result of the local area crisis, Maj Gen Saxe was on scene supporting relief efforts.
5. Old Business
 - a) Briefly reviewed last actions of ACAST 2020 Meeting #3 (see prior summary) on 9 October 2020. Motioned for approval of 9 October Meeting, seconded and put to a vote. Motioned carried with no dissent.
 - b) Reviewed status of requested ACAST memos provided to AK DMVA Commissioner. Anything else the ACAST Team can do to support?
 - i) Summary memo from 29 July 2020 (updated on 18 Nov 2020)
 - ii) Space Command Memo (dated 18 Nov 2020)
 - iii) KC-46 Memo (dated 18 Nov 2020)
 - iv) Clear AFS memo in support of Long-Range Discrimination Radar, which was in draft, awaiting details from DMVA
6. New Business
 - a. Welcomed Mr. Verdie Bower, Director State of Alaska Veterans Affairs to provide an overview of Alaska's Veterans Affairs program. Details of the review provided in meeting recording.



- i. Distinguished between wartime and peacetime veterans.
 - ii. Provided statistics and characteristics of Alaska’s veterans.
 - iii. Noted the program brings resources to the communities across Alaska and benefits Alaska’s veterans.
 - iv. Supporting document describing the program provided as Annex to meeting minutes.
 - v. Described “pain points” ...notably, the lack of digital record for DD Form 214 (Discharge papers).
 - b. Reviewed ACAST Draft Annual Report. Co-Chair Popp asked ACAST to provide suggestions/edits to Co-Chair Kee prior to holidays, but related the report was approved in concept.
 - c. ACAST Roundtable
 - i. Need to focus on Port of Alaska (Anchorage) in early 2021 as well as licensure.
 - ii. Need to discuss Arctic infrastructure.
 - iii. Link up with Wilson Center Polar Institute to understand Guggenheim project.
 - iv. Briefly discussed Senator Sullivan (as the Chair of the Senate Security Subcommittee on Transportation, Commerce and Science) is holding hearing on U.S. Coast Guard efforts in Alaska and the Arctic, rescheduled from 22 September 2020 to 8 December 2020. ACAST Co-Chair Kee is witness #2 for this hearing.
 - v. Defending and securing the Bering Sea EEZ likely warrants a separate memorandum of ACAST Advocacy.
- 7. Meeting chair provided recap discussion and gained closing reflections from ACAST participants.
- 8. Meeting chair requested motion to conclude meeting, which was received, seconded, and voted with no dissent. Meeting was adjourned.

End of Report.

+++++

Annex

Office of Veterans Affairs Annual numbers

FY 2020

Following information verified by VA Office of the Actuary:

Total Veterans: 68,891

Total dependents: 151,560



Compensation and pension Received by veterans residing in Alaska: \$333.06.1M
Total Number receiving Compensation and Pension: 21,598/Compensation – 241/Pension
New item this year (Compensation breakdown by rating percent) 0%-20%: 5,210, 30% - 40%: 3,731, 50%
- 60%: 7,603, 70% - 90%: 6,017, 100%: 2,521

Healthcare provided to Veterans: \$383.8M
Total Unique Patients: 20K

VA Education/Vocational Rehabilitation benefits paid in state: \$74M
Total utilizing VA Education/Vocational and Rehabilitation Benefits: 3,881 per month

Veterans Group Life Insurance payouts: 2.8M

VA Home Loans guaranteed \$997.067M
Total loans closed/Issued to Veterans 3,150
Average home price: \$310K

Following is from Department of Defense Office of the Actuary (New Tracking this year)

Total DoD Retirees residing in Alaska: 10,198
Total annual Retirement payments Received: \$295.8M

The following is those served and returned funds by OVA:

Alaska Population Served: total served 40,511 (Note: Veteran Service Officers Served: 17,514 – breakdown – Disabled American Veterans: 3,135 – American Legion: – Veterans of Foreign Wars: 2,974 – Vietnam Veterans of American: – Office of Veterans Affairs 22,997) VSO and OVA numbers reduced by 38,361K caused by COVID outreach stoppage. OVA is appointment only and VSO's moved to each perspective state headquarters due to federal shutdown of the Veterans Benefits Offices in Anchorage (all federal employees tele commuting)

Total One-time payments not calculated above: \$56.189M (this is back payments owed to our Veterans and their families this will continue to reduce as we transition to the new Appeals Modernization program at the Veterans Court of Appeals. The length of time for back payments have reduced to an average of 11.5 months vice the past average of 6.5 years.

Additional Notes of interests:

Military Veterans and DoD retirees received \$638M in direct annual funds from the DoD and the VA. They had \$56.189M returned in single one-time payments. Collectively they used \$74M for education/Vocational Rehabilitation at the same time received over \$383M in VA healthcare. This Health Care and Education is the highest amount since tracking these numbers. Our Veterans received over \$997M in VA Guaranteed home loans. Survivors and Widows received \$8.7M in Alaska. Veterans/Retirees and their families received a grand total of \$2.172B in payments and benefits.



Maurice “MO Baily Highly Rural Travel Grant:

This grant serves the following communities: Anchor Point/ Christochina/ Coffman Cove/ Cooper Landing/ Craig/ Edna Bay/ Delta Junction/ Edna Bay/ Fairbanks/ Gakona/ Glennallen/ Hollis/ Homer/ Houston/ Hydaburg/ Kasilof/ Kenai/ Ketchikan/ Klawock/ Kodiak/ Lab Bay/ Mendeltna/ Mentasta/ Metlakatla/ Nikiski/ Ninilchik/ North Pole/ Northway/ Palmer/ Port Lions/ Port Protection/ Saw Mill Creek/ Slana/ Soldotna/ Sterling/ Talkeetna/ Tanacross/ Thorne Bay/ Tok/ Wasilla/ Whittier

VA provided grant: \$250K

Veterans Served: 5916

Trips arranged: 5983

Total Distance: 289,618 miles (11X around the earth)

27, 653 NM on the Alaska Marine Highway system

