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Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Good morning and welcome to the last day of AFA. It's been a phenomenal conference. I am, as he just said, Lieutenant General Caroline Miller. But it is my honor to be here to moderate today's Families in the Fight Senior Leadership Perspective Panel. We are asking questions to our Air and Space Force leadership and spouses covering a variety of challenges impacting our Airmen, Guardians, and their families. We only have 50 minutes, and it's going to go quickly, so let's introduce our panel members for this session.

Voiceover:

Families in the Fight, Senior Leadership Perspective.

General Charles Q. Brown Jr is the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force. He is responsible for the organization, training, and equipping of 689,000 active-duty, guard, reserve, and civilian forces serving in the United States and overseas. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he is an advisor to the Secretary of Defense, National Security Council, and the president.

Mrs. Sharene Brown was raised in an Air Force family and has accompanied her husband on 20 assignments around the globe. They have two sons who have become wonderful young men. Mrs. Brown is an avid supporter of military families and is committed to improving quality of life within the Department of the Air Force, especially for those in EFMP. This passion led her to create Five & Thrive, an initiative that encourages military families to thrive.

General John W. "Jay" Raymond is the Chief of Space Operations in the United States Space Force. He is responsible for the organization, training, and equipping of all organic and assigned space forces serving in the United States and overseas. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he is an advisor to the Secretary of Defense, National Security Council, and the president.

Mrs. Mollie Raymond has traveled all over the world and moved 19 times with her husband as a military spouse. They have raised three amazing children. Mrs. Raymond has long been a champion for military spouses and families, working tirelessly to support them. As the spouse of the first Chief of Space Operations, Mrs. Raymond desires to build a culture of family within the Space Force by promoting family engagements, building connections, and creating a sense of community.

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, JoAnne S. Bass serves as the Personal Advisor to the Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Air Force. She advises on all issues regarding welfare, readiness, morale, proper utilization, and progress of more than 600,000 total force Airmen. She represents the highest enlisted level of leadership, providing direction for the enlisted force and representing their interest to the American public and to those in all levels of government.

Mr. Rahn Bass served in the United States Army for 27 years and continues to serve in retirement by volunteering to support service members, their families, and the local community. He is married to Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, JoAnne S. Bass. Together they have two children and could not be more proud of the sacrifices their children have made.

Chief Master Sergeant in the Space Force, Roger A Towberman serves as the highest enlisted leader for the United States Space Force. He provides direction for the enlisted force and represents their interest to the American public and to those in all levels of government. Chief Towberman acts as the Personal Advisor to the Chief of Space Operations and Secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, proper utilization, and development of the United States Space Force.

Mrs. Rachel Rush is a psychiatric registered nurse with specialized experience in adult, adolescent, forensic, and trauma inpatient settings. She is married to Chief Master Sergeant in the Space Force, Roger Toberman. Mrs. Rush is committed to working toward a culture of resilience while navigating mental health resources and services. She is both humbled and excited to serve Space Force personnel and their families during this historic transition into a new branch of service.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

All right, let's give a round of applause for our panel members. Okay, we'll start this off. We're going to go... I'm going to start with General and Mrs. Brown. With the current trend of inflation in the economy, what resources are available to Airmen, Guardians, and their families to assist with current economic challenges?

CSAF Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr:

Well, first of all, it's a pleasure to be up here with this distinguished panel. Good to see y'all. I think one of the things I would highlight as I dive into this particular question is there's a number of things that have happened over the course of the past several years that none of us really predicted. One is a global pandemic that impacted many of us in certain form or fashion, really on housing was one of the key areas, as well. But it's also the aspect of how inflation has come about very quickly on top of COVID. And so, with that, many of you know, we did make some adjustments to our housing allowance and temporary areas, but we're all going to see a rise in our housing allowance, a rise basic allowance for subsistence. Also, a rise in our pay raise. But that doesn't do it all. The other aspect we're really trying to do is be a little more working with OSD in looking at the local rental markets to have a better sense of how quickly the housing market is changing, so we can have a little bit more adaptable system.

The other piece we're also looking is, as we're making adjustments in COLA. The COLA adjustments were made about a year ago, the decision. It's also impacting at the same time as we're seeing inflation. So, we're looking at how we slow that pace down and again, have a more adaptive pace. And then, just this past week, there's been some engagement within OSD to take a look at, for some of our families, or those at the lower end of the pay scale, a potential for a kind of a one time outlay of money to help support those families to really get them back on track. But it's something we're going to have to continue to pay attention to and really engage in, not only hearing from our Airmen and our families, but at the same time, things we can do internal to the Department of the Air Force. But there's many times, things we'll have to do within OSD and the Department of Defense to make some of those changes.

Sharene Brown, Spouse of CSAF Brown:

He almost forgot me. So, I just wanted to say, in addition to some of those adjustments that are being made at the headquarter level, what we don't recognize oftentimes is there are a lot of resource and programs that we have that's currently already in place. Sometimes, we forget that even at our local level at our Military Family Readiness Center, the name has just changed from Airmen and Family to Military Family and Readiness Center, there might be programs and resources that are out there. And I would suggest highly for some of our spouses that are in the crowd and families, think about reaching out to the key spouses that are out there. They might have some ideas as to how to combat some of these challenges that you're facing because sometimes, the combination of all these things are high stressors. And so, how we react to them can change how we feel emotionally about some of these things.

Reaching out to our key spouses, if you feel like things are affecting your family, there might be programs out there for you to better engage with your kids about how these things are affecting you. You don't think that they have a ripple effect, but they really do. The stressors as to how you engage, maybe that's an opportunity for us to go look at that spouse resiliency page that's on the website on the airforce.mil website. Take a look at some of those things that might be able to help you. Yes, I realize in the moment, the housing crisis, the inflation that's going on, they have a toll on us. The other thing is we have key spouses that are out there. You just don't know what kind of programs they might have available to be able to contact them, get in touch with them. They may be trying to reach out to you.

So, as you think about these things, there are ripple effects that happen as a result of this. And we don't want this to really affect you, but we do have the programs that are available, and if you could just reach out to different people, the key spouses, maybe even the resiliency page, finding out what kinds of things might be able to help you feel like you can take this all in with a little bit of stride, then I think we'll be a little bit better for that. Because as you know, sometimes this is a rollercoaster ride. We don't know what kinds of things are going to be happening down the road, and we want to be better prepared as we go forward. So, with that, I'll turn the mic back over.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Thank you. Just a real quick follow on. What resources are available both off and on the installation for childcare?

CSAF Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr:

Well, for childcare, this is an area that we've heard loud and clear from our Airmen and families on providing childcare. It has been a challenge. And it's not only what we do on our brick and mortar, actually having the facility, but it's also the aspect of actually having qualified talent that wants to work in our childcare facility. One of the things that we did was took a look at the wages across the board for childcare providers that work in our child development centers and got that to a level of about \$15 an hour, if I have that number correct. But it really matches up against what's happening in the community. At the same time, it's our home care program, as well. It's childcare in your neighborhood. Also, being able to share a childcare spot, as well. And the last piece is really working with our community, as well. And there's also the money we put into fee assistance and that was a lot of our Airmen and families have taken advantage of that fee assistance program to help defray the cost, particularly if they're off base because, as was talked about on one of the panels in yesterday, about 70% of our Airmen and Guardians and families do not live on base. And so, it may not be convenient, depending on who's dropping off the kids, to go back to the base. Maybe better to do that in the community. And this is why we really appreciate the work from our civic leaders to help us focus on childcare in the community.

Sharene Brown, Spouse of CSAF Brown:

Okay. I'll hold it up a little bit. So, I just wanted to highlight, we have several programs, and believe it or not, we have, for Molly and I, we have the opportunity to sit down with our child and youth programs director. And we often have the opportunity to come back, and we go on base visits and go out and share with, or at least listen to some of our families when we're out on visits with our other halves. We hear some of the issues and challenges that are out there, but the child and youth program director is trying very, very hard to provide the programs so that we can better serve our communities. Let me just highlight just a couple of programs that we have out there currently. There's the Kinderspot app. I don't know if you're aware of this, but this is an opportunity that if members are not using their week let's

say, or a couple of days, then you might be able... They'll kind of advertise. It's an opportunity to sublet their spot at the CDC.

And so, you can do this and it's an app that's out there now, but it's a pilot program. And so, here, let me give you the list of locations. There's nine. They're trying to expand it to 15. So Luke, Davis-Moahan, Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, Andrews, MacDill, Malmstrom, Maxwell, and Peterson. Schriever is also included in that. So, this is an opportunity if you want to be able to take advantage of maybe the spot, and the rates that you would pay are equal to what your particular rank would be. So, it's an opportunity to be able to use that. Part of the reason it's in the pilot program is they want to be able to secure the information that's on those sites.

A while back on this panel, I heard Jeff Bezos say a thing, a quote, I think that followed the military where it's, "Slow is smooth, and smooth is fast." So, bear with us as we kind of roll this program out because we want it to be in the right direction and not have to go back and reiterate or make changes to it so that it will be correct.

The other program I wanted to tell you about is the in-home childcare, which is the program where you could hire a nanny to come into your home. And that, also, is a pilot program. And right now it's located in five locations, Hawaii, the NCR, National Capital Region, Norfolk, San Antonio, and San Diego. Again, it's a pilot program. They're trying to stand it up. There's a couple, mil-to-mil, who are working this program so that they can make it a little bit more accessible and help you understand how it works. There's a lot of initiative on your end in order to find that nanny and bring it in, but this couple that's working it happens to be Space Force and has children of their own, and they've been through this several times, so they want to make it easier for you.

So, we are working the programs. Just so that you know, there's also an incentive-based program that they've given to all the different childcare programs, CDCs, where they can use the funds themselves for [inaudible 00:13:58]. You all know that in different locations, the problems are different. So, how they tackle this in each individual region, or at least CDC, is up to that particular flight chief for that. So, we're trying to find different ways to be able to approach this, but it is difficult. It is challenging. So, I hope that is at least helpful to be able to use some of the resources that are out there. Thank you.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

Ms. Brown, if I could add. I'm going to give a shout out because that Kinderspot app that you talked about was actually developed by one of our very own majors, so kudos to our Airmen who are out there developing some of these apps for us.

Sharene Brown, Spouse of CSAF Brown:

Thank you.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Mrs. Raymond, this question's for you. At the end... Oh, don't worry sir, I've got one for you, too. At the end of 35 years of active service, what advice would you give to new Guardians and their spouses?

Mollie Raymond, Spouse of CSO Raymond:

Thank you. Thank you for the question. First, I'd just like to say thank you to Air & Space Forces Association for the inclusion of spouses in attendance and virtually. And welcome, spouses. Thank you for that opportunity. And yes, I can't believe 35 years as a military spouse and almost 39 years for Jay.

And it's been a great, great life. I wouldn't trade it for the world. I do have some nuggets of advice, but I'll stick to just three ideas that I would like to share today.

And the first is to know your resources. And life, as Sharene mentioned, military life can have many, many challenges, but there's help for you. I always, every time we moved, went to the Military and Family Readiness Center and attended Heart Link. And yes, do it at every location because you're going to build your network of support that way. You'll learn the who the subject matter experts are. And then, you can also help other people to know who they are. And there's so many wonderful programs there. There's employment assistance. There's transition assistance, relocation assistance, military and family life consultants, and financial readiness consultants who can help you do a personalized budget. I mean, there's so many things there. Heart Link is awesome, especially I like to recommend that for our inner service Guardian spouses so that they can learn what resources are available within the Department of the Air Force.

Second nugget would be to embrace change. I have to admit, I complained a lot at the beginning of many of our moves. I grew up same home, never moved, had never had to transition and build my life over continually. But when I learned to embrace change, embrace new locations, there's always new opportunities. And I firmly believe, as far as our children, we really struggle with a lot during the years. But they're young adults now. I believe they're the product of the experiences that they had and the people that they met. And I couldn't be more prouder of their resilience and their worldly views that they can contribute in their workplace right now and their compassion. So, embrace change.

And then finally, one of the core values for the United States Space Force is connection. And it is so important to connect where you are in your units, connect with your Guardians, connect with your Airmen, show up to retirements, show up to promotions, host a potluck, go to potlucks, go to a 5K run. It's how you make your life fun and enjoyable, and it's how you get support, and then how you can offer support.

I want to share a quick little story. This summer Jay and I had the privilege to attend BMT graduation. And it was the first graduating flight of Guardians. The only Guardians in the flight. And we were standing taking pictures afterwards with the family and, excuse me, their daughter was just graduating from BMT as a new Guardian, had just graduated from high school a few months prior. And we were standing, had pictures with her family, and her little brother was probably about 10. And after the picture, he looked up at Jay and said, "Please take care of my sister."

So, think of your Guardians that you work with, your Airmen that you work with as your sister, your brother. We have the opportunity, and you can think of Jay and I as your grandma and your grandpa. It is what it is. But we have, in the Space force, this opportunity with our size to build and cultivate that family-like culture. And it's an opportunity of a lifetime, and it's a privilege of a lifetime. So, thank you.

CSO Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond:

Thanks, Grandma.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

All right, Chief Bass and Mr. Bass. A constant challenge for Airmen and Guardians are the deployments. What advice can you give to families to help in support in keeping them connected during deployments?

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

Well, we are not your grandma and grandpas. Just put it out there right now. I still feel young, Ms. Raymond. I still feel young. I'm going to turn the mic over to my husband, Ron, since you might have

thought about this a little bit more, only because, right, you've done five one-year deployments in the Army, five one-year deployments, folks. And then, certainly when I was deployed, you were raising our two girls, and they had ponytails on all sides of their heads. And I had to learn to be okay with that. And I had to learn to see that you guys ate at Pizza Hut quite a bit because I saw that on USAA. But while I think about this question, because I was still thinking about grandma and grandpa, I'm going to turn the mic over to you, and then I'll figure something out really clever. Okay?

Rahn Bass, Spouse of CMSAF Bass:

Right. So, staying connected. Staying connected with your community, but staying connected as a family, I think, is more important. And I think it just requires that honest conversation with your significant other and really knowing that individual because when you deploy, if there are kids in the house, that service member that's deploying, hey, you are the relief when you come home from work. So, I think you just have to really, really sit down and have that conversation, know everyone's strengths and weaknesses.

If you do have school-aged kids, you need to understand, and I don't want to steal anybody's thunder, but you really do need to understand the school liaison officers. You really do need to engage the military family and life counselors because if you have kids, it's not only impacting the spouse, but it's impacting the kids, as well. We were very fortunate when we were in Mississippi to have a very active military family life counselor engage me the first day of school, engage my daughter throughout the school year. As a first sergeant, I've always talked about them and shared that info with my service members and their families, but to actually sit there and have one present and show up and actually doing the things that they're supposed to do to support our families was huge for us in Mississippi.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

But how did we stay connected?

Rahn Bass, Spouse of CMSAF Bass:

So, we're a little older, not quite grandparents, but when we were down range, we were able to do videos. We were able to read stories to the kids, share those things, but more importantly, just talk about our days because it's Groundhog Day, really on both sides. There's the mission down there, and then there's the life back here. So, sharing those things. But I would have to say, I'm going to go back to a statement she made earlier about us deploying. And I had the little girls, and unfortunately, I just don't know how to do hair. But there were some strong people in our community, in our church, that I was humble enough when they offered to take them up on that to even have a... Because we have two daughters. So, to even have a girl's day, things that I can't do. So, I really enjoyed that. That was huge, honestly. And it was always right on time when I was about ready, tapped out, you get these offers. So, it was awesome.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

Absolutely. We were talking about, last night, how do we stay connected? Today's generation has a little bit of an easier time because when we deployed earlier, we didn't have FaceTime. It's fascinating because we can't see y'all, just so you know that. The lights in our faces. But I mean, how many of y'all remember the days where you had to go and wait outside of... There's like one phone booth, right?

Audience:

Yeah.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

You had 10 minutes per phone call, and you were waiting on the other person to move out. We didn't have that. But there are so many resources available to his point, right, with it, for the person who's back home, but also to down range. I remember the USO. I'm a big fan of the USO. And we always used to take opportunities to do videos to connect with our families. And I'll never forget. You used to do videos and read to our kiddos, and it was pretty fun for me to then play the video and let our kiddos read it with the book. And you never quite said the words right. And I could see that on the video. And I'd be like, "I'm not going to tell my kids. They know that Dad's a rockstar." But anyway, there's lots of ways to stay connected. Count on your neighbors. Count on your community. Count on your coworkers. And that is a great way, but never forsake spending that quality time with your significant other.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Thank you. Thank you. All right, Chief Towberman and Ms. Rush. You both have a positive reputation for taking care of people. How do you balance that commitment with Rachel's career and your relationship?

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

We're like the cool aunt and uncle by the way? I just want to point that... It's pretty obvious. You know the one, right? And they go, "Hey, Mom. I want to go hang out with Auntie Rachel." And Mom's like, "No. She's too cool. We're shutting that down." I can't even remember the question. [inaudible 00:25:51]. One, I remember.

Rachel Rush, spouse of CMSSF Towberman:

Okay.

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

One, because I was trying to be funny. And two, because I'm in the presence of my beautiful wife, and she makes me speechless. Rachel hates this. There is nothing she hates more than a spotlight in her face.

Rachel Rush, spouse of CMSSF Towberman:

30 of them.

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

So, I listen to the wonderful introduction, and I can't wait for the day when people say I'm the husband of Nurse Rush instead of the other way around. Rachel's career, the difference that she makes in the world, is easily as important as what I do. And I think that everything we do to navigate this together begins with that understanding and that kind of embracing of that truth. We're a team, and we do everything together. I'm going to get in trouble later by myself, but everything else we do together. And so, I think that's where it starts, and you find that kind of equilibrium, that harmony. I don't know that they'll ever be balanced. It's hard to be a nurse. It's crazy schedules that you work, and we'll just get out of sync.

And so, it's really, it's about finding the kind of perfect, perfect moments, and then amplifying them like we do. I mean you got to see one of the cats. We've got three cats. It's literally all we talk about. If you live with three cats, it's living with a sitcom. It's just amazing. But I mean you always pick the stuff. I

don't know if you want to talk about the things that we do together to stay connected and invest in each other, since Joe got to play interviewer, so I thought I'd try it. I'm getting a look. I'm just going to do this.

Rachel Rush, spouse of CMSSF Towberman:

Oh, man. So yes, I do think that the stresses of this normal life, the unique stresses of the military can definitely take its toll. We both do work full-time jobs, and he's away a lot. And so, I am caretaker of my three furry babies, and it can be really stressful. So, I think Toby and I navigate this pretty well because, ultimately, we are very candid and honest with one another. We tell each other what we need. We tell each other what works for us in ways of comfort and what doesn't. I think a lot of times people forget that each person has a very unique mind and that that is a product of DNA and a lifetime of experiences, good and bad. And so, Toby's very rational and objective. And I'm extremely anxious, and I catastrophize things. So, something that may be very stressful to me, something as benign as public speaking, Toby's just like, "This is awesome."

And so, we engage with things in a very different way. But what I love about our relationship, he is my best friend and my little teammate, and I can come home and if there's something that's worrying me that he may think is kind of ridiculous, I'll say, "Hey, I'm worried. I need to talk about it." And so, we'll sit on the couch, and I'll tell him this thing that happened to me. And he's able to ultimately help me find peace, and oh, I'm going to cry, and that's just so beautiful.

But on a more fun note, what do we do as companions to de-stress our life and ultimately bring joy in our lives? And I think that we have found a way. We love word play. We're both linguists. Saturdays, because I work every Sunday, so on Saturdays we do ridiculous things like take our cat for a stroller ride. That happened. It happens a lot.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

[inaudible 00:30:56].

Rachel Rush, spouse of CMSSF Towberman:

It... Yep. There. And Toby bought this RV van, so he's very excited about it. And we'll take short day trips and just jam out to Phil Collins and Lionel Richie and just live our best lives. And you need somebody that is able to share those moments with you and know what brings peace and happiness in your life. And I mean, that's how you get through it because it's very hard to do alone. You can try, and some people are very successful, but I definitely do better having him by my side.

CSO Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond:

Now that our playlists, we're slightly less cool, aunt and uncle.,

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

I'm not sure I've ever seen a cat in a stroller.

CSO Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond:

Lionel Richie and Phil Collins. That's

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Okay. All right, General Raymond. What are the main challenges for Guardians families and what is the Senior Space Force leadership doing to address those challenges?

CSO Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond:

First of all, I want to go hang out with the crazy aunt and uncle in the van listening to Phil Collins and Lionel Richie. I think there's three challenges I'd highlight. First is we're new. And I'll tell a story. I was in the Pentagon, and I saw somebody walking around, and they're looking at pictures and I said, "What are you looking at pictures for?" "I need to know how to wear my uniform." They came in from another service. They didn't know where everything went on an Air Force uniform that... And so, little basic things that we just take for granted about, well not about, 895 folks that have transferred in or in the process of transferring in have to learn everything. And that also adds a layer of stress on families who are building new career paths. They're going to bases that they may never have gone to before.

So, all of that newness brings a level of stress to it. And so, the way we've been working to help de-stress that a little bit is to over communicate. And so, Mollie, every month... It's interesting. Mollie sends out a newsletter every month. I send out a newsletter every month. Mollie's newsletter gets rave reviews. Mine is like delete. So, if you want to read anything, read hers. But it's trying to communicate to the force things that we're doing and just bring this sense of connection and awareness. But I'd say probably the newness part is the biggest.

The other one is childcare. I don't want to... It's been talked a lot about. One of the challenges that the space community has in relation to childcare is the 24/7 work environment that we operate in. A lot of our operators, especially in Colorado Springs and in Denver. Work on 24/7 shifts and 24/7 childcare availability is tough.

At Peterson-Schriever complex, there's also been a capacity challenge, and there's been a significant wait list, largely because we haven't been able to hire the childcare workers to work in the childcare centers. And that's not at Peterson-Schriever. That's around the country. But in Peterson-Schriever, there's been some significant challenges. What we've done, what they've done, and it's really been pretty innovative, is to have hiring fairs where they bring everybody together. You get your background checks. You get all the different checks that you have to have all done in one-stop shopping. They've been able to hire more childcare workers and have actually reduced the backlog by about a hundred children over the course of this past month.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

And then, the last piece, I would say, is spouse employment. And there's obviously challenges for spouse employment, especially in populations that move frequently. There's a lot of work going on across the department of the Air Force on licensure, making sure that if you're a nurse that you can transfer your licenses from one base to another base.

There's also a program that we've started called the Guardian Family Career Program, and that's an effort to hire Guardian spouses to fill Space Force jobs or to hire military spouses to fill Space Force jobs. As we're building this service, we're hiring, and we're hiring a lot of civilians. About 50% of our force are civilians. And so, we've been doing a lot of work on trying to connect family members to those jobs, so they can stay connected, and they can keep those jobs as they continue to progress throughout the year. We have hired, so far this year, four, and our goal is five. And so, we'll get one more by the end of this year, and we're going to keep that going.

One of the ways that we're doing this, Hiring Our Heroes has a great program that they sponsor to get certificates for different career specialties like data science, project management. There's several others that they offer. And so, Mollie is going to start class this week. Mollie and about 90 Space Force spouses are going through the Hiring Our Heroes certificate training. They're going to get a project management certificate, and then hopefully, the goal then is for us in the Space Force to be able to tap into those spouses and hire them to be on our team. I'm about to be unemployed, so we need a certificate.

Mollie Raymond, Spouse of CSO Raymond:

Thank you Jay. Look forward to starting our project management certification course. Thank you to Hiring Our Heroes and Google. And they offer the certifications in five very highly sought after career fields, as Jay mentioned, data analytics, digital marketing, eCommerce, and IT support. So, it's for all spouses, air force, we have navy spouses, and it's going to give us confidence. It was wonderful to hear a lot of the spouses reply back when we were starting this project. I've been out of the workforce for a long time. I don't have the confidence, but doing this together as a cohort where we have study groups and are there to help and support and encourage and uplift one another, it made all the difference. So, we are looking forward to this. We'll see where it brings us. But spouses are so talented, so smart, and they make a wonderful contribution to the workforce. We are adaptable, resilient. We want to work. We have all the qualities that companies desire in an employee. And so, please consider hiring a military spouse. Thanks.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Thank you. General and Mrs. Brown, with the new school year starting and various concerns parents may have to include the worldwide pandemic, natural disasters... I'll start over. Time. ... natural disasters, social unrest, how can families obtain information about their community and about the specific schools to which they are zoned?

CSAF Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr:

I'm going to hand the mic to the expert in a second, but I want to real quickly tell you for two of us how important schools are. I'll just talk to you about just from our own personal experience. Many of where an EFMP family. Our oldest son is on a autism spectrum, and I purposely worked my career to stay stateside for his development early in my career until I became a general officer. It was my first overseas assignment as a family.

On the other end of the spectrum, our youngest son is a high achiever. And one of the things we found out, and we didn't realize it until he was doing us his college applications, but for his first eight years, he went to a different school every year either by PCS or by choice. And that didn't really dawn on us until he was graduating from high school. And for us, that was something to focus on. And I'll just tell you that Sharene is volunteer in high school. She went back to the high school our boys graduated from. They were long gone. We went back to MacDill, and she went back to volunteer again. So, it's really important to her. So, she is the expert, and I'm going to hand that mic to her.

Sharene Brown, Spouse of CSAF Brown:

He's cracking me up. Anyway, the whole process of, for the question as you refer to it, I can't say enough about school liaisons. And there's a lot of folks who just don't know much about who they are, what they do, and where they are. But they're at every base location. And if you happen to be at a joint base that's led by another service, other services have those school liaisons, as well. And so, if you reach out to them, they have a lot of knowledge and connection, specifically with relationships to schools, but in other areas, as well. Because, let's say your child is home and is not feeling well or something happens medically with your child, but you still want to figure out the school situation. They can help you.

They are there not just to do the job every day. Because we all have issues with when you move from one location to another, maybe the credits for the school don't transfer. Or maybe you have a child who's on EFMP, and you trying to get your IEP transfer. They can help you with all those sorts of things.

The other thing I would suggest is try to find out a little information before you even get there. And contacting your school liaison is one way to do it. It's huge. They also have the relationships that go all

the way up to the superintendent at those locations. And depending on where you are, there may be a number of different counties, cities, where the military connected student may be further out from the base. As we were saying earlier, families are not all living on base anymore. They're further out in the communities. So, being able to reach out and touch your school liaison is one way.

Some other ways that are impactful is if you haven't or can't reach out to your school liaison or finding it difficult to do that, make note of that. Call into the base leadership, or there's this little thing called ICE. And I think I got this right. It's the interactive... Help me with that. [inaudible 00:41:57]. I'm trying to remember it. So here now I wrote it down. Interactive Customer Evaluation. Yes, that's it.

And it's on every base installation website, where you can write in, usually by email, and if you want to be contacted back, they'll let you do that. And just identify that you had issues. It's not usually the school liaison that doesn't want to get back to you. It's because they're so busy trying to help other people. And so, sometimes we find that the school liaison in those locations, they're so busy managing four or five different counties and all the people that are there, that their ability to spread themselves out are just not available. So, we want to be able to say, "Hey, we want some more school liaisons in this location."

The other thing I would suggest is, a lot of you do this already, find out what's happening on the school website. Try to see what information is available there because I don't know if you realize, many of you probably do, we have a national law that says, "Hey, we're going to have education," but ultimately, it's the states that determine how they're going to implement their educational curriculums. And it's not just at the state level. It goes down to the county, down to the district. And one district can look so much different than another. So, being able to figure out how that works before you get there is monumental. So, whatever you can do to help with that.

And the other thing I would say is because we talked about national crises that are happening, and right now around the world, we're seeing all kinds of crazy things happening. At every location, there probably is a crises management person who can provide information and usually has a website associated with that. So, if you need assistance with trying to figure out... We've lived in Florida for a good deal of time, and I had no idea what hurricane damage could do.

And usually, if I am correct in this, I'll never forget our first assignment down in Miami. And my husband never lived in the South or in an area where tornadoes were prevalent. And so, I was working at the time, and my husband said to me, "Hey, there looks like a hurricane is coming. You're going to have to pack up and move." I'm like, "Yeah, right. I got a job. There's no way my folks at the job are going to understand that if I leave three or four weeks in advance because they think this is something that's going to blow through." But it's then opportunity to understand what that means, how damaging that could potentially be when you're in an area. So, the crises management person can at least provide you with information. They usually have a website. And they can share that information with you. Does that make sense? Yeah?

CSO Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond:

Could I jump in and pile in on this a little bit?

Sharene Brown, Spouse of CSAF Brown:

Yes.

CSO Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond:

One thing that I wish I would've known as a younger officer. As a younger officer, and we were all like this. We all signed up. We all took an oath. We all want to serve our country. The core value's service before self. "Put me in. I'm ready to do anything." I didn't communicate the needs of my family to my leadership. It was like whatever they need me to do. And so we moved five one-year moves in a row. Probably didn't have to do that. And I think it's important for you to be able to understand that there are ways that we can help take care of your family, and you can still have a spectacular career. And I think sometimes we think that might be against our nature of service, and it's not.

So, I would encourage each of you. And it wasn't until I was a one-star general that, he's been here this week, General North called me, and we were talking about a future job. And he asked me about how old my kids were. And I told him, and he said, "Hey, let's... Not now." And I remember, after I hung up the phone, I thought, "Man, I shouldn't have told him that because I..." And I should have. And lo and behold, it worked out okay for me. I would just tell you, you're allowed to care about your family. You're allowed to. It's important. And we're all big enough that we can find opportunities. Now, there will be times, I am sure, that, "Hey, we really need you to do this." And I got that. And that's what we're all committed to doing. But you can take care of your families, and you need to.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

I get... Feeling uncomfortable here. Anyway. All right. We're going to swing over to Mr. Bass. You are in the unique position to be the first male spouse of the chief master sergeant of the Air Force. And that has come with highlights and challenges. Can you talk to some of those challenges and how you and your family overcame them?

Rahn Bass, Spouse of CMSAF Bass:

I'm sorry. Can you say that... You caught me by surprise. I'm sorry. Can you repeat that question, please?

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Just trying to wake you up over there. All right. I said you are the unique position to be the first male spouse of the chief master sergeant of the Air Force. And that has come with highlights and challenges. Can you please talk about some of those challenges and how you and your family overcame them?

Rahn Bass, Spouse of CMSAF Bass:

So being dual military, I've never knew how unique the spouse role was, so we just did it for the time that we were married, whether it was deployments, PCS moves, or what have you. And I guess you never really have time to look at it from that perspective, but when I retired and I had an opportunity to be amongst these phenomenal, and I really mean that, to be among these phenomenal spouses here, the things that I'm privileged to see behind the scenes, the things that they advocate on behalf of our Airmen and our space force personnel, again, I'm in awe, sometimes.

So, I would tell you the adjustment for me was just being a spouse. And I don't mean that in a way that... I just didn't know. You don't know what you don't know. So, when I retired and I took on the spouse role, it was just like putting on a different set of lenses and looking at life differently and sitting back and watching the amazing things that she was doing and the amazing things that she continues to do. I love that front row seat. And to keep it in perspective for me, I just maintain, "Hey, I need to be a good husband still, and I need to be a good father to my kids." And that's where I keep it at even keel.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

So Ron is... Yeah, y'all give him a hand clap. So Ron's super humble. I'm proud of him for a couple things. One, I'm proud to see an army guy wearing some airplane socks. This has been a big feat. Right? When he went to full-time spouse from army husband and started to go to some of the spouse socials, I had to remind him, I said, "Hey, don't get First Sergeant and don't get army. You're a spouse." But I'm really proud of the fact that he is because I think he's helping to redefine what today's modern military family looks like, which is very different than it was in the '60s or '70s. And we all look different. We have more single-family homes, we have more dual military family homes. We have more dual working homes. We have homes with children, without children, with fur babies. And so, this is normalizing it.

And so for our home, we're helping to redefine what normal is. He doesn't have spouse socials that are teas. I love teas. I want to go to a tea. But he actually has football spouse socials, and they love it. So, I think that this is starting to normalize that we have a whole different look when it comes to our military families.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

Thank you. Okay, we only have a few minutes left, so this is the lightning round. So, basically what I want everybody to do is just do quick closing comments or leave the crowd here with some last thoughts. And we can start with General Raymond.

CSO Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond:

I'll just say thank you. Thanks for your service. It is great to be at an event that has so many active-duty Airmen and Guardians. So, my hat's off to AFA for making the professional development week that it is. And it's not just a professional development week for the active-duty, it's a professional development week for the families, as well. And I just want to say thanks again, to each and every one of you that wear this uniform or wear a uniform of our country. Hats off to you, and thank you.

Mollie Raymond, Spouse of CSO Raymond:

Yes, I'd like to also say thank you for this wonderful conference, and congratulations on the attendance record. That's great. I just like to say to our Guardian families, members, loved ones, you have a front row seat in shaping the future, and remember our core values and know that you have a purposeful, powerful role in developing a fantastic service ahead of you. And Sempra Supra. Thanks.

CSAF Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr:

Well, I'll also echo the thanks, but what I'd also highlight too, hopefully as you heard us all talk about our lives, that we are just like you. And we've had stressors. We're parents. We're brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles. Some people are grandparents. But the fact of the matter is, we've walked in the same paths many of you have. And our goal here is to make sure we make it better for those that follow and come behind us. And that's what our focus is. And we want to really... We're our hands on. We want to get engaged and break down as many barriers as we can to make serving in our Air force and Space Force the most enjoyable thing you could ever do. Thanks for being part of our team.

Sharene Brown, Spouse of CSAF Brown:

I just want to say thank you. I'm going to join the team here. Thank you to AFA, especially for increasing our spouse availability or be able to attend this conference. It's a huge deal for all of us. As we become more aware of the things that are happening with our military members, we can better support in a different way. The thing I would leave with you, we've had a couple of years where we've all been away from one another or maybe we've had just our nuclear family that we've been taking care of.

So, as we come out of this, hopefully, to connect a little bit more, communicate with one another a little bit more. Join those communities, activities, or programs. Because the more you're connected with things and people, whether it's at work, at church, at school, whatever programs, activities there are, sports programs, you get to see life in a different way, and you can open yourself up a little bit more. And when you do that, when one area might shut down, you have another area to go to and open your ourselves up to.

So, if you could just get out just a little bit more and enjoy yourselves and maybe bring that work-life balance into a little bit more equilibrium, I think it'll make us all feel a little bit better. And when we build that community with one another, as the Besses were saying...

I just had to smile when he had went to his friends, his community, to get the girls' hair done. That's what it takes sometimes, the village. And if we could all go someplace or feel like that somebody could step in and help us out, I think we'll all feel a little bit more comfortable. So, with that, thank you so much.

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

I will say thanks, too. I know the Space Force Chiefs are out here and probably, Chief Frasier has already started a pool. They all know Rachel pretty well and they're taking bets on how fast her lightning round is going to be, so I'm really excited to hear who wins later, but thank you. And you've heard it. You heard it from the CSO and from the chief of staff of the Air Force, what they're willing to do. We can't want more for your families than you want. You've got to hold us accountable. You've got to know that they are important. And you've got to see this. I told someone yesterday that the strongest things we say, we don't say with words. Look at these relationships, not just as teams, but as all of a team. If you can't feel the genuine love and appreciation for each other up here, if you can't see how powerful that is, come hang out with us later because it's real. And we want that for every single one of you. So, please hold us accountable and get your stopwatches ready chiefs, because I'm giving the mic to Rachel.

Rachel Rush, spouse of CMSSF Towberman:

So, I wanted to take this opportunity because it will probably be the last time I share a stage with you two, just to tell you I love you both, and it's been a beautiful journey. And thank you for bringing us along with you. Thanks.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

That was fast. All right, we're down to zero seconds. Love takes work. When I hear you talk about that, love takes work. Never treat somebody you don't know better than you treat your own spouse. That's a good one.

And to all the family members out there, thank you so much for being here. To our service members, I want y'all to text your family members, your loved ones, your supporters, doesn't matter who it is, and tell them that their Senior Air Force and Space Force leadership teams appreciates the heck out of everything that they do to support you.

Rahn Bass, Spouse of CMSAF Bass:

Thank you to AFA. Thank you for all that you do. And really, just thank you for highlighting the spouses and giving us all an opportunity to show a side of us that you normally probably wouldn't get a chance to see. So, thank you.

Lt. Gen. Caroline M. Miller:

All right, we are down to zero seconds, but I do just want to also thank General and Mrs. Raymond. Our journey started at [inaudible 00:57:14], and we've seen you... I mean, it's amazing. So, thank you very much. Good luck to you on your next adventure. Thank you all to all the panel members. This was fantastic. So, let's give them one more round of applause.

