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**NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND  
PUBLIC SERVICE**

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

**Subject:** Military Spouses Discussion (Group 1), Harker Heights  
July 20, 2018

The following is a record of a discussion meeting between the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service and military spouses, which took place on July 20, 2018 at the Military Child Education Coalition building in Harker Heights, TX. The conversation was moderated by Commissioner Steve Barney and also included Commission staff Andrew Swick and Sandy Scott. Four Army spouses participated in the discussion. This memorandum should be treated as For Official Use Only. This memorandum is not a verbatim transcript of the discussion.

**Attendees:**

- Commissioners: Steve Barney
- Commission Staff: Andrew Swick, Sandy Scott
- Participants: Four Army spouses from Ft. Hood.

**Key Takeaways:**

- The participants all agreed that their husbands' military service had been beneficial for them and their families, but that there were unique challenges for military families.
- The participants noted a lack of understanding between military families and their civilian counterparts, arguing that civilians had different perspectives of service.

**Meeting Discussion:**

*Mr. Barney began the discussion by introducing himself and explaining the purpose of the Commission. He then asked the participants to introduce themselves and state how long their spouses had served with the Army.*

The participants introduced themselves and noted that their husbands had all been in the Army between nine and twenty years. They all had moved several times during the course of their spouses time in service (between two and six times). Two of the participants had worked for the Army either in childcare or family readiness related positions.

*Mr. Barney asked whether family members had considered leaving the Army.*

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One participant stated that her family had considered leaving the Army around the ten-year mark due to pressures placed on the family—including stresses from multiple deployments—but had decided to stay in until the twenty-year mark for retirement and that they were currently planning their retirement and post-military lives.

*Mr. Barney then asked another participant about what factors were leading her family to consider leaving the Army.*

The participant answered that as their kids get older, it has been harder for the family to deal with the impact of their father deploying. She noted that she and her husband have been asking whether they are getting as much out of the Army life as they could be getting from other lifestyles. The participant also stated that these decisions were made harder by the fact that she was not used to any other kind of lifestyle—a sentiment which all of the participants agreed with.

*Mr. Barney then asked the participants with more experience (up to twenty years) in the Army whether these experiences were also familiar to them.*

A participant answered that when her husband had decided to switch to indefinite status in the military<sup>1</sup> it had been a relatively easy decision, given all of the pay and benefits provided by the Army. Now that they were reaching twenty years in the Army, however, she said that she was tired of being treated as the second or third priority by her husband. She stated that with the high operational tempo for those in Army leadership positions, there is not much time for the family.

Another participant observed that the twenty and ten-year marks were very similar inflection points, where the family has to decide whether to stay in the Army or move on. She noted that when her family was at the ten-year mark, they briefly lived in two separate locations in order to keep her kids in the same high school.

Another participant said that something similar had occurred with her family, and that it was difficult to live apart from her husband in a community that was not used to the military experience. She noted that it was a difficult experience for her children, and that she had decided with her husband to always live together as a family after that.

*Mr. Barney then asked what the participants would like civilian families to know about them.*

One participant responded that she has “a lot to say about that” subject, while another participant was just visiting with her civilian friends and she found that she was not able to connect well with them.

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<sup>1</sup> “Indefinite status” means there is no set end to an enlistment contract, such as with a 4-year enlistment.

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Another participant observed that she notices a lot of half-hearted gratitude from civilians, pointing to the phrase “thank you for your service” as an example of this. She further noted that while her husband hates that sort of sentiment among civilians, she believes that military service has been great for her family.

Another participant agreed and said that she appreciates that her children were able to grow up in several different places and around a diverse group of people.

*Mr. Barney then explained that the Commission is exploring the concept of developing an “expectation of service” in the nation and asked about how that idea would be received.*

A participant answered that because people are so divided and separated, she does not believe there is enough national pride for civilians to be motivated by national service. Another participant noted that she believes people are not properly educated about service.

*Mr. Barney followed-up by asking how they believe society could better prepare people for service.*

Another participant offered that the government should work to change peoples’ perspectives of service, by expanding their definition of service beyond the military. She noted that she serves by working at a military-related non-profit. She also stated that she believes that educating people about service starts with families.

Another participant stated that she believes people need to be personally invested in service, as military families are. She said that in civilian communities where the government provides extensive relief and benefits, there is little reason for service.

*Mr. Scott then asked whether there were any needs of military families which were not being met.*

A participant answered that the government should do a better job of asking military families what they need and suggested that the Army bring back funding for Family Readiness Support Activities. She also argued that the military should not cut Basic Allowances for Housing or money for military child care.

Another participant argued that military families need to be better educated about which benefits are available to them, to which the other participants agreed. Finally, a participant noted that rotational deployments were particularly difficult for families, as they do not provide the same benefits for families as a traditional deployment.

*Mr. Barney thanked the participants for joining the discussion and ended the conversation.*