

Arizona America250 Commission
Military and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee
In person and virtually via Zoom
Corrected Meeting Minutes of January 7, 2025

1. Call to order and welcome.

Chair Fontes called the meeting to order at 9:11am and provided an update from the full Arizona America250 Commission meeting on January 6, 2025. The logo was officially adopted along with licensing agreements to be negotiated by the Executive Director and Deputy General Counsel. The fiscal sponsorship for America250 Arizona was finalized. Sponsorship levels are currently being drafted and will be available by January 15, 2025.

Subcommittee Members Present:

Honorable Adrian Fontes, Chair	Julia Gusse	Paul Aguirre
Erin Hannigan	Gary Vaughan	Manny Beltran
Wanda Wright	Terry Ballentine	Nicole LaSlavic
Jonell Sullivan	Mary Kay Junis	Paul Johnson
Paula Pedene	Bob Dalpe	Sean Stoddard

Subcommittee Members Absent:

Pamela Rinesmith	Les Preskye	James Lawton
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2. Discussion and possible action: Election of Vice Chair.

Chair Fontes outlined the expectations for the Vice Chair. They will run the meetings, communicate with members, and work with staff. Chair Fontes shared that further professional commitments on the horizon may call for him to be out of the state more regularly, and he is looking for someone who can fully take the reins. He shared that Senator Vince Leach wrote the bill creating the commission, and he hopes the Senator will be appointed to the A250 Commission. Gary Vaughan nominated State Commander Manny Beltran of the American Legion for Vice Chair, which was met with no objections. Commander Beltran was selected as Vice Chair.

3. Discussion and possible action on projects and initiatives to engage military members, military families, and Veterans in the Semiquincentennial.

- a. **The American Legion oratorical scholarship program.**

Representatives from The American Legion shared that we are on track to partner with the contest, which will take place in the Sandra Day O'Connor HS auditorium. Banners and table covers will be able to feature the Arizona250 logo. There will be a total of four levels of two cycles between now and 2026.

b. Shared communications and a social media plan.

It was suggested that we create a central location to house a communications and media plan. Chair Fontes asked Major Hannigan to connect with SOS Communications Director Thacker to develop the communications plan before the next subcommittee meeting.

c. Veterans Day parade float and activities.

Paula Pedene will get in touch with Parade Team leads for possible entries for AZ A250. There are other parades across the state in Anthem, Surprise, and Prescott. Chair Fontes would like us to piggyback with organizations in the community to place our logo and build awareness around the 250th. Paula volunteered to get in touch with the American Legion and the VFW and update us next month.

d. Veterans relay on the Arizona Trail.

The Arizona Trail is approximately 800 miles in length. Chair Fontes suggested that, if we could find 250 Veterans to take part in the relay, each would run approximately 5k. He charged the members to approach Veterans clubs or fitness organizations to find people who would be interested in guiding and taking part in the project. The Arizona Trail Association will be a great resource. This event is targeted for the spring of 2026. The National Guard Association of Arizona is interested in promoting and working with their members to assign. Executive Director Terech reported that the Travel & Tourism subcommittee will also support.

e. USS Arizona SSN-803 collaboration.

Chair Fontes asked Nicole LaSlavic to look into collaboration with the new USS Arizona. He feels it would be great to have some representation from the crew even if commissioning has not occurred yet. Discussion was held between Nicole LaSlavic and Gary Vaughan about The American Legion's grommet project for the USS Arizona's three bells.

f. Arizona State Legislature Veterans Caucus.

The Veterans Caucus has not yet met for the 2025 Legislative session. Bob Dalpe will secure an opportunity for the committee to present to the caucus.

g. National Guard Association of Arizona conference.

Paul Aguirre reported that booth space will be available for us. Anticipated attendance is between 600 and 1000 Guardsman, and it is felt that this would be a great way to get exposure and possibly a media hit for America250 Arizona. The event will be held on April 25-26 and at the Tempe Palms. It was suggested we also connect with national A250 to see what they are planning for the national conference.

h. Armed Forces Day with professional sports teams.

Gary Vaughan will look to make contact as they are already recognizing Veterans at games. He will provide more information at the next meeting. We are looking to participate in Armed Forces Day (the third Saturday in May) and possibly Memorial Day. Steve Weintraub might be able to help with getting tickets for veterans for the games. Chair Fontes will connect with the Phoenix Suns.

i. Planting flags for Veterans in community cemeteries.

Chair Fontes believes this would be a wonderful reflective exercise. Paula Pedene suggested we partner with the National Memorial Cemetery.

j. Eagle Scout projects to support Veterans and military families.

The American Legion sponsors Scouting unions. They might be interested in participating and possibly cleaning the Arizona Trail as they go. Paula Pedene will also talk with the Girl Scouts. Gary Vaughan is meeting with Scout councils. It was suggested we think about including ROTC, Young Marines, Civil Corps, Civil Air Patrol, other youth organizations, ASU, GCU, and other schools. Family Readiness groups on the bases could help support. The USO can also help with military family programs on the bases. Tim Mullin said they would be happy to partner with us. It was also suggested we partner with Harkins and AMC to advertise what we're doing. Chair Fontes asked for that to be added to the communications plan. The Department of Economic Security also has support services available on bases. Chair Fontes suggested the possibility of doing a quarterly webinar for organizations supporting military families. He asked to compile a list of Veterans organizations and contacts to push for an email list – for the sole purpose of sharing Semiquincentennial activities. Bob Dalpe has something he can utilize for communications to list what is happening 30, 60, and 90 days out. It was also suggested to utilize the Business Services directory of Veterans non-profits. Julia Gusse with the Arizona Department of Veterans Services has already started a database with all this information. We will look into entering into an agreement with their department for shared promotion.

k. Shared projects with the Civic Engagement, Education & Community Service subcommittee.

Executive Director Terech will keep them informed with what is going on in this subcommittee about the oratorical contest and the Scouting initiatives. In regard to

additional events, Paula Pedene suggested adding Pearl Harbor Day. Disabled American Veterans will be having conventions in June; Terry Ballentine said he could get the subcommittee or the Commission a speaking spot. It was suggested we investigate getting a booth at Veterans Resource Fairs and looking into state conventions for The American Legions and making guest appearances.

4. Discussion and possible action on 2025 meeting dates and subcommittee membership.

The next two meetings (February and March) will be on the second Tuesdays of the month at 9:00 AM. We will set dates through July 2026. February meeting will be fully virtual.

5. Public Comment.

The American Legion National Commander James LaCoursiere, Jr., thanked everyone and would like to connect with Nicole LaSlavic of the USS Arizona Legacy Foundation. He volunteered to be a point of contact for the shipyard building the USS Arizona.

Colonel Wanda Wright mentioned that ASU does a Salute to Service every year; she can help with the Civic Engagement committee, as well. Graduation ceremonies in May and December might be an opportunity to feature elements of America250 projects.

6. Adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11am