

Colorado Rangers ("CLER") Board of Directors Meeting

10:00 AM, Friday, September 10 2021
CLER Headquarters
330 Park Avenue
Ft. Lupton, CO 80621

Attendance – Board of Directors: Senator Kent Lambert (via video teleconference), Senator John Cooke (via teleconference), Chief John Fryar (via video teleconference), Marshal Larry Johns (via telephone) and Chief Ronald Abramson (in person)

Attendance – CLER Command Staff & Support Staff: Deputy Chief Robert Pabst (in person), Operations Division Michael Morgan (via telephone), Support Division Chief Robert Grey (via video teleconference), Sergeant Paula Gurak (in person), Ranger Controller Norm Townley (in person), and Board Secretary Ranger Carl Luppens (in person).

There were no members of the public present.

At 10:00 Chairman Lambert called the meeting to order and took roll. All directors were in attendance. Chairman Lambert declared a quorum and the meeting began.

Senator Cooke moved for the approval of the minutes of the May 21, 2021 CLER Board of Director's meeting as presented, Chief Fryar seconded the motion, and the minutes were adopted by unanimous consent.

Chief Abramson requested deferral of some of the agenda items and discussion to get the benefit of as much of Senator Cooke's input as possible regarding Marshal Johns' Ranger staffing and agency partner expectations (since Senator Cooke had State legislature law enforcement matters that might require an early exit from this meeting) and those other items were moved to the later section of the agenda

Chairman Lambert approved the change of the order of discussion.

Chief Abramson stated that Ranger service demands were pushed hard this Summer with agency partner increased demands due to their police officer staffing shortages and the demands of simultaneously conducting a Ranger Reserve Peace Officer Training Academy (Academy #9) which drew away resources.

Marshal Johns observed that, across all law enforcement agencies, staffing is "thin" today. In the past, more Rangers were available than requested. When he asked for two Rangers, he might get four. Now, he might want four Rangers but, on some occasions, could only get two or three. This has not been the entire year, he often had his needs met, but it certainly is more prevalent than before. He asked if a shared Ranger commitment calendar could be available for outside police chiefs to review.

Chief Abramson responded that this Summer the Rangers were often serving 5 to 10 agencies weekly and providing regular street patrol services for some agencies who were short officers. This weekend Morrison PD, Denver PD, Ft Lupton PD, Severance PD and Nederland PD all will be served. Denver PD is down so many regular officers that they called at the last minute for 10 officers to support a major football game on Saturday at the Bronco's Empower Field at Mile High.

In addition to increased service demands, not all Rangers can be available every weekend due to personal demands, rest needs and other conflicts. They have performed incredibly admirably and given so much this summer, with many individuals going above and beyond expectations.

Marshal Johns stated that he wanted to get the issue in front of the entire Board and initiate further discussions. He asked, "How much service can an individual Ranger give out?"

Chief Abramson replied that “Some Rangers are ‘burned out’ at the end of the busy Summer season”, which has been a regular occurrence in the eleven (11) years he has been serving, but we need to provide a lot of service to obtain the funds to offer trading academies to provide the number of Rangers we are asked to deploy. It is a precarious cycle with a challenging balance because more Rangers meaning more insurance costs which means more agencies needed to support the higher cost structure.

Old Business:

Division Chief Gray reported that, although beginning with 22 cadets the day before the Academy, he expects 15 cadets to graduate from Academy # 9 after dismissals and drops. When combined with up to 5 previously P.O.S.T. certified officers, he is hoping that a total of 20 new Rangers will be sworn in this Fall.

Senator Cooke asked “How many were lost in the past few years?” He also said that we should discuss retention.

Chief Abramson reported that, in 2018 we had approximately 75 Rangers, subsequent to that date, we lost 15 to 20 through normal attrition, which are being replaced by these new officers. He again noted that each new Ranger increase the agency’s insurance cost and that it is a “precarious balance” regarding personal growth.

Senator Cooke inquired about the “burn out” factor. He asked if we were over-extended? Where is the point of diminishing returns? He emphasized that we cannot burn out Rangers and thereby degrading the quality of service.

Chief Abramson stated that he does not want to grow the Agency beyond 75 Rangers at this time. He has turned down a number of agencies that requested Ranger support but might demand too much service that could negatively impact service to existing agency partners. The Rangers dropped three agencies this year and added a few new departments at increased fees to help shore up Agency finances.

Senator Lambert asked if Marshal Johns had any more comments or questions?

Marshal Johns questioned whether “the overall law enforcement community situation is getting better?” The consensus seemed to be that the overall situation is not improving and the environment where seasoned police officers are leaving the profession in large numbers, and it is very difficult to recruit qualified new officers that can pass background checks, will continue for the foreseeable future.

Senator Lambert remarked that the “Rangers are doing great, as good as they can”.

Chief Abramson reported that the Rangers are performing regular street duty more than ever.

Chief Fryar stated that Ft Lupton is now down five officers, which is 28% of his force, and that it is very hard to get new officers and hard to keep old officers. He does not foresee significant positive change for law enforcement in the near term.

Senator Cooke stated that “At one time, there would be 400 applicants for 4 or 5 new full time police officer positions but now they only get 10 - 15 applicants and many of them come with undesirable “baggage”.

Chief Fryar emphasized that he has not been able to get viable new hire candidates since the beginning of the year.

Chief Abramson noted that this issue is reflected in the Adams County Sheriff's Office only graduating 24 cadets in the most recent class. The Rangers enrolled their goal of 22 cadets for Academy # 9 but two individuals dropped out the day before classes started and one quarter of the remainder were lost during the training process.

Senator Cooke observed that he doesn't see any changes coming soon which will result in more demands on the 'Rangers which, realistically, we will not be able to fully accommodate all requests."

Senator Lambert asked about the Adams County update.

Chief Abramson explained that, of the 20 officers the Rangers lost over the last year plus, 11 went to Adams County Sheriffs Office. Chief Abramson met with the Adams County Undersheriff and told him that it is inappropriate for ACSO to recruit or accept Rangers moving to his department as a Mutual Aid partner, especially considering the Rangers pay substantial amount to Adams county for training. The Adams County Undersheriff recounted that they had problems with reserve officers and that, from the former 11 Rangers, combined with 10 former Brighton Police Department reserve officers that had come over when Brighton terminated its reserve program, only two were considered "duty ready". He committed to ACSO not recruiting or hiring any additional Rangers and agreed that it was inappropriate, especially considering ACSO has been paid over \$700,000.00 in the past three (3) years by the Rangers for training.

Chief Abramson also noted that the Ranger training and then leaving problem should be alleviated since recruits now commit to 450 hours of service over three years to fulfill their agreement and avoid academy tuition reimbursement, as well as agreeing not to transfer to any agency we pay training money to within 5 years of the training.

Senator Cooke asked if Adams County gives up its reserve police officer program, will their reserves come to the Rangers and will Adams County expect the Rangers to support them?

Senator Lambert asked Operations Division Chief Morgan to report on Ranger service hours year to date but Chief Morgan was not prepared as he thought Deputy Chief Pabst would be reporting. He stated that service "requests are monumental", it was very busy and speed thin but did a good job. It was agreed that total yearly hours would be reported at the fourth quarter meeting.

At 10:29 Senator Cooke left the board meeting to attend a Colorado Senate meeting with Governor Polis on "No-Knock Warrants" and related matters.

Support Division Chief Gray introduced Ranger Townley to report on the financial condition of the Rangers.

Ranger Norm Townley then gave the financial report. \$114,999.75 is in the checking and savings accounts and \$44,752.36 is in the Training Academy account for a total of \$159,752.11. Total liabilities consist of the badge deposit reserve of \$28,025. There were no questions.

Chief Abramson noted that the Rangers continue to be on track financially for the next Academy (Academy #10). The next training academy is targeted to consist of approximately 22-24 cadets. It was noted that Denver pays a significant amount and is therefore an important partner to sustain the Rangers funding for training and insurance and Chief Abramson is working directly with them.

Chief Gray commented that recruiting was challenging for Academy #9. It took 100 candidates to yield 22 cadets which was the class target. The background checks and psychological evaluations are costly for such a large number of prospects. The 15 cadets expected to graduate and be sworn in as Rangers are really high quality, "equal to our best". We will continue to try to improve. We are treading the balance between the number of Rangers and the cost of insurance. We bring \$10 million of liability insurance to our agency partners.

Senator Lambert stated that the Rangers have done a phenomenal job in a difficult year. In the past, our challenges were organizational and staff issues; now the issues revolve around the demanding operational tempo since staffing issues had subsided considerably.

Senator Lambert asked if prior P.O.S.T. certified officers are a good source of additional Rangers.

Chief Gray responded that we often recruit but rarely hire prior police officers. We get a significant number of inquiries, but many are simply looking for a place to “park” their P.O.S.T. credentials so that the three year hold-over period from prior commissioned employment will restart. Now officers that do not attend a training academy but are required to fulfill a minimum amount of service hours.

Senator Lambert stated that prior police officers should at least serve enough to offset their insurance cost.

Chief Abramson asked Division Chief Gray the age of Academy #9 cadets.

Chief Gray stated that the new graduates are younger than the current average age of Rangers.

Senator Lambert asked if we have records of Ranger age trends.

Chief Gray responded that we are working on being able to analyze and report that data.

Chief Abramson explained that the initial group of CLER Rangers came primarily from the prior Colorado Mounted Rangers that was a fairly mature group and that many of these prior CMR individuals were already older than typical new Rangers and that some had “aged out” of service, although they are of absolutely outstanding quality. He also noted that it costs around \$10,000 to train a Ranger so we need to start considering retention strategies to keep Rangers. We are targeting to get 10 to 15 years of service life from new Rangers. Average age of new Rangers in Academy #9 is around 45, previously Rangers averaged around 55 to 57 years old.

New Business:

The only new business was the discussion of Staffing and Expectations introduced by Marshal Johns and previously reported.

Public Comments:

There were no public questions or comments.

Schedule for Next Meeting:

The next Board of Director’s Meeting was scheduled for Friday December 3rd, 2021 at 10:00, in Fort Lupton.

It was noted that the annual Ranger Summit is scheduled for December 4th and the Directors are invited.

The new academy graduates and the prior certified officers are schedule to be sown in on October 31 at 10:00 AM, location yet to be determined.

Closing Comments:

Chief Abramson thanked the Rangers enormously for tirelessly working the streets so far this year and emphasized that there were only two more high demand weekends this year. Our IGA partners are our priority and we have been able to serve them very well along with our other partners. Chief Abramson is amazed how incredibly much Rangers give in service to our communities. There will be a full report with statistics on agency use at the end of the year.

Adjournment of Meeting

It was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting and it was adjourned at 10:55 by unanimous vote.