

A Fireside Chat with USAF's Athenas

June 9, 2023

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Welcome to Air & Space Warfighters in Action. I'm Orville Wright, President and CEO of your Air & Space Forces Association. Thank you so much to the hundreds of people joining us online this morning. Three years ago, Air Combat Command established a special working group of Airmen called Sword Athena. Their mission was to identify, tackle, and propose solutions to female and family-centric barriers to readiness. The idea caught fire. Real change came about as a result, and soon, other Air Force major commands started establishing their own Athena programs. Today, we're fortunate to have with us four Athenas representing Air Combat Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and the Air Force Reserve component. Each of our guests work after hours on their own developing solutions to some of the most vexing barriers to women's success in the military. From fielding functional gear designed for women's needs to supporting Airmen and families in every phase of agile combat employment.

As a former Air Combat Command vice commander, fighter pilot, and the proud father of an F-15 Strike Eagle pilot, who's also the mother of our grandson, I know firsthand that these are not just women's issues or family issues, but readiness issues that affect the entire Air Force. Before we introduce our guests, and again, it's an honor for us at a AFA to have you here. Let me first thank our sponsors. BAE Systems, Collins Aerospace, Deloitte, Elbit Systems of America, General Dynamics Mission Systems, Honeywell, L3Harris, Lockheed Martin, Oracle Cloud, Raytheon Technologies, the Roosevelt Group, and SAIC. It is their support that makes Warfighters in Action possible. So thank you again.

Well, now to our guests. Joining me are Lieutenant Colonel Meghan O'Rourke, Mobility Requirements Flank Chief for Air Force Special Operations Command. Meghan oversees a \$22 billion program responsible for modernizing and sustaining 94 special operations C-130 aircraft. She is also co-lead for AFSOC's Women's Initiative team and a member of AFSOC's Dagger Athena. Next to Meghan is Major Sharon Arana, who is the branch chief for Air Force Air Combat Commands Distributed Common Ground Systems Futures and its intelligence operations division, BCGS. She is also co-lead for Air Combat Command's women's initiative team and a member of the Sword Athena core team.

Next to me on my left is Chief Master Sergeant "Mouche" Scaramouche, and Mouche is the senior enlisted leader with Air Combat Command's personnel division and leads a team responsible for executing policy updates across Air Combat Command. And finally, but certainly not least, Senior Master Sergeant Rebecca Schatzman. She's the squadron enlisted leader with a 911 operations support Squadron, a C-17 Loadmaster, and a member of the Air Force Reserve Component's ARC Athena, Air Reserve Component, ARC Athena.

Welcome all four of you. It is absolutely an honor, a joy really to be here with you. So let's get right into our questions, and for our audience, we'll focus on the panel members for a few minutes and then there will be plenty of opportunities over the next 50 minutes or so for audience questions and interaction. So thanks again to our audience for being here. Well, let's start with Major Arana. Sword Athena pioneered the kind of operational collaborative approach that we're really focused on today to solve tough problems. So what exactly is an Athena? How does that program, the Athena program, differ from the Air Force's Women's Initiative team, and how did the idea come about? Please share, and again, welcome.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Thank you, sir. First, thank you so much for this opportunity and thank you for everyone out there as well for tuning in. So to start off, the Athenas, an Athena is essentially a MAJCOM level initiatives group to allow MAJCOM center leadership to get at the issues that are specific to their mission set. And the way these differ from the WITS or any of the other DAF level initiative teams is that those are more going at DAF level and above issues. And I think that between the two, there has been so much great collaboration and overlap. We feed off of each other, and I think it is just this great relationship between the two that is very much needed.

And the way the Athena started was back in 2019, we had Colonel Lang, she was at ACC, identified a need to identify some of these issues. And we are all incredibly grateful for the legacy that she's left for us because she set up the first Sword Athena at ACC, and even through COVID and the difficulties that that resulted in, persevered, and was a huge success enough to... Like you said, sir, now this has spread like wildfire. It's just been amazing seeing this take off.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Awesome. Well, thanks, Sharon. And so we'll move across the panel here. I imagine the issues that you all face vary from command to command. So let's start with Rebecca, and let's hear starting with Rebecca from the 911, from each of you a bit about what you are focused on that's the same or different within your commands in a little bit more detail on particular issues you work. I know the audience would be very interesting what you're working on. So again, let's start with Rebecca and we'll go from left to right, please.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Thank you, sir. And thank you for having us here today. It's just a wonderful opportunity to be here. I really appreciate that. The ARC is Air Force Reserve Command and Air National Guard. That's what a lot don't understand when we talk about the ARC component. So there's a little bit of a three-tiered answer to this question as that's a very large component. So the Air Force Reserve command has about 82,000 Airmen. Air National Guard has about 107,000. So in total, you're looking at about 190,000 Airmen. We can possibly affect 25% of that, if you're looking at female specific barriers is around 45,000. So that's a massive number. The second piece of that is we encompass the citizen Airman piece, so there's a wide variety of talents that come under the ARC component, and there's also the resources that need to be had on drill weekends.

So that's where we talk about the third tiered answer to this question. So we look at our nine LOEs, those are our nine lines of effort. I'll talk about two in specific, just as really great examples of how it works on the ARC side. So on drill status weekends, we focus primarily on childcare. That's one of our largest LOEs. Childcare is an issue throughout the United States as a whole. Childcare providers, the lack of providers, the cost of providers. And that's a Monday through Friday operation. Well, what happens when you have a MIL to MIL or a single family or somebody that needs that childcare on a UTA weekend, you're talking about 6:00 in the morning until about 6:00 at night. It's very hard to find. A lot of the standalone bases do not have CDCs to fall back on, so that's one of the avenues that we are looking into right now to see how we can actively correct that.

EFMP, Exceptional Family Members Program, that's another really large LOE that we have. When we talk about drill status guardsmen and traditional reservists, we come in on and off status. So it's very different than other MAJCOMs where you're on an order period for years at a time. As a reservist or a guardsman, if you're on 31 days out of the year, you're entitled to specific benefits. And those benefits really get blurred and your family can get lost in the translation if you don't have those services available

at your standalone base. So those are two of the nine examples that we're working with that kind of differ across the MAJCOM when we talk about the essentially non-traditional resources.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

That's terrific. And you also spoke earlier with me about the support you get from the senior leadership.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Yes.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Across the reserve component, Air National Guard, obviously, and Air Force Reserves, up to level of General Hokanson. So encouraging.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Yes, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

And I know they appreciate the insight and the day-to-day work, General Healy and General Wool, so thanks very much.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

We're so thankful. Yes, sir. The senior leaders that we've had, ARC Athena was a very large success in April. The senior leaders that came and were a part of ARC Athena, they've showed their support 110%. They've asked the question, what can we do to help? That's a direct reflection of if you have good leadership, anything can happen. And we really believe that we can break down these barriers because we have the backing of their leadership.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, that's a good segue. Chief Mouche, we talked a bit about, in fact, and this is General Kelly Antonia's support for everything you're doing, not just in the A1 spaces, obviously cross Air Combat Command, pretty busy, large command.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

So a bit of Air Combat Command focus, and then we'll move back to Meghan and talk about Athena Dagger. So please.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Absolutely. So again, thank you to AFA. And again, thank you, sir, for being our moderator. As the good general said, Air Combat Command, we are the largest command. We're the CAAF, combat arm of the Air Force. And so when we look at barriers to service to readiness, we have to look at it at the combat lens. So what are the predictable stressors that our Airmen going to face? What are the predictable

stressors that the families are going to face? And then on the back end of that, the reintegration efforts that we're going to have. And if I may, for the past 20 years in the global war of terrorism, we kind of didn't do really so well on that reintegration effort, and our senior leaders own that.

And being a senior leader, I also own a part of that as well. And so for us in Air Combat Command with this near peer fight, how do we get after that predictable stressor, making sure that the issues that we faced with those previous conflicts that we're not going to look at with the near peer fight? And we're really blessed with General Kelly to support us in those efforts. Our working groups did phenomenal. And we have the support of senior leaders through all MAJCOMs, because what CAAF does everybody else have to go along with, right? So again, that's Air Combat Command.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Thanks Chief.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Thank you.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

And Meghan, moving to Hurlbert and AFSOC.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

We were just talking to General Sly.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Great.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

We're obviously now a A3, moved from AFSOC, and certainly you're current leadership at AFSOC, senior leadership, so a bit of an AFSOC focus on all things Athena Dagger.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Absolutely. Yeah, so the big thing with AFSOC, we're incredibly specialized, which really means I need every war fighter to be as lethal as possible. So one of the main areas that we focus on is increasing operational capacity. And some things within that is we've looked at getting Bluetooth medical devices approved in classified areas and also aircraft. So just to give you an impact from that, we had female lactating, Air Commandos who are having to leave their facilities, leave their workspaces, go to a totally different building, take care of their effort, and then come back. They were losing hours of productivity a day.

Now they're able to sit at their desk and do their job. And that's often all we ask for is, "Hey, I just want to do my job." And we're looking at things like if I've got medically downed Airmen, flyers who are at locations that don't have certified sims, how can I get them to the locations that have those certified simulators so I can keep them proficient and qualified in that aircraft so that I can return them to the

fight that much quicker? And really, oh man, my favorite area is fitment. How do I get gear, especially as we're continuing to incorporate special tactics females, how do I make sure that we have the right gear to make sure that we can do our job properly? So really just to kind of sum it up, how can I increase our lethality within the Air Commando branch? That's one of our core focus areas.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Lethality and readiness.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Everybody in the fight, everyone in the fight.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Everyone.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

You bet.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

And if they're out of the fight, how do I return them quickly to the fight?

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Oh, great point.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yep.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, Sharon has a terrific background. Lieutenant Colonel Arana, 11 years enlisted and or more, I think.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

It's 11, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

And then commission, so a good deal of experience here. And that experience then in your current role in Air Combat Command, I think is really applicable and relative when you go from your time as a crypto linguist, and she speaks a number of languages, so pretty amazing. And now obviously a more senior Air Force leader and a mom. So a bit about yourself, but certainly what you're doing in across Air Combat Command.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Thank you.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Sword Athena.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Yes, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Please.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

So with Sword Athena we've been working on, we recently just had our outbrief for this year. It was incredibly successful, and thank you to all of my Athenas out there that are listening as well. We couldn't have done this. Honestly, we say it's a sisterhood, but really it's everyone. The efforts that have gone into this and the work and the support that we've been getting. But some of the things that we have been pushing towards are, like I said, it's just reintegration, female fitment. It's just acknowledging that while we are all treated equally, but equal treatment is not necessarily equitable treatment. And just to understand what are those special things that are needed. Not special, honestly, it's just what are those things that are needed to make sure that all of our Airmen are able to show up fully in order to accomplish their mission. So yes, it has been great.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, that's a terrific introduction. So what I'd like to do then with the panel, again, we'll start with Rebecca, is talk about agile combat employment at a level of tactical employment. So remote locations, we're moving in our department of the Air Force from somewhat of a garrison force, and certainly we continue to fight from our bases, places like our B2 wing at Whiteman. At the same time, we're all over the world, from the Pacific to Europe, cold weather climates, hot weather climates. Maybe some unique challenges for our Airmen and Guardians regardless of gender. So I'll start with Rebecca. Let's talk about agile combat employment from an Athena perspective.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Yes sir. That's a great topic. I will quote General Hokanson on this one. At ARC Athena, he stated that women are not little men. That's one big piece, and it kind of sums it up as a whole when we talk about equipment and specialized equipment, it really shouldn't be specialized equipment, it should just be equipment, right? There is no one size fits all. That is one of our biggest things that we talk about, and that encompasses everybody. On the piece when we speak of the non-gender specific, we know everybody on this panel, if there's a deployment in this foreseeing future or the next war, are you ready if your family is not ready? That's a very big piece of what we talk about in the Athena factor. What we'll see, and everybody who is deployed has seen this, if your family is not taken care of, then that Airman falls apart. They do not give their best as they're deployed. They're not a hundred percent fully functional, and they will not be ready now. So those two aspects there, both equipment and the family side, go right into the ACE concept.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Yeah. Mouche, could you talk a bit about experience, that feedback you've gotten from a recent Air Combat Command deployment, Europe or the Pacific, that's further informed requirements and clear articulation of requirements that you're working on?

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Yes, sir. So within Air Combat Command, we're really focused on lead wings and XABs. And so how did those look in the future fight? And so we think what do we got to have? We've got to have planes, we've got to have people, we've got to have everything that comes with that. And so to normalize this conversation on the type of things human basic needs, we start with the normalizer of toilet paper. Everybody uses toilet paper. I don't care what you're into, you're going to use toilet paper. And so if we are looking at how do we solve agile combat employment and make sure that we continue to be the world's lethalist air force, we have to look at all aspects of combat employment. And so with that comes the equipment. And while those F-35s, F-22s, all those cool weapon systems, they're awesome, but what makes them even awesomer is the Airmen that touch those planes that make those suckers fly.

And so when we look at the things that those Airmen need to bring with them, toilet paper is a common question. How do we get toilet paper there? And then the second question I always like to bring up, so now as a female, I have a physiological thing that occurs. I can't wish it and will it away. It just happens. What do I do to resupply my pads and tampons? And so if I'm asking that as a chief, of course I'm going to pack my own supplies, but I don't know how long I'm going to be out there. Nobody knows what this near peer threat fight is going to truly look like. Is it going to look like what we faced for the past 20 years? Nobody knows. Is it going to be two weeks a week? How do we know what that's going to look like?

But for us, at the Sword Athena level, we just look at, "Hey, how do we make this weapon system of the Airmen more lethal, take care of the basic physiological needs, toilet paper, pads, and tampons, female fitment equipment for the flyers as well as the enlisted side?" How do we come together to make sure that, hey, we're all taken care of? And I think it makes us even more lethal, because when you look at China, I don't think they're considering that, right? So in the Air Force, not only can we focus on the mission, but I can take care of all those loose ends as well. So that's making us so dang awesome.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

I love it. So every Airman, Guardian a lethal weapon system.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Every time.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

So Meghan, break down for us, especially in the AFSOC operations, constantly deployed around the world. Let's talk about everything a bit, and I'll just frame the question, from weapons training, shooting, body armor, sustained capabilities to move, shoot, and communicate at a very deployed, demanding, in a demanding environment, a rugged environment.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

So you could probably do a lot to inform the audience on putting the audience, if you will, on the aircraft in the foxhole, on the ground.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yeah, absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Fully weaponized. And just talk us through that.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yeah, absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Both from a gender perspective, I guess, but a non-gender perspective.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yeah. So out there throughout the entire world, I've got Air Commandos integrated fully with all my units. And as Mouche talked about, there's things that come with that. And so whether I've got members deployed down range or doing exercises, a lot of times we're in incredibly remote areas. So as we're tackling issues like lactation, female hygiene, all those kind of things, those are definitely things that the Athena team's trying to tackle because as we're talking ACE and the mission support teams, the concept within AFSOC, and the mission or multi-capable Airmen. I got to make sure that they don't have to worry about those things so that they can focus on the mission. But they are, they're on the ground, they're living in cots, they're flying the aircraft.

They're on missions that are anywhere from 16 to 18 hours long, demanding schedule for my Air Commandos out there. And then when they're done, they need to go back, they need to sleep. I don't want them worrying about their families back home. I don't want them worrying about personal hygiene or anything like that. I want those barriers tackled, those leadership issues. These aren't women's issues, these are leadership issues. I want those tackled so that they can do their job as well as they possibly can.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Great. Colonel Arana, Sharon, if you might talk a bit, and I know Air Combat Command has been focused in the area of long duration missions in combat aircraft cockpits and certainly F-16s, now F-35s, F-15Es. We went a couple decades ago from maybe three four-hour missions, now we're flying 8, 10, 12 hour missions, and bladder relief is an issue. Well, really hydration and bladder relief are issues.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

How do you stay hydrated that long? How do you stay sustained? And I know, too, some background that it's not just bladder relief for women, it's bladder relief for men. And so there's a crossover here as we upgrade the technology, if you will, for bladder relief. And people go, "Here's the President and CEO of the Air & Space Force Association talking about bladder relief." I'm talking about being lethal. I'm

talking about being fully combat capable on very long missions. So help me out here, what are you doing? And update the audience

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Yes. Thanks, sir. Yes, part of our female fitment initiatives, a significant part of that was female bladder relief. The female bladder bladder relief, one of the biggest obstacles to that was the resourcing because one size does not fit all, and there are different systems that you can use and how do we make those systems accessible to our pilots? So there's the funding aspect in order for them to be accessible. And where does that come from? How do you coordinate this as well? How does a unit determine how many of each kit to fund and to carry?

So at ACC, one of our initiatives to Sword Athena is to stand up a fitment cross-functional team, and the intent is to collect all of their requirements for female fitment writ large, but it's driven because of female bladder relief, and just see what is out there, what are all the initiatives that everyone else is working on as well, and make sure that we have a focal point to help us normalize these processes when we talk about resourcing, acquisitions. And those processes don't necessarily address the issues for female fitment right now. And we are working on creating a position and a process so that all of this is going to be normalized, but that is our intent. Yeah, we're very excited about the way ahead for all of this.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

You see progress?

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Are you optimistic?

Maj. Sharon Arana:

I am. Yes, sir. Very much so.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

If you're talking to a combination of industry, Department of Defense, the team out there, what kind of help do you need, do you want? What kind of help do you need from industry? And let's just focus on fitment, and certainly it's bladder relief, but it could be flight suits, it could be more comfortable flight gear overall. Again, I'm focused on ACC and combat aircraft, but certainly it applies to bombers and airlift aircraft also. Please.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Yes, sir. I think it's that generally understanding that the Air force of today does not look like the Air Force of yesterday or years ago. And so our Airmen today are so diverse across the spectrum, and kind of like what senior was saying, we're not little men, but it's not just women either. It's just when you're coming up with industry, at least, it's trying to say how do we get at these barriers that are affecting all of Airmen, big A, to make us more lethal and ready to do our jobs and execute our mission, is to have

that in mind. And whatever may be narrow lens that is being addressed, make sure that you're stepping back and broadening your aperture so that you are addressing the issues that can affect all of us.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

That's great. Well, before we go to the audience, I'd like to do one more round with the panel, and you all are sending such a strong message in the context of opportunity. So Rebecca, you've got a good deal of Loadmaster experience all over the world. So break down, if you will, requirements, ARC Athena requirements as you would talk to industry, talk to the senior leadership across both industry and Department of Defense on your recommendations, if you will, from your own flying experience, Loadmaster experience. So please, Rebecca, and then we'll go to Mouche for a similar question, I guess.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Thank you, sir. That's a wonderful question, and to really see how it works in the operating field, this is a perfect opportunity for me to really speak about that, so I do appreciate it. What we see operationally is when we talk about tactical dehydration, that's one major part of it. If we talk about tactical dehydration, we know it happens male and female. So tactical dehydration is when you don't drink maybe five to eight hours prior to step. So when you get in the aircraft, your cognitive response goes way down, your pass out rate goes way up. That is not what we need in the next fight. When we talk about equipment and resources, we know that there's equipment out there, bladder relief devices, female flight suits, female two-piece, any kind of female equipment, we need those resources.

If they're out there, they have to be distributed down, because what we're seeing is, hey, maybe they're out there but we just don't know about them. So that communication from the top down is extremely vital. And then to get out into the field and to see what we're actually seeing, doing worldwide missions, that's what the C-17 does. We are worldwide capable any time. It's a very, very amazing job. But to get out there and do it and to see the struggles that we face is very important. And so that's where us at Athena can give that feedback right back to industry and say probably the equipment piece is one of the largest there.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Great. Chief, I didn't prep this question, but I know you're ready. For the Wright family, 35 years in the Air Force, raising two daughters in the Air Force, childcare is a big deal. I've watched childcare support evolve over time, but we're not there yet. So here's an opportunity to talk about childcare needs, childcare flexibility. A statement I've made at pretty high levels is when you've got two E3s and they're both working 12-hour shifts and they've got three children, childcare has to be affordable, has to be available and affordable. So I'll just kind of prep the battle space for you, the info space. So please, and be straightforward.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Yes, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Childcare.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Absolutely. You won't have to worry about straightforwardness from me. So childcare is an issue. No matter which branch of service you look at, childcare is an issue. And we are thankful to have senior leaders that see and recognize that. When General Miller went to testify at the armed services committee, she said, "Hey, this is an issue, but we're working at it and these things take time." And when you talk about things taking time in the military, that costs money. And so how do we research and how do we figure out what is the right balance of childcare for aviators, for defenders, for the folks that work on the flight line, for the medical team that need to stay overnight at the ER. What does that right look like? And so while we continue to define that, we just welcome your feedback, welcome your feedback when those surveys come out, "Hey, my childcare here is terrible. Here's why it's terrible."

What are some solutions that are we looking at? I know that there are childcare vouchers that can be processed, and if you're a senior leader or a squadron leader at any level, go and figure out those tools. And if you don't know, I'm the only Scaramouche in the Air Force, shoot me an email and I'll help you out. All right? And that's what this is about, right? Asking the question, hey, what support is there? Is there something being done? Yes, but those things take time, and that's the unfortunate part. I wish we could just, hey, childcare is fixed tomorrow. But it is a massive problem, it is a massive project, and our senior leaders are working on it. These things just take time.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, I would reinforce that your AFA is all about giving you voice. So as you get your own inputs on childcare requirements, we're happy to amplify and reinforce. So Meghan, back to not just AFSOC, but your own experience across the Air Force mom, could you offer for the audience sort of vector of perspective on to support your family and the families you work with every day? Recommendations, a top three, if you will, for DOD, Congressional support, in fact, the industry support, too, from the Air Force families?

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yeah, absolutely. Fantastic question. Thank you. One of the first things I can ask is just empathy from our leadership. I can't tell you how many times I've had to telework or my husband's had to telework because we've got sick kids. And if there's been one positive that came out of COVID, it's our ability to actually telework and accomplish our mission successfully while I'm not necessarily in my workspace. And so just I ask for grace from our senior leadership and our teams out there is, hey, if you have a member with a sick kid, let them telework. Most people are going to give you more than what you think. The next thing, this is something we've been looking at, I know most MAJCOMs are, is how do we tackle 24 hour childcare? I have MQ9 pilots who are flying 24/7.

And so, well, CDC hours are awesome. I've got childcare from 6:00 to 6:00 for a fairly reasonable amount at the end of the day. Those CDCs aren't filled properly, we just can't get the hires that we need because we have such a demand. But also, when I talk about 24 hour coverage, we just don't necessarily have that in place. And our senior leaders are tracking that ask, but we're still working on it. And then the other thing I would ask is there's a family care coordinators FCCs. Right now there are people out there who want to be able to take care of kids maybe in their own homes. If we can increase that training, make it more accessible so that we have more FCCs, now we can maybe tackle that 24 hour care. Or, hey, we don't have enough spots in the CDC. Now we've got FCCs throughout the region who are vetted and trained and ready to take in our military kids. And so those are the three priorities that I would like to see tackled.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Excellent. Thanks. I didn't tell you I was going to ask you that question, great response.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

I know.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Appreciate it very much.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Thanks, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, before we go to the audience, Sharon, beyond your Air Combat Command experience, as you're very connected to US Air Forces Europe and obviously Pacific Air Forces, in that ACC is very much a force provider. Can you share with the audience just a bit of perspective on the worldwide requirements for support for our Airmen across the combat Air Forces? Article came out today that at Kadena we can no longer support OBGYN requirements. You can't have a baby at Kadena. You have to go to a stork's nest kind of option. So could you talk about that challenge and opportunity, and again, help us reinforce your voice to get to a solution?

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Yes, sir. Thank you. Oh, absolutely. I think female healthcare, access to female specialized healthcare is a passion project of mine. I believe that when we talk about this OBGYN care in general, it's not just the member in uniform. Also, it affects everybody. It affects dependents as well. So when we put that... I don't want to say that it's on the back burner, but when we fail to prioritize it the way that it needs to be, when we fail to look at it in a holistic view, then we are failing our Airmen, we're failing our families as well. So I will say, yes, access to equitable OBGYN care is definitely an issue. Not just OCONUS, but CONUS as well, as we have our women's health clinics, the numbers are decreasing or going away. So we have more of our Airmen, again, those in uniform and our dependents are becoming more dependent on the civilian sector, on outside world, and okay, what is it that they have there in those services?

So we need to just make sure that when we're walking into, but specifically unit leadership, commanders, that they're seeing that as well. And do our Airmen, can we take care of our Airmen, and are they being taken care of across the board? I know we talked about some of the policies that are going on right now, and what is it? What can our leaders do to make sure that all of our Airmen are afforded access to equitable healthcare? And whatever needs to happen, regardless of what the rules may be based on the station, based on their duty station, maybe the rules are a little bit different there. The laws are different than what TRICARE affords us, but at the end of the day, TRICARE should be what is used and make sure that that is the access that we can garner.

So like Kadena, if that is the case, I would say what's leadership doing then to fix that? Because the answer should not be, "Well, if you are a woman of childbearing age, do you choose to go there? Do you say, I don't want to go there anymore?" That now becomes a barrier. But also, if you have families or people who want to start families, that's a pretty significant population of our military.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, I promise you this, AFA will continue to be engaging actively with Congress, Senate and House Armed Services Committees. It really comes as a matter of priority for funding in many ways and filling requirements for OBGYN professionals, doctors and nurses to take care of our force, to take care of our Guardians and our Airmen. And I would offer that we're directly engaged with DHA, Defense Health Agency, in that as we centralized care to DHA, we've got to constantly pay attention to, for us, for the Air & Space Force Association, Department of the Air Force requirements and the Department of the Air Force family requirements. So we're all in. Well, I'll ask the audience to raise your hand if you have a question. And I'm looking at Amy for the first question. And go ahead please.

Greg Hadley:

Greg Hadley with Air & Space Forces Magazine. I wanted to ask, each of you brought up fitment and equipment as an important issue and moving-

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

I'm going to stop just a minute, Greg. Can we hear him? Is Greg loud and clear for everybody? Okay. Go ahead, please, Greg.

Greg Hadley:

Fitment and equipment and moving beyond this idea of it being specialized, how are Athena teams working with leadership to integrate those concerns or those thoughts earlier on in the process? And how important is it to have those early on as opposed to trying to go back and fix it later on?

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Here, coming up in just a few weeks, actually at Eglin, the Air Force Uniform Office is actually coming down and doing a week-long session with uniform fitment, and so specifically our OCPs. So one of the things they're looking at, we have tons of data on the male body. And so this is the first time they're actually looking at trying to get about 200 women for this event and about a hundred men, and so that's definitely out of proportion from what we usually see for these kinds of events. And actually, their lieutenant actually reached out to the WIT and populated it through those channels, which is how we heard about it.

And so that's just one example where we've got a lot of data out there from the decades that we've been fighting of what the male body looks like, but now how do we incorporate all the different female types and sizes and movement abilities. So I know our Air Force Uniform Office is looking at this very deeply at this point to make sure, hey, we're tackling some of these problems and getting that data that frankly is just lacking right now.

Greg Hadley:

Great.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

So let's go with another question. You're working on initiatives that I understand are guided by something called the five R's. And can we talk just a bit about the five R's? We'll start, I think, with Rebecca, if you could start with what the five R's you're all about?

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Yeah, so I'll take the first three of the R's, and I'll pass on the last two.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Okay.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Yeah, so readiness, recruitment, retention, this is exactly what we're looking at for ARC Athena. Anything we talk about readiness, all of this encompasses readiness. Recruitment aspect of it, what we're seeing in, again, those instances where Airmen are not taking care of, they're getting out, so that's recruitment. Retention, same thing. The Airmen are going to leave if they're not taken care of. It's very simple. And that's a non-gender specific, that is all Airmen. I'll pass it on to Chief Mouche to show off the last two R's.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

The other two R's are risk and resource. So is there an acceptable level of risk on these initiatives we're taking? Heck yeah. When you start talking about female issues, people are like, "Oh, I don't want to talk about it, ew gross." But it's like, "Hey, we're here to stay." Right? We're not going anywhere. And so that's a part of the risk conversation. And then what is the risk to the mission? The risk to the mission is if we don't get female in the correct gear, what is our combat survivability at that point? If my helmet don't fit right, if my flack vest don't fit, if I can't relieve myself in the cockpit correctly, now I have an infection. What do I do? What's the long-term survivability, how much of a lethal weapon am I? That's the risk to the mission. When we talk about resource, that's money, right? Time, money, people. And so any initiatives we bring up, yes, there are a dollar sign attached to it.

It's how do we mitigate the massive cost of that? We are very creative. We try to find smaller pockets of funds, how do we transfer this to that? But risk and reward go hand in hand. And then just to tie up on the recruiting and retention, so when we talk about recruitment, our generation of younger folks that want to come in, they see the Air Force, they're like, "Wow, this is cool. Look at all that neat technology." But then when they come in, they're like, "Mm, this is not so new, cool stuff." And so that puts us at risk for losing this generation of innovators. That's exactly what they are, and that's exactly what we need for our Air and Space Force moving forward. We need this generation of innovators to take us to a hundred years of being an Air Force. This group coming in will carry us over to a hundred years, and we need that innovation. And as an Air Force, we absolutely have to accept the risk, do the innovation, look at recruiting and retention, and put those together smartly so we can attract those folks.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Great. Let me ask you, Meghan, and you've got your own experience, Air Force Academy graduate. So you went through unarmed combat training.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yes.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

And a lot of people don't know, I had to learn this, by the way, as a graduate from many years ago, that when you do unarmed combat training, now it'd co-ed.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yeah.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

And so you're getting an A or B based on whether you can have a fight off with a boy.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

So talk to us a little bit about not just your own unarmed combat training experience going through Academy, graduating, but that kind of training. And you already told me some stories about how women often are in better shape, better fighters than their male counterparts, and that's kind of a change in societal's view. So we're going to take an opportunity to educate society here a bit. So please, Meghan.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Definitely willing to work hard. So unarmed combat, even back in 2006, 2007, just to date myself a little bit, was co-ed. And so if I'm coming up against somebody who's 240 pounds, that's going to be a tough fight unless I'm able to think creatively and not necessarily fight in a traditional way. And so that's part of what unarmed combat does at the Academy is, hey, you can't necessarily go brute force v. brute force, but you have other specialties. Hey, you're maybe more quick, you've got a lower center of gravity. Hey, trip them, man, get them. Juke one way, go the other way. And I think that's something is, if we continue to just focus on skillsets through traditional means and not look at them through a different prism and realize that everyone out there has their different abilities and different specialties, we're kind of at a disadvantage, because we're focusing on just one area of fighting expertise versus the whole gambit. We've got these talents out there, and we just need to make sure that people are being able to use their talents appropriately.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Physical talents.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

And certainly mental talents.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

I would offer adult supervision talents. One of the things I found in my experience, I think when I was a wing commander, we were very early on in one of the first F-16, female F-16 pilots. One of the things I found is the level of professionalism, maturity that women brought to the fight, whether it was training,

socializing, or flying. Sharon, I bet you've got some experiences in that area. How does a special brand, if you will, of female leadership in our operations around the world bring an enhanced or reinforced or elevated level of professionalism?

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Yeah. No, I think... I'll say when we talk about gendered leadership, so many studies in academia out there about there is a difference between how men and women lead. It's just that it just is. We could talk about whether that's because of biology or because of society, but there is. And I think if we're going to create a lethal military, if we're going to sit here and utilize all of the tools that our Airmen bring to the table, a part of that is acknowledging that our leadership styles are going to differ, and to accept that there is no one model for what the leader looks like.

Gone are the days of the patriarch who is there overseeing and just telling us all what to do, and to understand that because our military is also so different and so diverse right now, we are going to thrive under different types of leadership. So no, I think women in general, we obviously... Listen, we are here, I am here TDY, I'm still ordering groceries and making sure that my kids' pictures are ordered for school. We are multitasking machines, and let's go ahead and take advantage of that.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Yeah, no bragged as fact, right?

Maj. Sharon Arana:

That's true.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

I'm with you. We've got a few more minutes. It's enthralling. Chief, as you look at your own experience, about 20 years?

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Yes, sir. 20 years.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Talk to us a little bit about learning from how we've made progress as it would define making more progress, more rapid progress, if you will.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Yes, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Please. and things have gotten better.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Absolutely.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Opportunities abound, I guess, so please.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Yes, sir. I think as we go through... So I joined in 2002, and the Air Force is a second chance of life for me, and I work very hard every day to make sure I pay back that second chance at life. But nonetheless, we have made significant progress. It was only 30 years ago that we had our first combat fighter pilot. So you had Jeannie Levitt, Martha McSally and Shannon Presley. And so that's 30 years. In the course of 30 years, look at how far we have come. Whereas many organizations or some, if you look at our allied nations, they're getting there, but it's just amazing to see how fast we have progressed in the Air Force as far as allowing women coming into those combat AFCs. As far as policies goes, I can speak from A1 side of the house. Oh, my gosh. When General Brown said, "Hey, action orders, let's accelerate, get rid of bureaucracy," I just screamed up and down on my desk because that's my favorite job is to fight policy.

And he just made it a lot easier for us in the A1 community to absolutely just take a baseball bat to policy. And so it's when we have senior leaders there that see that, hey, we understand policy, there's a need. We understand it comes from the NDA, there's law with that, but there's ways we can creatively fix things without having to really just burn down the entire institution. How do we creatively go around that? And so I would say with the generation of senior leaders coming up and seeing the change, and now that they're taking the change of command, that's where you'll start to see the innovation. And it's not previous leader's fault. You don't know what you don't know. And so the innovation, the technologies we have now, we have billionaires who just go to space. We have electronic cars that just be driving around like Tesla. So the innovation that we are going through as a people as a whole is absolutely amazing. So I just can't wait to see where we go, really.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

You bet. Me too. Rebecca, building a bit on your own experience and some of the great points that you already made, could you look out 10 years at the top three combined Athena and maybe Women's Initiative Team strategic focus areas that you would recommend to the audience and to all of us?

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Sure. That's a great question. Strategic areas, I think one of the pieces is the strategic communication piece, total force barriers. This is a great conversation piece that we've had across the Athenas. How do we talk to each other as a whole? Our component we look at, we have individuals from army.mil, and there's af.mil, and then there's civilians. We can't rise on one platform to talk together. So in 10 years, I think on that strategic communication piece that there will be one platform for all. And so this will make it easier and allowable for us to communicate. And that would be throughout the entire world, throughout the entire service bed. That would definitely be one piece, would be the communication piece.

The second part from the STRATCOM side of it would be the tactical approach. So now we're going to normalize that tactical dehydration. It's not going to happen anymore. You embed that into their schooling as soon as you go to UBT, as soon as you go to any kind of CEA school, all right, this is what you don't do, this is what you do, this is how you take care of yourself. You normalize it, so that way you get into the airplane, it's taken care of. It's no longer an issue. The third piece from the strategic side of the house would be the resources, manpower, and readiness for the family sector. That's the largest part for us, and that involves a lot of money. So in 10 years-

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Including childcare.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Yes, sir. That's one of the biggest pieces. And we can't say that that's going to be cheap. We can't say that that's going to be tomorrow, but we can say that it's going to happen. So in the 10 years piece, we know that our senior leaders are backing it. It's just the effort to get it in front of the right people at this point in time to recognize it. And then our force just becomes stronger, because Airmen are not going to stay if we don't have those resources available. They confide it in the civilian sector. What we need is to capture their strengths to make sure that they have accessible resources, and then all of us at the Athenas will be at the head of the table just kind of watching and watching this magic unfold. That's what I would love to see in 10 years, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

That's great. We have a question from the audience. Constance Crips, please don't forget to unmute and we're all ears. Please, Constance. Constance Crips, are you out there?

Audience Question:

I can ask the question for Constance since it's not working.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Go ahead, please.

Audience Question:

Her question is, the Air Force research... Sorry, wrong question. USAF has an AFSC for Cook Culinary Services. Has there ever been a thought to Childcare Specialist, and if it's such a widespread problem, could this be something that is then embedded with our troops?

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Let me go to Air Combat Command to answer that question. Sharon, you've probably looked at that. Maybe, I don't don't know.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

I can actually take that one.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Over to Mouche. Over to the Chief.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Hey, Ms. Constance Crips, thank you very much for your question. That's a really good question. So actually that question came up at our Athena working groups that we had. We have DSDs, so we have special developmental duties. So we have our military training instructors, your recruiters, and those are our Force generators. So we got asked the question, well, how come we can't have a childcare DSD? Well, so we looked at it, and the question is, one, there's a huge legal ramification. Do you want

somebody that you work with to watch your children on a everyday basis? Right? So that was the first question that came up. Mouche, I don't know, I don't have kids. Then the second question came to how do we get them through the training pipeline? What does that look like? Are they military? Maybe we should look at considering how do we get them in the certification circuit?

How do we make sure that, hey, if you want to join the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, or what have you, that we look at certification processes, making those easier to transfer from state to state for childcare reasons. We looked at all aspects of that, and I could tell you from just our standpoint and an Athena that while, yes, it would be an easy fix, right now we're having a hard time figuring out the DSD problem. And so to develop a whole new childcare DSD, that would be absolutely a complete constraint on the cycle and the processes that we already have. Again, go back to resources. Resources includes people, includes a training pipeline, and time. And so I don't think right now as a force we're there. Maybe 10, 20 years potentially, but I that's outside of my lane to speak to. But nonetheless, it did get brought up.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, while it's outside of your lane, you're helping more than you might know. Our Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Gil Cisneros, routinely invites some military service organizations to meet with him directly. So what I'm going to do to swing a bigger bat maybe than my counterparts in the Navy League or Army USA, is I'm going to take this session and I'm going to send it to Mr. Cisneros and his staff.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Wonderful. Thank you.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

And he'll appreciate the input. There's so much content in what you all have described, but if we could wrap up, here's your AFA President and CEO talking to Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. My job, and I would ask for your support. So let's just kind of do a speed round starting with Meghan, a message for Mr. Cisneros, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Man, that is an awesome opportunity. I think if there's one thing I'd like to really push is we talk often about mission and resources, and I can do the mission with less resources, but that's at an increased risk. We talk about that a lot in AFSOC. And right now we've got a lot of people out there who are assuming, honestly, unintentional risk because of fitment, healthcare, and whatnot, and it's honestly just not recognized because it's been out there for so long.

Think of the hair regulation. This changed and all of a sudden then women were like, "I'm not getting headaches at the end of the day. I'm not needing to go to a chiropractor as often." But until that hair reg changed, I didn't know that that's why I was getting headaches. I didn't know that that's why I needed to go to a chiropractor every two weeks. And now I go maybe once every three months. That saves money. And so it's being open to the fact that there might be problems out there that none of us have a lens yet to look for. And so encouraging our people to think creatively and look for those problems and then be willing to listen to them when they're presented to you.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Outstanding.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Yeah.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Sharon, please.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

I would say, thank you, sir, for the opportunity. I think probably my biggest thing or my biggest ask would be just to keep us protected, us as in the military. And what I mean by protected is that here, when we're talking about policies, policies integration, workflow processes, is just to make sure that at the end of the day, our health and safety and wellbeing is what is being prioritized. And sometimes, oftentimes it feels like politicizing pieces of us, as in our healthcare access, access to maybe education or fill in the blank. Then that takes attention away from our ultimate purpose here, which is basically we're here to serve and we're here to keep this amazing nation safe and to be that lethal arm that we are being trained for and just to keep the focus on that and to make sure that we are... Anything else that draws attention from that, we refocus.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Wonderful, great inputs. Rebecca, and then Mouche, Chief, to wind up. Please, Rebecca.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Thank you, sir. And thank you for this opportunity. When we look at the ARC component, I immediately think of the manpower and readiness, what do standalone bases look like? What resources do they need there? Is it infrastructure? Is it building remodels? Is it equipment? Is it personnel issues? These are one-stop shops that we need to look at. A lot of the bases that have abundance or a influx of resources are joint bases. Standalone reserve and guard bases may fall a little bit on the back burner, so I would say take a look at those resources. And then on the second side of that, it would be the insurance. It would be members coming on and off status. That's one of the biggest pieces that I don't believe that there is a wide lens on that senior leaders know about what the effects are, the second and third tier effects of when a member comes on and off status and how that affects their readiness, how that looks like on their insurance and how that looks like on their family. Thank you, sir.

Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Great. Chief, please.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Awesome. I would say, wow, what a humbling opportunity to be able to advocate something on behalf of all Airmen and Guardians. I would just ask to continue to listen, to continue to advocate, and don't shy away from listening to that dissenting opinion. Sometimes that dissenting opinion, you can use 1% of a bad idea. And so maybe that 1% of, hey, let's think about this creatively, differently, and maybe let's use that to move forward. Because moving forward, we are going to need that innovation. We're going to need that systems too thinking. It's going to be crucial. So I would just say continue to listen, continue to advocate, and thank you very much for this opportunity.



Bruce "Orville" Wright:

Well, thank you. As we say across your Air & Space Forces Association, we're on your wing, ever higher and faster, including whole earth orbit. It's been a fascinating day. Our next Air & Space Warfighters in Action event is July 10th, and we're going to sit down with Brigadier General Luke Cropsey, who has the lead on behalf of the Secretary of the Air Force for JADC2, and all things around battle management, ABMCS battle management. And so again, thank you to the audience. Thanks again to all of you, the AFA team here that puts all this together. And this, as I shared with you earlier, should be a launchpad to continue to reinforce and support all of you and the incredible work, the leadership you're bringing to a tough fight. It's certainly about what we've talked about as bringing every Airman and Guardian, giving them the opportunity to accomplish the mission at the highest levels of their capability and support of a great nation, as Sharon said, a national security strategy, a national defense strategy, and the senior leadership of our nation. So thanks again.

CMSgt. Diana Scaramouche:

Thank you, sir.

Maj. Sharon Arana:

Thank you.

SMSgt. Rebecca Schatzman:

Thank you.

Lt. Col. Meghan O'Rourke:

Thank you.