

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING

STATE CAPITOL
MAIN BUILDING
ROOM 140
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2014
1:35 P.M.

PRESENTATION FROM
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND
VETERANS AFFAIRS

BEFORE:

HONORABLE WILLIAM F. ADOLPH, JR., MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE KAREN BOBACK
HONORABLE JIM CHRISTIANA
HONORABLE GARY DAY
HONORABLE BRIAN ELLIS
HONORABLE GLEN GRELL
HONORABLE SETH GROVE
HONORABLE ADAM HARRIS
HONORABLE TOM KILLION
HONORABLE DAVID R. MILLARD
HONORABLE MARK T. MUSTIO
HONORABLE DONNA OBERLANDER
HONORABLE BERNIE T. O'NEILL
HONORABLE MICHAEL PEIFER
HONORABLE SCOTT A. PETRI
HONORABLE JEFFREY P. PYLE
HONORABLE CURTIS G. SONNEY

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BEFORE (cont.'d):

- HONORABLE JOSEPH F. MARKOSEK, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
- HONORABLE MATTHEW D. BRADFORD
- HONORABLE MICHELLE F. BROWNLEE
- HONORABLE MIKE CARROLL
- HONORABLE H. SCOTT CONKLIN
- HONORABLE MADELEINE DEAN
- HONORABLE DEBERAH KULA
- HONORABLE TIM MAHONEY
- HONORABLE MICHAEL H. O'BRIEN
- HONORABLE CHERELLE L. PARKER
- HONORABLE JOHN P. SABATINA
- HONORABLE STEVEN SANTARSIERO
- HONORABLE JAKE WHEATLEY

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

- DAVID DONLEY, REPUBLICAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- DAN CLARK, REPUBLICAN CHIEF COUNSEL
- MIRIAM FOX, DEMOCRATIC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- BERYL KUHR, DEMOCRATIC CHIEF COUNSEL
- HONORABLE BRYAN BARBIN
- HONORABLE TOM CALTAGIRONE
- HONORABLE DOM COSTA
- HONORABLE SHERYL DELOZIER
- HONORABLE JOSEPH HACKETT
- HONORABLE RON MARSICO
- HONORABLE MIKE REGAN

**JEAN M. DAVIS, REPORTER
NOTARY PUBLIC**

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TESTIFIER

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 * * *

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: I'd like to reconvene
4 the Pennsylvania House Appropriations Budget Hearings.

5 Good afternoon, everyone.

6 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Good afternoon.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Our next testifier is
8 Major General Wesley Craig. Nice to see you, General.

9 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Good to be here.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Nice to see you here.

11 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: I know you're a very
13 busy man. And I'm sure the questions that the Committee
14 will have for you will keep you busy for the next hour or
15 so. That's for sure.

16 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: I'm sure.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Before we get going,
18 it's customary that we allow the testifiers to give an
19 opening statement or a few words to the Committee.

20 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 It's indeed a pleasure to be here again. The
22 Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, as everybody
23 knows, has a dual mission, first to support the 1 million
24 veterans that are part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
25 and the second is the commanding control of the

1 Pennsylvania National Guard.

2 For veterans, we run six veterans homes of a
3 capacity of 1,554 beds. And we also have an outreach
4 program where we advocate for our 1 million veterans. This
5 is done through our Veterans Services Outreach Program, the
6 new Pennsylvania Veterans Trust Fund, and the new
7 Governor's Veterans Advisory Council, which I will be glad
8 to talk about when you have questions.

9 For the Pennsylvania National Guard, we are in
10 charge of recruiting, training, maintaining, and command
11 and control for the 19,550 members of the Pennsylvania
12 National Guard. We are the third biggest in the country.
13 We have been the most heavily deployed both overseas and
14 domestically in the country.

15 Our dual missions for the Pennsylvania National
16 Guard are to prepare for combat operations overseas, which
17 as you all know we have done a lot of, some 35,000 overseas
18 deployments since 9/11/2001, and be ready for domestic
19 operations plus the approaching snowstorm. We have
20 rendered in the last four years 1.5 million man days of
21 service to the Commonwealth or to our neighboring states
22 under state active duty.

23 And today, as I speak to you right now, 480
24 soldiers and airmen are reporting to their home station
25 armories to get ready in case Pennsylvania needs us with

1 this approaching winter storm Pax. So we continue to work
2 hard and live up to our motto, always ready, always there.

3 Mr. Chairman, I'm ready for your questions.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Just a statement. I
5 can't thank you and the men and women that serve in the
6 Pennsylvania National Guard enough for the service that you
7 do for your country and for the residents of Pennsylvania.

8 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Chairman Markosek.

10 MINORITY CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Thank you, Chairman
11 Adolph.

12 Just to echo, thank you for your service.

13 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

14 MINORITY CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: Yesterday we had the
15 Auditor General and the Attorney General. And we referred
16 to them as General.

17 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: True.

18 MINORITY CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: And today we get,
19 you know, another General. This must be a General week for
20 us here.

21 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

22 MINORITY CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: But thanks for your
23 service.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

25 MINORITY CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: I don't have any

1 immediate questions for you.

2 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Okay.

3 MINORITY CHAIRMAN MARKOSEK: I'll turn it back
4 over to the Chair.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

6 The first question will be by Representative Mark
7 Mustio.

8 REP. MUSTIO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Thank you for testifying today and again for all
10 that you do for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

11 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

12 REP. MUSTIO: There was an issue that we used to
13 face once every ten years. I'm from Allegheny County
14 representing the Pittsburgh Airport area. And that was
15 BRAC. Now it seems like every year we're fighting to save
16 the 911th and some changes maybe at the 171st.

17 So is it possible for you to give the Committee
18 an update on those two facilities since it would have a
19 significant economic impact to our region and state if we
20 lose those?

21 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Okay. That's both the
22 171st and the 911th?

23 REP. MUSTIO: Yes.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Okay. Yes, Representative,
25 I'd be glad to.

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REP. MUSTIO: Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: The 171st continues to be in a very good spot, I would say. Being an air refueling squadron wing, they're the largest in the Air Guard. They're probably one of the busiest and have probably the best reputation for service delivery of any air refueling wing in the Air Guard or the Air Reserve.

REP. MUSTIO: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Their geographic location of Pittsburgh is ideal for supporting the air bridge over the Atlantic. They're employed there all the time in addition to their overseas support and missions, which they get tasked anywhere around the globe on a regular basis.

REP. MUSTIO: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: The fact that they are tied in with the Pittsburgh Airport gives them an economic advantage. They are very cost effective. The Pittsburgh Airport handles things like Air Traffic Control, fire rescue, runway clearing, routine maintenance, that if we had a separate base, we, the Air Guard, would have to pay for it all.

REP. MUSTIO: Right.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So that puts them at a great advantage. They are one of the top competitors for the new KC-46 tanker refueling aircraft. I'm very

1 confident that either the next one that gets elected or the
2 one after that will be the 171st.

3 REP. MUSTIO: Okay.

4 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So I'm not really concerned
5 about them. They're in a really good position.

6 The 911th Wing, however, an Air Force Reserve
7 Wing, which is not under my direct control because it's Air
8 Force Reserve rather than Air Guard, unfortunately, they
9 fly the oldest model C-130s that are out there. It's a
10 very large wing in total number of people with a very small
11 amount of airplanes of support.

12 REP. MUSTIO: Okay.

13 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We will know by March 11th
14 when the President's budget is issued whether there will be
15 any attempt to reduce or modify that wing. There doesn't
16 appear to be any chance that they will be BRACed because
17 there doesn't seem to be any appetite in Congress for a
18 BRAC. But a reduction in force of that wing is definitely
19 possible, something we'll have to watch for.

20 REP. MUSTIO: And that was one of the areas that
21 I know the Volunteer Military Affairs Council had tried to
22 save last time, was the disagreement with the Feds on the
23 number of actual bodies that were there.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Right.

25 REP. MUSTIO: And the inability to get actual

1 data from the Federal Government to save the base. Is
2 there any suggestions, recommendations, other than keep
3 doing what we've done in the past, to save it that you
4 would recommend to our local community that's worked so
5 hard on this issue?

6 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: The community out there has
7 been extremely supportive. So I would continue to
8 recommend to do what you're doing. Get the local
9 Congressmen involved. And certainly Congressman Tim Murphy
10 has led that effort. That's his district. You've got good
11 allies with both Senators. They're also concerned.

12 REP. MUSTIO: Sure.

13 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Really the entire
14 Congressional Delegation seems to be concerned. The
15 Governor has gone on record that it's a wise thing to keep
16 this unit there. So just keep that going because the Air
17 Force Reserve Unit, again, being based at Pittsburgh, has a
18 similar economic advantage for the Air Force of maintaining
19 that air base there because the air base itself, the
20 airport, picks up a lot of the cost. So there are
21 advantages for the Air Force to maintain that.

22 REP. MUSTIO: Sure.

23 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Long term, we're going to
24 have to get them another airplane because sooner or later
25 they're going to shut down that specific airplane.

1 REP. MUSTIO: Okay.

2 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So they may morph into
3 another mission. We'll see. But I would recommend keep on
4 doing what you're doing.

5 REP. MUSTIO: Now, I did hear you say that the
6 KC-46 tanker, we are a strong candidate for the 171st to
7 receive that.

8 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Correct.

9 REP. MUSTIO: And would you repeat for me again
10 when that decision should be made?

11 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: They're going to award it
12 to four Air Guard wings. The first decision has already
13 been made. And that's Pease Air Force Base in New
14 Hampshire. The next decision will be about three years
15 from now. I think we're a prime candidate for that at that
16 point.

17 REP. MUSTIO: Okay.

18 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And I will tell you, even
19 if we don't get it this time around and we'll have to wait
20 for three years beyond that, the Air Force is going to be
21 flying KC-135 tankers, which is what the 171st has for the
22 next 30 or 40 years. So we still remain in a very, very
23 competitive spot.

24 REP. MUSTIO: Thank you.

25 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

1 REP. MUSTIO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

3 Before we go to the next question, Chairman
4 Markosek and I were discussing the driver's license behind
5 you.

6 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Would you like to give
8 us an explanation of the driver's license that's behind
9 you?

10 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes. It is not my
11 daughter, the picture there. The driver's license -- this
12 is what the driver's license for the veterans will look
13 like.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

15 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We will be able to start --
16 PennDOT will have those online and be able to start issuing
17 them to veterans on March 3rd.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

19 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: The designation in the
20 bottom left is an American flag with the word veteran,
21 right behind my head here. And that will be available for
22 any and all veterans who served honorably.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So it's a designation and
25 something important to our veterans' community. I look

1 forward to it myself, to going down there on March 3rd or
2 4th and getting my own as well.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Sure.

4 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: It serves two purposes.
5 It's a way for the Commonwealth to say thank you for your
6 service, because we make this designation on the plate.
7 And then also if you happen to run into a law enforcement
8 officer, they can see, okay, you're a veteran, as soon as
9 he asks for identification.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Sure.

11 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And if you're a candidate
12 for Veterans Court because you've done something maybe
13 that's not so smart or you've done something, that will
14 allow them to realize, hey, I've got a veteran here. I've
15 got to approach this person differently. And I think that
16 will help defuse any potential confrontation.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Sure.

18 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So it's a really good
19 benefit. It's a nice way to say thank you. We're really
20 glad this is coming to be.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you for that
22 explanation. And, yes, we're very proud of that
23 legislation that finally got passed. I'm sure the veterans
24 will be appreciative as well.

25 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Representative Parker.

2 REP. PARKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Hello, General.

4 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Hello.

5 REP. PARKER: Thank you so much for being here
6 today.

7 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

8 REP. PARKER: And thank you for the work that you
9 do.

10 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

11 REP. PARKER: General, probably about three weeks
12 ago, members of the Philadelphia Delegation of the
13 Pennsylvania House held a meeting in Philadelphia with a
14 veterans group called the Pointman Soldiers Heart Ministry.
15 And they worked very hard to sort of coordinate services
16 with other veterans groups in the region. And they gave me
17 a list of recommendations and perspective questions that
18 they wanted to see if we could get an answer to.

19 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: All right.

20 REP. PARKER: And what I found very interesting
21 is their questions were based on work from and research
22 from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, the Legislative
23 Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. And I just
24 printed a copy of the report just so that I could leave it
25 with members of your staff.

1 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Okay.

2 REP. PARKER: The first question, General, was
3 about the rates of unemployment and homelessness among
4 Pennsylvania veterans. And I know it's been a major issue
5 of discussion for members of local government in
6 Philadelphia.

7 They were wondering if you had any knowledge of
8 stats statewide on unemployment for veterans and
9 homelessness?

10 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Ma'am, certainly I track
11 the unemployment of my own soldiers and airmen. For
12 returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, we're in
13 about the 13 to 14 percent area. We have a very robust
14 outreach program from our deployment cycle support branch
15 that is working with employers in support of the Guard and
16 Reserve.

17 REP. PARKER: Okay.

18 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And private organizations,
19 like Recruit Military, that are outgoing and outreaching to
20 our soldiers and airmen trying to get them employment.

21 REP. PARKER: Okay.

22 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We've achieved some success
23 in the last several months. We know we've got jobs for at
24 least 125 of my own soldiers and airmen from the
25 Pennsylvania Guard. We'll continue to work this issue with

1 such groups as the Veterans Multiservice Center in
2 Philadelphia, which does retraining and trying to get
3 people in school as well.

4 REP. PARKER: Okay.

5 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Plus, I do know that a
6 number of these unemployed that are officially in the
7 unemployed line are about ready to go into school because
8 they've signed up for our Educational Assistance Program
9 that's available through the Pennsylvania National Guard.

10 REP. PARKER: Okay.

11 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So they will get training
12 which will lead to their employment later on.

13 REP. PARKER: Okay.

14 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So we do watch that very
15 carefully and work closely with employers' support of the
16 guard and reserve, our own outreach branch, and other
17 organizations as well.

18 REP. PARKER: Any comment about the homelessness
19 portion of it? Has there been an increase in the number of
20 veterans reaching out to the Department regarding
21 challenges with homelessness?

22 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: I'd say it's about the
23 same. The official number we've been given from the U.S.
24 Veterans Affairs Department, the Federal Department, is
25 1,500 Pennsylvania veterans are officially homeless.

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REP. PARKER: All right.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We are working through the Pennsylvania Veterans Trust Fund and local charities like the Veterans Multiservice Center in Philadelphia, a similar faith-based organization out in Pittsburgh, another one here in Harrisburg, working to pull the homelessness off the street and also work in conjunction with the Federal VA as well.

REP. PARKER: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So we have a program that we're working to try and eliminate that. The Federal VA has a program. They'd like to eliminate homeless across the country in veterans by the end of '15.

REP. PARKER: Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

REP. PARKER: And my final question, General, is they reference in their list here a study that was done a few years ago indicating a need for three more state veterans homes in the Commonwealth.

Can you speak to that for us and talk to us about if we've been moving in that direction?

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: At this point, Representative, there's no real plan to add any more veterans homes.

REP. PARKER: Okay.

1 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: When you talk to the
2 Federal VA, they come up with a convoluted formula and say,
3 a state the size of Pennsylvania should have about 2,300
4 beds for older veterans. Well, we have 1,500. So we're
5 about seven, eight hundred short.

6 REP. PARKER: Okay.

7 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Well, then they have a
8 second rating that says, okay, if you have a need of 2,000
9 or more beds, you have a significant, almost urgent need
10 for more beds.

11 REP. PARKER: Okay.

12 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And 1,000 to 2,000 is
13 considered a moderate need.

14 REP. PARKER: Okay.

15 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And under 1,000, which is
16 where we fall, is a very minor need --

17 REP. PARKER: Okay.

18 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: -- which tells us that they
19 won't fund -- and they are partners in construction. They
20 give us about 40 percent of the money. They will not fund
21 it. So we would have to go that completely alone in
22 Pennsylvania.

23 REP. PARKER: Okay.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: But at this point, there is
25 no further plan to add additional homes in the community

1 basically because we know the Federal VA will not
2 participate at this point.

3 REP. PARKER: Thank you, General.

4 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Ma'am, thank you.

5 REP. PARKER: And thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

7 I'd like to acknowledge the presence of a former
8 member of this House and a former member of the House
9 Appropriations Committee, Judge Doug Reichley. Nice to see
10 you, Your Honor.

11 JUDGE REICHLEY: Thank you.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: The next question is
13 from Representative Karen Boback.

14 REP. BOBACK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Good afternoon, General.

16 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Good afternoon.

17 REP. BOBACK: Funding for veterans homes
18 decreases approximately 1 percent in this budget to a
19 reported reduction in administrative costs, from what I
20 understand. But I'm concerned. How can quality care
21 continue and be maintained as we continue to cut in the
22 budget? Can you comment on that?

23 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes, Representative Boback.
24 Several methods.

25 REP. BOBACK: Okay.

1 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We are very aggressively
2 seeking additional Federal augmentation through a series of
3 programs, Medicaid, EVR, and Medicare, and increasing our
4 participation so we get more money from the Federal side
5 which allows us to reduce the state side.

6 REP. BOBACK: Okay.

7 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And in addition, we have
8 been very, very careful in the way we run the homes. We've
9 done a complete new staffing matrix so we've got the right
10 number of staff in the right home at the right time.

11 REP. BOBACK: Okay.

12 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: There's a certain minimum
13 which we must maintain, health care workers per patient.
14 And we're always above that. That's our goal, to be always
15 above that. And we are.

16 REP. BOBACK: Okay.

17 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And then we also are very
18 careful in controlling overtime.

19 REP. BOBACK: Okay.

20 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Several years ago we had an
21 inordinate amount of overtime. We think the staff matrix
22 will take care of that. And we're very careful to do that.

23 REP. BOBACK: Okay.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We also look at controlling
25 medication. We used to be in the habit of ordering 30 or

1 more days of medication for each patient. If the
2 medication changed, now I've got 25 days of medication.

3 REP. BOBACK: Sure.

4 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Say, if you were changed
5 five days into your issuance, we'll have medication we'd
6 have to throw out. So we now do it much closer.

7 REP. BOBACK: Okay.

8 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So cost control measures
9 like that, we're very comfortable with.

10 REP. BOBACK: All right.

11 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: But we are quite aware that
12 we must maintain the quality of care. And I will tell you,
13 we have a 90 percent satisfaction rate among the residents
14 in our home.

15 REP. BOBACK: Well, I thank you for all you do.

16 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you.

17 REP. BOBACK: I proudly serve on the Gino Merli
18 Board. And I know what they do in that particular home.

19 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Excellent.

20 REP. BOBACK: I'm very honored to be a part of
21 it.

22 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you.

23 REP. BOBACK: Thank you, sir.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you, ma'am.

25 REP. BOBACK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

Representative Dean.

REP. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hello, General. How are you?

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Ma'am, I'm fine.

REP. DEAN: Thank you for your service, particularly in our area. I saw you last week.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Right.

REP. DEAN: And I just very much appreciate all that you all do.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you, ma'am.

REP. DEAN: I was thinking about the National Guard and the extraordinary strain that has been put on the National Guard. And I noticed in one of the briefings that I read that there are enhanced benefits for the Guard.

Is it sufficient when you think about the service they've provided and multiple deployments overseas? Is the enhanced benefits and support sufficient for the National Guard members?

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Representative, I have to say Pennsylvania has been just outstanding in their support of the Pennsylvania National Guard.

REP. DEAN: That's good to hear.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: There's a whole series of programs that have been added that have helped our soldiers

1 and airmen both on the state side and the Federal side as
2 well.

3 REP. DEAN: Good.

4 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So, yes, I think they are.
5 And I will tell you, our numbers, our retention numbers,
6 show it and our strength numbers show it. We are, at this
7 point, in the Army National Guard, after 12 years of war, a
8 number of killed in action, hundreds wounded, we are at 103
9 percent.

10 REP. DEAN: Okay.

11 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We literally have people
12 waiting to get in the Pennsylvania National Guard to join
13 us. The Air National Guard is at 95 percent. And the only
14 reason they're not at 100 percent is because their strength
15 level got adjusted on the 1st of October.

16 REP. DEAN: Okay.

17 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: They went from a
18 requirement of about 3,800 to a requirement of about 4,100
19 because they are recognized as an excellent member of the
20 total National Guard. And so the National Guard is
21 investing additional units in our Air National Guard.

22 REP. DEAN: Okay.

23 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We'll probably be at 100
24 percent strength by the Air National Guard by the end of
25 this fiscal year .

1 REP. DEAN: Okay.

2 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So, yes, the benefits are
3 very generous. We are very appreciative, especially the
4 Educational Assistance Program, which is key to our success
5 in recruiting and retention.

6 REP. DEAN: Well, I really --

7 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We thank this Committee for
8 that.

9 REP. DEAN: I admire what you're doing.

10 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you.

11 REP. DEAN: My father-in-law is a former National
12 Guard member. And he's very proud of his service.

13 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you.

14 REP. DEAN: And I'm proud of him.

15 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Of course.

16 REP. DEAN: And No. 2 on the homeless vets, I
17 just wanted to brief for you that I have a piece of
18 legislation that would add \$3 million to the Neighborhood
19 Assistance Tax Credit Program specifically for veterans
20 homelessness. So I offer that to you and ask you to take a
21 look at it and maybe talk it up and help me get support for
22 that.

23 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Representative, I'd be
24 happy to take a look at that. Thank you very much.

25 REP. DEAN: I think it's a laudable goal to make

1 sure that Pennsylvania has no homeless veterans.

2 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: That certainly is the
3 Federal VA's goal and our goal as well.

4 REP. DEAN: And then my final thought is on
5 Medicaid expansion and what that might mean for our
6 uninsured veterans. I think the numbers are somewhere
7 about 47,000 Pennsylvania veterans that are without health
8 insurance. And I think by the numbers that I have read,
9 about half of them would be eligible if we had expanded
10 Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act as of January the
11 1st.

12 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

13 REP. DEAN: Can you talk to us about that and how
14 meaningful that might be to our veteran population?

15 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: No, ma'am. I don't really
16 have those figures. I do know if you're currently serving
17 as a member of the National Guard, for pennies, you can buy
18 TRICARE, which is the military health care. So for the
19 currently serving members of the Army and Air Guard, we can
20 easily take care of their need for health care. It's
21 probably the best benefit around.

22 REP. DEAN: Okay.

23 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: But I'm not aware. I'll
24 have to look into that and I'll get back to you with
25 information on that.

1 REP. DEAN: I'd appreciate it. I think it's
2 going to be critically important to the veteran population.

3 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

4 REP. DEAN: Thank you very much.

5 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome, ma'am.

6 REP. DEAN: Thanks again.

7 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Certainly.

8 REP. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

10 Representative Curt Sonney.

11 REP. SONNEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 General, thank you for being here.

13 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you for having me.

14 REP. SONNEY: Just a few minutes ago you touched
15 base a little bit on the funding for our local veterans
16 homes.

17 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

18 REP. SONNEY: You know, we know that there was a
19 slight reduction in state funding. And you mentioned that
20 there was a slight increase in Federal funding.

21 Is any of that funding for capital projects? And
22 how do you rate the status of those existing homes today?
23 I'm from Erie County. And I know that that facility is
24 well kept, but it is also older.

25 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Representative, we, in the

1 past five years, the state of Pennsylvania has invested
2 about \$133 million in capital projects spread among all six
3 homes.

4 REP. SONNEY: Okay.

5 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And the Federal Government
6 has invested about 62 million on top of that. So between
7 the two, in five years, we've invested about \$190 million.

8 REP. SONNEY: Okay.

9 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And the Soldiers' and
10 Sailors' Home in Erie, we've added that brand-new wing
11 which I know you are quite aware of.

12 REP. SONNEY: Yes.

13 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So we continue to look for
14 opportunities to continue to make our homes the best that
15 we possibly can.

16 REP. SONNEY: Great.

17 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We have been told now from
18 the Federal side when they would come in and partner,
19 usually about a 40 percent, that unless it's a health or
20 safety issue, they're not going to participate going
21 forward at this point. So anything else we do will be
22 entirely state funded.

23 REP. SONNEY: Okay.

24 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: But we are -- just like we
25 do in armories for the Pennsylvania Army Guard, we're

1 developing a long-term plan so we get to keep our
2 facilities at the best we can possibly do. So we will
3 continue to work with the Governor and with both Chambers
4 of the Legislature here as we develop those needs.

5 REP. SONNEY: And is there a current waiting list
6 for all of the homes for entry?

7 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes, sir. We are at about
8 300 on the total waiting list.

9 REP. SONNEY: And is that pretty much a normal?

10 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: It seems to be.

11 REP. SONNEY: Is that much of an increase?

12 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Part of our problem is if
13 you live in the east, usually you want to go in one of the
14 homes in the east, which would be in Spring City, Delaware
15 Valley, or Gino Merli. You don't want to go out to
16 Hollidaysburg where we have a lot of room and vice versa.
17 So part of it is due to geography. But, yes, 250 to 300
18 seems to be the norm.

19 REP. SONNEY: Thank you.

20 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

21 REP. SONNEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

23 Representative Dave Millard.

24 REP. MILLARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman .

25 General, thank you for being here with us today.

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MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

REP. MILLARD: I have an armory in Berwick in my district. And I know that you're going through a process where a number of them are being sold.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

REP. MILLARD: Can you detail to this Committee what the cost savings for disposing of these armories would be?

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Representative, generally speaking, we use a figure of about 20,000 a year for just utilities as the cost saving.

REP. MILLARD: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We have about 20 now that we are in the middle of disposing or have disposed of.

REP. MILLARD: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And that's due to the fact that we've built 15 new ones and done a major construction and addition and alterations on ten more in the past five years.

REP. MILLARD: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So we have basically changed, created -- essentially a third of our armories are brand-new at this point, which we're quite proud of and quite lucky to have accomplished.

REP. MILLARD: Okay.

1 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: But there is cost savings.
2 Now, it depends if you're on a large armory like in Center
3 City like Hunt Armory, the utility bills can run as high as
4 \$100,000 a year.

5 REP. MILLARD: And can you provide this Committee
6 or direct it to the Chairmen what the status of the sale of
7 the older ones is and what the status of the new ones are?

8 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Certainly. We can do that.

9 REP. MILLARD: I'd appreciate that.

10 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Sure.

11 REP. MILLARD: And secondly, the Department has
12 received 180 million annually from the Federal military
13 construction funding to modernize the state armories in
14 prior years. But that amount is decreasing.

15 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

16 REP. MILLARD: In fact, Pennsylvania received 80
17 million in funding, according to figures provided to me,
18 for last year, 30 million in the current year, and is
19 projected that in the next fiscal year, that number will
20 drop to 28 million. Given the continued reduction in
21 funding, does this mean that all of the Stryker Brigade
22 projects have or will be completed?

23 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Representative, all the
24 Stryker Brigade projects are now completed.

25 REP. MILLARD: Okay.

1 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We cut the ribbon and
2 opened the last one just several months ago. And that was
3 in Coatesville.

4 REP. MILLARD: Very good. And do you anticipate
5 military construction funding being eliminated totally in
6 the future?

7 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: We hope it's never
8 eliminated totally because we do have several more
9 facilities. In fact, we're in negotiations with the
10 National Guard Bureau for one in York. And we do know now
11 there's going to be a \$35 million project at Fort
12 Indiantown building another hangar for Muir Army Airfield.

13 REP. MILLARD: Okay.

14 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So we will continue to go
15 after all the military construction we possibly can. Our
16 goal is to have everybody in the most modern and up-to-date
17 facilities as we possibly can.

18 REP. MILLARD: Okay. Thank you, General. Thank
19 you for your testimony.

20 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

21 REP. MILLARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

23 Representative Donna Oberlander.

24 REP. OBERLANDER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Good afternoon, General.

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MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Good afternoon,
Representative.

REP. OBERLANDER: Thank you for your service,
first and foremost.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

REP. OBERLANDER: And I just want to say that I
truly respect and appreciate all of our military men and
women and what you do for us.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you.

REP. OBERLANDER: I've recently heard that the
suicide rate of veterans has increased at an alarming rate.
Some studies suggest that it's occurring at a rate of 22
per day or one every 65 minutes.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes.

REP. OBERLANDER: And that is truly
heartbreaking.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes, it is.

REP. OBERLANDER: My concern is that your
Veterans Outreach Services is sustaining a 13 percent
decrease in its funding. And I'm wondering how that
affects that outreach and what kinds of things are you
doing to help that suicide rate?

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Representative, good
questions.

For currently serving members of the Pennsylvania

1 National Guard who are veterans themselves, we have a very
2 aggressive program funded primarily through the Federal
3 Government and executed locally here, a series of training
4 that goes on, suicide awareness training, suicide
5 intervention training, down to the unit level. The unit is
6 a company size of about 100 soldiers and airmen.

7 REP. OBERLANDER: Okay.

8 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: That has been very
9 successful. That program kicked off two years ago. And in
10 2011 we had six suicides in the Pennsylvania Guard. In
11 2012 we had five. In 2013 we had four. Our ideal is to
12 have none this year, is what we're trying to do.

13 REP. OBERLANDER: Great.

14 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So I'm very comfortable and
15 very happy to see that.

16 REP. OBERLANDER: Great.

17 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And in addition -- it is
18 very sobering to realize but also good news -- we've had
19 for the last two years, each of the two years, we've had
20 about 75 successful interventions where a soldier or airman
21 has come to our chain of command and said, I'm in a bad
22 place. I'm afraid I'm going to end my life. I just can't
23 deal with it anymore or some trigger like that. And the
24 chain of command then immediately reacted and got that
25 soldier or airman help.

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REP. OBERLANDER: Great.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So it's disconcerting to me that we would have any soldiers and airmen in that position. But the fact is we probably saved, of those 75 potentials, probably 10 or 15 would have actually tried to do it. And we were able to intervene and stop it. So I'm real happy and very pleased with that result.

With the suicide prevention in general, the Federal VA has come online with that in a big way. They have a very successful suicide intervention hotline that has experienced in about a year 800,000 calls. It's very well staffed.

REP. OBERLANDER: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Army One Source also takes care of currently serving members of the military with similar-type stats.

REP. OBERLANDER: Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So there's a lot going on for that. Also the VA, the Federal VA, has added a considerable number of mental health professionals to their ranks, to the tune of almost 2,000. So they're very aggressively going after that as well because they want to have the same kind of success that we have enjoyed here in the Pennsylvania Guard and drive that figure down.

REP. OBERLANDER: The 2,000 mental health

1 professionals, are they in the military or are they a
2 civilian contract?

3 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: They're civilians.

4 REP. OBERLANDER: Thank you. Thank you for your
5 answers.

6 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

7 REP. OBERLANDER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

9 Last year I believe we sold the Scotland School?

10 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes, we did.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay. Approximately
12 \$1.7 million, and those proceeds were put into a new
13 Veterans Trust Fund. And the Governor has proposed a
14 transfer from the General Fund of another million dollars
15 into this new fund.

16 Can you please tell this Committee what programs
17 are going to be used out of this trust fund and why the
18 additional million dollars?

19 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd be
20 glad to.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you.

22 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: First off, we did receive
23 \$1.7 million in the Pennsylvania Veterans Trust Fund. And
24 700,000 of that went to what we call Act 66 or the Veterans
25 Service Outreach Program, which is a program that's been

1 active since 2008.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

3 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And we basically employ
4 members of the American Legion, VFW, and other VSOs to act
5 as veteran service officers to basically interpret and get
6 as many of their members signed up to the Federal benefits.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

8 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: It's been an extremely
9 successful program. In the last three years, something
10 like 53,000 veterans have been contacted and enrolled in
11 Federal benefits, which have brought about \$650 million to
12 those veterans.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

14 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So we're very happy with
15 that program. We used that 700,000 to fund that.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

17 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: This budget year we got a
18 separate appropriation for the VSOs so we don't have to go
19 to the Veterans Trust Fund.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

21 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: That left us with about a
22 million dollars. The law that was passed requires the
23 Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to reimburse
24 PennDOT for this veterans designation on the driver's
25 license which is behind me. That bill from PennDOT is

1 about \$750,000.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

3 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So I went to the Governor
4 and said, Boss, a lot of our money is going away. We
5 really could use your help. The Governor and the
6 Governor's staff thought about it and then we were able to
7 get this additional money.

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

9 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: So we will take that money
10 now and use that to provide grants to charitable
11 organizations, to county directors of Veterans Affairs, to
12 run a program hopefully targeting homeless veterans, and
13 also for women's veterans symposium.

14 We have requested a proposal of close to eight
15 hundred or nine hundred thousand dollars. We'll probably
16 award grants of somewhere around \$450,000 for those kinds
17 of organizations this year.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Okay.

19 MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: I think it's very powerful
20 because when you get this license, or any driver's license,
21 there's a way for private Pennsylvanians to indicate that
22 they want to donate money, \$3 to the Veterans Trust Fund.
23 That has received tremendous acceptance already from the
24 general population.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Good.

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MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: And we're on track to receive around six or seven hundred thousand dollars from that checkoff. So it becomes a public private partnership. We're quite pleased with that. We're quite excited about this initiative.

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you very much for that explanation.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're welcome.

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: There are no further questions, General. I want to thank you and your staff for being here today. And once again, thank you for your service.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: You're quite welcome.

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: We're looking forward to working with you to balance the budget between now and June 30th.

MAJOR GENERAL CRAIG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: Thank you very much.

(The hearing concluded at 2:05 p.m.)

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I hereby certify that the proceedings and
evidence are contained fully and accurately in the notes
taken by me on the within proceedings and that this is a
correct transcript of the same.

Jean M. Davis
Notary Public