

**DELIBERATIVE & PRE-DECISIONAL/ FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY**



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

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

**Subject:** Military Spouses Discussion (Group 2), 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 Vice Chair Deb Wada and included Commission staff Jill Rough. Three 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: Vice Chair Deb Wada
- Commission Staff: Jill Rough
- Participants: Three Army spouses from Ft. Hood.

**Key Takeaways:**

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

**Meeting Discussion:**

*Vice Chair Wada began the discussion by introducing herself and explaining the purpose of the Commission. She then asked the participants to introduce themselves, note whether they had children, and state how long their spouses had served with the Army.*

One participant had been a military spouse for 22 years, had foster children who are now grown and just returned to Ft. Hood from the Army War College. Another participant was prior Army herself. She had been a spouse since 2009 and had one child. The final participant had been a spouse since 2003, she had 3 children, one of which was special needs. She was also an educator and had worked with the Military Child Education Coalition.

*Vice Chair Wada asked the former soldier why she left the Army.*

## DELIBERATIVE & PRE-DECISIONAL/ FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

The participant shared that her daughter came very quickly in their marriage, and that they tried a dual-military career for one year but decided it was not the right fit for their family. She separated because her spouse had more years of service at the time.

*Vice Chair Wada then asked the same participant why she had joined the Army.*

The participant answered that she had always thought of it, but decided to join at age 23 when there was a protest event during Memorial Day that showed how many soldiers had died. It inspired her to join.

*Vice Chair Wada then asked the other participants if they had military associations.*

One participant notes she had grandfathers and uncles who had served, along with many police officers in the family. The other participant noted extended family members who had served in WWII, and that her father had graduated from the US Air Force Academy, but he was not active duty by the time she was born so she never “saw” the military in the same way.

The spouse who was former service member noted that having prior knowledge of the Army helped her understand the needs of the service. She noted many spouses don’t understand TDY [temporary duties, away from home] but that she did and it helped her deal with the separations.

*Vice Chair Wada then asked participants what they felt was the biggest challenge being a military spouse.*

One participant said “being a single mom.” Another stated it was hard to put yourself on the backburner. She felt as a spouse you were always second to the Army and that was a challenge. Another stated separation from one’s support network was always hard, and in particular it was a challenge to start over in creating support systems at each location.

*Vice Chair Wada noted that there is a lot of talk about the majority of Americans not understanding service or what military families go through. She asked what the biggest misperception they hear when they “go home” and how educated they felt the American public was.*

A participant answered that people don’t understand the day-to-day. She noted that Americans see homecomings but not the days in between. She noted that what servicemembers do is very different, but that what the spouses take care of the homefront is more alike than different.

Another participant noted you have to plan every day as if you are a single parent because you can never count on your spouse to not be pulled away for the needs of the service. The third

## DELIBERATIVE & PRE-DECISIONAL/ FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

noted that TDYs are not like business trips, that it can be 3-4 months separation and the kids can be impacted.

*Vice Chair Wada followed-up by asking what the impact of military life was on children.*

A participant offered that it was a particular challenge for middle and high school students. It was difficult for them to get into leadership positions in sports, in clubs, in school. She also noted the socio-emotional needs of the kids are high; some moves are easier than others but kids can become wary. They might know they are leaving in 10 months and decide not to invest time and energy into the community.

Another agreed, noting that they changed duty stations during the summer and the older kids had to start school without a network of friends. She expressed that sports may not allow mid-year tryouts, although interstate compacts can help. She also noted it was hard to get teacher recommendations and to get coaches to invest in kids if they are scheduled to move in 18 months.

One participant said the same occurs with spouse employment and they all heartily agreed.

*Vice Chair Wada asked if there are best practices to utilize.*

A participant answered some opportunities are out there but to bridge the civilian-military divide and civilians need to come onto the base. Fort Carson had an Army 101 visit which included 1 day of training, and she felt it was very useful.

Another participant noted that security concerns after 9/11 have limited these opportunities, outside July 4<sup>th</sup> events or air shows.

*Vice Chair Wada asked whether schools were open to recruiters and how best to reach the educational system.*

A participant answered some schools will take recruiters, but it might just be having a table set up during lunchtime. The quality of the visit varies; access does not equate to a serious conversation about the opportunities of service. She noted that vocational schools were also very important, because everyone wants their child to attend college, but they need truck drivers with CDL licenses.

*Vice Chair Wada asked whether the participants believed service should be a requirement.*

One participant thought it was a good idea as it offers job skills, and a good way to figure out what young people might be interested in. Another referenced Germany and Korea and agreed it

## DELIBERATIVE & PRE-DECISIONAL/ FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

was a good idea. The final participant approved of it, if it was all forms of service, not just military service.

*Vice Chair Wada asked whether the participants believed women should register for selective service.*

One participant expressed she had mixed feelings. She felt serving is good and offers life lessons, but the military was not for everyone. She did not want anyone serving alongside her husband if they were not suited to be there.

Another participant noted she didn't think gender was the concern. She felt "grit" was, male or female. She felt many kids were not preparing for any kind of service.

*Vice Chair Wada asked if there were any key takeaways for the Commission.*

One participant noted the need for strong day care programs, whether it be for military members or for use during mandatory national service. People ages 18-25 have children and she felt there is an obligation to take care of the children.

Another participant mentioned spouse employment as an issue. She also noted that mental health issues were a concern and a barrier to service because of what is now commonplace medication.

*Vice Chair Wada thanked the participants for joining the discussion and ended the conversation.*