

dear residents

Service Without Profit: The Thread That Connects Us

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Dear Residents,

I applied for **Medicare** recently. It began with an online application, which seemed quite straightforward. At the end, I received a notification that I needed to either mail or bring in my naturalization certificate and my birth certificate to the Social Security office. I have the former but not the latter (since my parents never registered my birth!). I did learn that if one does not have a birth certificate, school or hospitalization records before age 5 may be sufficient. I did not quite have that either but did have a school record from age 6. I thought it best to appear in person rather than mail what may or may not have worked. I made an online appointment. In the meantime, I was getting regular updates by email - my application had been received in the Dallas office and was being reviewed. I could also follow the progress online. Then I got a call from the Dallas Social Security office. A very friendly person informed me of the need for these two documents. I explained the situation. She was very understanding and made an even earlier appointment for me. I arrived, expecting a long wait - but the check-in and the process were quite speedy, and the person who helped me was exceptionally courteous. By the next day, I received an email stating that my application had been approved. In contrast, I've been waiting for weeks for the airline that cancelled my recent flight to refund my ticket, and it has been near impossible to reach anyone. It struck me that public servants work in systems designed to be responsive, keep people informed, and build trust - qualities that stand out even more when contrasted with most corporate customer service experiences.

Social Security, established in 1935 by **President Franklin D. Roosevelt** in the wake of the Great Depression, has long been a cornerstone of our nation's safety net. In [Who Is Government?: The Untold Story of Public Service](#), **Michael Lewis** reminds us that behind these systems are dedicated public servants - often unsung - whose work in agencies like the IRS and FDA quietly sustains the public good. Closer to home, Parkland Health embodies this same mission, providing care driven not by profit, but by the belief that health is a basic human necessity. The VA Health System serves a similar role for veterans, while not-for-profit hospitals like Clements University Hospital care for the broader community, sometimes within the constraints of insurance coverage. As residents, you are part of this lineage of public service, meeting people where they are, caring for them without regard to profit, and ensuring that the safety net holds for those who need it most.

Fred Cerise, the Parkland CEO, writing in [Harvard Business Review](#), emphasizes that large, publicly funded safety-net institutions like Parkland Health have unique advantages over private enterprises. These advantages stem from being less influenced by market pressures and profit motives, allowing them to focus squarely on patient and community needs. Parkland has incredible public servants like you

who treat patients with care and compassion, pharmacists who help patients get approved for medications that would normally be out of reach and social workers who find places for the unhoused to help them get off the streets.

In many ways, your work mirrors the quiet, steadfast service I experienced at the Social Security office - solution-oriented, compassionate, and grounded in the belief that every person matters. Whether you are prescribing a life-saving medication, navigating a complex discharge, or simply taking the time to listen, you are part of a tradition of public service that sustains our community. The systems you work within may not be perfect, but your presence, integrity, and commitment help ensure they serve their purpose.

Thanks for all you do.

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