



Kathleen Ferguson:

Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks for being here for the last session of the day. Quiet audience. Thank you, thank you. I'm Kathleen Ferguson. I'm going to be your moderator for today's panel, United Forces and Families. And I'm on the AFA Board. I am a career Air Force civil engineer. I was a Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Installations, Environment, and Energy. I was a military spouse and now I work on the outside supporting military families and communities by working with defense communities. So I'm really honored to be here today to welcome you to this panel titled United Forces and Families: Communities in the Fight.

Today, we gather to explore the critical role that communities play to support our military members and their families. This is not a new relationship. Defense communities have supported our Air Force for over 76 years. They donated land for our bases. They worked to mitigate encroachment and environmental challenges, and they have supported our members and their families in many different ways.

Today, we're going to create awareness of the primary challenges families face today and how communities can help, that these creative solutions require collaboration from the Air Force, local communities, and the Congress, to communicate Air Force efforts to increase readiness and resilience of installations, and Air Force efforts to enable family readiness and resilience and to identify what communities are and can do to help. This panel brings together a diverse group of individuals, and through their experiences and insights, we hope to shed light on these issues. And as we saw in the last video, stronger families make stronger forces.

Now, I'd like to briefly introduce our panel members, Mr. Alex Wagner, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Dr. Ravi Chaudhary, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Energy, Installations, and Environment. Mrs. Janet Driggers, Advocate for Military Spouses and Families. I think I know who the favorite panelist is going to be. She's the spouse of the 502nd Air Base Wing Commander in San Antonio. And finally, Jeff Hoagland. He's a member of the Air Force Chief of Staff, Civic Leader Program, and President and CEO of the Dayton Development Coalition. I guess we're going to have to measure that.

So first, I'm going to ask Honorable Wagner the first question. So Mr. Wagner, now that you've been the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs for a little over 15 months, we sat on a similar stage together last September, can you share with us some of the issues you and your staff are working on behalf of military members and their families? And are you seeing some examples of what communities are doing to help?

Alex Wagner:

Well, I'm so excited to be here, and thanks again for AFA for hosting me. I wasn't sure if I was going to get an invite back after last year. It was the last session of the last day and I tried to bring my A-game energy, and so I'm going to try to do that also today. So listen, the Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs is kind of like a private sector company's CHRO, Chief Human Resource Officer and also Chief Talent Management Officer plus plus plus. And so I often joke that my portfolio starts with getting kindergartners interested in STEM so then maybe one day they could be a DAF civilian Airman or Guardian all the way to assessing whether or not a two-star General who passed away 50 years ago, and by the way, this is a real case, should be upgraded to four stars and everything in between. Oversight of the Air Force Academy, education, professional military education, schools, quality of education, childcare, healthcare, spouse employment, talent management, promotions, discipline, military prison time, everything in between.

And so the portfolio is incredibly vast, it's incredibly rewarding. And what I'm really laser-focused on is creating a quality of life and a quality of service so Airmen and Guardians can do two things, be focused



on the threat, be ready at any time, and be so frightening that no one dares, dares go after the United States of America, our allies, and friends. And so everything that I'm doing is focused on lethality. When Airmen and Guardian are focused on their work, they have confidence that their kids are in the right school, that their spouses are taken care of. They're not worried about economic security. When they are having challenges, they have access with low barriers to entry to the right resources. And so I have a whole host of things I can talk about today that we've made progress in and the last year plus of this administration under the leadership of Secretary Kendall, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, CQ Brown and Chief of Space Operations, Salty Saltzman. I can't wait to talk about it, but I'll let some other people get a word in edgewise first.

Kathleen Ferguson:

We'll come back to you. Thanks. Next, Honorable Chaudhary, you have a really unique background for panelists. Not only are you a Senate-confirmed appointee, political appointee, you also served as an active duty Air Force officer for 21 years. Thank you for your service and your continued service. And you flew C-17. And during those 21 years, I'm sure you personally challenged many of the issues that folks in this audience are facing today. So you've been your role now for five months, and I know from talking to your staff here, on the road a lot meeting with military communities and military members and their families. So one thing we'd like to know is, as you traveled around and you're creating your ideas of moving forward, what's your vision for how communities can help families on installations?

Dr. Ravi I. Chaudhary:

Yeah. Thank you for that, Kathy. And once again, thank you to AFA, AFA leadership for having me here. Thank you for being here today and participating in this vitally important conversation. So thank you for the brief intro. A little bit of what we do at Energy, Installations, Environment is it's apropos because we start with one thing, energy. We bring energy to our Air Force and make sure that we're ready at our installations to go to war at a moment's notice. It's simple as that. But a big part of our installations are the people that execute on them, the families that live on them, the infrastructure, the homes that they live in, housing, where you work, what you do. All those are connected to my portfolio and why I'm so committed.

I came to this job for one reason, because I want to have another chance to serve the men and women who give their all every single day. It's that simple and it's personal to me because I've lived it. To share a short story of my experience, when I was at an installation, my son was diagnosed with autism. We needed a base housing environment in which my son could be free from challenges to allergies, special dietary needs, and we just needed that level of support. And so what can communities do for that? I'll just give you a little cross-section of that. Ensuring they have daycare, daycare facilities that work for our families, houses that are befitting of the service of our military members. And that's a key portion of my key priorities and why we're staying laser-focused on that standard. Not just housing, but housing befitting of the men and women who serve. And that's what I focused on in my first few months.

And how do we get there? One, I've got to talk to you. So I've been to roughly 20 installations and every single installation I make sure I spend lunch with or have a coffee with two groups of people. One, our first-term Airmen to understand what their conditions are. And two, our families and especially our spouses so I can hear their feedback on what steps we need to take first. So my strategy, which I'm going to be announcing publicly in the next couple of days, is going to be centered on that one statement, ensuring all the men and women who serve have facilities and living conditions, befitting their service.



Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you, Mrs. Driggers, as the only military spouse on this panel, we're very anxious to hear your story. And can you tell us a little bit about your experiences over the last 25 years as both a military spouse and a mom, and also tell us a little bit about what you've been involved in since you moved to San Antonio in the 502nd Air Base Wing.

Janet Driggers:

Sure. Hello. Hi, everyone. I want to say thank you, first of all, the F2 arm of AFA, incredible, thank you so much for giving spouses this opportunity, and families. So wonderful. Thank you. Okay, well, a little bit. First part of the question, on Thursday, it will be 27 years that I married my then Lieutenant Driggers and we hopped in a car, drove across the country. He started pilot training the next week. It was my first time being away from family. It was my first experience at all with the military. I was young, I was confused, I was scared. I remember sitting in a billeting room trying to make a medical appointment, and when the person on the other end of the line asked me what my last four was, I panicked and hung up the phone. I had no idea what they were talking about.

But over the course of these years, I've reinvented myself every single time we've moved to a new base. And it really wasn't until my husband started being given the opportunity to hold command positions that I really found my passion. And that was for mentoring those younger spouses that might be sitting alone in a billeting room, not figuring out what their last four is. And so I've really been appreciative of my husband's positions because they've given me a unique voice and a unique position to be able to help those younger spouses and help them to thrive and grow and bloom where they're planted regardless of what situation they find themselves in. So that's been a wonderful experience.

When we got to Joint Base San Antonio, Joint Base San Antonio has an incredible alliance. It's called the JBSA Alliance, and it is made up of government entities, non-government entities, profits, nonprofit organizations, and basically, they network and they communicate and they keep a calendar so that different people that want to help the military aren't stepping on each other's toes. In this alliance, they meet every single week via Zoom, and then periodically, they meet in person. And shortly after my husband took command, I was asked if I wanted to come and meet the members of the alliance and tell my story. And so I agreed. And so I stood in front of a room full of about 150 people and I complained, basically. I told them my story.

I told them about every single time when we get new orders, my husband gets very, "Okay, what's my mission going to be? Who's working for me? Who am I working for? What's the battle rhythm going to be?" And my brain is completely different. I'm like, "Where are we going to live?" But oh, I can't figure out where we're going to live until I know where my kids are going to go to school. And my son has type one diabetes. Am I going to find a pediatric endocrinologist that is taking new customers or new patients? Am I going to be able to work? And I can't work, if I can't find childcare. So those same five issues continue to continue to continue to come up. And so when I was asked the Five and Thrive Framework of Mrs. Brown's, it was just fabulous and wonderful, gave me the words, it gave me the framework to be able to voice my concerns to this room full of community members.

And it's not just me as a spouse that's dealing with it, it's my children too. A lot of people who have never been in the military, when we moved and my daughter had to sit the bench for a month so that we could prove to the state that she wasn't recruited for volleyball. That took a lot out of her. She's five four, she was not recruited, okay? But it's just things like that that they pile up and they pile up and they pile up. And so as I was speaking with these community leaders, at the end of my rant, I was nice, but at the end of my talk, I said, "I know how much you want to help me as a military spouse, but have you ever asked me what I wanted or what I needed? How many military spouses are you employing? How



many military spouses do you invite into your boardrooms and meeting rooms and give us a voice, give us a sit at the table so that we can help you help us?"

And well, I'll tell you what, that blew up in my face pretty quick because after that meeting, I had so many people asking me, "Oh, can you come talk to me? Can you come do this? Can you meet with me?" And so I said yes. And I started to go to all these meetings and JBSA is a really big place and I'm only one person. So I reached out to Mrs. Brown's team, her Thrive team, and I said, "Can you help me? Can you mentor me? Am I even allowed to do this? I don't know." And they were just awesome. They were like, "Go for it." And so I did. I stood up Thrive Team JBSA, and now we are that spouse voice in the room in both things like at the MFRC meetings, at working groups, patient advisory councils, all these kinds of things. And so we're sitting in these rooms, we're briefing Five and Thrive to different organizations. We brief Five and Thrive, what nine times a month to every single newcomers briefing of anyone coming into JBSA because it's just the resources are just incredible. It's amazing.

So that's kind of what has kept me busy the past nine months, but it's been great.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you, Janet. And finally, Jeff Hoagland. Mr. Hoagland, can you tell us a little bit about your background and how you became involved in the Civic Leader Program and how has that helped you to understand some of the needs of the Air Force and their military members and their families?

Jeff Hoagland:

Yes, thank you, Kathleen. So I'm an Ohio boy, and for those of you who have been attending, if you haven't seen Ohio on display, I don't think you've been paying attention. But I'm a Cleveland boy, I came down to the University of Dayton, went to school there, and then got involved in local and economic development. So I've been doing that most of my profession. And then, the last 12 years been working with the Dayton Development Coalition, which is a regional economic development organization focused on job growth, job attraction. But really, one of the main reasons our organization was stood up almost 30 years ago was to support the Airmen and now Guardians at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, the families to grow the missions, to keep the missions. And there's a lot that's involved in that. But one of the fortunate things that I've been a part of was I was on the AETC-CLP first, and then I was asked to sit on the AFMC-CLP, which I'm currently on, and then was asked, which we have representatives from AFMC here, so thank you.

And then I was asked a few years ago to sit on the Air, and now, Space Force CLP. And if you could flip up the slides real quick, there's just a couple slides. Yep, there's one. So the group that I am associated with, and it's a really unique group because it's members from throughout the country, various Air Force bases. We all are experts kind of in our own state or in our own region, but we go to various bases throughout the country. We get together about three times a year. And as I said, we all know, for the most part, what's going on at our base, and sometimes we can get probably a little laser-focused on what our day jobs are. But when we get the opportunity to go to some of the other bases throughout the United States and other parts of the country, it gives us a different insight onto what's going on in those bases.

You can see some of the pictures of the sites and then some of the members that are here. But it takes us different places, takes us, really, out of our, I think, our comfort zone and really opens our eyes up to what are some of the housing problems going on in other parts of the country? What are some of the environmental problems? Cost of living, Ohio is a very affordable place to live. So when we're hearing people from Los Angeles or from Alaska talking about how difficult it is to find rental property or to afford it, it doesn't impact the Dayton community as much as it does some of these other cities. So what



it's really done is opened our eyes, but it also, it brings our groups together. If it's the AETC-CLP or the AFMC or the Air and Space CLP, it brings us together and allows us to advocate on behalf of the Air and Space Force sometimes in a way that the government's not allowed to. So it's allows us to really speak with one voice.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thanks, Jeff. So turn to our next set of questions here. And the first question's going go to Mr. Wagner, and I'm really going to consolidate a couple of questions in the interest of time. But we have a question that came in ahead of time from Laura, then one from Maria, and both of them around childcare, the issue of being able to afford childcare and the issue of when you have a dual military family. When you've got 12-hour shifts, how can you work those arrangements and what is the Air Force doing to help mitigate some of those challenges?

Alex Wagner:

Well, I'm so glad you asked that. But first, I just want to talk a little bit about, we talked about the year plus that I've now been in this role, but there's been a huge difference of what I expected and what I've found, and I want to talk about that and then I will put that childcare issue in that critical context. So prior to this role, I used to convene the Chief Human Resource Officers and the Chief Diversity Officers of the Air and Space defense industry, many of the folks who are down on the floor, and talk to them about what challenges they found in attracting a high-tech, competent, white-collar, and technical workforce. And what they told me was that they were looking to become an employer of choice in the competition and the race for talent. And so that's what was in my mind when I came into the Department of the Air Force. How can we make the Department of the Air Force an employer of choice with record high wage growth, record low employment and attract the talent we need?

What I've learned is not only are we, but we have to be so much more. We're not only an employer, we're a membership organization. We want to attract people to this organization, we want to retain them in this organization. We want them to come in, give them the skills, give their dependents the skills, give their spouses opportunity so they're focused on the mission and it's so much more than the typical employee-employer relationship. Childcare is perhaps the most critical element of that. The military intentionally incentivizes relationship-forming and child creation in order to create something that gives people a greater sense of purpose outside of their job. I'm trying not to make news here today. I promised, I promised my team, I wouldn't say anything too racy. It's a real struggle.

So I came into the job and I heard childcare is a challenge. Childcare is a challenge. Alex, we've got to figure out something to do on childcare. I have been laser-focused on childcare since day one. In June of 22, when I was sworn in, I said, "All right, give me a list of every single Department of Air Force installation and what we pay on post and then what we pay in the local community for the average starting wage." And I got it. And I looked at the data, and remember, I work for a data-focused boss. Secretary Kendall is always saying, "Show me the data." So I thought, I'm doing my homework right. And it shocked me, in nearly every single case, with the exception of maybe one or two overseas locations, we paid more, and in fact, in some cases, substantially more than the average local wage in the community.

So what did that tell me? It tells me that something else is going on. So I did some more research and I had my team do some research. And of course, what I knew and what was validated by, again, the data, is we were in the midst of a national childcare shortage as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. People didn't want to go into those jobs and take care of other people's kids because they were afraid of them taking whatever that was in that CDC back home to their families. So as we were moving out of the



pandemic, I said, "It's got to be more than just paying people the right salary to make them competitive. What about the time to hire?" Well, guess what? For those positions that are DOD civilian positions that have to be worked through an appropriated funds angle, sometimes you can pay a lot more.

And if it takes you two or three months to get onboard and pass clearance, then all of a sudden, that paid differential of one or \$2 more an hour doesn't really pan out. So we went to OSD and we got direct hire authority. I then said, "Well, how do we keep the people we've got and how do we incentivize more people to come in?" And so now the DAF offers a variety of recruiting and retention incentives. But really, what I think has made an impactful difference is the Secretary of Defense said, "I'm looking to further incentivize staffing. Maybe the services could offer a discount."

And so late last year, he put out a memo as part of the Secretary of Defense's Taking Care of People Initiative and said, services should offer a minimum 50% discount for direct care staffers for their first child." And so I went back to our grader team, our A1 team, our S1 team, and I said, "I think we can do more." And so we crunched the numbers. And so when the DAF rolled out its policy, we rolled out a hundred percent discount, first child free for all direct care providers. We offered a 25% discount for second, third, and infinitely nearly more children and then offered the same type of discount for the support staff at the CDCs.

Listen, I'm incredibly, thank you, I'm incredibly proud that we were able to do that and lead the other services. But what I'm really proud is from June of 2022 to now August of 2023, DAF CDC staffing has gone from 65% to today, 80%. Now, that's not in every location, but I'm looking at the trends every single month and we're making progress. Our CDCs are the gold standard. Everyone wants in, everyone is not available to meet the CDCs during their opening times. And so we are incentivizing a whole host of other options including family childcare homes, including fee assistance, and we're focused on that to fill those gaps, because again, if you are worried about your kids, you are not focused on the mission.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you. So maybe a little more mundane question for Dr. Chaudhary. So I want to focus a little bit on our community partners and having worked in SAF/IE, when I left the building, we would meet with about 70 communities every year. And the communities are truly dedicated to supporting the men and women of the Air Force and the mission. But sometimes they don't know how to help and what to do. One of the avenues, one of the tools in the toolbox that has been in play for a few years now is the Community Partnership Program. Can you talk a little bit about the Community Partnership Program and how some of the military folks in this room, the commanders, can engage with their community partners?

Dr. Ravi I. Chaudhary:

Absolutely. But before I do that, I want to build a little bit on Alex here. In addition to the work that he's doing from the facility side of CDCs, I am very proud to share that we were making the largest investment in CDCs in over a decade in our DAF. 19, count them, 19 CDCs are in the works to be built part of a larger \$1.6 billion package for not only CDCs, but first-term Airmen dorms. And so this is your DAF doubling down on your quality of life. And so across our offices, we recognize that investments have to be made and we're going to do it including the first net zero CDC, which honestly means a lot because we're modernizing in a way that's going to make us more cost effective in the future. So with that, fist pound, all right, awesome.

Alex Wagner:



Anybody notice the pun? He's going to build upon what I was talking about with childcare? Ba-dum-bum. See, we've got jokes. We're here all night. Don't forget-

Dr. Ravi I. Chaudhary:

Never again on a panel with you, my friend.

That's fine. No, I'm just kidding, brother. I'm just kidding. But let me get back to community partnerships because this is really an exciting time and I want all of our leaders to know that we have got to open our doors on the installation to new innovative ways of executing our mission. And our community partners are absolutely critical. We are looking for opportunities to build upon what we're already doing in the existing environment. For example, at Edwards Air Force Base, we're looking to develop apartment complexes with local communities to make sure that we exceed our housing standards and build them effectively. This is inside the wire, but in partnership with our local communities who are willing to commit to the opportunity to do these. And we're going to build them to standards that meet the needs of our men and women who serve and give them the full range of living conditions to do that.

So other areas in which we're innovating, we're partnering with private utility companies. If you ever had a power outage on base more than twice, it's unacceptable to me. So making sure that we go through utilities privatizations opportunities that allow us to reduce those power outages, reduce the load. But that's also mission critical activity. Micro-grids, we had an installation that now has fully implemented a micro-grid on their installation and that's going to deliver power. They did that all through sustainability initiatives, took the savings from that, invested in a micro-grid. And guess what, at Kadena Air Base, during their recent typhoon, they had zero power outages. That's because they invested in resiliency going forward. These are things that are great for our community. They are partnerships that allow us to build resiliency.

I'm also working in the Dayton area to look at development opportunities that allow us to up the capability of our existing bases to take some of our legacy facilities and get modern facilities to work and execute our mission. So if you're a wing commander and you have not accessed the OLDCC program, the Office of Community Cooperation, and look for those opportunities, everything from infrastructure at your installation to opportunities for better utility privatization and enhanced-use leases, which allow us to seed a little bit of land, but also gain the benefit of greater development capabilities in the economy. All those partnerships are for us and they're funded by OSD. So it's the adage of using other people's money to build advantage in your service, and we're absolutely going to take advantage of that.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Perfect. Thank you. And Mrs. Driggers, if you can answer this one. I know you're a wing commander's wife and with that you may have some access that other spouses may not have. Can you give some advice to folks, the military spouses in the audience on how they can become more involved in community activities to help what's going on, on the installation?

Janet Driggers:

Absolutely. I think one of the biggest thing is don't reinvent the wheel. There are already so many incredible resources, and as far as community partners, pretty much 20% of people in the military are able to live on any installation. 80% are out there in the community. And so fostering relationships with our community partners is vital. And I think every wing out there has some sort of ability to talk with the community leaders. And so just plugging into what is already in existence is, I think, they'd want to hear from you and just go for it. If you see a need, be the change you want to see,. And I see it all the time of people, they reach out on social media and they're in crisis. And I am like, go to MFRC or go do this.



There are so many different resources that the spouses just don't take advantage of because they don't know that they're there.

And so I would just say, be that connector. I'm not the subject matter expert on any of the five pillars of Five and Thrive, but I know who is and I know how to get to that spouse in contact with who they need to be in contact to. So I would just say be smart on who is the subject matter expert and then just be willing to listen and learn and see things, because you can see someone if they're needing help and not being afraid to say, "Hey, how can I help you? Or here's the information." So I just feel like that's what I try to do is to gather up all that information and have it on hand. I have my little Bible with me all the time that I keep all my business cards in and try to keep up to date with what the right information is so that I always am armed to be able to hand over that information to a spouse in need.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you. Great advice. So Mr. Hoagland, I'm going to follow up with you. Janet talked a little bit about communities and what may be out there, and you've been involved in a lot of different organizations in Ohio over the years to help Wright Pat and the other installations. And you've been named a great American defense community, so can you explain a little bit about what that is and what that means and tell us your most satisfying example of helping military members and their families?

Jeff Hoagland:

Sure. Well, at the end of the day, what I think makes a great military community, it's the people. It's people inside the fence. It's the people outside the fence. It's the relationships. It's building the trust from our federal delegation to the state, our state legislature, one's passing license reciprocity rules, school rules. General Miller is with us today, but he had an issue that he brought to our attention when he was at Wright Pat that we're working with our state legislature on. So it's having those relationships with the industry, the private industry. But it's really, at the end of the day, to me, what makes a great community, it's everyone working together. And it seems like a simple concept, and it really is, I think, and that's what I think makes Dayton and Ohio special.

We have Midwest virtues and values, and I know there's a lot of people in here that have been through Wright Pat, have come back to Wright Pat, and a lot of people are retiring and staying in Wright Pat. And what we're seeing in Ohio, when you're hearing of projects like Intel coming back to Ohio and Honda and Sierra Nevada Corporation building right outside the fence, something special is happening. But once again, it's about the relationships, it's about the trust.

One of the things that's very top of mind to everybody is childcare. And we're very proud and excited to know that we have two childcare centers, two separate ones that are going to be funded, that have been funded, that are going to be constructed in the very near future. So that's a high priority. If you could go to the slides, one of the things that to me is the most fun in our community, because there's a lot of hard work that happens in every community, but one of the things we've done in the Dayton community is we've taken on a Hometown Heroes Program where we've worked with the local base because they give so much, not just to our country, but to our region, and it's about the families. So we've done a ticket program where we give tickets to the families and it's all legal. We run everything through the legal attorneys and get the gift letter signed and everything done properly. But it's also about having fun.

And you can see here during the 75th anniversary working with the CLP Group, they asked us to find events that General Brown could go to celebrate the 75th anniversary of United States Air Force. And for you college basketball fans, the NCAA March Madness starts in Dayton, Ohio with the First Four. So General Brown was there, he did something very special that night. He swore in about 20 recruits,



which, I mean, what a special event to be a part of. It was a sellout. We actually had our local Wright State University play, won their first NCAA basketball game that night. But it was a way, we gave out over 7,000 tickets to Airmen and their families, and now, Guardians.

We've done a few things with the Dayton Dragons. It's a Cincinnati Reds affiliate. We've been doing this since my predecessor, JP Nauseef started this with the Dayton Dragons where we do a military appreciation night. We give tickets out to every game where a family gets a kind of a behind the scenes tour of the facility. They go to the game, they just have a great time. You can see here General Richardson and Colonel Meeker throwing out the first pitch at one of the games. And then we love music in Dayton, Ohio. It's a big music town. And we actually have an event coming up this Saturday where we do a military appreciation night. It's a concert and we're giving out a couple thousand free tickets to Airmen and their family members.

We've had big acts like Dan and Shay, and we've got Justin Moore coming this weekend. But we get them right before they get too expensive. And then when they hit it too big, then we can't get them anymore, like Dan and Shay. But it's a simple way for us just to say thank you. And we've given out now since the program has started over 100,000 tickets to Airmen and their families. And that's something that people may think that sports or concerts or performing arts aren't important, but the families in our community and other communities, we know they love them and it gives them something a little bit more to do.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you. Jeff.

Alex Wagner:

Could I just pile on for that?

Kathleen Ferguson:

Absolutely.

Alex Wagner:

So one of the hidden gems I think that people aren't always thinking about is very personal to me because my portfolio is a total force portfolio, which includes the Reserve, but also the Guard. And I think when people are looking at engaging communities, they think about city council members and school board presidents and mayors and maybe even local state legislatures, but oh, the adjunct general of the state, that's a Guard issue or the adjunct general. That's an Army general. I think of adjunct generals as the senior military advisor to governors. So for the wing commanders in the audience, I want you to proactively find ways to build relationships with your TAGs. For community leaders, reach out. They have their ears, the ears of their governors. They can be incredibly effective. And I think it's an underutilized resource.

You think about how to engage your community, think about the state level, think about the governors. I am not only asking you to do this, I'm doing it myself. So a couple of months ago I went up to the Council of Governors and the National Governor's Association and I had speed dating with a number of governors. And I told them where childcare staffing was low, where there are challenges on their installations. I told them where there are healthcare problems and I asked for their help. I need help in building those relationships. I need help in conveying those messages. And I think we'll have incredibly receptive partners, if we can build those relationships together.



Kathleen Ferguson:

Very well said.

Dr. Ravi I. Chaudhary:

I'd like to add a little bit to that. I know we just have a few minutes left, but I really, really thank you for that, Secretary Wagner, because it is critical that commanders connect with their local communities and state and local government. The benefits are numerous. At Tyndall Air Force Base, it really was a partnership between the installation commander and the local Department of Transportation, FDOT, Florida Department of Transportation, that built, literally built an overpass to alleviate traffic onto the installation. We could not have done that alone. We're finding all kinds of opportunities in which we can match funds with the bipartisan infrastructure law and the whole host of other opportunities that the administration and Congress are working together to free up with us. But when we match with them and put our dollars together, there are incredible opportunities to build up infrastructure and our local community leaders are key to matching that together. So really engage and look for those opportunities. We're here to help anytime you need to do that.

Kathleen Ferguson:

So we've got just about a minute left, so I want to just run real quick through our panel members and see if they have any last statements they want to make for our audience out here.

Alex Wagner:

All right, I'll be quick. We've got an increasingly diverse demographic population here in the United States. We have an incredibly diverse military and we put those people into communities that are often less diverse. It's up to all of us to make sure that we've got welcoming communities that are proactive for everyone wearing a uniform, for every spouse, for every dependent in every single school. You are not a military-friendly community unless you are friendly to every single member of our military. We need to do more. We need to keep up. This is our strategic advantage against the pacing challenge. And I want to exploit the power of our diverse military, our diverse Air Force, our diverse Space Force.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you.

Dr. Ravi I. Chaudhary:

Right on, Mr. Secretary. I will add that we have an Office of Community Partnerships. If you need help building that bridge, we are here to do that for you. Just reach out directly to us and we'll connect you immediately. We cannot wait. We know that we're in an era of strategic competition. That means our entire economy, our entire community, our entire installations and the communities surrounding them are part of this. So we need to bring everybody together in order to address the challenges our nation faces. That's it. Thanks for all you do. It's honor to serve with you.

Janet Driggers:

I just want to say thank you. I think this is a wonderful venue. And if you're a military spouse, you just keep on keeping on. I'm so proud of you and we can all do this together and get the resources out to the people that need it. And thank you for your service too.



Jeff Hoagland:

And finally, to the communities that are out there, get to know your bases, get to know the missions, really get to know them in deep. Our leadership, they change every two or three years and they move on. But there's a lot of civilian workforce, there's a lot of others that are there. Get to know them well, but then also work with the congressional delegation because both sides want this to work and the bases need it, the congressionals want to help. We've been fortunate in Ohio, both on the Democrat and Republican side, that they work together and rally around the military. So just get to know each other. And over the course of 10, 20, 30 years, lots of great things can happen.

Kathleen Ferguson:

Thank you. And everyone, that concludes our panel. We just went just a little bit over, but if you can just join me in thanking all of our panelists for being here.