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Voiceover:

Good afternoon, please welcome to the podium the 18th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Kaleth Wright.

Gerald Murray:

Ken, I don't think I'm Kaleth.

Voiceover:

No, sir. I don't think you are.

Gerald Murray:

So is Kaleth coming or is it me?

Voiceover:

Right now, sir, it's you.

Gerald Murray:

All right, ladies and gentlemen, it is good to be back with you. And yes, Chief Wright will be joining us just a little bit later this evening, but I have the great pleasure of making an introduction now that I look so forward to. We talked about, and of course, the Secretary yesterday, and I said it earlier about the founding father of our Space Force and that being of course, General Raymond. Of course right beside of him is the second Guardian of the United States Space Force. And back a year or more ago and I turned to Chief Towberman, I said, "Toby, you are going to be the Paul Larry of the United States Space Force."

And I will tell you that the Space Force, the Guardians could have no greater Guardian to be the first Guardian to be able to lead the enlisted force of the United States Space Force. Ladies and gentlemen, it is just an incredible pleasure for me to be able to introduce after three decades of service of wearing Air Force Blue, Chief Toby Towberman. As I said, became the second member of the New Space Force in April of 2020. Since then, he has worked very closely with the Chief of Space Operations General Raymond, to build the brand new service from the ground up. His work is setting the stage for our future Guardians. And ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, please welcome the Chief Master Sergeant of this Space Force, Chief Roger "Toby" Towberman.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Thank you. Sit down. We got work to do. Sit down and stop.

Thank you. I remember when Chief said that, and I've said this many times and I mean it. If the only thing they can put on your tombstone is your job title, you didn't do your job. And so I hope however they remember any of us, and we're all in this together, that it's by our works and it's by the difference that we make in the world and the changes that we make in the lives of Guardians. So thank you so much everyone for being here. Thanks Mr. Secretary, it's great to see you as always. Thanks again for the [inaudible 00:03:05], you're like the biggest rockstar on social media right now. To get above Chief Bass in rockstar status isn't easy, so we really appreciate it. To AFA, thanks as always for a fantastic event. Thanks for embracing the Space Force. Thanks for embracing our enlisted leaders and giving us an opportunity to talk. We always truly appreciate it and don't take it for granted. So thank you so much.

General Brown, thank you sir for being such a fantastic teammate and hiring really my closest teammate. And thanks Joe, love you and glad you're here and glad we get to hang out every day and bang our heads against the wall, it's fantastic, I appreciate you. General Raymond, I remember that day I was working for Mr. Manasco and they said, "Hey, you got to go talk to General Raymond down in... you know where they got the exec com?" "No." And that was the old visiting GO office, and I don't know, a 15 minute conversation, and my life changes forever. And I just really appreciate the opportunity still to this day and you and Molly welcoming Rachel and I. Thanks so much sir. I really appreciate it and thanks. Now one story I'll tell though. So General Raymond calls me up to tell me that he's hired me. And he talks about, "Hey Chief, this was such a difficult decision, and I really had to think through it." And he tells you what... I know what's coming. He didn't hire me, he's going on about how difficult this was. And so I go through all the stages of grief in my own head, in what was probably four actual seconds, but seemed like four minutes of you apologizing. And then he says, "So how'd you like to come work for me?" I'm like, "Wait a minute. That's what you start with." I felt like the guy on the Daily Show, like, "why didn't you lead with that? How'd you like to come work for me?" Life changed forever, sir. And I'm just so happy.

Mary, hi. I know General Thompson had to go back to work because that's what he does. He keeps us afloat and I'll give him a big old bear hug later. Anyway, happy birthday United States Air Force, we appreciate you. Give a clap.

On Sunday, the Air Force cycling team tried to kill me riding up from Quantico. General Goldfein was there on some fancy rig and we rode with the team. And I would encourage anyone, it actually wasn't that bad of a ride from Quantico, 54 miles or whatever we did. Next year, this Monument to Monument thing that they did, raised a little bit money, great advertising and public outreach for the department. What a fantastic event. So I'm really proud of them, and Air Force cycling team for putting that on and then to invite us to be part of it, really cool. So next year, if you feel like going down to Kittyhawk and getting on a bicycle for a few days, it's really worthwhile. So happy birthday.

And this morning General Raymond showed the photo and I was reminded he showed the photo on the plane and the champagne, I mean there's only a handful of us. It was just those of us that were in DC. But what I remember, and some Guardians have heard this story before, but what I remember from that evening was you saw him opening the champagne. Well, there's not glass on the aircraft and so they have the old little plastic cups. That's what we...I'm like, "am I rinsing at the dentist? Or am I drinking champagne?" And so for me on the Space Force birthday and at Space Force banquets and such, I will always look for the plastic cup. That was our beginnings. There was no big cake, there was no big celebration. There was this humble and wonderful intimate beginning. And I will personally always remember it by toasting with a plastic cup. Plus it's a cheap gift. So you can, one day when I retire, just give me a plastic cup, I'll be happy. Not that kind. Not the red solo kind, just the little one that goes on the plane.

So we learned, two great things happen this morning. One we swore in five new Guardians, which for us adds actually measurable difference to our [inaudible 00:07:44], so I was very excited to see them. Like, "yes, we're getting closer to 8,400, we're going to get there, we're going to get there." And then we released a song. And it is really, except for this, there's some sort of apparently really important dilemma the world is trying to solve involving chicken and cold medicine, which is really trending on social media. But except for that, we're doing really well, hundreds of thousands of people have seen the video and I know many people here have seen the video. And so I grew up in the Air Force being told that Commander gives you intent, Commander puts you on the mission, and the NCOs are supposed to rally your team and pull it off.

So we got the intent this morning, we got this song, we unveiled it. And if I look at 36 26 18, what it tells me, is that senior Airman are the effective trainers of the United States Air Force, and that senior NCOs help them. And so Dr. Teachenor, when he still wore a uniform, was a senior Airman. So Jamie, if you don't mind coming up here, what we're going to do is we're going to learn properly, the Space Force song. And I'd ask you all to do this. We're going to warm up with the Air Force song. So this is all inclusive, fun time. But we're going to start warm up with the Air Force song. I'm serious. I really am.

All right, here's the truth. Here's the truth. Maybe don't stand up yet because the truth might take a second. But here's the truth. So the public affairs guys came and they said, "Chief, I'm not sure you want to do this." I said, "What do you mean? This is going to be great!" They said, "Well, we're afraid it might not resonate with all groups." And I said, "First of all, my brand is crazy so I literally can't go off brand. I'm good. And second of all, come on, I'm not afraid of anything." And they said, "Well we're afraid it might not resonate." And I said, "What's the secretary's priority?" They said, "China, China, China." And I said, "And how do you say afraid in Chinese?" "Pa." P A. This is a coincidence, I'm sure. It's a coincidence. I was a Chinese linguist, I'm telling the truth. I said, "Well we're not going to be afraid. People are going to get into this. It's going to be fantastic." I heard us sing the Air Force song in this very room last night and it blew the doors off. So Jamie, you know the Air Force song, right?

Jamie Teachenor:

Yes sir.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Yeah. So we're going to sing the Air Force song. Stand up, we're going to sing the Air Force song first as warm up. Y'all know the words, we don't need to put them on the screen, right? We're following your lead, Dr. Teachenor.

Jamie Teachenor:

(singing)

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

(singing)

That's pretty good. We got the lyrics. Jamie's going to walk us through one line at a time. Here's what's going to happen. He'll sing the line and then we are going to all repeat it back. We're going to learn, we're going to go through it, let's see how it goes. Go ahead.

Jamie Teachenor:

All right. First line, just one line.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

One line. Go.

Jamie Teachenor:

(singing)

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

(singing)

Jamie Teachenor:

(singing)

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

All right. Jamie and I are going to sing a one time through all the way through. Join in whenever you're ready. We're just going to do the first verse right, next verse, same as the first. We're going to do the first verse twice, one lyric sheet. Whenever you're ready, jump in. By the time we finish the second time, it needs to be at least as loud as the Air Force song was. Fair? And then I will sign off all your JQS's and Jamie will help me, and we'll all be certified. Fair enough? Because who knows? Tomorrow at an event we might have to sing this, right? So we got to be ready. Are you ready?

Jamie Teachenor:

Yes sir.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

All right. Two times. We're going through two times. Jump in whenever you're ready to jump in. But by the time we're done, got to sign you off, got to be loud.

Jamie Teachenor:

Ready? (singing).

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

(singing)

One more time.

Jamie Teachenor:

(singing).

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

(singing).

Jamie Teachenor:

Great job.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Thanks brother.

Jamie Teachenor:

Thank you brother.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

That's great, right? It's great!

Thank you. When your brand is crazy, you can't go out of bounds. Thank you all. And see PA was okay, everything was okay. So I'll tell you the truth. This is actually what happened. I did my normal thing and sat down with the PA guys and they said, "you can't do any baby boomer jokes this year." And I said, "but boomer jokes are super easy, why would you take those away from me?" And they said, "Nope, doesn't resonate with all groups. No." I said, "I have to make fun of someone." They said, "make fun of us or make fun of yourself." So I wasn't going to pick me. So I picked... So thank you for being great sports. Sergeant Gibson and [inaudible 00:15:37] who are my wonderful gatekeepers. They rarely write stuff that I say, but they're constantly crossing out the things I can't say right? Keeps me from getting fired. So I really appreciate them.

And to be perfectly honest, I was going to play this whole thing straight, nothing funny today, I'm totally going to be this very serious. And then I sat next to General Hecker yesterday and he said, "Chief, are you talking tomorrow?" I said, "Yes sir." He goes, "You're so funny, I love it, I can't wait!" Oh well now... So I've been directed to be funny, it's not my fault.

So last year I stood up here, and I don't see... I don't think she's here, but we talked about building an orange. We talked about how important it was for the space force that I felt if we got into an apples to apples comparison to industry, to commercial space, to the other services that we might not fare well. That we needed to be unique enough while still being in the family, right? Because that way, not everyone had to oranges, but some people could like oranges and it was really important.

And afterwards the under came up and she said to me, she goes, "Chief, I want to be in orange." And it was really so beautiful. And so what I'm hoping, is that we're going to lay out some things and give you some updates. But of course the goal is not really to get people to want to be part of what we're doing, but to want them to continue to be part of what we're doing. So hopefully we'll give you some updates today and talk through some things and when we're done, all of us that are already in this orange, get to keep being the orange, and everyone else they want a little bit.

Where do we start? So last year we talked about... We unveiled these. And people are wearing them, right? They look great. By the way, they tell me that we've been getting a lot of good feedback, and we're going to start wear testing the uniforms soon-ish, right? Over the next year or so, we're going to really start getting the testing done so that over the next couple years we'll be able to put this service dress on everyone. I would ask everyone to remember that General Raymond and I are incredibly handsome men. So just because it looks this good on us, doesn't mean you're going to pull it off. So get on your Peloton because, I could wear a gunny sack, let's be honest.

But these chevrons, which were still in design last year, are now being proudly worn by Guardians all over. We can't keep them in stock, and we just couldn't be happier. So thanks for you, thanks for coming up with the ideas guys, and thanks for helping us go through the process. I couldn't be happier.

So we also talked last year about talent management and some of the things that we wanted to do and I touched on why we thought we had to look in different places. And why you couldn't necessarily predict outcomes based on qualifications. How do we really find the right people? And so we've been really tweaking our recruiting, and General Raymond touched on a little bit of that this morning. And General Lord said something this morning, he said "who?" He said, "Who are you?" And I thought that was so important, because one of the things that we're doing in this central booking process, is that prospective Guardians tell us why they want to join the Space Force.

And in case you are wondering if their why is to hunt down and kill aliens, we put them in this pile over here. And if their why is, "I want to be part of changing the world. I want do great things. I want to serve my country. I want to help people. I want to enable modernity itself because that's what space does."

Well then we put them in this pile. But to be able to walk through with that kind of intimate look into who they are, is we think really important.

The other thing that we're starting to do, he mentioned we bring in about 520 enlisted folks. We had 41,000, 42,000 people express interest last year. And that 42,000 ends up with the 500 that we selected. I think it's important that we ask questions, not just about that 520, not just understanding who they are, but who are those 41,000 that we said no to? And why did we say no? And are we sure that none of them got put in the wrong pile accidentally or arbitrarily or automatically because of some predetermined rule set that we've laid down that maybe needs to be tweaked? So we're trying to look not just at who we picked but who we didn't pick, and why. And make sure that we know that and that we dial in that process.

The other thing that we talked about last year was that that ever present career field pyramid. And I get a lot of feedback on this chart because I don't remember now because I was dreaming last year. But I mentioned the mollusks on this chart and now this is a really fun word for people to say to me. But this scholar natura, which is how science used to believe things existed, like you could be a bell or you could evolve into a human being.

This pyramid, we didn't like it. We talked about how we could tweak it, and we're working through that. And General Raymond this morning talked about the tailoring that we think we can do with competencies and that's a lot about both the individual and the opportunity. But the entire environment is tailorable.

So on the enlisted side, we don't have key leadership duties anymore. We don't have key leadership positions anymore. We don't have stratifications anymore. We're doing all we can to eliminate anything that could be used as a proxy for truth, that we should be able to learn and know about a human being, if we look hard enough. Because we believe if you look hard enough and you see truth, and you really know the size and shape of the human being, of the peg, if you will, then you'll be able to find a size and shape hole for that person. Is that as soon as you label an opportunity as more important than another opportunity, why would I be motivated for the latter? And so we're moving away from those things, and we're saying it's not about the opportunity that you were given, it's about what you do with the opportunity regardless of what it is.

We've let go of those proxies, of those labels, and that's allowed us to do some pretty cool things. For instance, we've got a young lady, I think she might be here, is [inaudible 00:23:19] Olavera here? I don't know if she's here, I can't see anything. There you are. Hi. How are things? I'm going to clap for you. Nobody else knows why but we'll clap.

So there you were, out in Kadina. Sit down. It's making me uneasy now that you're standing up, sit down. But there you were out in Kadina, and you don't fit. I don't have a requirement anywhere. Your husband's a two alpha, right? He is an Airman maintainer. We need our maintainers. It was important to us to keep the family together. We didn't have a fit, but we did have this important intel job that needed to be done, just this little thing called the National Space Intelligence Center.

So we take a Cyber Senior and CO that we believed in, because she's a leader and she's proven and her intentions are noble. She just wants to be a good family member, and a loving spouse, all of these things are wonderful. I know before I meet you that you're a fantastic human being. And sure enough today at Wright Pat you're killing it. And that never happens if we label you and ignore the human being that's underneath those labels. And so thanks for letting us trust you and thanks for letting me talk about it. Because if you would've messed up then I'd have nothing to talk about. Thank you so much. I appreciate you.

Oh man. So we got a couple other folks on the picture there. Sergeant Laughlin up in the top, another Air Force, Space Force mil-mil couple. Him and his wife, she was the first sergeant. But here's an intel guy and we said, "Hey, why don't you go help stand up this cyber squadron?" And Sergeant Mussick down there on the bottom, He's a cyber guy and we say, "Hey, why don't you go help us with ops for a little while?" We can do these things when we let go of the labels and they're all killing it. And we see this over and over and over again in our new talent management system, that looks at human beings and really tries to find the fit that works.

In the bigger picture there on the right Sergeant Langa, he had this crazy desire to have his wife be with him. She was in Africa, she was in Kenya, and she was just about to move to the state so that they could be together and the process said, "Hey, we're going to [inaudible 00:26:02] to an unaccompanied tour because that's how it works. Or you can quit." I'll talk about quitting later. But thankfully we had Senior Dempsey there, I think still wearing Master stripes at the time, no, she's got her senior stripes on.

We have leaders that raise their hand and say, "Hey, what about this? Is this really what we want to do?" And of course it wasn't, right? They showed courage. One of our core values, we say let's operationalize our core values. Let's talk about the courage to say "why?" Why would we let this happen? Let's talk about the connection required to see it in the first place. So long story longer, Sergeant Langa is still with us. We didn't make him separate, he just reenlisted last week in fact. We found a wonderful volunteer to go to the [inaudible 00:26:58] assignment and we're moving forward.

We do these things because we put them out there, and we said "this is our ideal. This is what we believe." My team gave me a little beliefs, like on Ted Lasso, it's in my office. If you haven't watched Ted Lasso, there's like 75 leadership lessons an episode, it's fantastic. A little study in leadership and positivity and persistent optimism.

But we believe in the Guardian Ideal. And we believe that it's important to remember that it literally is a standard of perfection. It is a principle to be aimed at, it's not a goal to be achieved. We will never be done. That doesn't mean we can move slowly. Doesn't mean we can leave things undone. But it means that this is about continuously improving. This is about our commitment to mastery of ourselves, of our team, of our domain. That's what we get from the Ideal and it's why it was so important, it's why it's such a great book. Over the next few months we'll release the handbook. If you have a better name than handbook, I would love to hear it. I don't really like handbook. We went through all this work to give a Guardian Ideal, I'd love to follow it up with something better than handbook. So if you got ideas, send them our way.

But this will be the long text if you will, that walk through our values, in this really neat way of "I will" statements. The entire book is "I will". "This is what I will do as a team leader. This is what I will do as a team member." These "I will" statements are important because they remind us many, many books that have been written to guide our lives that they're written for us to use for ourselves, not for us to judge other people. To hold ourselves accountable. So these I will statements all put together will be released. It's with me actually, it got to me this week. So we're looking through that book. We appreciate everybody's hard work on it. But I think that'll come out here very soon. We're in the final stages, and if you got a better name than handbook, I'm all ears.

The other thing we're working on is the Guardian value proposition, and of course that's part of what we're talking about as well. What is it? Because it's not just compensation. Man, we have to pay people enough to take money off the table. But like we've heard multiple times a day, it's about mission, it's about autonomy, and mastery, and purpose. It's about being part of something that's bigger than you. We're collecting all that data from Guardians. We're talking to them, we're listening, well, what is it? Because everyone from the Secretary's first words yesterday, all through every speaker, has talked about people. And people are everything.

So we do these things because we need you to keep wanting to be an orange. We do these things because that's the greatest advantage we have. And in particular, to borrow some words that have already been said by all the leaders, but I would drill down a little bit, and I would say that the most decisive military advantage in the history of the world is the enlisted force of this nation. You could probably clap for that, I think, yeah.

I don't believe the atomic bomb is the advantage over adversaries like the enlisted force of this nation. There is nothing, there is no greater delta than the enlisted force of this country and everyone else. And so we've got to be proud of that. We've got to lean into that. We've got to take care of people.

Chief Bass and I sat down with Mr. Wagner yesterday for actually quite some time, we talked about a lot of things. We talked about [inaudible 00:31:34] analysis, working groups. And so since I'm talking about people and I knew I was going to be talking about people. And last week, I had a couple wonderful young leaders come and talk to me. Colonel Moon and Colonel Salinas from the WIT team and specifically from the childcare line of effort. They came to me and they said, "Hey chief, things are getting better. They're not great yet. We've got work to do." And it really made me think, and we talked and I said, "Hey, I promise you if you send me what you're talking about, I'll talk about it. I'll be your champion."

I think this is a great single example and there are many, many, many examples. But on the left, this is the steps to ask for childcare. And on the right are the steps to ask to separate. Now if we charted other things, EFMP, assignment change, ETPs for blah blah blah, and this is right on the enlisted side, we don't have to ask for separate. We do nothing and it'll just go away. We live in a one click world. In fact, we're starting to live in a zero click world. If I get on the right website and take one look at a fly rod, there's a chat bot saying, "Hey, you want to buy a fly rod?" I'm like, "I always want to buy a fly rod. I don't even know who you are and why you're talking to me. I didn't click on anything yet."

We live in a one click world. And we must be retention focused. The technical expertise, the depth of experience, the phenomenal craftsmen that we need to stay ahead of China and to win, cannot be built in six months or a year or in four years. We have to be retention focused. And that means that no one has a reason to quit. It can't be easier to leave, than it is to get help. It can't be easier to walk away, than it is to stay on the team.

I get asked a lot about competition. The word drives me nuts. There's only one competition. There's two competitions. One, against our adversaries, and two, against ourselves. I'm not worried about industry, I'm not worried about commercial space, I'm not worried about other services. I'm worried about never giving a Guardian a reason to walk away. Moving towards meaning is always good for us. Moving towards something is generally healthy. Moving away from discomfort, moving away from stress, moving away from things I don't like, personally our professionally, institutionally or individually, is no way to live. But as an institution, we've got to make sure there's not a reason to do that.

So this really is about building an orange that continues to taste like the orange you wanted. Thanks for being on the team. The one team. And for the Guardians in the audience, I'm right there with you. I would do anything for any one of you, and we won't stop. We used the startup analogy a lot, right? And you went on Kickstarter and you put a little dash in our company, you believed in us. We had a good idea, we had good talent, we were working pretty hard. I appreciate it. I'm glad you put a little in. We want you to get a good return on your investment.

This is what I promise you. I put everything in. I sold my house, like sold my business, quit my school. I was doing okay, job was doing okay, right? I do a pretty good Airman. I traded it all in for this. I will never leave you. I will do everything I can until my last breath to build a space force that you deserve. And for the Airmen in the room and especially for the 10,000-ish Airmen that support our missions, we love you just the same. And we couldn't be here without you. So thank you for being on the team. Thank

you for being great teammates in the building. We absolutely have to continue to do this together. We can't do it without each other. We can't do it alone. I hope that the orange tastes good tomorrow, but certainly today I would say thank you. I appreciate y'all and from the bottom of my heart, Semper Supra. Thanks everybody.

Gerald Murray:

Chief Towberman, thank you so much. It's an absolute pleasure to be able with a token of our appreciation with the 75th coin that commemorates, our Air Force and your recognition, there of that. My old boss, General Jumper said yesterday, and often talks about the vertical integration of air and space. And I will tell you, your comments and the talk and discussion with that, you and Chief Bass are working collectively together. Not only what you have taken from your years of experience in our Air Force, but what now you're able to give back, and with your integration with Chief Bass that is making and will continue to make our great enlisted Force of Air and Space even greater. Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, Chief Towberman.

