



**NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND
PUBLIC SERVICE
MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

Subject: Rural Civil Servants, Cranfills Gap, Texas (July 2018)

The following is a record of a meeting at the Cranfills Gap Community Center, which took place on July 19, 2018. Commissioners present were Vice Chair Debra Wada, Shawn Skelly, Steve Barney, and Tom Kilgannon. Staff present were Morgan Levey, Eleanor Vuono, Jud Crane, and Andrew Swick. Steve Barney moderated the discussion with Shawn Skelly as the co-lead. This memorandum is protected by the deliberative process privilege and contains attorney-client privileged information and should be treated as For Official Use Only. This memorandum is not a verbatim transcript of the discussion.

Attendees:

- Commissioners: Tom Kilgannon, Steve Barney, Shawn Skelly, Debra Wada
- Commission Staff: Jud Crane, Jamie Hammon, Morgan Levey, Andrew Swick, Eleanor Vuono
- Participants: Twelve local civil servants, including two mayors, several Chamber of Commerce members, leaders of local charities, and fire department volunteers.

Key Takeaway:

- The attendees love life in their small town. Each person is a critical volunteer resource, because they do not get support from the state or federal government. Very few young people stay in the area because there are no jobs. The area cannot recruit employers because the infrastructure is crumbling and there is no housing available.
- People return to Cranfills Gap as retirees because it is a wonderful place to live, and they know everybody. The retirees have the time and energy to volunteer and meet the local service needs.

**FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY
DELIBERATIVE & PRE-DECISIONAL
CONTAINS ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGED INFORMATION**

Discussion:

Mr. Barney introduced the mission of the Commission and described the specific questions that the Commission is considering. He asked the assembled citizens to describe their small-community needs.

The participants stated that with so few people in the community (only 281 at the last census count for Cranfills Gap), everyone must fulfil several roles for the local community. There are many opportunities to serve the community because you just have to raise your hand. Everyone has a chance to get involved. When you ask for help in this town, everyone says “yes.” People want to say yes (except perhaps with fundraising). The biggest mistake communities make is not asking for help.

Rural communities are self-reliant. Service is not a separate thing—it is part of their daily lives. Each neighbor serves each other. They are like a family taking care of each other.

Mr. Barney asked the group to describe the obstacles to service.

Poverty is the biggest problem in their community. Rural America needs money. Their roads are falling apart, and their infrastructure is crumbling. There is no money for maintenance and investment. When a pipe bursts, they only have money to patch it, instead of replacing it with a modern system.

They also do not know how to ask for money. They just hired a grant-writing company to help them find sources of money.

The community needs investment in jobs and businesses so that all the young people do not leave. But the regional hospital has a hard time recruiting doctors and nurses because they cannot find housing. The school district has the same problem recruiting teachers. The biggest employers are the school system, the hospital, and a state prison 30 miles away.

Is there an effective partnership between local government and local non-profits in this area?

Non-profits step in to address the local poverty. For example, local citizens started a Facebook group to share stories of neighbors in need of help and to provide a way for people to volunteer and give donations. One person was not able to mow her grass, so another disabled neighbor offered up the use of a lawnmower. They do not allow political comments on the Facebook site, only positive comments. It is a great tool to engage the community to help one another.

How do we reach younger Americans and create a culture of service? Who influences the young people in your community?

The schools must be involved with service. For example, a group of community leaders created “Leadership Hamilton County,” an 8th grade program to meet with the local historian, the justice of the peace, and firefighters. The Leadership program builds a sense of pride in the community. There are many examples of student community service: students in the Honor Society, Boy Scouts, and Future Farmers of America all must complete community service.

**FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY
DELIBERATIVE & PRE-DECISIONAL
CONTAINS ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGED INFORMATION**

The local Church leaders work with youth at camps. One volunteer explained how he spends a lot of time with the kids at these camps. The volunteer fire department has great potential to attract young people into community service. There are always high school boys who volunteer at the fire department. The local Chamber of Commerce started a mentoring program between older and younger students to tutor. They are even paid.

The 4H program is a great source of change. Recently, it has grown from 40 kids to over 200 kids. The biggest challenge is time-- retirees are more engaged in volunteerism because they have the time and energy.

What about mandatory military service and expanding draft registration to women?

The veterans in the room supported both. One local citizen stated that military service teaches skills and is good for growing up. A draftee¹ said it was the best experience of his life. He was schooled in counter-intelligence and then went on to 36 years at the Central Intelligence Agency. It gave his life focus and a professional skill. Another speaker agreed that the best thing in his life was his military service—he went in as a young, selfish man. He learned so much from his experience and it made him grow up. He always talks to youth about the benefits of military service. He argued that we need to educate youth about the opportunities available to them.

One mom of four kids was strongly opposed to mandatory military service. In her opinion, high school has become glorified babysitting. College is now required to get ahead. Her fear is turning our strong military into a babysitting service. She would rather see these communities teach their youth at an earlier age, so they choose to serve later, and argued that the military is not for everyone.

What about mandatory national service for one year between 18 and 25 (military or otherwise)?

About half the group liked the idea because it would give young adults a bigger sense of the world. A vocal group disagreed. One citizen said he has never seen a government program that works. Some participants noted that kids are often very different from each other, and that service is not for everyone.

Mr. Barney then thanked the participants for their time and comments and concluded the discussion.

¹ The individual later identified that he was drafted in 1953, spent two years with Army Counter-Intelligence, then did tours throughout the Middle East in Iran, Iraq, Jordan, among other locations.