

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY AFFAIRS, AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

Minutes of the 4th Meeting of the 2021 Interim

September 22, 2021

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 4th meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection was held on Wednesday, September 22, 2021, at 10:00 AM, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator C.B. Embry Jr., Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator C.B. Embry Jr., Co-Chair; Representative Walker Thomas, Co-Chair; Senators Jimmy Higdon, Stephen Meredith, Robby Mills, Dennis Parrett, Wil Schroder, Brandon Smith, Whitney Westerfield, Mike Wilson, and David Yates; Representatives John Blanton, Kevin D. Bratcher, Myron Dossett, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Al Gentry, Jim Gooch Jr., Mark Hart, Matthew Koch, Scott Lewis, Savannah Maddox, Bobby McCool, Scott Sharp, Pamela Stevenson, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Bill Wesley, and Buddy Wheatley.

Guests: Colonel Lance O'Bryan, Garrison Commander, U.S. Army Fort Knox; Brigadier General (Ret.) Jim Iacocca, President and CEO, Knox Regional Development Alliance; Brandon Brummett, Louisville District Outreach Coordinator, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Colonel Andrew Jordan, Garrison Commander, U.S. Army Fort Campbell; Kelli Pendleton, President and CEO, Campbell Strong Defense Alliance; Joseph G. Harbour, Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Fort Campbell; Colonel Stephen "Steve" Dorris, Commanding Officer, Bluegrass Army Depot; Craig Williams, Program Director, Kentucky Environmental Foundation; Captain Amy Beach, Commanding Officer, U.S. Coast Guard Ohio Valley Sector; and Brigadier General (Ret.) Steve Bullard, Executive Director, Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs.

LRC Staff: Jessica Zeh, Maurya Allen, and Logan Schaaf.

Senator Wilson moved to approve the August 24, 2021, meeting minutes. Representative Gooch seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

U.S. Army Fort Knox

Colonel Lance O’Bryan, Garrison Commander, and Brigadier General (Ret.) Jim Iacocca, President and CEO of the Knox Regional Development Alliance, delivered presentations on Fort Knox. Colonel O’Bryan said Fort Knox was his military installation of choice when he returned to the United States from Germany. In 2020, Fort Knox was named the best garrison in the U.S. within the training directorate. Colonel O’Bryan said that his job is to keep everything updated, from infrastructure to training, and to ensure readiness. Quality of life is also of utmost importance for soldiers and civilians at the installation.

Fort Knox is home to nine General Officer commands, the most per capita of any installation. They have missions worldwide. Colonel O’Bryan explained Fort Knox’s motto, “Strength Starts Here.” As the home of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, they train and validate all recruiters. U.S. Army Cadet Command, the largest organization producing newly commissioned Second Lieutenants every year, is also based in Fort Knox. Human Resources Command manages a soldier’s career from start to end, and the Command Assessment Program helps determine an officer’s strategic leadership potential. Fort Knox is also home to unique ranges, including the 360-degree live fire range on the Salt River and the Digital Air Ground Integration Range (DAGIR), which should be ready for use by late 2023.

Colonel O’Bryan emphasized the multifunctional nature of Fort Knox. It is the Army’s first energy secure and energy independent installation. When their water treatment plant is operational, likely by November 2021, they will be able to produce their own water. They also have three Intergovernmental Support Agreements, all with Hardin County. Next spring, they expect to begin construction of 50 new four bedroom houses, helping to alleviate some of the housing deficit. Colonel O’Bryan said he recently approved an agreement with LG&E to assist with the KentuckyWired Project. He concluded by highlighting the continuing efforts to improve childcare services for military families.

General Iacocca said the Knox Regional Development Alliance (KRDA) was born out of the CORE Committee, which was created by community leaders to recognize the importance of Fort Knox. In 2017, the KRDA was established. They are managed by a 28 person board, consisting of both ex officio members and members selected through a nomination process. Their first objective is to protect the existing missions and advocate for new ones at Fort Knox. KRDA also helps defense contractors establish connections with the Army, but they do not advocate for them.

KRDA creates opportunities and connections for soldiers and families. They created the first military spouse employment initiative. Working with Elizabethtown Community and Technical College, they started a coding academy to teach computer skills at the installation. They also market Fort Knox’s potential at the political level.

General Iacocca highlighted Fort Knox's regional impact, including the \$2.6 billion it injects into the economy, its \$750 million annual payroll, the 22,000 jobs on the installation, and the 13,000 jobs supported off the installation.

General Iacocca listed some of Fort Knox's other positive qualities and provided policy recommendations. The Department of Defense released studies on the potential impact of climate change on military installations and determined that Fort Knox is not impacted. There are no environmental restrictions on training. General Iacocca concluded by recommending the repeal of the vehicle sales tax for soldiers who purchased a car in another state and were relocated to Kentucky, and the repeal of the retirement pay income tax as a way to convince potential community leaders to stay near Fort Knox after retirement.

Representative Scott thanked General Iacocca for his service and said he was sympathetic to the repeal of the vehicle sales tax, and would work with Representative Tate on the issue.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Brandon Brummett, Louisville District Outreach Coordinator for the Army Corps of Engineers, presented on the activities of the Corps in Kentucky. At each level, the Corps is supervised by military officers. Mr. Brummett recommended that citizens with questions for the Corps start at the district level. With relatively frequent turnover of leadership due to the political nature of the appointments to those positions, Mr. Brummett said the employees in non-political jobs are critical for keeping projects going during political transitions.

Some of the most important missions of the Louisville District include civil works projects, support to military customers and other federal agencies, environmental missions, and emergency management. In August 2021, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Army Corps of Engineers awarded an \$840 million contract to build a new VA medical center in Louisville. The Louisville District has a civil works program focusing on responsible development, protection and restoration of water and land resources, flood risk reduction, and management of navigation locks and dams on the Ohio River and the Green River. Its military works program supports construction on installations in Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. They also have Army Reserve and Air Force Reserve programs, providing project management, planning, design, and construction support.

Representative Blanton asked about the possibility of opening more land around lakes in Kentucky for the construction of new homes. Mr. Brummett said that it is a conversation the Corps would be happy to have, although sometimes more land around lakes is needed than one might initially think for the management of surging water levels and potential flooding. Mr. Brummett said that the Corp develops plans for lakes that

typically go 20 to 25 years in the future, and they are updating many of those plans now, which could provide an opportunity to address some of Representative Blanton's concerns.

U.S. Army Fort Campbell

Colonel Andrew Jordan, Garrison Commander, and Kelli Pendleton, President and CEO of the Campbell Strong Defense Alliance, delivered presentations on Fort Campbell. Colonel Jordan began by praising the relationship between Fort Campbell and Fort Knox. He also reported that in 2021, Fort Campbell received the Commander in Chief's Annual Award for Installation Excellence. Colonel Jordan highlighted Fort Campbell's importance for national security. It is home to some of the most deployed units of the U.S. Army. Within days of the September 11, 2001, attacks, units from Fort Campbell were deployed to Afghanistan, and the 101st Airborne Division has participated in every operation since its formation in 1942.

Colonel Jordan said that for the first time in 20 years, all of Fort Campbell's soldiers are home. Some soldiers are in training exercises and others are deployed elsewhere in the United States, supporting the evacuation of allies from Afghanistan, but all are in the U.S.

Fort Campbell has one of the country's largest airfields, and they also use roads, rail, and barge facilities. The active duty population is approximately 27,000, with 20,000 belonging to the 101st Airborne Division, and there are approximately 50,000 family members and 6,000 civilians. The total supported population of Fort Campbell is almost 250,000 people, and the total economic impact is \$10.1 billion.

Colonel Jordan said that about 31 percent of the soldiers who leave the service from Fort Campbell decide to keep living in the region, seven points higher than the Army average. Another 20 percent are flexible on where they decide to stay, and favorable policies from Kentucky could help persuade them to stay in the Commonwealth. Colonel Jordan invited the members of the committee to visit, observe their spouse employment program, and provide guidance for how Fort Campbell might partner with organizations like the Kentucky Department of Labor.

Kelli Pendleton emphasized Fort Campbell's role as the largest employer in Kentucky. She also listed Campbell Strong Defense Alliance's objectives, including support for existing units and missions, advocating for modernization, development, and improvement of the installation, attracting defense related companies to the region, improving post-private partnerships, and supporting employment and transition services and workforce partnerships.

Ms. Pendleton praised Chair Thomas's work on the resolution passed in the 2021 Regular Session supporting Fort Campbell's Future Vertical Lift helicopter program. She also listed potential opportunities for Kentucky coming from the installation, including additions to the workforce and population growth. To increase the attractiveness of

Kentucky for soldiers leaving Fort Campbell, Ms. Pendleton recommended repeal of the state income tax for military retirees, improvement in education, increased housing availability, and expanded workforce opportunities.

Blue Grass Army Depot

Colonel Stephen “Steve” Dorris, Commanding Officer, Blue Grass Army Depot (BGAD), spoke to the committee. BGAD is Kentucky’s only defense industrial base, and one of 26 in the United States. Material is produced, maintained, or demilitarized at BGAD. They generate approximately \$120 million annually. Colonel Dorris emphasized BGAD’s close relationships with Fort Knox and Fort Campbell. An augmented security force from Fort Knox is available to help provide additional security in case of a national security event. They also provide chaplain support, soldier service support, and VA services. Additionally, BGAD shares an energy contract and cyber support with Fort Campbell. The only remnants of chemical weapons stored at BGAD are quickly being disassembled, eventually meeting OPCW treaty requirements.

Colonel Dorris highlighted the benefits of BGAD’s location, including its proximity to major interstate highways, access to rail, and safety from most extreme weather events. They also have a storage of nonstandard ammunition, especially useful in training for foreign operations where soldiers assist with internal defense. Much of the nonlethal riot gear shipped to Washington D.C. after the recent unrest emanated from BGAD.

About 2,400 people staff BGAD now. After the chemical agent destruction program ends, estimated in late 2024, there will be 550 personnel remaining. The total estimated annual economic impact for the region is \$151 million.

Colonel Dorris spoke about the transition away from older equipment and BGAD’s role in developing new capabilities. Working with the Joint Munitions Command and the U.S. Army Materiel Command, Colonel Dorris said much of his focus is directed towards these future initiatives.

Senator Meredith asked about the projections for staffing after the closure of the chemical weapons disposal operations. Colonel Dorris replied that the current projection estimates that BGAD will support 550 people after these programs end, but that this can change any time if they take on new projects.

Kentucky Environmental Foundation

Craig Williams, Program Director of the Kentucky Environmental Foundation, presented on chemical weapons destruction. Approximately 158 tons of chemical warfare agent has been destroyed so far, including all mustard projectiles and all VX projectiles. They are working now on destruction of VX rockets.

Mr. Williams spoke about a recent \$500,000 grant from the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation to explore the impact of the closure of the chemical weapons destruction operation. They examined regional supply chain mapping, economic diversification, and workforce retention, which Mr. Williams said was their primary focus. Other projects that could potentially attract new missions to BGAD include its access road, water suppression systems, and two static detonation chambers (each valued at \$50 million) that could assist with the destruction of unusable conventional weapons.

U.S. Coast Guard Sector Ohio Valley

Captain Amy Beach, Commanding Officer of the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Ohio Valley, spoke about the Coast Guard in Kentucky. Captain Beach highlighted Sector Ohio Valley's role in enforcing waterway safety across the Ohio, Cumberland, and Tennessee Rivers. They contribute to national security by thwarting possible threats, including terrorist activity and transportation of illegal drugs. They also operate a Vessel Traffic Service in Louisville during periods of high water.

So far in 2021, the Coast Guard's search and rescue operations have saved 50 lives in Kentucky, assisted over 200 mariners, saved over \$1 million in property, and assisted with the saving or salvaging of another \$19 million in property. The Coast Guard is the only part of the Department of Homeland Security with a presence in Kentucky's geostrategic maritime assets.

Captain Beach discussed the Coast Guard's work with state and local partners to plan and secure waterside events, and she emphasized their role in providing interagency Department of Defense intelligence relating to maritime threats. As the designated federal maritime security coordinator for Kentucky, Captain Beach is responsible for overseeing eight maritime security committees.

Sector Ohio Valley personnel participate in exercises and boat drills with state and local partners, providing training to state and local law enforcement, as well as search and rescue focused agencies. They also provide safe oversight and regulation of the maritime transportation system and 44 waterside facilities. Captain Beach said the legislature could provide additional incentives for infrastructure along the river system, including cell phone towers, placement of additional cameras along bridges (which are especially helpful in search and rescue cases), improvement of communications equipment, continued investment in marine assets and training, and the reestablishment of a Region IV representative in the Louisville EPA office.

Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs

Brigadier General (Ret.) Steve Bullard, Executive Director of the Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs (KCMA), emphasized the importance of the partnerships within the Kentucky defense community. Kentucky is overwhelmingly an Army state.

Ninety four percent of the Commonwealth's direct military spending is Army related. Kentucky ranks highly nationwide in terms of military spending relative to state GDP.

General Bullard said Kentucky is home to nearly 300,000 veterans. One of the largest Department of Defense providers, Humana, is located in Louisville.

KCMA has five strategic goals. They are to protect and grow DoD installations and activities; expand the economic impact of Kentucky's defense related industry; develop and implement the model for transitioning service members, veterans, and spouses; establish Kentucky as the most military friendly state in the nation and grow veteran and retiree populations; and communicate strategically and gain interagency, intergovernmental, and public-private support for strong military advocacy. General Bullard emphasized the importance of the military retirement tax exemption. Thirty five states, including Kentucky's neighbors, have the tax exemption.

With no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:00PM. The next meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection is October 20, 2021, at 10:00AM.