

**PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS:
WHAT WORKS? WHAT DOESN'T? WHAT'S NEXT?**

Lessons From The Military Housing Privatization Initiative 1996-2016

**Center for Strategic and International Studies
October 18, 2016**

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Former Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction

[Following Introduction by Andrew Philip Hunter]

Good morning and what a privilege it is to be here with all of you.

Sandy shared with you some impressive numbers on the impact of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative. I would like to share one story—a true story about an Army Sergeant's wife.

After admiring and working with Sandy for years on this project, I finally had the chance to see the first new RCI housing at Ft. Hood in my district.

We had a press conference and it was a truly beautiful home with a large kitchen where the family could eat and spend time together...and large bathrooms and closets—not exactly the norm for enlisted families at the time, but exactly what families said they wanted.

After the tour, I walked into the back yard and went up to the Sergeant's wife and said, "It's just you and me now, no press, and I'd be grateful to know what you think, good or bad. I'll never forget what she said. "Congressman, it's not just a house that I am proud to call my home, it says my country respects the sacrifices my children and I have made." You see, it wasn't just about quality housing, as important as that is, it was about respect. That's a lesson I will never forget.

There were also some political lessons I learned along the way, and if just one of these can help implement other public-private partnerships that can support our troops, their mission or their families, then I would have been grateful to be here.

First, never ever underestimate the power of inertia, whether it is on Capitol Hill or at the Pentagon. The fear of change is a powerful motivating force in both places. I would imagine I am preaching to the choir on this point, so I won't belabor that self-evident truth.

Second, because of point number one, it would be good if you could clone Sandy Apgar—a champion who just wouldn't give up. Until we perfect cloning, it's just critical that you have a tenacious champion at the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill on the key Committees, whether that is Armed Services, Defense Appropriations, or the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. Having one or two committed champions on Capitol Hill is more important than having 10 or 20 lukewarm supporters. On the point of tenacity, Sandy could have given up, but he just wouldn't do it, because he knew our Army families deserved better housing than the status quo would give them.

Third, the mission has to be clear and convincing. When it came to military housing, for me it was simple math and right and wrong. Doing it the old way, we'd never catch up and provide adequate housing for our military families—the dollars needed would never be appropriated. And, it was a moral issue to me. Asking troops who had been on multiple tours of duty to live in run down housing none of us would be proud to live in was just plain wrong. I think the challenge on future public-private partnerships will be if the mission isn't as politically and morally powerful as supporting housing for our troops. The message might have to be that saving budget dollars by doing things more efficiently will allow those dollars to be used to protect and support our troops. To overcome inertia against change, the mission has to be clear and convincing.

Fourth, you never know who your friends will be. As a Democrat, I would have assumed that Republicans who generally want less government and bureaucracy would have been the initial champions of the RCI project. Wrong. This was pushed by a Democratic Administration, and on the House Milcon-VA Committee, I, a Democrat, had to take on two Republican Chairmen who initially opposed this. One of the reasons is that our Milcon-VA Approps Subcommittee would lose power to the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. The lesson there is that it's not just data and facts and traditional political philosophies that influence who your friends are on Capitol Hill.

Fifth, never underestimate the power of staff on Capitol Hill. The only public, verbal fight I had in 20 years in Congress was with a Subcommittee staffer who was attacking Sandy Apgar when he testified before our Subcommittee on the Army RCI project. It was all about protecting turf.

In conclusion, I believe the Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI) has proven that public-private partnerships can work and work well. However, future initiatives will require a clear and convincing message and tenacious champions at the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill. Thank you.