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Kathleen Ferguson:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathleen Ferguson and I'm your moderator for today's panel. I spent nearly 35 years as a civilian in the Air Force, served as an SES for 14 years in numerous positions, and retired as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Installations, Environment and Energy. I'm now a member of the Air Force Association Board of Directors, and thank you all for being here today.

Congress established that Senior Executive Services part of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. The SES Corp was established to ensure that executive management of the government of the US is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the nation, and otherwise is of the highest quality. Members of the SES typically serve in key positions just below the top presidential appointees, and are the major link between these appointees and the rest of the federal workforce.

The Civil Service Reform Act also gave greater authority to the agencies to manage their executive resources, including attracting and retaining highly competent executives, assigning executives where they will be most effective in accomplishing the agency's missions, providing for the development of managers and executives, and then holding executives accountable for both their individual and organizational performance.

Today you will hear from Honorable Wagner, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force from Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Mr. Tony Reardon, and Ms. Venice Goodwine about the Senior Executive Service in the Department of the Air Force. You'll hear how the department manages and develops senior civilians, how the department utilizes the Executive Resources Board and Performance Review Board and gains some insight on what they see as the future for SES's and the Department of the Air Force.

So with that, I'm going to ask the first question to Mr. Wagner. You've been the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs for just about three months now, but are not new to DOD. You've worked in the Army during the Obama Administration and you've also spent considerable time leading talent management at the Aerospace and Defense Industry, while you were at Aerospace Industry's Association. In your current role, you provide overall policy direction for the management of both military and civilian manpower. And Mr. Wagner, can you tell us what your biggest surprise has been in your return to DOD specifically related to talent management and development of senior executives?

Hon. Alex Wagner:

Thanks so much. I'm so excited to be here. Thank you all for showing up to this panel, the very last panel of the last day of AFA. You guys are real troopers. I am a little nervous today because this is my first time at AFA since 1997. So I'm so excited to be back. Many of you might be wondering why the Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs is even on this panel. And for that you can blame my partner in crime, Tony Reardon. He and others in the Air Force prior to my confirmation moved SES management and that office from a one over to M&RA. And so, I am so excited because this is something that as Kathleen mentioned, I have a little bit of experience in both as a GS 15, and OSD policy, but also working directly for the Secretary of the Army in helping him approve and manage our SES Corp.

So eventually I'm going to get to your question, which was what surprised me? And I'll tell you, I've new to the Air Force, but I'm not new to the reputation of the Air Force and I'm certainly not new to the Air Force's senior executives because a number of them have been senior executives or GS 15s and partners in crime and colleagues of mine in other parts of my life in the Pentagon. And now they've found their way from different agencies outside of DOD or within DOD over to the Air Force.

So my answer to your question is the SES Corp of the Air Force is unlike and unrivaled by the other services and by OSD. And I've seen it up close and personal the last three months. I've known of it by reputation, but every single day when I work with the SES Corp, when I engage with them, when I meet people for the first time, the depth of knowledge, the breadth of experience, the knowing how to manage up, me and some of my new colleagues, some of whom have never served in government before, and the focus on mission is truly exceptional.

And I'm just so pleased and proud to be your colleague. In some cases, be your advocate, and looking forward to in this new role, helping ensure that we're able to grow each of you and those who aspire to be one of you as professionals. And also ensure that at the end of every day we are focused on the war fighter. We are focused on mission, we are focused on our US National Security. And I think that's what distinguishes the SES Corp and the Department of Defense, but more importantly, in the department of the Air Force, that we've got such a great crew. We've got them in the right positions, and we'll talk about that I think a little bit more in the day. But I'm so pleasantly surprised that the reputation has met the reality.

Kathleen Ferguson:

And thank you Secretary Wagner. And want to ask you a follow up question. Can you describe a little bit about what your vision is for the SES Corp?

Hon. Alex Wagner:

So I'll say this, the Army's SES Corp that I became pretty familiar with very slightly in how they manage from the Air Force's. And I see a lot of depth of expertise, but I also see people who have been doing similar jobs for quite some time. My vision is not to move people around like general officers, but my hope and my goal is that we can expand the breadth of expertise because I think a broader expertise helps people find more meaning in their job, challenges them with new skills. It's more fun to get out of your comfort zone and build relationships with different people. And one of the visions is essentially saying, "How do we broaden the SES experience in the Air Force learning from what the Army does?" Well and what the Army could do better to continue to keep the Air Force SES the envy of the other services and the envy of OSD?

Kathleen Ferguson:

Perfect, thank you. So turning to Mr. Reardon who is not new to the department of the Air Force, you've been in SES now for about 13 years and have held a number of different positions as a senior executive. And certainly over that time you've seen a lot of changes, and changes in both military leadership and the political leadership in Department of Defense, both democratic administrations, republican administrations. Can you share some of your lessons learned over that time and what advice you'd give new SES's and existing SES's?

Anthony P. Reardon:

Thanks. I thought about this question a lot. So I'm going to use two words that are kind of the opposite of each other. You need to be flexible. We all remember that growing up in the Air Force. Flexibility is the key to air power. Seemed that was on a water tank at one of the bases I was stationed at. But then more than that consistency is the other thing. So what we've seen over the last couple years is changes to our processes. Without that consistency in the SES Corp, it's hard to maintain the balance as you move forward. I guess when you look at it as a new administration comes in, they see issues inside the processes with any bureaucracy, they see that and then they move to change those. And we go through

a cycle with every administration where you make major changes to major processes. And sometimes, we finish them in the term of that administration. Sometimes we don't. I think oftentimes, when we don't, we build kind of sub-optimized processes on top of other sub-optimized processes.

So the real goal of an SES, I think is to kind of whether that storm to be able to provide that consistency throughout the organization to understand what the outcome is and how to drive them towards the outcome. Probably the biggest lesson that I've learned is networking. So I can tell story. I just did a senior leader orientation course last spring where I have 22 years in the Pentagon. Got here in September of 2000, which I never would've envisioned being in the Pentagon for 22 years. So I actually had longer time in the Pentagon than some of the general officers had in the Air Force. So it's kind of interesting to see the changes throughout the years as the new group come in. But the networking is what makes my job attainable right now. It's the people that I've grown up with, the people that I've seen as they come through on the numerous assignments into the building, then leave, come back again, being able to work through processes with them and drive towards the outcome.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thanks Mr. Reardon. So turning now to Ms. Goodwine, you are also relatively new to the Department of the Air Force, but you were an SES before you came over and working in Department of Agriculture. Can you tell us what prompted your move to the Air Force and what you've experienced since coming on board?

Venice M. Goodwine:

Okay, so thank you. Good afternoon and yes, you are brave. I appreciate it. And so got here with the Air Force in June of 2021. And I will tell you, having served in the military myself for over 30 years, I was familiar with the Air Force's commitment to training and education of its enlisted and officers because I had done both. When I got to the Department of Agriculture, I expected that same commitment and I was surprised. So if there's any USDA implants here, I'm sorry I'm not being negative about you, but in three and a half years I had one training class as an executive and I had no training budget for my team. And I was flabbergasted because I just assumed because the way we did it in the Air Force and DOD that the entire federal department did it that way as well.

So that's not true. And so when the opportunity came for me to get back to the Air Force, to my roots and what I knew about their commitment, I took that opportunity. And what I liked is when I got here within my first 30 days, shout out to Mel McGuire and Virginia Reynolds, and the senior leader team because within the first 30 days they told me the expectations. That I would continue to grow, they'd give me opportunities for courses that would allow me to continue to grow my leadership skills, also my functional skills. They also told me my responsibility of mentoring others and developing others as well as an executive.

But also what was more important was that they were going to offer these opportunities, but that was up to me to take advantage of those opportunities. And so while originally I was envy of all my friends, my Air Force SES's because they were going to Harvard for class, and MIT, and Chapel Hill when I got back. So I've now been here what Mr. Reardon? About 18 months. I too have gone to Harvard, and MIT. So now I'm the envy of my other friends. But truly, the deliberate management that is provided by the executive office is what to me makes our executive service in the Air Force very unique and special. I'm excited to be a part of it.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you. Turning back now to Secretary Wagner, I've heard that there's some angst among the SES's in the Department of Air Force about the need to reduce the overall number of SES's from about 190 to 160. Two part question for you. One, can you shed some light on how the department is going to do that? And then second part of that question is, do you think there's going to be reassignments or terminations associated with that reduction?

Hon. Alex Wagner:

So you give me the softball to start and then throw a curve over the plate with spit on it. I'm going to try to take a swing at this. What I'll say is that these reductions are not by fiat from the Secretary of the Air Force or from me. These are congressionally mandated reductions since 2017. That's the first thing. The second thing is I believe they've also come with geo reductions. Similarly, I think we've taken about a 10% cut. So that's the bad news. The good news is that we have been managing down effectively. And the better news is we've actually never had 190. We've actually only had 166 allocations. And so as retirements come, what we're doing is we're trying to be focused on making sure we've got the right people, in the right roles, at the right time.

So, your second question is about reduction termination. So, I used to be a lawyer, I dabbled a bit in employment law. I know you never talk about firing people, but what I can say without question, is the answer is no. As I alluded to before, we are managing down. We are managing down to 160, we have a plan to do that, which for 2022, we're going to easily meet. There might be some challenges going forward, but that's our overall allocation within all of what the Department of Defense is allowed to have. And so, we're doing it proactively. We're utilizing and leveraging the Talent Management Council, the Talent Management Board. The goal is to make sure that people are in the right place, for them, but also the Secretary of the Air Force's priorities. So we're looking where we can move SES billets to support those priorities. I think that'll create additional opportunities for people looking for new ways for professional growth.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thanks Mr. Secretary. Going back to Mr. Reardon again for this one. I think we gave Mr. Reardon the softball part of this question. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 gave the department so the federal government great latitude to manage their senior executives and within the Department of the Air Force, Mr. Reardon, can you talk about the roles of the ERB and the PRB, and what they do and how they're organized?

Anthony P. Reardon:

Sure. We actually added a third. Years past the ERB was a little bit more inclusive in what it had oversight responsibilities for. What we've taken now at the ERB, we almost do just SES hiring actions and allocations of positions. So what that group does is it follows the merit principles, it reviews an SES package as it comes forward, makes sure that everything's been done in accordance with the merit principles, and that the selection was processed properly. It also kind of reviews the request from different organizations that want to stand up specific SES position, or an HQE type, position or a CSE is probably the best way to say it. What we did a couple years ago is we split out of that a group called the Talent Management Committee, which manages the tier ones. There's another one that does tier twos and tier threes, and they do a little bit more of the reviews of the development of the individuals.

They make the recommendations for school selections, they make the recommendations for slates. We slate all the different SES positions inside the Air Force. So we will pick SES's that have the skills that are needed for that particular position. We'll put them on a slate and if that position opens up, we use that

slate as the first measure to see if we have available people to do it. The PRB is kind of where we review the end of the year appraisals. We're under a certified system, so because of that we have a little bit more of a formal process, but we review the performance objectives and the accomplishments of each individual by name. We have three PRBs. One of them does tier ones, one of them does tier twos, and then the other one does tier threes. And then obviously it's high and below. So tier threes have a select group of tier threes and then the tier twos are evaluated by tier threes, and then tier ones are evaluated by tier ones.

One of the things that we've tried to do with all three of the processes, that's been a little bit of a thorn in people's side over the last couple years, is to increase the transparency of the process. The talent management committee, for example, gives a rating for an individual whether they should continue to build tenure in their job, whether they should be available for increased challenges, or a promotion, or whether they should be available for career broadening, which is a lateral move.

We're trying to find ways to help people understand what the ratings are, what the discussion was prior to the TMC. So what we do is we've assigned SES's to other SES's. So anybody that sits on the TMC has a core group of 10 to 15 SES's that they're responsible for. So they reach out prior to the TMC, they kind of get the idea of what it is they want to do with their career, how they're doing in their job, what their timeline is to move out of that job and what they're interested in the future. And then they match those to the discussions of the individual when the TMC comes back. And then we provide feedback after it to say, "Hey, this is kind of what the TMC thinks you should look for. These are some of the leadership classes that we should think you should take." So I think we're making great strides in the transparency and I think that's the thing that we're working on the most, making sure that we have meaningful feedback to the senior executives and we help them when they have requirements to enhance their leadership skills.

Kathleen Ferguson:

I'm going to circle back to Secretary Wagner for a second part of this question. And I want to have you respond to what happens. Can you tell the audience what happens when the ERB is done putting together their recommendations, and then the package goes behind the glass doors. And for folks that don't work in the Pentagon, don't work for the Air Force, behind the glass doors is literally behind the glass doors. It's where the Chief and Secretary work, the Under Secretary works there, the Vice Chief of Staff works there, and the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force and Space Force. So, Secretary Wagner, if you can talk about what actually happens to that package when it moves down there?

Hon. Alex Wagner:

Well first it moves to my office, and if anyone in this audience has ever heard me talk about the SES process, you'll have heard me say the same thing over and over. If there are challenges, I want to fix the process, not fix the outcomes. And my goal is if we are going to have an interview process that when the results of that interview process and a primary and a secondary or maybe some additional secondary candidates are selected, alternates, I want to see what the value of the interview was. I'm going to read why one person was selected over another because otherwise we could just pick it via resume. And so anything that gets to my desk, I'm going to work with our SES management office to make sure that those of you... And I know many of you have been on these boards, these interview panels. The goal is to extract meaningful differences that can't be seen in a resume only based process. And then to articulate those differences to demonstrate the value of that process.

So I've worked with Mel McGuire and her team a number of times to say, "You've got two candidates that seem very evenly matched on paper. Help me understand when I'm reading this package, what the

meaningful differences are? Why you picked one candidate over another? What's the right skill set for this job?" And throughout all of that, I want to make sure we're asking the right questions. And to date, I can tell you in report that someone who has been a member of an SES before when I was in the Army, and I've written some of those reviews of the interview process to help influence a senior leader or a hiring...

Hello? Oh, there we go. A hiring official's decision. I thought I was being pulled off stage here. Is my time up? No. What I'm focused on is making those meaningful, and allowing senior leaders to understand the thinking, and the rationale clearly. And I'm pretty convinced from what I've seen, that we've got the right process, we've got the right questions. I mean, one of the things I'm always looking for is when we ask the question about how do you value diversity? How do you create an inclusive environment? How people answer that, because that really matters. And I think that's one of the strengths of our SES Corp.

I also think it's something that we need to continue to focus on and grow. And so when I get that recommendation, and I read that rationale, very often, in fact, more often than not, I'll write a note up and I'll say, "This candidate in the interview process was able to articulate this, which is a value proposition for this particular job." Or, "This candidate displayed a skill that I know we've been looking for that we don't have yet."

And so when it gets to the glass doors as Kathleen, we a... I wouldn't call it an unwritten rule, but a deviation of responsibilities where the Under Secretary reviews the tier one and the tier twos, and then the Secretary reviews the tier threes. And sometimes if I haven't done my job well enough, the Secretary, or the Under Secretary will call me in and say, "Hey, help me understand, why you endorse this recommendation." But, if there is something that's not working for the Air Force, my focus is ensuring we have the right process in place. And if we have the right process in place, the right outcomes will be the result. And I'll defend those, you've got my word on that.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you for that. Ms. Goodwine, back to you. You talked about in your earlier response about the Air Force providing deliberate talent management to you as a senior executive. And having worked in the building for a long time and managed the Civil Engineering Career program, I know the Air Force doesn't provide talent management and educational opportunities for just the senior executives. Can you share with us what your development team is doing now in deliberate talent management and how you are identifying grooming people for future leadership opportunities?

Venice M. Goodwine:

Okay, good. Yes. So if you'll know, there is an office that manages the Chiefs. There's an office that manages Colonels. There's an office of course that manages GOs. There's also, as we talked about, office that manages the SCS's. There's not an office like that for Senior Civilians. So what we have instead in place is a career field team, which has a functional authority who is normally the Senior Civilian in that career field. We have the functional manager that executes the direction of the functional authority. And then we have a career field manager. So I serve as the Functional Manager for the Cyberspace and Information career field, 11,000 individuals across department of the Air Force. And so the way we identify high performing individuals, or provide educational opportunities is a couple of ways.

One, we have a vectoring program and all of these civilian career fields have the same. And with that program, it's a voluntary program where individuals can submit their applications through my vector and a panel that's chaired by myself and some of the other senior civilians in our career field, we will provide them advice about their career. And that advice is based on what we value as a career field. For

instance, it is we value PME on par with our military counterparts. So if at a certain grade, if they have not completed SOS or ACSC, we'll recommend that they complete that.

Or if they don't have a degree, a civilian degree, which is civilian education, something else that we value, we'll make that recommendation on par again with our military counterparts. And that also includes functional credentials but also career broadening opportunities as well as key civilian positions. And so when they submit that application and we give them back a vector saying, "Yes, do this. Go do this. You've had enough of this." Just so we talk about you should probably move, because it's based on the goals that they have set in partnership with their supervisors of where they want to go in their career as a civilian.

So besides that, after the vector is done, which is done in the fall, just stomp, stomp right now vectors are due by the applications are September 23rd with endorsements by September 30th by supervisors. So if you have civilians, please help them with that. Your endorsement is very important to us.

But also we have our development teams just as they do for the military where we've board our civilians for selection into courses as well. So another way that we build our civilians. The other way is those are the formal processes that we use and it's uniform across the civilian career field for the entire department. But some of the other things that we do in our career field is webinars. We hold webinars at all levels. A webinar if you want to be an SES, we talk about our ECQ process. If you need help writing your resume, we've held webinars on doing that as well. And so with the combination of the formal and the informal process for the career field, we are using that to identify those senior civilians who want that next opportunity to make sure they're prepared for that. But also that we can identify high potential candidates as well that we can help them move into some of our key civilian positions throughout the department.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you, Mr. Reardon. One of the questions we've heard from a number of individuals is other federal agencies have career development programs that provide training for and groom folks that are in GS 14, 15 positions to be future SES's. Can you talk about why the department of the Air Force and DOD don't have a similar program?

Anthony P. Reardon:

I think it's a DOD decision. I think OPM spends a lot of time helping us do our jobs to start with. And I think if we stood up one of those programs, I think the rigor of it would overcome the department. So instead of that, I think we've turned to the development teams to have them mentor the folks and develop them in the right way. There are other programs that are out there. We do have a couple of programs, DODY, the Defense Senior Leader Development program, DSLDP is probably the big one. The difference between that and the program that the question addresses is your ECQs aren't certified on the other side of that.

Kathleen Ferguson:

And I have a follow up question on that relative to ECQs. So there was language in the National Defense Authorization Act that requires just a resume and not ECQs. Can you walk through a little bit and explain how that works and when that applies?

Anthony P. Reardon:

I can. I think it's an excellent opportunity. I'm not quite sure the other services utilize it to the same degree that we do, because I think at the end of the year we get some of their allocations and we use

them. There's a good and a bad side to that. The bad side of it, we'll start with that, is the fact that you're limited then to be an SES inside of DOD only. If you move out to another agency, your ECQs are going to have to be certified by OPM. For those that have written ECQs, it's not easy to do and oftentimes it's an obstacle to people moving forward to an SES position because of the rigor that's involved in capturing all the executive core qualifications in the way that they want it done. And for those that aren't familiar, you only have a couple bites at the apple when you send it to OPM. If the panel reviews it sends it back with a couple of changes, if you don't correct the changes suitably, the individual kind of goes into a probation period.

What the resume only does, is it allows you to capture those ECQs in a smaller format, so it's contained in the resume. All you have to do is put... All you have to do. It sounds easy. It's actually hard to review the resumes with the ECQ qualifications put into them. But it gives you a little bit more flexibility. It's limited to fewer pages, and then it kind of walks you through your career. The flexibility that we have with that is basically speed. It allows us a faster process to get an executive through the screening board, through the approval process and into the seat, because we don't have to rely on OPM running a board to get their ECQs done. Plus, I think we get better and more applicants for each one of our panels based on the resume only format.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Okay, thank you. And I have just one last question, and I want to ask it to each one of the panel members, and I'll start with Ms. DeWine. I'm sorry, Ms. Goodwine. Sorry. Can you explain, or just give us your thoughts on what does that one last thing you want to share with the audience relative to senior executives, leadership development, what they should be looking at?

Venice M. Goodwine:

I'll tell you what my grandmother told me. She said, "You have to stay ready so you don't have to get ready." And I looked at her the way you just looked at me like, "Huh? What? What do you mean?" And she said that to me when I was probably 12 or 13, and I didn't understand. But I'll just tell you real quickly. So every Saturday morning in my house, it was the deal that Saturday morning was the time that she did errands. If you went with grandma when she did errands, you either got McDonald's or you got ice cream. So that was the goal. It's not like today where everybody has Uber Eats, right? Going to McDonald's in my day was a big deal. And so there are times when she would get ready to go, and I wasn't ready. I'd run downstairs, and I would be frantic, like I want to go. I ended up standing at the door with tears in my eyes because I wasn't ready.

She'd always say, "You have to stay ready, so you don't have to get ready." Well fast forward to where I am now, and I now understood what she meant. So here's what I say to civilians. If your goal is to be a member of the Senior Executive Service, the goal and the steps to get there are known. You're going to have either ECQs, or you need to have resumes that show the demonstrated qualities, the ECQs within that.

And so, to stay ready means are you ECQ ready? Have you written them? Have you practiced your interview questions? Do you have your resume ready? Have you talked to a mentor? Get ready. Have that stuff ready so that when the opportunity comes and presents itself, you won't be like me standing at the door with tears in my eyes because I wasn't going to get McDonald's. You will be able to just submit your package when you see that USA job announcement. Or, when your mentor who's advocating on your behalf tells you about an opportunity, you are ready.

The other thing I like to say is to my military, I know that you like that your civilians are your consistency. And I agree we do offer that. But some of your civilians have goals and desires to do more. So I ask you



to support them with their endorsement package for DT, because as a chair of the DT, I read that and I look for the strats just as you do on the military side for civilians. Help them and mentor them as well into what it means to move and have career broadening. That's why our officers move around. And sometimes as civilians, we need to move around as ready. So my last piece of advice to my civilians is stay ready so you don't have to get ready when that opportunity comes.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Very well said. Mr. Reardon?

Anthony P. Reardon:

For me, hey, I wish I could tell you that being an SES included all these great things, but for a lot of people, they struggle with the decision as whether they move from GS 15 to an SES position, and it's more than a little bit of more money. It's more than a parking space inside the contained area. And it's more than the executive dining room. But it's a responsibility that I think I would like to see more of our GS 15s aspire to. I think the core leadership of the SES's right now in the Air Force is pretty good. It's actually great.

And I think what we provide to the service is that continuity, and that understanding, and that stability, and the organization that allows us to succeed. So more than anything, I'd tell people, if you're interested in it, know what it is that you want to do, know what direction you want to go, know what type of jobs you're interested in. And then just like Venice said, make sure that you get all your ducks in a row. You know what it is that you need to get done before you sit down for that first interview. It's actually an excellent opportunity. I think it's something that everybody should look at at some point in their civilian career.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thanks, Mr. Reardon. Secretary Wagner?

Hon. Alex Wagner:

Well, those are two really hard acts to follow. And given that I'm new, I figured maybe it would help you understand a little bit about me and how I'm approaching this class of issues. He's not my grandmother, but my friend, and mentor, and twice former boss, Eric Fanning, former Air Force Under Secretary and Acting Secretary has always told a story of the 2013 shutdown. And when he'd travel across the country to bases, the Generals would come out and they greet him on the runway and the first thing they'd say was, "We need our SES's back. We need our senior civilians back." And so that helped me understand at the beginning of my career in the Department of Defense, just how valuable the SES Corp was to this incredibly important mission.

What I can say about myself, and I know it's true for nearly all of you in the audience and those of you at home, is that the power of being a senior civilian, whether you're a political appointee, presidentially approved, or a senior career official, is that you've got the rare, unbelievable opportunity to have an idea in the shower in the morning, have a meeting on it, convene a meeting on it by noon, convince the senior military leaders of the military department that it's the right thing to do by three o'clock and help sign it out and affect the lives of, at least in the Department of the Air Force, 700,000 civilians, Airmen and guardians before you drive back home and or metro in my case.

And so I think that unbelievable mission and impact that we can have really embodies what... This is not just parroting the boss, which is always a good thing for me to do, but every day I think about what one

team, one fight really means. And it's not only we're the Department of the Air Force comprising a Space Force and an Air Force. It's not that we are civilians and we are military.

To me it's that every day, the politicals in the Department of the Air Force, the military, the career civilians, the SES Corp, come into work and have such awesome responsibilities and yet have such incredible abilities to make an impact and make a difference. And my goal and my hope is that, that I am an incredible advocate for you, I am someone that can help open up additional opportunities to challenge you and make sure you've got a challenging career. But at the end of the day, that we all realize that we're in this for the same purpose. And it's the war fighter and those young civilians who are looking to grow their career in National Security that we're looking to make the department and frankly the world a better place for.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you very much. And with that, I would like to conclude our discussion this afternoon and just want to thank... If you can join me in thanking Secretary Wagner, Mr. Reardon, and Ms. Goodwine for being here.

And then finally to all the folks out there in the audience, thanks for sticking with us till the very, very end of the AFA conference. I know there's a big dinner tonight celebrating the Air Force's 75th birthday. And as a member of the Air Force Association Board, we welcome your feedback. What did we do right? What did we do wrong? Just don't say anything about the fact that we ran out of lunches on Monday. We got that. But tell us what we can do better next time to make a more rewarding conference for you. And again, thanks for being here, and joining us this afternoon.

