

# Alaska Dispatch News

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[Home](#) > Army investigation finds no sexual assault cover-ups in Alaska National Guard

Jill Burke <sup>(1)</sup>

May 22, 2014

**Main Image Credit:**

**Main Image Caption:**

A military investigation has cleared higher ups within the Alaska National Guard of mishandling sexual assault cases. The Army Inspector General's report, completed last month, also found that guard members did not feel concerned about the issue.

A brief summary of the findings was made public Wednesday in a one-page letter sent to Sen. Lisa Murkowski by the Department of Defense Inspector General, who had oversight over the investigation because senior officials within the Guard were under scrutiny. The agency finished its review early this month, and this week told Murkowski it concurred with the Army IG's findings.

The letter, signed by Acting Assistant Inspector General for Communications Larry D. Turner, concludes "...The Adjutant General (TAG), AKNG, and other AKNG officials did not cover up any reported sexual assault incidents."

Gen. Thomas Katkus, who has led the Alaska National Guard since 2009 as the adjutant general and also serves as commissioner of the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, is satisfied with the Army findings, according to Maj. Candis Olmstead, public affairs director for the Alaska National Guard.

"Gen. Katkus is glad that the investigation was handled by an outside federal agency which has no agenda but ... to determine truth. He is cautiously guarded because there will always be room for improvement. But he is looking forward to seeing what areas we can improve upon," Olmstead said.

The IG's letter comes close to a year after Murkowski asked the independent agency to look into allegations that dysfunction within the Alaska National Guard's command climate impeded the reporting and investigation of sexual assaults, including attempts by some officials to try cover up incidents. Murkowski called for the investigation after two chaplains from the Alaska National Guard came to her seeking help. The chaplains have for some time tried to get help for victims they believe weren't helped the way they should have been.

Another victim advocate, Lt. Col. Ken Blaylock, who retired in 2012, has voiced similar concerns.

Since leaving the guard, Blaylock, a former National Guard commander and staff officer, has emerged as a tenacious whistleblower with a laundry list of complaints about the command structure. He said this week he was unconvinced by the IG report, which clears that command structure of allegations it mishandled and covered up sexual assault cases.

"It's interesting that the inspector general did not interview me, since I have documentation which disproves his conclusions. I wonder how many other victims and witnesses he did not interview," said Blaylock.

The report has not yet been made public or released to Murkowski.

In the letter to Murkowski, the inspector general indicates the report also addresses the climate in which Guard members are operating and whether they had concerns about sexual assault or sexual harassment reporting. "Climate sensing sessions" found no such concerns, according to Turner's letter.

Blaylock has asserted that climate surveys have in the past been used to smoke out anyone who might speak against the command structure. Out of fear of retaliation, people choose not to speak up, he said. Plus, Blaylock said, before the investigative team showed up, the Alaska National Guard held mandatory briefings in which the stories of some sexual assault situations were discredited, and procedures about proper handling of cases reiterated.

Olmstead said climate surveys are always anonymous and the survey-takers are not subject to retribution for their answers. Only if the participant chooses to put his or her name on it would their identity be known, she said. Surveys may help a new commander get a sense for the working climate within the unit, and different command levels may also review the surveys "to assess how members of the unit feel about the quality of their work environment," she said.

Olmstead also said that while "all call" meetings did take place prior to the IG investigation and surveys, they were not convened for the purposes of skewing the results. All call meetings, which everyone attends, are not uncommon, and during those meetings information about process and procedure is often discussed. At no time were sexual assault stories or situations discredited, she said.

Blaylock has also questioned whether the IG actually had a chance to look at all of the evidence, meet with all of the victims and follow how all of the cases were handled, or if it followed only those cases the National Guard gave it access to.

In its inquiry, the Army IG found that 11 cases of alleged sexual assault were referred to Alaska law enforcement authorities — proper procedure since military code requires investigation and prosecution of cases involving Alaska National Guard suspects. It also found that Katkus took action against two suspects, each time after the sexual assault allegations were substantiated against Guard members. Consequences included being discharged and separated from the Guard.

"We definitely did not just pass on a select group of cases. All of the cases that have been reported have been documented. And all of that information was readily available to the inspector general's team," Olmstead said.

Everything follows policy and procedure, and everything is reported, she said.

She also pointed out that Blaylock, who has not actively been a part of the command for nearly two years, is not in a position to have firsthand information about current cases or the way things have been handled.

Through its public affairs chief, Bridget Ann Serchak, the Department of Defense Inspector General declined to comment on the scope or procedures employed during its investigation. If someone like Blaylock had continued concerns, they were welcome to call the IG's hotline and initiate a whistleblower complaint and through that process could be interviewed, she said.

A Murkowski spokesman said the senator is withholding comment until she has an opportunity to see the full report.

**Source URL:** <http://www.adn.com/article/20140522/army-investigation-finds-no-sexual-assault-cover-ups-alaska-national-guard>

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[1] <http://www.adn.com/authors/677869>

Good evening, Lisa.

I had all but one of these answers to your questions (below) ready for you yesterday, and sent you an email stating that I was waiting for some additional information. I was fact-checking another document that shares the Alaska National Guard's data on sexual assaults so that I could provide it to you as well (it is attached).

However, I saw that your story ran last night, so I worked on other priorities today. Maybe this information will still be helpful if you do a follow up story about how allegations about our organization could not be substantiated by a Department of Defense inspector general team. In fact, the IG team stated that "The Adjutant General (TAG), AKNG, and other AKNG officials did not cover up any sexual assault incidents," and the sexual assault response coordinator "promptly coordinated referrals of all incidents to Alaska law enforcement authorities."

If you are interested in doing a story on how our organization helps our members who are sexual assault victims, a service rarely provided in other agencies or organizations, I would be happy to provide you with additional details and put you in touch with our lead SARC.

Once the OCI assessment concludes, you may need more information from the Alaska National Guard. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. I will do my best to find you answers. Depending on your questions and the people I have to contact for the answers, and their schedules and availability, it is fair to need about two business days to reply in some cases. I will reply as promptly as possible. And if you have a story deadline that I am aware of, I will try to expedite.

Answers to your questions:

1. The command climate survey is used for various purposes, such as when a unit gets a new commander and he or she would like a better understanding of the working climate within the unit, or periodically at different command levels to assess how members of the unit feel about the quality of their work environment.

The current command climate survey that all members of the Alaska National Guard have been asked to take part in was requested by the National Guard Bureau Office of Complex Investigation, in an effort to assess the overall health and wellness of the Alaska National Guard. The survey seeks members' input regarding the entire Alaska National Guard. The last day for members to complete the survey is June 1.

The survey is completely anonymous and no one can be personally identified in connection with their input.

2. The four phases of the OCI assessment are 1) Intake, 2) Interviews and Review, 3) Assessment and 4) Finalize Report.

Phase 1 Intake

- Command Climate Survey
- Data Collection

Phase 2 Interviews and Review

- OCI Ground Assessment begins
- Interviews with AKNG members, State Prosecutors office and Law Enforcement -Travel to identified/requested installations

Phase 3 Assessment

- OCI team returns to NGB to assess data and draft a preliminary report -OCI returns to Alaska as needed

Phase 4 Finalize Report

- Initial coordination may be made with JFHQ and/or Governor's Office at Governor's discretion -NGB-JA conducts legal review -Out brief provided at Governor's request

3. OCI team left Monday morning.

4. OCI team works for Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and they work in the Pentagon.

Please see the attached, which should provide additional helpful details.

Best Regards,

Candis Olmstead

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**From:** Olmstead, Candis Maj (MVA sponsored)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 20, 2014 5:25 PM  
**To:** 'Idemer@adn.com'  
**Subject:** AKNG/OCI questions

Lisa,

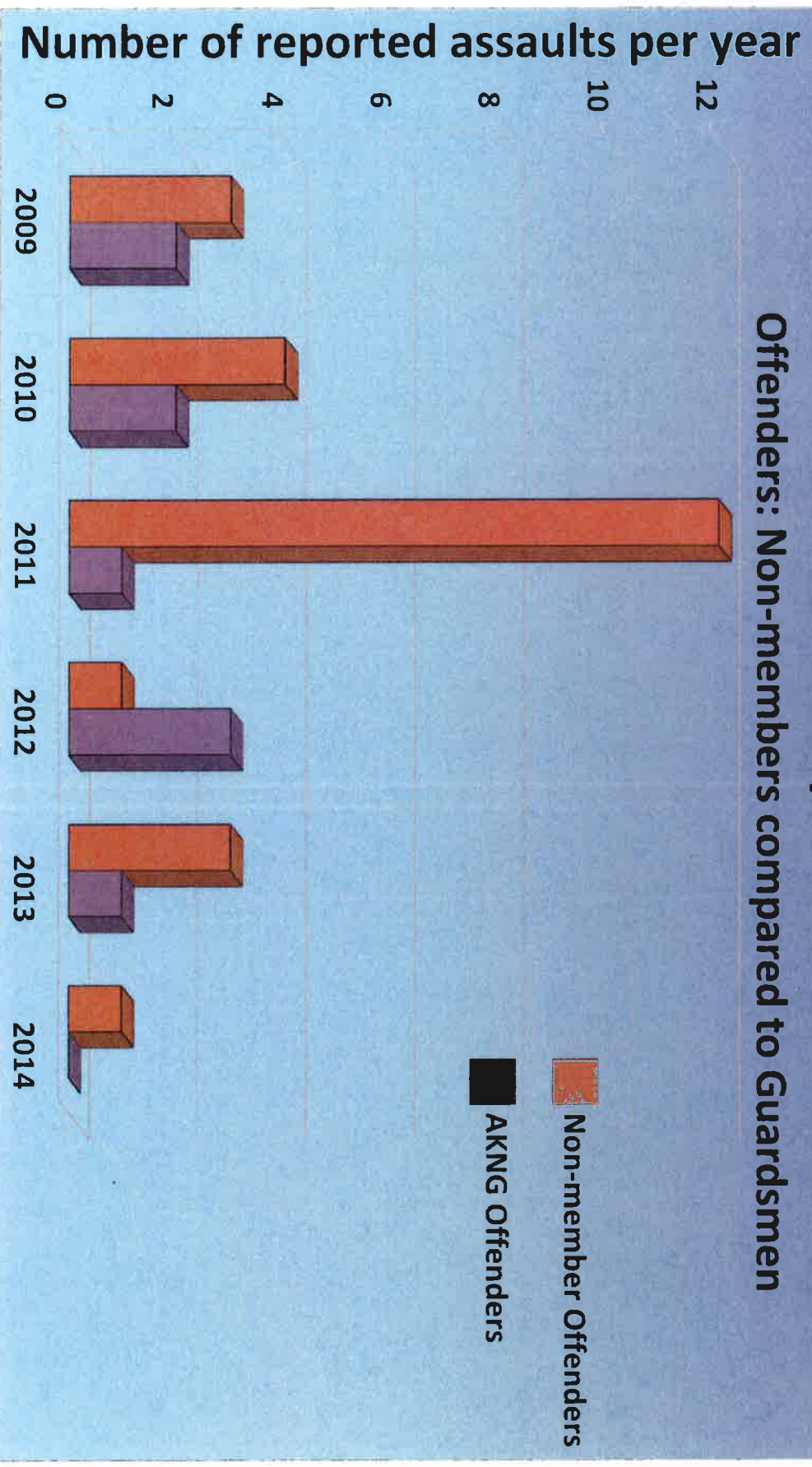
I have almost all of your answers ready. Waiting back on a couple of things. I hope tomorrow will work for you; I need to follow up in the morning with a couple of people.

Thank you,

Candis  
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# Alaska National Guard Reported Sexual Assaults

Offenders: Non-members compared to Guardsmen



From January 2009 to May 20, 2014, there were nine sexual assaults reported by victims in the Alaska National Guard whose offender was also a member of the Alaska National Guard. In the same timeframe, there were 26 sexual assaults reported by Alaska National Guard members whose offender was not in the AKNG, but was someone from the community. The bar graph illustrates the number of sexual assaults reported by AKNG victims and compares the number of non-member offenders with the number of AKNG offenders. The numbers and years all reflect when the assault occurred, not necessarily when the report occurred.

## **Uninformed, inaccurate reporting is painting the wrong picture of the Alaska National Guard**

In the past seven months, two news writers have contacted the Alaska National Guard with questions regarding sexual assault in the organization. All additional news reports have recycled inaccurate, misconstrued information. Interviews with Alaska National Guard leadership have resulted in reports that left out key, relevant details.

Media and politicians who lack correct information and have chosen not to pursue accurate, current data have made multiple false and defamatory statements about the Alaska National Guard.

Every commentary printed to date in local media was written without the author contacting the Alaska National Guard for information. The authors did not give us an opportunity to correct inaccuracies or provide facts, but chose to regurgitate information that had already been reported without fact-checking. Others are using this sensitive subject for political posturing, disparaging our organization to advance their political or commentary careers as they generalize and exaggerate reality.

### **Here are the facts.**

1. In the Alaska National Guard, there have been nine reports of sexual assault that have occurred in the past 5 ½ years in which the alleged perpetrator was a member of the organization. (This includes data from January 2009 through May 20, 2014.)

- A. Nine reported assaults in five-and-a-half years averages fewer than two reported assaults per year. In this 4,000-member organization, 1/20th of one percent of our membership has reported a sexual assault.
- B. Of these nine assaults, one occurred on duty at duty location. Three occurred on a military installation off-duty. Five occurred after hours, off-location.
- C. There was one report of a sexual assault committed by a member of the Alaska National Guard in 2013. There have been zero reports in 2014.

2. Nearly three-quarters of the sexual assaults reported since 2009 were committed by perpetrators who were not in the Alaska National Guard. We track these numbers because we want to help victims regardless of who assaulted them, or when the assault happened. Yet these numbers continue to be included in data that media and politicians are citing when they misrepresent our organization and suggest that we have such a high number of assaults in our ranks. They say we have a culture that tolerates this behavior.



How many other organizations have full-time support personnel dedicated to meeting with victims and helping them through the difficulties after being assaulted? We do.

We don't just point them to a counselor. Our sexual assault response coordinators and victim advocates are with victims every step of the way, to the extent that the victim allows.

Our sexual assault response coordinators go with victims to appointments, court dates, sit with them when they are being questioned by law enforcement, check in with them, and notify them of the status of their cases when possible. These services are offered to all victims who report, regardless of when the offense took place or who the perpetrator was.

3. Two chaplains shared with a reporter for an October 2013 print media article that there were victims in the Alaska National Guard who had not received proper, timely response from the organization, and victims were not taken seriously with regard to being sexually assaulted.

After that media coverage, the chaplains shared previously undisclosed details of their cases with our sexual assault response coordinator so that she could cross-reference the names with those victims who had reported to a victim advocate or a sexual assault response coordinator.

Every victim who sought support from our chaplains had either reported their assault and was receiving support from our sexual assault response coordinators; or chose to report only, but not seek further assistance; or chose not to report, while knowing that assistance is available.

All unrestricted reports had been referred to local law enforcement. Of the cases that local law enforcement did not pursue, one met criteria that allowed us to request further review by the National Guard Bureau's Office of Complex Investigations. We referred that case, and they sent an OCI team to investigate further.

4. The Alaska National Guard does not have criminal justice authority over sexual assaults or other non-military criminal offenses in the way that active duty military services do. Some politicians and partisan commentators have incorrectly suggested that the Alaska National Guard, rather than local law enforcement and the court system, should pursue prosecution of sexual assault. This is not possible, as civilian offenses such as sexual assault may only be prosecuted by civilian criminal justice authorities, per state law.

These uninformed individuals have also asserted that we chose not to be proactive in our response to victim reporting. This is also incorrect, as every unrestricted report has been referred to local law enforcement.

5. The Alaska National Guard pursues administrative action in response to local law enforcement and Office of Complex Investigation results. Some members who have committed acts of sexual assault or sexual harassment have lost rank, been forced out of the organization, lost command, or been administratively reassigned pending the outcome of administrative boards.

In order to ensure due process for the subject and the alleged victim, these actions take time. Due to required confidentiality and respect for privacy, personnel who are not directly involved in the administrative actions are not privy to the status or details of pending actions. This may be the reason for some people's concerns about timeliness or level of response; they are unaware of the status for each case, and therefore make incorrect assumptions that cases are not pursued.

6. There are three sexual assault response coordinators and 42 victim advocates throughout the Alaska National Guard. We have individual and class training, sensing sessions (feedback discussions), "all-calls" for leadership to communicate directly with all personnel, in addition to a video message from leadership, announcements, advertisements, articles, posters, brochures, presentation tables, and social media posts. All of this to ensure in every way possible that we have resources in place to help victims.

Communications are consistent and often so the message will be clearly understood that sexual assault is not tolerated. We do many things to ensure our members know our stance on sexual assault, including encouraging them to come forward for support in the event that they have been assaulted.

7. Of the nine assaults that allegedly occurred since 2009 by a member of the Alaska National Guard,

- A. Five were off-base, off-duty.
- B. Four were rapes.
- C. Five were inappropriate touching with clothes on.
- D. Seven were referred to law enforcement (the other two were restricted reports—a decision made by the victim—which therefore could not be prosecuted or otherwise further pursued while in such status.)
- E. None have been prosecuted.

8. Administrative investigations in the National Guard are now conducted by the Office of Complex Investigations but this program has only been funded since 2012. Prior to this, local units did not have the resources or guidance to fully and properly respond to reports of sexual assaults and were limited to "15-6" Investigations (in the Army National Guard) or "Commander Directed Investigations" (in the Air National Guard).

One assault is too many. But in an organization that draws members from a community of citizens who live in the state with the highest rate of sexual assaults in the nation, 1/20th of one percent is not the epidemic proportion being portrayed by some journalists and politicians.

We are very proud of the many distinguished Soldiers and Airmen in the Alaska National Guard who proudly serve our state and nation. We will continue to educate them, protect them and pursue justice within the means we have.

We hope that others who care about the people in our organization will focus on the real needs and concerns we must address, and hold their fire, even though they are being misinformed by cynical political agendas.

Home Tuesday, July 29, 2014

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# Major General Thomas Katkus responds to National Guard sexual assault allegations

By Lori Townsend, APRN

Posted on May 2, 2014 at 7:01 am

Category: Legislative News, Military, National Government, Recent News, State Government

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Governor [Sean Parnell](#) has been responding to allegations that sexual assault crimes within the state's National Guard were reported to him four years before he requested a federal investigation. The Governor says as soon as he had specific information, he acted. Parnell's commissioner of the Department of Military and Veteran's Affairs, Major General Thomas Katkus says the federal investigation should help improve the system.

### Major General Thomas Katkus, how large do you think the sexual assault issue is within Alaska?

The numbers I've got show us below what it would be in Alaska, we have a different number, total number of cases, because we track victims, don't track it as if we've got that many suspects. We've got 37 cases; of those 37 cases we have only 11 reported sexual assaults are Guard members as perpetrators. My position is even one is too many and it's a problem – a large problem; 37 cases over the past 5 years.



Major General Thomas Katkus

### How does Alaska compare to military nationally for sexual assault?

With Alaska being the highest sexual assault in the nation, dark climate, small houses, alcohol, there is a lot of propensity toward that kind of activity, which is unfortunate but also very rampant in cold, dark climates. I think the problem is getting better results with the resources being put toward it. The Guard is community based so we have a lot of resources beyond DOD. We have a lot of members in the National Guard that are counselors or lawyers so we have resources. The issue is out there fairly evenly across all services but we're better equipped to offer services.

### Does the legal structure of the Guard make it more cumbersome, more difficult to track cases and get information, Anchorage Police Department handling cases? Helpful or more difficult?

Difficult to address. We as a National Guard, we don't have an independent criminal justice system. We're not like active duty that has its own Uniform Code of Military Justice to address specifically infractions within the National Guard, because we have members that are also traditional, that go home at night and are under the laws of their communities. The authorities that cover our members are really the local authorities, the state troopers or other law enforcement. It's not our purview to supplement that. We take our own disciplinary actions through normal business practices, rules and regulation enforcement and then we have



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discipline. But we don't incarcerate individuals. We don't have a requirement; that our preponderance of evidence is what we go off of, 51% is civil action as opposed to beyond a reasonable doubt in any type of criminal investigation.

**Governor Parnell said he acted to call for a national investigation as soon as he had specifics. What kind of specific information is needed to prompt an investigation?**

For the National Guard Bureau that the Governor asked, it's just the request of the Governor. The Governor, anytime he has a desire to have an independent assessment or look into an organization he's responsible with, which would be the Air Guard or the Army Guard, he can contact the National Guard Bureau, advise them of the problem and they would propose the best solutions to step forward to look into it. Because it could be a safety issue, it could be an area of concern on finance, so either the safety investigators would come out or an auditor. Or in this case to look at a problem with how the reporting system is or an assessment of how overall, we are addressing sexual assaults or sexual harassment in the National Guard. So, in this case, again, he puts the problem statement forward and they provide the resource that best answers that.

**Why wouldn't chaplains risking their positions to bring the concerns forward to the Governor be enough to prompt an investigation by the DOD?**

I don't know that I have an answer for that. The Chaplains shouldn't be at risk for bringing any of these issues forward. There's no risk to them to, matter of fact it's incumbent on them to bring those issues forward. Their job description is pretty much, they advise the command....trying to make sure I get this right so that this is fairly accurate. The significant responsibility that they're held to is to advise the commander of issues of ethics, morals and morale within an organization. So they're almost held on a no harm, no foul. They're required to bring the bad news forward if they've got the bad news.

**Well it seems there was some confusion or hesitancy in that regard. Your deputy commissioner asked the chaplains to sign a document saying they wouldn't speak on behalf of the Guard, when actually what they were doing was bringing victims concerns forward. Did you ask him to do those things or was that something he felt he needed to do as deputy commissioner?**

I believe the letter you're referring to is a letter that went out to all of our members as we approached the political season. It was advising everyone to be very judicious and cautious on how they answer anyone that is approaching them and asking them for an official position of the department. So in that sense that was just to reiterate to clear it with a supervisor and we're not prohibiting anybody from talking to the press, their chain of command or other people. Just that they try to clear that, get the best information possible and if they're speaking for the department, make sure they clear it through our public affairs office in order to make sure we have the best, most accurate information out there.

**Do you think there needs to be changes in reporting and how people can bring these concerns forward to help boost confidence for people who are taking on the very difficult thing to have to come forward and talk about trauma and painful episodes they may have experienced?**

Absolutely, especially with as many deployments as we have because it's not only in the area of sexual assault, it's any type of experience that they are not normally exposed to in civilian activity. So there are traumatic events in everyone's life. We follow DOD policy and its changing constantly. I think in the last five years the department of defense has definitely stepped up its game. It's provided additional resources and of the limited training dollars, a significant amount of that resource is directed to bystander training, self help awareness to educate people about reporting any type of sexual assault or activity related to it. Then the resourcing for the investigation of those has increased and we've worked on training our investigators to investigate the civilian equivalent complaints of sexual harassment. We have additional resources that would look into any allegations of sexual assault, after the law enforcement have also been engaged on that same topic. And then the victim advocacy program we have. Multiple victim advocates have been assigned to the Guard as of late. Currently have three sexual assault coordinators assigned and 42 victim advocates assigned to the National Guard. So your question was, do I see better ways to do it? We can always improve but it is an incredible change over the past five years to where we are now.

**Major General, how damaging is this for morale?**

You know, it's damaging for morale, but where I'm very, very concerned, is we've made great strides in making people aware, we have a process in place, it's very transparent and they can feel comfortable reporting and they're going to get the help. With all of the adverse press and the senior officials who have basically expressed their concern and trust, I would hope that would not translate to the other end of the food chain to the young members who may be victimized

and may now decide not to come forward because of lack of trust in the system. The DOD has spent five years trying to put in place a system that works and I'm very afraid that this might be undermined by the lack of confidence that may be generated by this perception that is out there.

**Are you confident that when this investigation is over, that the system will show there are no major problems with how the guard is handling reporting and the cases that come forward?**

I'm confident that the assessment will come in with a better way of doing it. This is the first time we've really stepped back and evaluated from top to bottom, the entire process. I would hope they would come in and advise us of better ways to do business. So we look forward to what we will get as feedback. My feeling is we have a good system in place right now, it's a workable system that follows all of DOD's processes and regulations and I'm thinking an outside look will provide that much more suggestions that we can incorporate and make this better.

**My last question would be, you just mentioned Guard members and a perception of what's happening. What would be your concern about perception? We know there are high rates of assault, what perception are you concerned about?**

Well, the perception I'm concerned about is that, in the past five years, 70% of reported assaults, the perpetrator was a member of our community, not the National Guard. So 11 assaults in five years, those members were Guard members who committed those acts, so out of 37 cases, only 11 have we had to discipline one of our own members over. The rest, the other 26 cases, are all cases where we have provided exceptional support for the victim. Those victim advocates have engaged. We've taken the victims to local law enforcement, supported them through all of the issues and tried to make sure we could be there for them. That's what's not getting reported here is DOD as an organization has provided incredible response in taking care of the soldiers and airmen that are assigned in the National Guard and that's where I'm really afraid the perception is being missed here.

**Is the Guard looking at, the people who have been victimized. Are there efforts underway to track back and look at where are people getting into positions where they're at risk. Is there research into that so you can help young men and young women avoid some of those pitfalls?**

There's always different types of training we have people exposed to and mandate and some of the best is bystander training where not only do you train people to look out for themselves and not put themselves into harm's way but also train soldiers to look out for other people that may be inadvertently putting themselves in harm's way. So they teach them how to carefully approach a situation and defuse it. Sometimes a third party, that extra set of eyes that the potential victim may not be able to see. So your answer is yes, we're training people to be safer and we're training them to look out for each other and realistically that's how you start solving all of these problems is everyone becomes aware of looking out for each other.

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# Major General Thomas Katkus Responds To National Guard Sexual Assault Allegations

By Lori Townsend, APRN - Anchorage | May 1, 2014 - 6:04 pm

listen to audio: <http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/05/01/major-general-thomas-katkus-responds-to-national-guard-sexual-assault-allegations/>

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**Why wouldn't chaplains risking their positions to bring the concerns forward to the Governor be enough to prompt an investigation by the DOD?**

I don't know that I have an answer for that. The Chaplains shouldn't be at risk for bringing any of these issues forward. There's no risk to them to, matter of fact it's incumbent on them to bring those issues forward. Their job description is pretty much, they advise the command....trying to make sure I get this right so that this is fairly accurate. The significant responsibility that they're held to is to advise the commander of issues of ethics, morals and morale within an organization. So they're almost held on a no harm, no foul. They're required to bring the bad news forward if they've got the bad news.

**Well it seems there was some confusion or hesitancy in that regard. Your deputy commissioner asked the chaplains to sign a document saying they wouldn't speak on behalf of the Guard, when actually what they were doing was bringing victims concerns forward. Did you ask him to do those things or was that something he felt he needed to do as deputy commissioner?**

I believe the letter you're referring to is a letter that went out to all of our members as we approached the political season. It was advising everyone to be very judicious and cautious on how they answer anyone that is approaching them and asking them for an official position of the department. So in that sense that was just to reiterate to clear it with a supervisor and we're not prohibiting anybody from talking to the press, their chain of command or other people. Just that they try to clear that, get the best information possible and if they're speaking for the department, make sure they clear it through our public affairs office in order to make sure we have the best, most accurate information out there.

**Do you think there needs to be changes in reporting and how people can bring these concerns forward to help boost confidence for people who are taking on the very difficult**



**thing to have to come forward and talk about trauma and painful episodes they may have experienced?**

Absolutely, especially with as many deployments as we have because it's not only in the area of sexual assault, it's any type of experience that they are not normally exposed to in civilian activity. So there are traumatic events in everyone's life. We follow DOD policy and its changing constantly. I think in the last five years the department of defense has definitely stepped up its game. It's provided additional resources and of the limited training dollars, a significant amount of that resource is directed to bystander training, self help awareness to educate people about reporting any type of sexual assault or activity related to it. Then the resourcing for the investigation of those has increased and we've worked on training our investigators to investigate the civilian equivalent complaints of sexual harassment. WE have additional resources that would look into any allegations of sexual assault, after the law enforcement have also been engaged on that same topic. And then the victim advocacy program we have. Multiple victim advocates have been assigned to the Guard as of late. Currently have three sexual assault coordinators assigned and 42 victim advocates assigned to the National Guard. So your question was, do I see better ways to do it? We can always improve but it is an incredible change over the past five years to where we are now.

**Major General, how damaging is this for morale?**

You know, it's damaging for morale, but where I'm very, very concerned, is we've made great strides in making people aware, we have a process in place, it's very transparent and they can feel comfortable reporting and they're going to get the help. With all of the adverse press and the senior officials who have basically expressed their concern and trust, I would hope that would not translate to the other end of the food chain to the young members who may be victimized and may now decide not to come forward because of lack of trust in the system. The DOD has spent five years trying to put in place a system that works and I'm very afraid that this might be undermined by the lack of confidence that may be generated by this perception that is out there.

**Are you confident that when this investigation is over, that the system will show there are no major problems with how the guard is handling reporting and the cases that come forward?**

I'm confident that the assessment will come in with a better way of doing it. This is the first time we've really stepped back and evaluated from top to bottom, the entire process. I would hope they would come in and advise us of better ways to do business. So we look forward to what we will get as feedback. My feeling is we have a good system in place right now, it's a workable system that follows all of DOD's processes and regulations and I'm thinking an outside look will provide that much more suggestions that we can incorporate and make this better.

**My last question would be, you just mentioned Guard members and a perception of what's happening. What would be your concern about perception? We know there are high rates of assault, what perception are you concerned about?**

Well, the perception I'm concerned about is that, in the past five years, 70% of reported assaults, the perpetrator was a member of our community, not the National Guard. So 11 assaults in five years, those members were Guard members who committed those acts, so out of 37 cases, only 11 have we had to discipline one of our own members over. The rest, the other 26 cases, are all cases where we have provided exceptional support for the victim. Those victim advocates have engaged. We've taken the victims to local law enforcement, supported them through all of the issues and tried to make sure we could be there for them. That's what's not getting reported here is DOD as an organization has provided incredible response in taking care of the soldiers and airmen that are assigned in the National Guard and that's where I'm really afraid the perception is being missed here.

**Is the Guard looking at, the people who have been victimized. Are there efforts underway to track back and look at where are people getting into positions where they're at risk. Is there research into that so you can help young men and young women avoid some of those pitfalls?**

There's always different types of training we have people exposed to and mandate and some of the best is bystander training where not only do you train people to look out for themselves and not put themselves into harm's way but also train soldiers to look out for other people that may be inadvertently putting themselves in harm's way. So they teach them how to carefully approach a situation and defuse it. Sometimes a third party, that extra set of eyes that the potential victim may not be able to see. So your answer is yes, we're training people to be safer and we're training them to look out for each other and realistically that's how you start solving all of these problems is everyone becomes aware of looking out for each other.



## Parnell defends timing of National Guard inquiry

Posted: April 30, 2014 - 12:02am

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**ANCHORAGE** — Gov. Sean Parnell's call for a federal investigation of sexual misconduct within the Alaska National Guard came nearly four years after allegations first arose, but he said Monday that he could not act before getting specific details of allegations.

Parnell on Sunday was criticized in a newspaper column for the timing of his call for an investigation and responded to reporters' questions following a candidate debate in Anchorage, the Anchorage Daily News reported.

Early in his tenure, Parnell said halting assaults on women would be a focus of his administration.

Parnell said he met with National Guard chaplains in 2010 regarding the lack of the service's response to reports of sexual assault. However, he did not learn specifics until this year, he said.

"When the chaplains came to me in 2010, I listened to them, had a lengthy meeting with them, heard their concerns specifically on sexual assault, sexual misconduct, those charges that they were saying was occurring in the Guard," Parnell said. "They could only give me general allegations."

The chaplains were "under a duty of confidentiality," Parnell said.

Parnell spoke to the National Guard commander, Maj. Gen. Tom Katkus, and learned some of the cases were years old and that allegations of criminal acts had been referred to police or Alaska State Troopers.

Parnell worked with Katkus to make sure a safe reporting mechanism was in place for sexual assault complaints, he said.

Parnell said he met with state Sen. Fred Dyson, R-Eagle River, on Feb. 26, and was given the name of a person in the National Guard who could give specific details on how the system was not working for victims. Parnell said he called the guard member within 24 hours and was told of two instances where the system had not worked.

"Within 24 hours of learning those specific details, I was writing a letter to the Guard Bureau, contacting them, saying please send a special investigator to review all of the cases that the guard has whether they are related to sexual misconduct, whether they are related to fraud," Parnell said. "Got right on it as soon as I had those specific details."

The letter asked for a federal investigation of sexual assault and fraud in the Alaska National Guard and an examination of how commanders handled reports of rape. Parnell announced the federal review in March.

The bureau's Office of Complex Investigations could complete a report by with recommendations by late summer or early fall, Parnell said.

"You can be sure if anything untoward is there or anything that raises concern relative to sexual assault victims or reporting or the command structure, that I will take action," Parnell said.

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Information from: Anchorage (Alaska) Daily News, <http://www.adn.com>

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# Gov. Parnell Says He Took Immediate Action On Sexual Assault Allegations

By [Lori Townsend, APRN - Anchorage](#) | April 29, 2014 - 5:25 pm

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Governor Sean Parnell is defending his decision to wait four years to request a federal investigation into reports of a sexual assault problem in the Alaska National Guard. Anchorage Daily News columnist Shannyn Moore wrote Sunday that Parnell first learned about misconduct in the Guard in 2010, when he was approached by three guard chaplains. Parnell says he took those charges seriously, but lacked the details to prompt an investigation until February.



Governor Sean Parnell discusses his proposed FY15 budget. Photo by Josh Edge, APRN – Anchorage.

He says after the initial concerns were raised, he went to Major General Thomas Katkus to make sure the systems were in place to protect guard members. Then in February, Parnell says he was able to talk with a guard member who provided specifics.

- [Sen. Hollis French letter to Gov. Parnell](#) (PDF)
- [Op-Ed by Gov. Parnell](#) (PDF)
- [Department of Military and Veterans Affairs confidentiality agreement](#) (PDF)

VmP

**Based on what you've heard from victims and others, how big of a problem do you think sexual assault is in the National Guard?**

I think one allegation is too much and I take every allegation seriously, because I am concerned about Alaskans who suffer from sexual assault and violence. It's been a core part of who I am fighting for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. So, I take every assault allegation seriously. So, in 2010 when the chaplains first came to speak with me and they made allegations that sexual assault was occurring on Guard members I questioned them and asked for detail, and they could not provide it because they were under duty of confidentiality to the people they counseled, but immediately after that I took action and went right to the Guard, to the general, and asked him to talk to me about what he knew of sexual assaults occurring in the Guard. And he went through the cases that had been filed at that time; spoke about how any cases that involved allegations of criminal activity, as in sexual assault, are not only investigated but they are also referred to local law enforcement – like the Anchorage Police Department. And I made sure that for the safety of the victims and any future victims in the Guard that there was, and is, a reporting process that's safe for anybody in the Guard to utilize; that there's an investigation process that is complete and accurate and directed that appropriate penalties be assessed. Now, that's outside the criminal context, but the criminal context goes directly to law enforcement. I had only those general allegations of sexual assault, but I still took action to make sure that there was a system in place that works for victims of sexual assault.

Those general allegations persisted but they were the same allegations about events that occurred years ago. And then on Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>, Senator Dyson, came to me and said he had specific detail. Before when he spoke to me he had general allegations and he asked me to call a guard member who would provide me with specific detail about how the system wasn't working. I made that contact within 24 hours of Sen. Dyson's [call], personally spoke with a Guard member. That Guard member provided me with two instances where, if the allegations were substantiated, that the system would have failed our Guard member. And at that point, I realized I needed to get an independent assessment of the entire reporting and investigation structure. So I called in the National Guard Bureau, they have a complex investigation review team – I did that within 24 hours and that team is on the ground now in Alaska, doing their work to make sure that victims are safe.

**Some people will think why was it four years? In hindsight do you wish you would have come forward four years ago, what do you think could have been done differently?**

At the time I took immediate action to make sure that every victim of a sexual assault had been referred to law enforcement. I made sure that anyone who had concerns about what was happening in the Guard had a safe reporting structure, but without specific detail about how the system was otherwise failing, that's all I could do, is what I believed. And still believe that. But, on the other hand, once I got specific information about how the structure was actually failing, in other words the who, what, where, when why – the same thing you reporters ask – even though I pressed for that earlier and nobody could or would provide me with that, the second I got that kind of information I took immediate action with the National Guard Bureau to get them in there and get an independent look at what was happening.

**Talk more about the specifics? What exactly were you needing for you to have that ability to actually ask for an investigation?**

So, 4 years ago I was told there is a problem with sexual assault in the Guard. That is the sum and substance of what I was given. When I went to Guard leadership to inquire about that they said that yes they had specific instances where sexual assaults had been reported, that those had been referred to law enforcement for investigation, like the Anchorage Police Department. And they also detailed the reporting structure for any kind of alleged malfeasance in the Guard that was in place. And I had detailed for me, here's the list of cases that are pending; here's the list of cases that have been resolved in the past. But when it came specifically to the sexual assaults, when that kind of criminal activity was brought forward, that went immediately, as I was told, to law enforcement, which I think is appropriate.

**One of the problems with sexual assault cases is there often isn't enough information and it's very difficult for victims to come forward. Did you consider that when you decided not to pursue an investigation earlier? What would you say to a victim of sexual assault about the statement that you didn't have enough specifics? Do you think that's enough of an answer for someone?**

What I did is an internal state investigation. Meaning, I went in, my office went in and we made leadership tell us exactly what they were doing to protect sexual assault victims.

When I had an actual specific set of facts related to how the system had failed, or – in this case – was alleged to fail, I asked the National Guard Bureau, as an independent assessing body, to come in and look at what I had been told and also look at the entire system to make sure we protect our guard members.

**The Choose Respect campaign has been a big focus for you. Are you concerned this will damage the momentum or image you're hoping to get across to Alaskans about coming forward when these things happen?**

Well, absolutely. Anyone who knows me would say I care deeply about victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. And I'm more concerned than anything that victims may not come forward. Because I know from speaking with many across the state how difficult that already is, and I don't want to make that more difficult. That's why I launched the immediate investigation, even when I had the barest of details, and now that I have specific details, I've called in the National Guard Bureau to help because I think it's beyond us at this point.

**When do you expect the investigation to conclude, when will you have a report and will you commit to releasing that report publicly?**

I already have. I have made that commitment. The review team from the National Guard Bureau let me know they would be on the ground, in Alaska in the month of May. They said that it would take several months after that to complete the report and make that available to me. I already committed to making that report public, with the exception of any confidential victim information that should not be put forward, because I do want to protect the privacy of the victims. So, that's been my commitment and remains so.

**You're still standing behind General Katkus. Do you have confidence in him? Do you wish he would have come to you sooner?**

General Katkus has been very forthright. When I started asking questions about sexual assault cases, he came forward right away, showed me the cases that had been transferred to law enforcement, showed me how they have tracked cases, detailed how they investigate cases. And he's been very proactive about holding what the Guard calls "sensing sessions," meaning going into guard units and informing people about how to report acts of sexual harassment, acts of sexual violence. So General Katkus has been very proactive in that regard, and that's what I know at this point.

**Do you think he could have done more within the Guard itself to make sure this behavior was not at all tolerated?**

From what I know now, the answer is no. But again, I've asked the National Guard Bureau to come have that independent look to make sure our Guard members are safe. General Katkus has told me at every turn that's his desire and mission, he understands it, gets it and he has the systems in place that demonstrate that. I have asked the National Guard Bureau to make sure that those systems truly work for victims because we care deeply, and I care deeply, about protecting Alaskans.

**Did you talk to anyone beyond General Katkus about the chaplains' concerns?**

Yes, in fact, our office talked with numerous Guard members. All of which had the same general allegations. There was one victim who came forward and spoke with a member of my office. Her case was also being investigated by Anchorage Policed Department at that point in time, so the answer is yes, we spoke with a number of people.

**Mike Nizich-yYour chief of staff- was using his personal e-mail account to correspond about this issue. Why was that?**

I spoke with Mr. Nizich and understand that was at the request of the chaplains who wanted to go outside the official channels. However, I've asked Mr. Nizich to check his personal e-mail for that and his recollection is that it's one email. I've asked him to check for that and move it to the state account, which is protocol to follow. And that will be a part of the public record at that point.

**McHugh Pierre was asking questions. Who asked him to have the chaplains sign confidentiality statements?**

I don't know that but I do have a copy of what he apparently asked to be signed. It's a statement that was emailed to all Department of Military and Veterans Affairs employees. It says employees aren't authorized to give statements on behalf of department without first coordinating the request with one's supervisor, which is standard operating policy in any department or any business that you don't speak for the business, you don't speak for the department. without first coordinating it with your supervisor.

**He also spoke with people on base about wanting to know how information was getting out. It almost feels a bit like a witch hunt. Does that concern you that oftentimes it takes people acting outside of the normal channels to get this information out and at the end of the day, that's the main mission, is it not?**

Well that's true and that's why I asked these questions. Again, there's nothing that stops the employee, as long as they're not speaking on behalf of the department. In other words they're speaking as a person, as an Alaskan who's concerned, that's not what this statement addresses though.

**But the chaplains weren't' saying they were speaking for the department, they were raising concerns about people who were alleging sexual assault.**

And I don't condone the activity you just described. I do, on the other hand, understand when supervisors are asking their employees not to represent the department in certain things. In this case, I don't have all the facts, but I don't condone trying to stop what you're describing.

**So you're saying you wouldn't condone McHugh Pierre asking them to be quiet?**

No. But again, I don't have evidence is that's what he did. What I evidence is that he asked them not to speak on behalf of the department without coordinating that with a supervisor.

**What have you taken away from this process? Do you think there are changes that need to be made? Are you frustrated by the process are there things that need to be done differently?**



I am frustrated when Alaskans in the Guard don't feel like they are protected; that's entirely frustrating. And it's frustrating to me when I don't have enough information to take action beyond what I did. In other words, I took action, I made sure that the systems were in place to protect Guard members; and that the people were in place, like an independent investigator – a safe route for people to report, but until the end of February, until then I didn't have verified facts that alerted me I needed to bring the National Guard Bureau in. So, I do get frustrated when Alaskans are reporting harm and are continuing to report harm, even though, from all appearances, the system is in place and the checks and balances are in place to assure their safety – including referrals to law enforcement agencies. So if indeed we find there is wrongdoing, I 'll take steps to punish that and make it right, there's no question about that.

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**Sexual Assault Response  
Alaska National Guard  
Key Messages and Talking Points**

**30 Apr 14  
Media Interview  
Lori Townsend  
APRN**

**Pursuing Justice.** We do not have an independent criminal justice system in the National Guard and we are not subject to the provisions of the federal uniformed code of military justice (UCMJ). We report crimes to local civilian law enforcement.

We have opportunities to respond to allegations administratively through personnel actions that may affect the future career of a perpetrator, but there are lengthy processes as we follow regulations for due process. We do all that we can to ensure victims are protected and perpetrators see consequences to their actions.

**Victim Reporting.** Victims decide if they want to report their assault to a sexual assault response coordinator or a victim advocate. We have 3 sexual assault response coordinators and 42 victim advocates in the Alaska National Guard.

**Victim Assistance.** They provide assistance to victims. *In 70% of reported assaults in the last 5 years, the perpetrator was a civilian member of the community;* not a National Guard member. We want to help members of our organization who have been harmed, and we offer assistance and resources that a large majority of civilian organizations do not offer to their employees in-house.

**Our Rates vs. Alaska's Rates.** There have been 11 reported sexual assaults with National Guard members as the perpetrator in the past 5 years. We have 4,000 people in our organization and an average of 2 assaults by National Guard members per year over a five-year timeframe. One assault is one too many. But our organization has a much smaller percentage of reported assaults than the percentages reported by Alaska citizens as a whole, where we are challenged with one of the highest sexual assault rates in the nation.

**RECAP: Summary of Numbers for Reported Cases.** There have been 37 reported cases of alleged sexual assault since 2009. In 26 of those cases, the alleged perpetrator *was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard.* We have 11 reports in the past 5 years where the alleged perpetrator was a member of the Alaska National Guard.

**more, next page**

## **Reports.**

### **Year: Total Number of Reported Cases (Restricted and Unrestricted)**

2014: 1 (Unrestricted, 1 not in the AKNG)

2013: 11 (8 were unrestricted; 5 not in the AKNG)

2012: 3 (2 unrestricted; all 3 not in AKNG)

2011: 12 (10 unrestricted; 11 not in the AKNG)

2010: 6 (5 unrestricted; all 5 not in the AKNG)

2009: 4 (2 unrestricted; 1 not in the AKNG)

*All unrestricted cases were referred to law enforcement.*

**Chaplains assertions.** All of the victims who sought support from our chaplains also reported their assaults and have received or declined assistance from our sexual assault response program.

**Law enforcement.** None of the unrestricted cases that were referred to local law enforcement have been prosecuted to date. You may contact law enforcement directly if you have questions about referred cases.

- End -

## Parnell responds to his handling of allegations of sexual abuse in the Guard



After a candidate forum on Monday, Gov. Sean Parnell answered questions about his administration's handling of allegations of sexual abuse in Alaska's National Guard, something that appears to have plagued the Guard for years. The problems in the Guard were [reported in the media last October](#), and were revisited in a [Sunday column by Shannyn Moore](#). More is likely to be revealed about the issue. For now, however, below are the allegations that I questioned Parnell about, followed by his response.

- **Allegation:** Parnell waited for four years to act on allegations of a widespread culture of abuse in the Guard. In 2010, three chaplains had a meeting with Parnell to discuss the culture. Republican Sen. Fred Dyson called on Parnell three times to take action. However, it wasn't until March 2014 that Parnell called on the federal government to conduct an official investigation into the allegations.
- **Response:** Parnell said that the allegations lacked the specificity that he needed to take action. He said he met with now Adjutant General Thomas Katkus about the issue. He said he reviewed charts and spreadsheets that documented the allegations, and saw that the appropriate ones had been referred to the Anchorage Police Department and the troopers. On February 26, Republican Sen. Fred Dyson brought forth a "specific person who was able to make specific claims about what went wrong," Parnell said. Parnell himself talked to this person, and within 24 hours, called on the feds. That investigation is expected to be complete in May. A report will follow likely sometime late summer.

- **Allegation:** Parnell's deputy commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, McHugh Pierre, tried to get a sexual assault investigator to stay quiet and not talk to legislators about the issues in the Guard by having her sign a letter saying she wouldn't do so. He then tried to get the Guard chaplains to sign the same letter.
- **Response:** Parnell said that he was "surprised" by the accusation. But when he looked into it, it was "less nefarious than what had been reported," he said. Indeed, the letter in question, which you can read here, is one that went to other department employees. It says that employees should not give official statements without prior authorizations, and that although, according to the letter, "the mandate does not mean that an employee cannot reach out to one's legislator to address a personal situation," such contact had to take place during personal time using personal resources.

Finally, Moore reported that Mike Nizich, Parnell's chief of staff, was using his personal email to correspond with the chaplains about the issues in the Guard. Personal emails are not subject to public information requests. Parnell said that if those emails were about state business, they should be forwarded to Nizich's state account and will direct him to do so.

Contact Amanda Coyne at [amandamcoyne@yahoo.com](mailto:amandamcoyne@yahoo.com)



#### 15 REPLIES

This entry was posted in news, Politics and tagged alaska national guard, sean parnell on April 28, 2014 [<http://amandacoyne.com/politics/parnell-responds-to-his-handling-of-allegations-of-sexual-abuse-in-the-guard/>] by admin.

15 thoughts on "Parnell responds to his handling of allegations of sexual abuse in the Guard"

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Lynn Willis

# Alaska Dispatch News

Published on *Alaska Dispatch* (<http://www.adn.com>)

[Home](#) > Shannyn Moore: After 4 years, Parnell finally lifts a finger to help sexually assaulted Guard members

Shannyn Moore <sup>(1)</sup>

April 26, 2014

**Main Image Credit:**

**Main Image Caption:**

On Feb. 28, 2014, our governor, Sean Parnell, wrote a letter asking the Department of Defense to investigate "reports of sexual assaults and other behavior creating a hostile environment and culture within portions of the Alaska National Guard."

He explained that he was compelled to request the investigation by "information I recently learned."

That was not true. In fact, it was very far from the truth.

Military officers had risked their careers to tell the governor personally that female soldiers had been sexually assaulted by other Guard members and that those assaults were not only not investigated, they were covered up by senior officers.

And when did the governor really learn about this misconduct?

In 2010, four years before he finally decided somebody needed to do something about the pirate ship that was his National Guard.

Here's some of what happened, taken from the accounts of people directly involved:

In 2010, several of the victims of sexual assault and misconduct were distraught and frustrated by the Guard leadership's unwillingness to investigate their complaints and protect them from retribution by victimizers. Eventually, in desperation, they took their stories to their military chaplains. Three chaplains, convinced that they could not trust senior officers of the Guard to respond appropriately, selflessly decided to take their concerns over the heads of those officers directly to the governor.

The chaplains were able to connect with the governor because, in addition to his military duties, one of them had also worked in administration for the Grace Christian Church school, which Parnell's daughters had attended. Using that connection, he was able to arrange a phone appointment with Parnell.

On Nov. 18, 2010, the chaplains -- a major and two lieutenant colonels -- gathered in a church office for their telephone conference with the governor. The chaplains, all feeling personally uncomfortable and professionally at risk for going outside the chain of command, told Parnell, their commander in chief, what they thought he needed to know about the widespread lack of trust in senior Guard leadership, the mishandling of sexual assault complaints and the misuse of Guard funds and resources. The call lasted 20 minutes.

Parnell thanked them for their courage.

Less than two weeks later, on Nov. 30, 2010, several Air National Guardsmen sent a complaint to the governor asking him to "accept the resignation of Major Gen. Thomas Katkus because of 'multiple acts of moral turpitude' he had allowed to run rampant, including drug trafficking, sexual assaults/rape, illegal use of aircraft."

Katkus, who has since been promoted by Parnell to adjutant general of the Alaska Guard, is a member of the governor's Cabinet.

Col. Robert Doehl, a former vice commander of the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th wing, now works for Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska, as a special assistant for military and veterans' affairs.

On Dec. 3, 2010, Doehl wrote a seven-page letter to the governor. He thanked Parnell for a meeting they'd had that same day.

Doehl went on to repeat and document allegations about the Guard that he had shared with Parnell in their meeting. The allegations included abuse of authority, safety shortcuts that had resulted in loss of life and aircraft, cover-ups, cronyism and retaliation against whistleblowers. He named names, specifically accusing Lt. Gen. Craig Campbell (he became lieutenant governor in August 2009) and then-Maj. Gen. Katkus of failing to stop the misconduct.

That meeting also included the chaplains, the major and the lieutenant colonels, along with several other officers. By that time, several female soldier rape victims had submitted written statements to the Governor's Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, Katie Tepas, according to one of the chaplains. Your office already has those statements, the officers told Parnell. Tepas had also met with some of the victims, who told her their stories in person, according to two officers who heard it from the victims directly.

Karl Hansen, a former special agent with the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division and a former member of security details for Defense Secretaries Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates, is now the medical ombudsman at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. In that role, he has dealt extensively with the Guard sexual assault victims. Hansen said one of the victims told him that Tepas had asked why she, the victim, didn't like Katkus and what she thought of the governor. The meeting led nowhere. There was no investigation.

During my conversation with him, I asked Hansen what he thought of Parnell's "Choose Respect" campaign against sexual and domestic violence. He said, "The victims I've talked to feel it's just lip service. I'm dealing with women who are suicidal because of what has happened to them -- some attempting multiple times."

On Dec. 29, 2011, the lieutenant colonels spoke by phone with Parnell's chief of staff, Mike Nizich. Nizich had been present for other discussions and was the designated contact person for the chaplains. Nizich said he would convey their concerns to the governor. The chaplains stayed in touch with Nizich -- through Nizich's personal email, not his state email -- over the following months.

By early fall of 2013, state Sen. Fred Dyson, R-Eagle River, had been briefed on the allegations about the Guard. He knew one of the chaplains through their service together on a community board. Dyson said he went to the governor with information about the pervasive climate of "boys will be boys" and the "circling of the wagons" around alleged perpetrators in the Guard.

"It appeared to me that the governor was not giving enough credibility to the information the chaplains were giving him," Dyson told me.

In October 2013, reporter Sean Cockerham wrote a story about the sexual assault allegations for the Daily News. Cockerham reported that Lt. Col. Jane Wawersik, a member of the Guard and a

former Anchorage police officer, had been appointed to investigate the charges of sexual misconduct. (I'm told she was appointed by Brig. Gen. Catherine Jorgensen.)

The chaplains were asking why it had taken so long. It had been three years since they first told the governor what had happened to some women in the Guard.

After the Cockerham story appeared, Dyson went to the governor a second time, encouraging him to take an active role in addressing the chaplains' concerns. "The question of the propriety of the chaplains in speaking to the media came up," Dyson said. He meant the governor didn't like the fact they had talked to a reporter.

On Dec. 6, 2013, Parnell's deputy commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, McHugh Pierre, summoned Lt. Col. Wawersik, the sexual assault investigator, to his office on JBER. He wanted to know if she had been giving information to Dyson. Wawersik told him she had not.

On Dec. 9, Pierre called two of the chaplains to his office. After asking which lawmakers they had talked to, Pierre asked them to sign a letter stating that they would not talk to legislators. Both declined, saying they would first have to consult an attorney. They were not allowed to take a copy of Pierre's letter with them.

The next day, their attorney, Wayne Anthony Ross of Anchorage, wrote to Pierre asking for a copy of the document. He also asked Pierre to explain the "established guidelines" he had referenced in his discussion with the two chaplains.

As of Friday, almost five months after he wrote Pierre, Ross had not received a reply, he told me.

In February 2014, Dyson contacted the governor a third time and again strongly encouraged him to act. Two weeks later the governor requested a federal investigation.

When I asked Dyson why he thought it had taken so long for the governor to do something, he said, "He was too loyal to his people" and he "lacked a healthy skepticism."

I think that's a charitable analysis. I'll just say it doesn't suggest the governor had an excess of concern for sexual assault victims, or the need for a functional National Guard.

Sen. Hollis French, D-Anchorage, has been asking some of the same questions I have about these events. This past Friday, when I emailed the governor's office asking to talk to Parnell about the Guard, his spokeswoman sent me a copy of a letter the governor had just sent to French.

In the letter, Parnell suggested it wasn't possible for him to have followed up on the chaplains' sexual assault information. He posed this question to French:

"Did the chaplains also tell you they were unable to state case-specific detail with our office to substantiate their concerns because of their duty of confidentiality to the individuals they counseled?"

The governor conveniently overlooks the fact that the sexual assaults had been reported earlier within the chain of command. Presumably all Parnell would have had to do was ask the nearest general to get him the names and allegations of all the Guard soldiers who had reported being raped in the last few years. And if that didn't work, his office already had the victims' statements, and someone there had talked to victims.

Parnell's letter continued: "Even without detail specific enough to pinpoint a victim willing to report, nor a perpetrator, we made sure through the Adjutant General that Guard members had a safe



route to report sexual misconduct, and that their allegations would be taken seriously and investigated to conclusion, including any appropriate penalties. Where criminal conduct was alleged, we directed referral to the appropriate law enforcement agency."

And who was the Adjutant General who would ensure the safety and proper treatment of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators?

Thomas Katkus, of course.

Both of Alaska's U.S. senators, Mark Begich and Lisa Murkowski, responded relatively quickly to the public allegations. Sean Parnell, the commander in chief of the Alaska Guard, waited nearly four years.

In the meantime, the victims suffered and the pirate ship sailed on.

Shannyn Moore is a radio host on 1480 AM in Washington, D.C., and on Netroots Radio.

Shannyn Moore  
comment

**Source URL:** <http://www.adn.com/article/20140426/shannyn-moore-after-4-years-parnell-finally-lifts-finger-help-sexually-assaulted>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.adn.com/authors/677951>

**Question: How many reports of sexual misconduct per year has the AK Guard seen as a whole each of last five years?**

Our Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, Octavia Thompson, only tracks sexual assaults that are reported to her. There are several facets of sexual misconduct that don't rise to the level of sexual assault, things such as fraternization or sexual harassment, of which she does not track.

In addition, a victim may choose to file an unrestricted report or restricted report. If a victim chooses unrestricted reporting, it gives victim advocates permission to notify the victim's command and local law enforcement. Unrestricted reporting also gives us the opportunity to ensure offenders are disciplined to the full extent of our means.

Also, keep in mind that a victim can report a sexual assault to the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, but his/her perpetrator does not have to be a member of the Alaska National Guard. We will still provide the victims with resources and assistance.

For unrestricted reports of sexual assaults, the breakdown is as follows (keep in mind that some assaults happened prior to the time frame they were reported in):

\*As of April 14, 2014

Year Reported: Number of Unrestricted Reporting Cases

2014: 1 (This case has an alleged perpetrator who is NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2013: 8 (3 of these cases had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2012: 2 (1 of these cases had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2011: 10 (All 10 of these cases had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2010: 1 (This case had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2009: 2

All of these cases were referred to local law enforcement.

Please note the broad military definition referenced below on sexual assault. The 2005 Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies report states:

*"Within the military community, the term sexual assault carries a more far-reaching meaning that encompasses everything from violent sexual acts such as rape, forcible sodomy, and assault with intent to commit rape or sodomy, to indecent assault. While indecent assault connotes violence, violence is not a prerequisite of the crime. **Indecent assault can be a mere sexual touching that occurs without the consent of the person who is touched.***

If a victim chooses to file a restricted report, we can only share information to the extent in which the victim gives permission. There could be instances in which a victim reports a sexual assault to a victim advocate, chaplain, medical personnel or the VA and chooses not to meet with the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator. Also, when a victim chooses to file a restricted report, their information is not shared with law enforcement or Guard leadership and is kept confidential. Law enforcement is only contacted when a victim files an unrestricted report.

For restricted reports of sexual assaults, the breakdown is as follows (keep in mind that some assaults happened prior to the time frame they were reported in):

\*As of April 14, 2014

Year Reported: Number of Restricted Reporting Cases

2014: 0

2013: 3 (2 of these cases had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2012: 1 (This case had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2011: 2 (1 of these cases had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2010: 5 (All 5 of these cases had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

2009: 2 (1 of these cases had an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard)

In summary, 37 cases of alleged sexual assault since 2009 reported to the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator:

Year: Total Number of Reported Cases (Restricted and Unrestricted)

2014: 1

2013: 11

2012: 3

2011: 12

2010: 6

2009: 4

Of those 37 cases, when the alleged sexual assault occurred, 26 cases involved an alleged perpetrator who was NOT a member of the Alaska National Guard.

Of those 37 cases, the victim filed an unrestricted report in 24 cases.

Of those 37 cases, the victim filed a restricted report in 13 cases.

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## Gov. Parnell Asking For Investigation National Guard Sexual Assaults

By Lori Townsend - APRN, Anchorage and Associated Press

Posted on March 28, 2014 at 6:38 am

Category: [Legislative News](#), [Military](#), [Recent News](#), [State Government](#)

Estimated reading time: 1 minute, 6 seconds

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Governor Parnell is asking the federal National Guard Bureau to investigate cases of sexual assault in Alaska's National Guard. In a press release, Parnell wrote he is "deeply concerned by reports of sexual assaults and other behavior creating a hostile environment and culture within portions of the Alaska National Guard."

The investigation follows a story from the [Anchorage Daily News](#) last October where alleged victims of sexual assault described an extensive problem in Alaska's National Guard.

Sean Cockerham is a reporter with McClatchy Newspapers Washington Bureau. He broke that story and is reporting on the investigation. He says he began hearing about problems in the Guard last year.

[KTUU](#) says Parnell's office this week released a [Feb. 28 letter](#) to National Guard Bureau chief Gen. Frank Grass that asks for an investigator to be appointed to examine open and closed investigations of alleged sexual assault.

Parnell spokeswoman, Sharon Leighow, says Grass quickly responded, and Parnell met last week with officials, including Col. Christian Rofrano, the chief counsel of the National Guard Bureau. Leighow says the scope of an investigation was discussed.

Alaska National Guard officials have said 29 cases of sexual assault have been reported since 2009. Of those, 21 were closed or suspended after law enforcement got involved.



Gen. Frank Grass (Photo courtesy U.S. National Guard)



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## Hull, Angela (GOV)

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**Subject:** FW: more questions

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**From:** Olmstead, Candis Maj (MVA sponsored)  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 13, 2014 9:56 AM  
**To:** Cockerham, Sean ([scockerham@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:scockerham@mcclatchydc.com))  
**Subject:** more questions

Good morning, Sean,

Your questions and my answers are below. Please let me know if you need anything else.

Sincerely,

Candis

**QUESTION:**

I understand some things are not releasable, but I'd like to request at least a synopsis of what each of these soldiers is specifically alleged to have done. Also, are you saying the names of the soldiers involved will never be released? I'd like to renew my request for the names, or at least the ranks.

**ANSWER:**

Because these are personnel/administrative investigations (not criminal investigations), we are limited by regulation about what we can release. If we were to release some of what you are asking for, it could invalidate separation board proceedings and negatively impact our ability to pursue justice.

Allegations include a range of misconduct, from fraternization to misuse of government equipment.

Not every investigation was in response to victims coming forward and seeking assistance. In some cases, supervisors or commanders were notified of possible behaviors, and the commander pursued an inquiry (internal administrative investigation). In other cases, victims initiated a restricted report, which does not give permission for the organization to refer the case to law enforcement. And in some cases, the victim initiated an unrestricted report.

If law enforcement is unable to pursue the case due to lack of evidence, lack of cooperation by the victim, or a variety of other reasons, the adjutant general may request that the National Guard Bureau Office of Complex Investigations (NGB/OCI) pursue an investigation. A secondary option is the administrative internal investigation to root out more details of the alleged activity.

**QUESTION:**

Will the charges for these soldiers be referred to law enforcement for possible criminal prosecution?

**ANSWER:**

It is always our practice to turn over all allegations of a criminal nature to local law enforcement.

Four of the cases were already referred to local law enforcement, and local law enforcement did not pursue the cases.

One of those four cases was referred to NGB/OCI, was investigated, and is still in process.

The other eight of the 12 investigations were initiated in order to look into allegations that did not indicate or claim actual criminal behavior—although such investigations may discover possible criminal behavior—or the victim chose not to report or pursue assistance from local law enforcement or cooperate with law enforcement.

CANDIS A. OLMSTEAD, Maj, AKANG  
Director, Public Affairs  
Alaska National Guard  
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs  
Desk 907-428-6030  
Cell 907-891-2983  
PA requests: [mvapublicaffairs@alaska.gov](mailto:mvapublicaffairs@alaska.gov)  
[Alaska National Guard Facebook](#)  
[Alaska National Guard Youtube](#)

To all DMVA employees:

We are about to turn the clock on a new year and 2014 will certainly be exciting!

There are many candidates for political office and many of them keep the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs as a high priority. This can affect our department in many ways, one of which can lead to candidates contacting employees to get an official statement outside of the chain of command.

Employees are not authorized to give statements on behalf of the department without first coordinating the request with one's supervisor, and the Commissioner/ Adjutant General's office.

Our goal is to maintain the utmost professionalism in the workplace and the community, and this is one step to ensure we will be successful.

This mandate does not mean an employee cannot reach out to one's legislator to address a personal situation. But the employee must make this contact during non-business hours with personal resources.

I look forward to a successful 2014 and I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

McHugh Pierre  
Deputy Commissioner

I fully understand and will comply with this rule: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Alaska National Guard unit being investigated for allegations of sexual misconduct

By Sean Cockerham

McClatchy Washington Bureau

Published: Sunday, Oct. 27, 2013 - 3:00 am

Last Modified: Sunday, Oct. 27, 2013 - 7:29 pm

WASHINGTON -- Current and former members of the Alaska National Guard say there's serious sexual misconduct within the ranks and an investigation of recruiters accused of rape is now underway.

Lt. Col. Jane Wawersik, a former Anchorage police officer, is investigating allegations of sexual assault as well as other offenses, such as inappropriate relationships with new recruits, by members of the Alaska Army Guard's recruiting and retention unit headquartered at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Members of the guard said other soldiers are also under investigation.

Sgt. Rosa Ralls, a currently serving member of the Alaska National Guard who reported being raped in 2009 by a former member of the military, said the sexual assault problem is severe.

"It's horrible, it really is," she said.

Lt. Col. Rick Koch, the state command chaplain for the Alaska National Guard, and Lt. Col. Ted McGovern, a chaplain in the Alaska Army National Guard, questioned why it's taken so long for action.

The two chaplains said sexual assault victims have been coming to them for years, and that the majority were assaulted by fellow guard members. The chaplains said victims don't trust their commanders to help because of a history of mishandled complaints, in which victims felt that nothing was being done.

"There were lots of bread crumbs on the trail that were never taken seriously. It was almost shocking to think that somebody wouldn't try to bore down deeper than they did," Koch said.

Maj. Gen. Tom Katkus, who has led the Alaska National Guard since 2009 as the adjutant general, confirmed "we do have some investigations going on." He said he could not discuss the details.

Katkus said the guard investigates all allegations of sexual misconduct.



"The Alaska National Guard will do everything appropriate to protect our women and men from sexual assault, and those who would attack their dignity and honor. We are focusing efforts on prevention, victim support, investigations, and accountability," the general said in a written response to questions.

The military is grappling with a nationwide sexual assault crisis. The Pentagon reported a 35 percent increase over two years in the estimated number of military personnel victimized by sexual assault and related crimes. Sexual misconduct is already an issue in Alaska, where the commander of the Army National Guard's 49th Missile Defense battalion at Fort Greely was suspended this summer following complaints that he condoned affairs.

The Alaska National Guard is part of the state's Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. There are 1,905 members of the Army guard and another 2,029 serving in the air guard.

Katkus said the federal National Guard Bureau has helped every state as the Department of Defense gained an understanding of the magnitude of the problem across the country.

The Alaska National Guard now has a trained sexual assault investigator, he said, while it used to have to rely on its senior officers to investigate.

Chaplains Koch and McGovern said the administration of Alaska Gov. Sean Parnell, who oversees the Alaska National Guard, was told of sexual assault problems as far back as fall 2010.

The chaplains also said sexual harassment is pervasive in the Alaska guard and that the culture needs to change. "I would imagine every female in our organization has at least been harassed," Koch said.

The chaplains said some of the victims came to them through Lt. Col. Ken Blalock. Blalock said the first sexual assault victim, a subordinate, came to him around four years ago for help.

He said others soon followed after word got around that he would help them.

"I've had 15 sexual assault victims come to me," said Blalock, who is no longer in the National Guard.

Blalock said he brought sexual assault victims to the Anchorage police and the governor's office but nothing came of it except he got in trouble with his chain of command.

"I reported to police and the next thing I know I was getting my butt chewed by Gen. Katkus for daring to go outside of the chain of command with this stuff," Blalock said. "If a guardsman goes and robs a bank you call the police, you don't call the general."

Katkus said multiple agencies have looked into allegations by Blalock and "so far they haven't been able to substantiate too much."

In his written response to questions, Katkus said National Guard investigators pass information to law enforcement immediately when they became aware of possible criminal activity.

Katkus, a member of the governor's Cabinet as commissioner of Alaska's Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, was an officer in the Anchorage Police Department for more than 20 years.

He said that as a police officer he was learned firsthand to the impact that sexual assault has on victims and the community, and that he is committed to protecting members of the guard.

"It is my non-negotiable responsibility to ensure that every member of this organization root out any and all harassment, hostile work environment, sexual assault, or trading of sexual favors," he said.

Lt. Col. Wawersik's investigation began in December and focuses on multiple members of the guard's recruiting unit. Wawersik declined to comment when reached by McClatchy.

Court filings show that this summer Wawersik sought and obtained a 20-day protective order against one of the soldiers, Master Sgt. John Nieves, who was a recruiting commander before being reassigned.

Wawersik wrote in the court filings that she was afraid Nieves would hurt or kill her.

"Nieves is a subject of a military investigation I am conducting regarding recruiter misconduct with recruits. . . . As a result of my investigation Nieves stands to lose his 20 year career and be publicly humiliated," she wrote.

Nieves told his counselor at Fort Richardson that "he has a specific plan in mind to harm me," Wawersik wrote in her petition for the protective order. The counselor took the threat seriously and contacted Wawersik to warn her, the petition said.

Wawersik also wrote that the Anchorage Police Department was conducting an undercover investigation "regarding Nieves offering an individual money to harm a witness in my investigation."

Police consider Nieves dangerous and advised her to get the protective order, Wawersik wrote. She added that, even as a former 10-year police officer, she had "never felt more in fear for her life."

Nieves has not been charged with any crime. He said at a July court hearing that the alleged threat against Wawersik was an overreaction. "It was a counselor, somebody I confide in with my issues, it just happened to be that day I was upset. . . . No woman should be under any threat. Period. I am sorry," Nieves said, according to an audio recording of the court hearing.

The judge declined to issue a long-term protective order.

Nieves, reached for comment last week, said he's never committed sexual assault and did not seek to harm any witness.

He said he is awaiting the conclusion of the National Guard's investigation.

"I haven't been charged with anything, just told that I'm being investigated for basically sexual misconduct. And that's it, that's all I know," he said.

Nieves said he couldn't discuss details while the investigation is ongoing.

"I wish I could, honestly, I do want to talk about it. . . . I haven't had any chance to clear my name at all."

The guard's problems have attracted the attention of Alaska's congressional delegation. Sen. Mark Begich said he started hearing last year from constituents about misconduct in the organization.

"We were getting such a frequency from a variety of sources that it told us there is something going on there," Begich said.

Begich said his inquiries led to a National Guard Bureau review of the Alaska Guard. While it didn't tackle the scope of the sexual assault issue, Begich said he thinks it triggered a broader review.

Sexual assault numbers are problematic, as it's a crime that's often unreported. Gen. Katkus said there have been 29 cases of alleged sexual assault reported since 2009 to the Alaska Army and Air National Guard's sexual assault response coordinator.

The alleged perpetrators were members of the military in 11 of the cases and civilians in the rest of them, according to Katkus.

In some cases the victim did not want the attack known. But most of the reports were referred for investigation to local law enforcement, he said, such as Anchorage police or state troopers.

Katkus said he is not aware of any prosecutions resulting from the cases.

Anchorage police offered little explanation in response to a series of questions from McClatchy, other than to say that its special victims unit works closely with the National Guard.

"The Anchorage Police Department has made targeting the problem of sexual assault in our community a priority, and each report of sexual assault submitted to APD is reviewed and investigated based on its individual circumstances and merit, regardless of suspect or victim affiliations," said spokeswoman Dani Myren.

National Guard Sgt. Ralls said she told the Anchorage police and National Guard about her rape in 2009, but never found justice.

“I have no trust for either organization,” Ralls said.

Ralls obtained her police report and provided a copy to McClatchy. It shows the Anchorage Police Department investigated the alleged rape. But the last entry, which was from 2011, said the case was suspended awaiting analysis of a DNA sample from her alleged attacker. Anchorage police did not respond to an inquiry about the status of her case.

Ralls said she believes her attacker slipped something in her drink. Melissa Jones, who said she was raped while in the Alaska National Guard in 2007, also said she thinks she was drugged.

Jones said she told her guard supervisors about the rape and was then confronted by her fellow soldiers with rumors, including that she’d been gang raped by the entire F Company.

Jones, who does not know who raped her, said the guard gave her no help.

Jones said she left Alaska but was traumatized by what happened, started cutting herself, and at one point attempted suicide.

“I am extremely angry,” she said.

Read more here: <http://www.sacbee.com/2013/10/27/5852679/alaska-national-guard-unit-being.html#storylink=cpy>

## Hull, Angela (GOV)

---

**Subject:**

FW: media questions on Alaska National Guard

**From:** Sean Cockerham <[scockerham@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:scockerham@mcclatchydc.com)>

**Date:** October 19, 2013 at 7:35:15 AKDT

**To:** "Katkus, Thomas H (MVA)" <[thomas.katkus@alaska.gov](mailto:thomas.katkus@alaska.gov)>

**Subject:** Re: media questions on Alaska National Guard

Thank you,

Sean

Sent from my iPhone

On Oct 19, 2013, at 1:12 AM, "Katkus, Thomas H (MVA)" <[thomas.katkus@alaska.gov](mailto:thomas.katkus@alaska.gov)> wrote:

Sean

My SARC confirmed for me that all unrestricted reports are referred to local law enforcement for investigation. I need to correct my earlier e-mail. I do not have visibility of their efforts to investigate. I am not aware of any cases that have been prosecuted.

THOMAS H. KATKUS

Commissioner

Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs - The Adjutant General

OFFICE: [\(907\) 428-6006](tel:(907)428-6006)

MOBILE: [\(907\) 854-1880](tel:(907)854-1880)

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Email:

[Thomas.Katkus@alaska.gov](mailto:Thomas.Katkus@alaska.gov)

or

[thomas.h.katkus.mil@mail.mil](mailto:thomas.h.katkus.mil@mail.mil)

Sent from electronic mobile device.

On Oct 18, 2013, at 10:04, "Cockerham, Sean" <[scockerham@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:scockerham@mcclatchydc.com)> wrote:

Thank you. And please let me know if any of those cases resulted in criminal prosecution.

Best,

Sean

On Fri, Oct 18, 2013 at 1:58 PM, Katkus, Thomas H (MVA)  
<[thomas.katkus@alaska.gov](mailto:thomas.katkus@alaska.gov)> wrote:  
Sean

I will follow-up with my SARC and get you the details.

THOMAS H. KATKUS

Commissioner

Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs - The Adjutant  
General

OFFICE: [\(907\) 428-6006](tel:(907)428-6006)

MOBILE: [\(907\) 854-1880](tel:(907)854-1880)

FAX: [\(907\) 428-6019](tel:(907)428-6019)

Email:

[Thomas.Katkus@alaska.gov](mailto:Thomas.Katkus@alaska.gov)

or

[thomas.h.katkus.mil@mail.mil](mailto:thomas.h.katkus.mil@mail.mil)

Sent from electronic mobile device.

On Oct 18, 2013, at 9:40, "Cockerham, Sean"  
<[scockerham@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:scockerham@mcclatchydc.com)> wrote:

Major General Katkus,

Thanks again.

I have a follow up question. You write that APD and AST were contacted on approximately 21 sexual assault cases but "for specific reasons" did not open an investigation.

Am I understanding you correctly to say that APD and AST did not investigate any of those cases? What can you tell me about why they would not do so?

Sean

On Thu, Oct 17, 2013 at 9:29 PM, Katkus, Thomas H (MVA) <[thomas.katkus@alaska.gov](mailto:thomas.katkus@alaska.gov)> wrote:  
Sean,

Thank you for the opportunity to give input prior to the publishing of your story on my department. I would like to state my position right up front so you get an accurate understanding on my attitude towards this issue. As Commissioner for the Department of Military & Veterans Affairs and Adjutant General for the Alaska National Guard, it is my non-negotiable responsibility to ensure that every member of this organization root out any and all harassment, hostile work environment, sexual assault, or trading of sexual favors. Unequivocally, these actions simply have no place in any American work environment.

As both a state and federal entity, we treat such complaints with the utmost sensitivity and follow the clearly established checklist procedure in initiating the appropriate action. As DoD gained an understanding of the magnitude and impact of this problem, we have been extremely fortunate that the National Guard Bureau has provided important resourcing to every state, territory, and District of Columbia. The Alaska National Guard now has a trained sexual assault investigator on staff. Prior to this vital resource as a part of our inventory, we relied on our senior Officers to conduct military investigations. If any of these investigations developed the elements of a crime, the case was immediately passed to local law enforcement and/or the Army's Criminal Investigative Division (CID).

Since 2009 there have been 29 cases of alleged sexual assault reported from the Air and Army National Guard to our Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC). Our leadership and investigating officers are trained to coordinate with CID and local law enforcement immediately when they become aware that a crime may have been

committed. Out of the above mentioned 29 cases, the victim chose to restrict reporting in 11 of those cases. Of the 29 cases, 18 had civilian perpetrators and 11 were military. Local law enforcement, such as Anchorage Police Department or the Alaska State Troopers were contacted in approximately 21 cases, and for specific reasons, APD/AST did not open an investigation.

During the course of military investigations, if our investigators become aware of possible criminal behavior, immediate contact and consultation begins with local law enforcement and/or CID. Those that do not rise to the level of criminal activity are addressed by command in accordance with established military policies and regulations.

I cannot confirm or deny the names of any individuals under investigation, according to Department of Defense personnel policy. Any person under investigation has the right to privacy and the right to due process. I cannot comment on the status of any ongoing investigation. However, in the interest of good order and discipline, we take appropriate action to investigate any and all allegations while ensuring the safety and security of possible victims while simultaneously protecting the rights of anyone suspected of inappropriate behavior.

The Alaska National Guard will do everything appropriate to protect our women and men from sexual assault, and those who would attack their dignity and honor. We are focusing efforts on prevention, victim support, investigations, and accountability. Sexual assault and harassment is inconsistent with our values and it erodes trust and confidence. When an allegation is substantiated, we deal with it within the full measure of applicable policy, regulation, and law.

As you may know, I have been a Traditional Alaskan National Guardsman for over 37 years. I spent 21.5 years serving as a full time police officer with the Municipality of Anchorage in a wide range of assignments and eventually retired in 2000 as the Captain of the Resource Division. During my very active career with the Anchorage Police Department, I was exposed first-hand to the effect that sexual assault has on a person and our community. I spent my entire first full-time career



under sworn oath as a Police Officer to keep Anchorage safe. Now, still under sworn oath as a federally recognized officer in the US military, I continue work to ensure every one of our Alaska National Guardsmen and our state work force have a secure work environment free from any harassment or abuse.

THOMAS H. KATKUS

Commissioner

Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs - The Adjutant General

OFFICE: [\(907\) 428-6006](tel:(907)428-6006)

MOBILE: [\(907\) 854-1880](tel:(907)854-1880)

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or

[thomas.h.katkus.mil@mail.mil](mailto:thomas.h.katkus.mil@mail.mil)

On Oct 16, 2013, at 10:33, "Cockerham, Sean" <[scockerham@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:scockerham@mcclatchydc.com)> wrote:

Major General Katkus,

Hello, my name is Sean Cockerham and I'm a reporter in Washington, D.C. for McClatchy Newspapers, a chain that includes the Anchorage Daily News and 30 other newspapers around the country.

I am writing a story about sexual assaults in the Alaska National Guard. Several current and former members of the guard tell me there is a serious sexual assault problem that was left unaddressed for years.

I wanted you to have an opportunity to respond before we publish the story. Please get back to me in the next two days.

Here are the specific questions I have:

1. I am told that Lt. Col. Jane Wawersik is conducting an investigation of sexual assaults allegedly committed by

members of the Alaska Army National Guard's recruiting and retention unit.

Is that correct?

What prompted the investigation and when did it begin?

What are the names and ranks of the soldiers who are under investigation?

What, if any, action has the guard taken against them?

When will the investigation be concluded?

Is there any indication that members of the recruiting and retention unit were also involved in dealing drugs?

2. I am told the broader sexual assault problem in the Alaska National Guard has been going on for years. Why did it take so long for this investigation to happen?

3. What exactly has the guard done about the sexual assault complaints over the past five years?

4. Do you have statistics on reported sexual assaults in the Alaska National Guard over the past five years?

If so, how many do your numbers show?

5. Retired Lt. Col. Ken Blalock says he brought sexual assault victims to the Anchorage police and governor's office, but nothing came of it except he got in trouble with his chain of command. "I reported to police and the next thing I know I was getting my butt chewed by General Katkus for going out of the chain of command with this stuff," he said.

Is that an accurate characterization? Did you ever discourage anyone from taking complaints to law enforcement? Did you ever involve law enforcement in this issue and, if not, why not?

Has law enforcement taken any action against your soldiers for sexual assault within the past five years?

6. I am also told sexual harassment is a substantial problem in the Alaska National Guard. Is that the case and, if so, what has the guard done about it?

7. What is the current status of the following soldiers?

Sgt. Jarrett Carson

Sgt. John Nieves

Sgt. Shannon Tallant

Sgt. Maj. Clinton Brown

Sgt. Maj. Bradford Quigley

Thanks much. My direct phone number is 202-383-6016.

Sean

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\* Columbus (GA)  
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Bluffton, SC \*  
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Sun-Star \* Modesto Bee \* The (Monterey County)  
Herald \* The (Myrtle  
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\*  
The Wichita Eagle \* The Idaho Statesman \* The (Olympia) Olympian \*  
The  
Bellingham Herald

## **Setting the record straight for Alaskans**

April 28, 2014

*By Governor Sean Parnell*

In response to a recent opinion piece (Sunday, April 27) regarding the Alaska National Guard that was full of false statements and inferences designed to mislead readers, I am compelled to set the record straight.

First and foremost, the author's claim that I did nothing when first hearing the concerns from National Guard chaplains about sexual assault complaints is utterly false.

Since my days in the state Legislature to my time as governor, my top priority has been to eliminate sexual assault and domestic violence in Alaska, including the military.

The chaplains provided general information to me that sexual assaults were occurring in the Guard, but because of their duty of confidentiality to the people they counsel, the chaplains could not disclose names of victims, perpetrators, or specific circumstances.

Nevertheless, even without specific enough details to pinpoint a victim or case, I went to Adjutant General Tom Katkus, requesting information regarding what the chaplains had told me. I made sure through Gen. Katkus that Guard members have a safe route to report sexual misconduct, and that their allegations are taken seriously and investigated to conclusion, including appropriate penalties.

Where criminal conduct was alleged, we directed referrals to the appropriate law enforcement agency, such as the Anchorage Police Department.

Further, the opinion piece asserts that Sen. Fred Dyson came to me a number of times with concerns about what he heard from the same chaplains. During Sen. Dyson's visit with me last fall, he too had only general allegations. On Feb. 26, 2014, Sen. Dyson gave me the name of a Guard member who was willing to provide specific detail.

Within 24 hours of that meeting, I personally phoned the person named by Sen. Dyson. In that call, I learned of specific, but unverified allegations, causing me to question the existing reporting and investigation process.

Two days later, within a day of getting specific details about the reporting system – not two weeks, as the columnist claims – I sent my request to General Grass, chief of the National Guard Bureau, for a review of all open and closed investigations related to reports of sexual assault, rape, and fraud among Alaska National Guard members.

The National Guard Bureau responded quickly, and currently has a team in Alaska conducting the review.

The columnist's claim that our administration had enough specifics to act on before 2014 is based on two instances: First, the writer alleges that Katie TePas of my office

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February 28, 2014

General Frank J. Grass  
Chief  
National Guard Bureau  
United States Department of Defense  
1411 Jefferson Davis Highway  
Arlington, VA 22202-3231

Sent Via Email: [Frank.J.Grass.mil@mail.mil](mailto:Frank.J.Grass.mil@mail.mil)

RE: Request for Investigator, Office of Complex Administrative Investigations

Dear General Grass,

I request the detailing of a CNGB Complex Investigation Program Investigator to investigate open and closed investigations related to reports of sexual assault, rape, and fraud among members of the Alaska National Guard. I request that you issue a detailed memorandum allowing the investigator to act under my authority to gain access to State personnel and records to the extent allowed under State law and regulation.

I am extremely proud of our Alaska National Guard members and their professionalism in carrying out their duties. However, I remain deeply concerned by reports of sexual assaults and other behavior creating a hostile environment and culture within portions of the Alaska National Guard. Not only are individuals victimized and traumatized in these circumstances, but collectively our National Guard is harmed – from morale to mission damage.

In recent years, Adjutant General Thomas Katkus has emphasized strong systems for reporting, investigating, and tracking such cases; and he has raised awareness among Guard members to these issues through “sensing” sessions. Information I recently learned, however, compels me to write and seek an outside look at our Alaska National Guard’s training, reporting, investigations, and case dispensation practices related to the areas I outlined above. Where a number of matters were referred to civilian law enforcement who declined to investigate, I ask you to review those matters, as well. In my estimation, the review should include the National Guard’s command structure and its responses to these cases, up to and including TAG.

I am willing to meet with your investigator, along with my Chief of Staff, Mike Nizich, in order to assist in planning and conducting the investigation. I have directed my Chief of Staff to ensure your investigator receives the full cooperation of State National Guard personnel. I have directed my

General Frank J. Grass

February 28, 2014

Page 2

Attorney General, Michael Geraghty, to provide legal advice as necessary. When the investigation is complete, I will make myself or my designee available for an Out-Brief with the investigator. Your investigator will receive full cooperation from all units, guardsmen and women, and civilians within the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs who are under my authority. If your investigator receives resistance in regard to the investigation from any individual under my authority, please have your investigator contact my Chief of Staff or my Deputy Chief of Staff, Cindy Sims.

Your investigator's point of contact is Chief of Staff Mike Nizich at 907-465-3500 or Deputy Chief Cindy Sims at 907-269-7450. They will provide cell numbers once initial contact has been made.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Sean Parnell  
Governor

cc: The Honorable Michael Geraghty, Attorney General, State of Alaska  
Mike Nizich, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor



**INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
4800 MARK CENTER DRIVE  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22350-1500

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senate  
709 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-0203

**MAY 21 2014**

Dear Senator Murkowski:

This is in response to your letter dated June 19, 2013, regarding allegations that the command climate within the Alaska National Guard (AKNG) is not conducive to reporting and investigating sexual assaults and that, in some instances, officials may have taken steps to cover up incidents of sexual assault.

Our letter of July 18, 2013, indicated that the DoD Hotline referred the allegations to the Department of the Army Inspector General (Army IG) for action (case number 20130620-014429). Our letter of March 6, 2014, indicated that officials within the Directorate for Investigations of Senior Officials (ISO) opened case number 20130715-014791-CASE-01 to monitor the senior official investigation by the Army IG.

On April 15, 2014, the Army IG completed the investigation and forwarded the Report of Investigation to ISO officials for review. The Army IG investigation found AKNG command climate sensing sessions did not identify concerns regarding sexual assault or sexual harassment reporting, and that The Adjutant General (TAG), AKNG, and other AKNG officials did not cover up any reported sexual assault incidents.

The Army IG report noted the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, AKNG, received reports of 11 alleged sexual assault incidents (since February 2012) and promptly coordinated referrals of all incidents to Alaska law enforcement authorities. Alaska State Statute, "Military Code of Alaska," Section 26.05, dictates that Alaska state civilian law enforcement authorities investigate, and the Alaska civilian criminal system prosecute, cases involving AKNG member suspects. The TAG took adverse administrative action on the only two cases upon which he could act; those which substantiated sexual assault allegations against AKNG members. In one case, the TAG discharged the subject from the AKNG, and in the other, he initiated the subject's separation.

On May 6, 2014, ISO Oversight Branch officials completed a review of the Army IG investigation and concurred with the findings and conclusions.

Should you have questions, please contact me at 703-604-8324.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Larry D. Turner".

Larry D. Turner  
Acting Assistant Inspector General for  
Communications and Congressional Liaison