

STATEMENT FOR THE SUB COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
TEXAS SENATE
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by

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Task Force

My name is Pete Taylor and I live at 11105 Highview Drive, Belton, Texas. I appreciate this opportunity to address the Higher Education Sub Committee of the Texas Senate regarding favorable consideration of Senate Bill 157 relating to establishing 1000 full time student equivalents (FTSE) as the threshold for allowing Texas A&M University—Central Texas to become a full service, stand alone, upper level academic institution.

I am the Chairman of the Heart of Texas Defense Alliance – a regional non-profit 501(c)(6) corporation located in Harker Heights, Texas. Our organization's purpose is to promote the importance and sustainability of Fort Hood, Texas all defense-related industries, organizations, and institutions in the Central Texas area defined as Bell, Coryell, and Lampasas Counties. The organization was formed in early 2003 in response to an expressed need by the communities and counties of central Texas most affected by the activities of Fort Hood. While the initial focus was on informing and preparing the area around Fort Hood for the challenges and opportunities that would come with the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Act of 2005, the organization's purpose has since expanded to include advocating for Fort Hood's role in the very significant Army Transformation process that is occurring. A future upper-level, stand-alone university known as Texas A&M—Central Texas can and will play a major role in the future of Fort Hood.

I am also the Chairman of Central Texas University Task Force which has also represented Central Texas for over fifteen years in our efforts to obtain upper level, state supported educational opportunities for our citizens. Our current "Pathway Center" established in the fall of 1999 was the first step in that process.

Prior to retirement from active duty in December 1993, I served for over 33 years in the US Army. My final assignment was as the Commanding General of III Corps and Fort Hood – the Army's largest military installation. It was in that capacity that I first began to work with the local communities in transforming the concept of a future state-supported, upper-level, stand alone university into a reality.

As mentioned above, in 1999, the Tarleton State University System Center opened its doors as the first University System Center under the Higher Education Coordinating Board's "Pathway Model". Since that date, enrollment has doubled as compared to the enrollment of the small private university it

replaced. Currently, the University Center has a FTSE of 877. However, limited degree programs as well as the fact that 80% of the classes must be held after 4 pm has inhibited further growth and the ability of the Texas A&M University System to meet the demand for upper level higher education in our Central Texas Communities.

Thus, on 5 September 2002, the Texas A&M University System Chancellor, Howard Graves sent a letter to then III Corps and Fort Hood Commanding General, LTG B.B. Bell in which he addressed the success of Tarleton State University-Central Texas and thanked Fort Hood for their role. He further stated:

“as we celebrate our success, we are now ready to move to a new phase of development, and we in the Texas A&M University System need additional help. We are seeking your assistance to obtain 500 acres of Fort Hood to create a permanent stand alone university campus. The primary site should be at least 300 acres for construction of buildings with an adjacent buffer zone of 200 acres to ensure space for long term expansion. We would desire, of course, that it be accessible from major transportation arteries, be environmentally sound, and be in alignment with the nearest municipality’s long range development plans. As we seek your help to secure access to a 500 acre tract, we will work with the Texas Legislature and Higher Education Coordinating Board to provide Central Texas with a stand alone campus.”

On 20 November 2002, General Bell replied that he would support such an initiative. Upon General Bell’s promotion and departure in December 2002, he was replaced by LTG Thomas F. Metz as the III Corps and Fort Hood Commanding General who after receiving a letter from the TAMUS Chancellor on 21 March 2003 responded “my staff will initiate the feasibility study for a future land transaction.” Prior to his deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom in January 2004, LTG Metz reaffirmed his commitment for this endeavor in a letter dated 7 January 2004 to Dr. Benton Cocanougher, the interim Texas A&M University System Chancellor.

Since Federal Land can only be conveyed by Congressional action, the Fiscal Year 2005 Defense Authorization bill, which was signed into law by the President on 28 October 2004, included legislation stating:

“The Secretary of the Army may convey to the Texas A&M University System of the State of Texas...all right, title, and interest of the United States in and to a parcel of real property...consisting of approximately 662 acres at Fort Hood, Texas, for the sole purpose of permitting the University System to establish on the property an upper level university that will be State-supported, separate from other universities of the University System, and designated as Texas A&M University, Central Texas. As consideration for the conveyance, the University System shall pay to the United States an

amount equal to the fair market value...in lieu of all or a portion of the cash consideration...the Secretary may accept in-kind consideration including the conveyance by the University System of real property acceptable to the Secretary.”

In April 2004, Ft Hood received a Vision Statement for Texas A&M University – Central Texas from Dr. Cocanougher, identifying the potential benefits of the partnership created between the Army, Fort Hood, and the Texas A&M University System as a result of the establishment of Texas A&M University, Central Texas. To highlight a few areas from this vision statement regarding the importance of this initiative to Fort Hood:

1. Of the current Tarleton State University-Central Texas enrollment of approximately 2000 students, 56 percent, or 1120 students are either Active Duty Soldiers or their family members, Fort Hood civilian employees or their family members, or retired Soldiers and their family members. Given enrollment caps at the University of Texas and Texas A&M University, these individuals have access to a four-year public educational opportunity (in conjunction with our two community colleges) that they otherwise would not be able to get. The Chancellor’s vision statement and enrollment projections through the year 2025, anticipates a seven-fold increase in enrollment in Central Texas. At \$100 per scheduled credit hour, a future Texas A&M University, Central Texas provides an affordable alternative to getting a public, four-year degree.

2. 51 percent of Tarleton State University-Central Texas full time employees have a military affiliation. That accounts for approximately \$1.2 million in direct economic impact on Central Texas. That figure can be added to the Texas Comptroller’s latest calculations of the direct and indirect economic impact of Fort Hood on the Central Texas economy which equates to over \$6 billion per year.

3. Education, particularly post-secondary education, is extremely important towards a Soldier’s advancement in the ranks. In addition, it provides this group that is disciplined and more educated than the norm, ready access to completing a four-year college degree program.

4. Chancellor Cocanougher saw the opportunity for powerful partnerships with a transformed US Army in terms of graduate programs for Army officers to meet the needs of the Army, a research institute as part of an Army-defense-contractor-TAMUS Research and Technology Park to collaborate with the Operational Test Command and other Defense agencies at Fort Hood to develop the equipment, organizations, and concepts for the 21st century Army, here in Central Texas.

5. Due to Fort Hood’s presence and the demographics of our communities, Tarleton State University-Central Texas has the most broadly diverse enrollment in the A&M System – a critical concern as part of the

Governor's "Closing the Gaps" initiative. Currently, the local "Pathway Center" has the most diverse population of any institution in TAMUS

In summary, Fort Hood and the Central Texas Communities have been willing partners towards making Texas A&M University, Central Texas a reality. The regional community has already contributed over \$12 million by conveying the assets of the private university as well as providing facilities and classrooms free of charge to the "Pathway Center" for the past five years. The citizens of Central Texas as well as our brave Soldiers and their families deserve access to a four-year public education opportunity and the ability to obtain a degree from a renowned university. Since the beginning of the conflict in Iraq, Fort Hood has suffered 1,842 casualties; of that number, 171 Soldiers have paid the ultimate sacrifice in giving their life for their country.

Of the 47,000 Soldiers currently assigned to Fort Hood, over 19,000 from the 1st Cavalry Division are just returning from being deployed in Iraq for the past year. The other Fort Hood-based 4th Infantry Division has already been alerted that they will return to Iraq this Fall.

The Texas Legislature could send no stronger message of support to the citizens of Central Texas, Fort Hood and the Army, as well as our Soldiers and family members, than to approve the legislation that would make the concept for a four-year public education opportunity in the form of Texas A&M University, Central Texas a reality. I urge you to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain 662 acres of prime real estate from the Federal government by making this stand alone university a reality. Please support the passage of Senate Bill 157.

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