



Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Good morning. Good morning everyone here in person and virtually. It's great to be here and it's my honor to moderate today's "United Forces & Families: Senior Leadership Perspective Panel." We are asking questions to our Air Force and Space Force leadership and spouses covering a variety of topics impacting our Airmen, Guardians and their families. Although our participants truly need no introduction, I am pleased to welcome Air Force Chief of Staff General CQ Brown Jr. and his spouse Mrs. Sharene Brown. Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass and her spouse, Mr. Rahn Bass. Chief of Space Operations General Chance Saltzman and his spouse Mrs. Jennifer Saltzman. Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force Roger Towberman and his spouse Mrs. Rachel Rush.

Each of our panelists bring their unique and personal perspectives based off of experiences and personalities, so we have a limited time so we're gonna go ahead and get started with the questions. So I'm going to ask an open question for everybody on the panel. So let's start with General Brown and Mrs. Brown followed by each couple left to right. So, General Brown and Mrs. Brown, how has the military service changed throughout the time you and your family have served?

Sharene Brown:

Well, good morning, everyone. We're delighted to be here, first of all, and thank you to AFA for allowing us to be here and have this panel to be able to speak to you all. I just thought it was funny that my husband just handed me the microphone.

So to your question, there have been a number of things over the years. You know, as I stop and think about this, I don't know what to think only because it makes me feel quite seasoned, if you will. Seasoned. But as I look at the different things that have happened over the course of time I think about, health care has changed with the mental health programs that are out there and what's available for a lot of our Airmen, Guardians, and family members. Where that's available. The fact that we can talk about this openly. This wasn't a topic that we could talk about initially going forward, and how we're able to connect and what resources are out there. They're huge. What's available at our base installations, and then what's available off base. I think about some of the resources like Cohen Veterans Network. Some of the things that are available just even within our communities, our local communities.

The other thing that I think about is our EFMP system. That's changed and as many of you know, we are an EFMP family. My son will be the first one to tell you that it was okay because we wanted to make sure that... He's the reason that we've become an EFMP family, and when I spoke to him, I wanted to make sure that he was okay with that, and I think he's quite happy actually about that because he has a video blog in which he talks about autism and he's just hoping to increase his subscribership. Then the other thing I would talk, we've made some major changes with that. When we were coming up through the program with him, it was a little bit of a challenge just trying to find out the information because you kind of go through stages with this. You really start off with a little bit of denial. You're a little upset trying to figure out why this all happened and why to us. Why is it even occurring?

But then you get down to business and you figure out you got to do something for that individual, whether it's whoever it is in the family that needs assistance, you're trying to be able to assist them. But we have so many things going on now. The case managers that are available to be able to service our families, the legal office that has information about school, the opportunity to engage with the schools if you have an IEP or individual education plan, that was never really in the realm, and gosh knows, the



opportunity to sit in a meeting and have to talk about what your child really needs is really overwhelming for a lot of our family members. I'll tell you, from my perspective, it really is. Then the other cases, I'm trying to think the other thing that was really new. The family support and what they're able to do, the resources that are available that are there.

And then last thing I will mention really quickly is the school liaisons. The first time we encountered with school liaisons was we were overseas, we were in Aviano in Italy, and I wasn't really sure what that program was because with DoDEA you kind of just engage with that particular entity, that school system. But for our school liaisons, they are these professionals that engage in school related matters. But it's not that just simple definition of who they are. They do much more than help out our family members with, I'm coming from one school to another and perhaps I have, my student has taken a course, but now it's not being accepted in this location. Or perhaps your student is coming in and want to play sports in this one particular area and they can't play because we don't know if they're trying to be recruited or whatever the case may be, or you live in a certain district. Those sorts of things.

But I would tell you, if you would let me share this one little thing about school liaisons, what they do is they engage not only at the school level, but they engage with various folks within the community, and they try to educate the wing leadership with what sort of things are happening with our students in education. The folks at Dover, the school liaison at Dover, this is the, in 2022 I believe it was, was the first time they led a program, a simulated active shooter situation, and you think about that. I was just looking this morning, and I don't mean to bring this down, but since Columbine in 1999, there's been 386 active shooter situations, and so we can no longer just sit back and just assume it's not going to happen to us, and the fact that the school liaison led that effort to be able to institute with a number of different folks involved to include the community to be engaged with that particular event within elementary school and a middle school that was on the base says something to what our school liaisons are able to do.

The other part of this is down at Hurlburt, no, Eglin I think it is. The community had a football team that had lost every single game I understood for two seasons, and because the SOF community is located there, they instituted... The school liaison engaged with the MSG commander, and they decided to do a military action commando team where they brought in the members of the SOF team and they worked with that football team along with a number of other sports folks associated with the school, and so they went through the drills to kind of help the team get better along with the coaches, and from what I understand, this past year, they played their first game and they actually won. All right, I'm getting the hook, so I'm going to hand this over to my husband.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

You can tell who's the more talkative one. A couple of things I would highlight is how we connect. That's what's changed. When I came in, I got my first email address when I was a captain, and before that we spent a lot of time hanging around the ops desk, getting to know each other, talking to each other. I'd say the same thing with our bases. We had a lot more activity on our bases. A lot of that's moved off base, and we went to the club on a regular routine and you don't have that same level of connection, and I just think in some aspects we've gone down the path to social media and I think social media is antisocial. You don't spend time talking to each other, and I think that's an important aspect of how we move things forward, getting to know each other. That's the thing that we've always enjoyed is the friends we have throughout our career where we serve and the communities we've had a chance to engage with, and that's been really exciting for us.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:



Chief Bass. Okay. One of the Bases.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

When it comes to change, I think what I think about is, and we, like most of everybody up here has served over 30 years. Today's military family looks very different than it did when I came in, right? In today's military family, you have more dual working, you have more dual military, you have more single parents, and so I've seen that change, and like General Brown mentioned, we've seen the change in support. I've seen a lot of positive change, by the way, and I think we have to acknowledge that. When I had a kiddo, I got six weeks of parental leave, right, and that was it, and after that six weeks, some of y'all remember this, we had to be ready to take a full on PT test in six weeks. Today's parental leave, we actually probably needed to do a big hand clap because a lot of that work was done by our women's initiative team leading the charge to make those things happen. So I've seen a lot of positive change, but this is one of those things that as leaders we have to very much balance making sure that we keep things on our installations, that we keep connection on our installations, that we keep the bowling alleys on, that we keep the libraries on so that we can have that support.

Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

I keep reminding myself that the Air Force that we joined was over 500,000 people and we decided that we could automate a lot of the functions, and I remember... Now we're our own personnel to some degree. We get online and we make changes to our records. We're our own finance officers. We get on and we get online and we can manage our accounts. We're our own travel officers where we file via DTS, right? Who loves DTS? When we joined, you went to the CBPO to do all those things, so it fundamentally has changed. I think for the better for the most part. But I think it also means that we expect more of our Airmen and Guardians, that they're more responsible for their own activities and it's less about a bureaucratic process and more about what you do, and that just stacks up the to-do list for all of our Airmen and Guardians.

I also like to point out, this is something we have fun with all the time. I tell young people that the Air Force I joined, we had more ashtrays on desks than computers, or no computers. I was in a shop of about 25 people and we shared one computer and fought over it mostly to just type things up and let other people read our work. I don't know why we were on the one computer. We didn't really have anything to do. I didn't have an email account, so I didn't know what to do on the computer, but we had one that we all looked at.

It was a fundamentally different Air Force, so I think that when we look at what the service does now, what occurs to me is that we have cut and cut and cut, and to say that we've cut to the bone is not sufficient in terms of our talent. We really only have what's left of the best and brightest that America has to offer, and now we've heaped on them all of these extra administrative burdens, all of this extra capability that we expect them to do, and we're coming through, and that's impressive to me is how we have managed to shift from an Air Force of over 500,000 to an air and space force that is far less than that, 40 percent less than that now. It's just impressive.

Jennifer Saltzman:

Hi. I've never held a microphone before unless I was probably, I would never karaoke after him, and I will not do that to you all today either. But I feel like there's about 500,000 people in here right now. You guys, wow. The changes, and yes, I think that's one of the biggest ones is, yeah, not having computers everywhere, and it wasn't quite carrier pigeons, but it was close. I mean, you had to go and talk to people and you had to go and make things happen, and it was more... It seemed it was easier to



get together, and the changes though, we all still crave that. We all need that connection, and there was no place in the beginning of our career that we ever would've been other than at the club on a Friday night so you could hang out, meet all of your neighbors, the connectedness, and bowling alleys, love a bowling alley. There's nothing better than a bowling alley burger and a milkshake, so I hope we never... Yeah, I love bowling alley things. As changing obviously and dynamically and with technology changing, but ultimately we're still the greatest collaborating teams and people that are, and families that are still willing and serving every day, so my appreciation to all of you, and this is, wow, you guys are awesome.

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

Good morning. I don't know how well anyone can see this, but as I'm thinking about the question, I'm kind of looking down and I'm thinking something that has definitely changed is the shoe game, like the fashion on this stage with these two ladies, so if we can't see that, we got to get these shoes in the shot, because you would not have seen this in 1970. Like there's no way. This is awesome. I'll tell you what, and before I forget, since Jennifer brought up bowling alleys, because I know there's a lot of wing leadership teams around and our Space Delta leadership teams. If you have not seen what they have done at Patrick Space Force Base with the bowling alley, taking a lane or two and converting it into a gaming center so that they still leverage that burger making machine, it is phenomenal, and so hats off to the Patrick team that did that, and I encourage everybody to look at what they did because it is amazingly successful and our young Airmen and Guardians are really... They love it. It's a fantastic facility. I'll tell you what hasn't changed, that this serving is a team sport and the family is in it every single step of the way. You guys know this. I have the most amazing wife in the world.

Don't clap yet. I haven't told you the cool part. Many of you, right, have shift workers. Rachel's a nurse. Monday, 12 hour shift. Tuesday, 12 hour shift. I might've forgot to mention that this started at eight o'clock this morning, so Tuesday night, awkward conversation. But Wednesday morning, here she is because she's a hero. The thing that's changed I think that I think about is I remember many of you remember when we would stand in line, right, someplace where there's sand in our boots. We would stand in line for an hour to make a 15 minute call on a payphone hoping your buddy's not too close to hear you sniveling. And now in the last time, my 19th experience with a deployment, Rachel's got to watch a rocket attack happen because it happens in the middle of a Skype call. So the technology has been amazing, but there's some downsides as well to that connection, and so I just think we embrace those advances and put them in the context of everything that's happening and do our best to continue to make our relationships better because of that thing that will never change. This will always be a team sport. What do you want to say?

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Okay. Thank you all for sharing. These are great because last year I heard that you rolled your cat in a stroller, and now we've got shoes. It's always interesting. Anyway, thank you all for sharing.

Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

You should see the shoes that she rolls the stroller with.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

I can only imagine. As a follow-up question for each couple, starting with General Saltzman and Mrs. Saltzman, given the demands of your life and your careers, how do you balance? How are you able to balance?



Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

Do we balance?

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Wow, that was super insightful.

Jennifer Saltzman:

I think this is more of a do as I say and not as we do, maybe, because we need you, because you guys are going to be the ones that are sitting up here with a microphone soon, so you do need to balance. It is very important to keep connecting and take care of each other and do fun things. I'm a live music person. That would be my balance. Or I'm a thrift store person. He loves to ride his bike. But right now, yeah, balance. We'll get there. Hopefully next time we'll be more balanced.

Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

Yeah. Unfortunately, it's one of those things on our schedules where you have to literally schedule in balance, and step one is put it on the schedule, and then step two is not to ignore that part of the schedule when it comes up. Easier said than done, but if you don't put it on the schedule, it's never going to happen. And then my other advice is take heart in the very small things. It's the stolen looks in between questions being asked on the stage. It's five minutes of deep breaths. It's a 30 minute Netflix show to catch up where you just don't look at phones, you don't look at anything except each other, and it's those small moments I think that kind of put it back in perspective and back in balance.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Thanks.

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

I think balance, and I think we've tried to kind of stop using that word and instead talk about harmony a lot. I think that's the best you can hope for, especially if your balance is coming through some sort of math equation. It's just not the way that time works. But I think that that harmony comes best, and the boss talked about little moments. I would say undiluted moments. There's too much of our life that gets diluted if we're not paying attention, and diluted experiences are hardly experiences at all, and so I think we try really hard to specifically be present and say, no, this is about us. This is about a real moment here, and if it can't be that long or if it can't be that fancy, at least it's not watered down by anything else that's happening, and that's because you make sure that happens. I appreciate you. Oh, you got an aw. Are you ready to talk yet?

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Rachel? No?

Rachel Rush:

I didn't think this was our question. I talked about this last year. Toby and I, we have very deliberate time together and it doesn't really matter what we do. I'll tell you one story, and this is pretty ridiculous. We take a lot of walks to the commissary. I don't know why. That's what we do though. And we had just watched Footloose and we were jamming out. I had my phone in my hand and we were jamming out to the soundtrack and it was the song when they were dancing in the gymnasium. I don't know, they were



swinging off rafters. I don't know if y'all remember that. Anyway, Toby and I were mimicking this dance routine in the parking lot, kind of where the DV quarters are, and people were in their cars, and I thought, "If this makes it to YouTube." Anyway, so things can be very simple, but like Toby says, he speaks so poetically. It's this undiluted kind of concept. But, yeah, you just have to make time for the person that you love and share even the tiniest moment with them and maintain that relationship and that presence in their life. Okay.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Well done. Well done. You did well. Let's give her a round of applause. General Brown, sir?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

The thing that I'd also highlight, it's not about balance. I think about time, and it's not the quantity of time, it's the quality of time, and that's something that we try to focus on. We try to do something every... We're foodies, so we try to get every weekend to go someplace. Sharene's gotten me hooked into Instagram now because there's a couple of folks that advertise things here in D.C., so we now have gotten into rooftop bars here in D.C. and we did that last weekend or so ago, which was a great, and it's really about the relationships that we have. I'll also tell you that no relationship without friction, and that's a part of sometimes it's good to be together and other times you want to be apart, and so there's things she wants to do on her own and there's things I want to do on our own, which actually helps for a healthy relationship. Matter of fact, there's a sign that hangs in our bedroom that says, "I love you more today than I did yesterday because yesterday you pissed me off." We've all been there. And so anything that's worth having takes work, and that's what I'm really proud about our relationship.

Sharene Brown:

All I'll say is ditto.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

This is hard going last because I forgot the question because I'm listening-

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Balance. It's balance.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

... to everybody else. But I really think that everybody else covered it. You have to be deliberate about your time, especially as a service member, right? You have to be deliberate, and I went many, many years without not being very deliberate about my time and probably being imbalanced with that, especially as it comes to the family, so we're pretty deliberate about our time. Weekends, as much as possible, it is family time. Also, we try our best to not miss the big stuff. The big stuff I think matters, right? When we were both serving in the military, I used to tell the kids' teachers, "Tell us when it's the big stuff and we have to be there." And then boss, I agree with what you said on time together is super important, and time apart is super important. I mean, he loves to golf. Now that that he's retired, 27 years in the Army. He loves to golf and there's times if we're together too much, he's like, "Don't you have a TDY you need to go to?"

Rahn Bass:



The only thing I'll add to that is when you look at these positions up here, realistically, you really can't turn off. The phone's going to go off whether it's a message or whether it's a phone call, and I think just being realistic about that. We're as deliberate as we can be, but we're still present in the moment of what's really going on and couldn't have said it better. The time piece, it means so much more when it's actually quality and when you're actually deliberate about it.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

If I can add one more thing, and we're all real people just like you, all right? There was a time where public affairs, I think a good fellow asked if they could follow us around and do a day in the life of the Bass family, and they asked, "Can we start at your house at 6:00 AM?" That was a hard no. You do not want to see what happens because like you, I mean, how many of y'all it is straight chaos at 6:00 AM? Yeah, so we're just like you.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Oh. Great responses, great responses. Okay. General Brown and Mrs. Brown, this next question is for you. You've talked about your shared love of travel, how living overseas allowed you and your family to experience different cultures and the importance of community engagement. Can you talk to us about the role local communities have played in the various locations and assignments you've had over your career?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, you mentioned overseas, but that wasn't until we came a general officer. We spent most of our time stateside earlier in our career because of our son. That was purposeful. We really tried to work our assignments, stay stateside for his development, and then when he was in high school, we got a chance to go overseas. From a community standpoint, one of the things we did, we tried to live off base until we had to live on base because we want to be part of the community. That's been one of our focus areas to build a network outside of the community, because that's where our kids will go to school, that's where we'll go to church, all those kinds of things, and so we've tried to stay involved. I coached, my son's now 27, but when he was nine years old, I coached his soccer team when I was here at the Pentagon.

I was a Cubmaster as a group commander, assistant scout master, and those kinds of things are important. We actually have friends not only overseas but all across the country that we've had a chance to engage with, that we stay in touch with, and I think they play a key role because so many of our families live off base, and that connection is important because their schools, their healthcare are the things that are going to help not only their community, but they're going to help our Airmen, Guardians, and their families, so I think it's important that we stay engaged and build those relationships at all levels. Not just at the senior level, but every one of us has a role in our various communities to make that community better because it supports us as a nation in the long run.

Sharene Brown:

I agree a lot. I would agree very much with what he was saying. We would often get out into the communities, and I would suggest that for a lot of our Airmen, as you go to different locations, you start off, you don't really think about how you're engaging with the community. You just want to be able to find folks that are just like you that are doing the same things that you're doing, whether you're just going to church or you're joining a book club or just going out into the community like we do when we



go to these rooftop bars, so it's just an opportunity to engage. What we have found, as he said, we found friends along the way, and one of those friends interestingly enough had no plans.

At church, we met a family who had kids about the same age as our kids, and as it turned out, we invited them over for dinner, I think it was, and we learned that he was a professional assistant coach for the Tampa Bay Bucs, and it was just interesting to hear about his life. She's a lawyer. Well, their lives are almost similar to the military. When a coach maybe leaves that football team, either some of the other coaches go with them or they have to find another job, and so they were picking up and leaving. We've been friends for a very long time as we talk about how similar our lives are and what it's like for them because they didn't have any support going from one place to another, so I would often have conversations with her as to what that actually looked like and how they engage with their kids. This is the kind of support that we had in the military, which offered a little bit of support for her.

So as we're coming through this, we are kind of like little ambassadors, if you will, to introduce what military life is like to our civilian community, and they are intrigued by what we do. I know that we don't always want to say we're a part of the military just because it's a part of our culture. We just don't really talk about that. But it is revealing to a lot of folks as to how different our lives are when we start to open up and share just how different our lives look, and for all of us as we've gotten, as we've continued this journey. He's been in a number of these different positions. I learned a little bit more too about what our community partners can do for us. I remember getting involved only because maybe there was a situation at school or with the public schools that we were sending our kids to and maybe at a swim event that my son was involved with, the mayor showed up. Right?

And so you kind of want to just, "So, where does your kid go to school?" Kind of thing, and do you know about? And as a military spouse, I could do that. I can just kind of ask a question and kind of engage in a way because now this is common ground and he's going to be interested because for all he knows, I'm his constituent, and for me it's like, well, what are you doing about this? So it's these little things, but they happen over time and they happen over whatever interests that you have, and so as you come across challenges and whatnot, it gets kind of involved and we all become invested at that point, so community partners can make a big difference and they're willing to help us. Thank you.

Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

Caroline, can I add that real quick?

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Yes. Yeah. Yes sir.

Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

One of the things that Jennifer and I talk a lot about is these blessings and curses that come with military life, and I think to the point of travel, one of them is that. I know this crowd fully understands how tough a PCS is and the PCS life every 2, 3, 4 years and all of the frustrations and complications and busted knuckles and all those box cutters laying around. Who owns 30 pairs of box cutters, right? And those are really difficult and we understand that. But what comes with that on the bonus side is Jennifer and I grew up in the same hometown. We've lived in places we never would've ventured to. We've experienced communities that we just never would've thought to go to, Northern California or Watertown, Massachusetts.

And then our kids have seen, as tough as moving around is for kids, they've also recognized as they've grown older what that experience was like for them, and when they're in middle school in Watertown and the topic of California comes up and somebody shows a picture of the Golden Gate Bridge and my



daughter says, "I've been there," and she's suddenly a celebrity in the Watertown Middle School because she's seen the Golden Gate Bridge. She knows what it smells like to be standing at the base of the Golden Gate Bridge, and that's just, those are blessings that come with some of the frustrations, but it's just a tremendous opportunity to be able to travel and experience the vast diversity that this country has to offer in all the communities.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Thank you. Great. All of that is true. Chief Bass and Mr. Bass. At one point, you already alluded to it, chief, but you are a mil-to-mil family. What advice can you give military families as both spouses continue to serve and work?

Rahn Bass:

I don't know if I really have advice to give. I can share some experiences, personal. When we were single, it definitely looked different. Deployments, TDYs, can do those.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

No kids.

Rahn Bass:

No kids. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. That is correct.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

I'm sure it was different when you were single, yes. Yes.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

Things were different when we were single, too. When we were married with no kids.

Rahn Bass:

I apologize. I apologize.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Okay, let's start over. Let's start over. Mil-to-mil. You're married. Okay, go.

Rahn Bass:

I feel like I'm looking at a hundred thousand people out here. I apologize. But yes, when we first got married and we had no kids, it was different. The deployments, the TDYs. But as we started planning for family, everything was different, and it became very deliberate that we had to communicate. We needed that community. We needed that village to help us navigate that time, and I mean in a good way, and I shared this story last year when we were on this panel, and that humility is needed. But I remember my wife had had deployed and she was worried about the girls and I needed to do the hair and make sure they look good. Those are just words until you actually have to do it. Fortunately for us, we were in a good church, we had some good staff, our civilian partners in the CDC, and those ladies really, bless me, saw that I needed a little bit of help and I was struggling there, and once I stopped fighting it and let it go, I mean, it really did bless me and it blessed them because my girls' attitudes



reflect their hair. What I was fighting and struggling with, when I actually submitted, those kids were wonderful. But all jokes aside, it looks different and it looks different in stages.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

I don't even know how to come back from that. I guess my thoughts on dual military life, like dual military life is hard. How many y'all are dual military out there? Not easy, but definitely doable. I think my first advice is you have to communicate, right, with your spouse. There was a point where because we were so busy, right, Army, Air Force, oftentimes stationed about an hour away from each other, had kiddos. We used to think it was kind of cool to just do five minute debriefs, right? That's about how much time we had because we're all busy and we learned that five minute debriefs just don't cut it. We actually had to be very deliberate about making sure we had time to communicate with each other, and that communication piece is key because there were times where we left our kids at the CDC. Remember that? Okay. And we paid a dollar a minute. Where's A1S? Like a dollar a minute, right? \$33. I'll remember that check we wrote.

But communication I think is key. Communicating about that next assignment. Communicating on if the family is still in and can we keep doing this thing. Not assuming that your spouse can read minds. I had to learn as a young Airman that he doesn't read minds, right, and if I feel like I need some appreciation as the spouse, I can't assume that he knows, so I've learned that it's okay. We communicate, and so I'll tell Ron, "Hey, man, it's time that I probably get some flowers," and that solved all our problems, and he's like, "Thank you," and then I get flowers. But if I don't communicate that, then I'm mad I don't have flowers, and he's like, "Why are you mad?" Right? So we've had to learn to communicate. And again, I think the other key piece that you said is really tap into all the amazing people around us, right? It's kind of natural sometimes as people to just, right, try to not impose on other folks, but people want to help. Your neighbors want to help, your wingmen want to help, and so we just have to be humble enough to receive the help from people.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

That's great. Thank you. Thank you. General Saltzman and Mrs. Saltzman, as you continue to lead Guardians accomplishing the Space Force mission, can you share with us the unique nature of being deployed and employed in place and provide any advice for those members and their families?

Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

Well, I think step one is just acknowledging that being employed in place is fundamentally different than being stateside waiting to deploy. They're just different conditions. It's also worth noting that this is not a space force problem, that the Air Force has a tremendous number of employed in place people, whether it's the DCGS community, the ICBM community, the cyber folks, obviously Space Operations, and most of what we do is stateside employed in place. But this is a growing number of people in our forces. Because of what automation has allowed, what remote capabilities has allowed, we can create effects worldwide without leaving the safety of our garrisons in some cases. So I think we just got to recognize that this is a growing percentage of our forces and that they come with different sets of challenges and different sets of stressors.

The bases that we traditionally operate from are the power projection platforms, whether it's simple things like power and cooling air to make sure the computers are working. Those are critical functions on a space base, and we rely on the Air Force to do the important maintenance functions that keeping those capabilities alive and well for us to be able to do our jobs. But on the people side, I think is where we sometimes miss the mark on making sure we're accounting for the differences, and that's, when you



are doing a combatant commander's mission from a garrison in the United States, you are still mentally on the timing and tempo and prioritization wherever the combatant commander or wherever the operations globally is taking place, and if we think you can just, because you're physically separated that you can also be mentally separated from that action, I think that would be a mistake to assume that.

I had the opportunity to be at Buckley Space Force base and visit the missile warning team up there while they were in the highest density missile events in terms of worldwide missile events with the Russia, Ukraine fight, and those Guardians and Airmen were there processing hundreds of missiles a day, and those hundreds of missiles were hitting civilian targets, military targets, and then they would go home and on CNN see the impact. They would see where those missiles were hitting. They would see the devastation caused in cities. They would see the devastation caused on the human population there. And to say I was just there processing that, it felt disconnected, but suddenly it's real, and suddenly it's what I was doing. I was doing a combatant commander's mission to support that, and then you have to mow the yard and then you have to help your kids with homework, and if we think we can easily compartmentalize that and set work aside and come home, that's just to not understand how people work, I think.

And so once we recognize that there are those differences when you're employed in place, then we have to as a leadership team, try to mitigate those stressors. Find ways, outlets, coping mechanisms, therapy sessions, be in tune with all of that which comes from conducting a combatant command mission in a home station and then having to deal with home life. Those of us that have deployed, sometimes it's easier in one sense because you don't go home at night. What you focus on is the mission and you're there and you understand why you're there and you can kind of put other things out of your mind to some degree, never completely. But when you're employed in place, it is really hard to separate that, and I think it's up to leadership to stay in tune and think about that.

I know from the spouse's perspective, and I'll let Jennifer speak for herself, but we come home and we're distracted mentally because our mind is still in that game back at the office, and so we're not there in person. We're not there in the moment sometimes and the spouses don't necessarily understand it because we don't communicate as well. I'm with you, Ron. I can't read the minds either, and that makes it hard and that puts stress on the relationship, et cetera. But it's something we have to recognize first and then deal with second.

Jennifer Saltzman:

You did good. He can speak for me. That's great. I think all of those things are absolutely true. Ultimately, I think families, we just, and all of us, kids, spouses and everybody who serves, just be there for each other. I mean, look out for each other and take care of each other because those stressors of hair, I mean, that was near and dear to my heart. I mean, it wasn't quite like a dual military situation, but when my mom had a surgery one time and my dad was almost in tears, not because he was worried about her, but he was like, "How do I do her hair?" Right? I mean, those are all of those things, but that's just taking care of each other. So I would say that recognizing that it is really hard to separate the very demanding work that you can't sometimes share. I mean, you can't share those things that you've been dealing with, so just to make sure that, I don't know, we're all taking care of each other.

Sharene Brown:

Hey, can I add a little bit to that? I fully understand that even though there have been times when he's been deployed, but obviously he's gone away. But there have been times too to speak to your point about coming home and then dealing with home life, but from the other side, sometimes I would see that he would come home and my kids wanted to engage, right, but he was maybe aloof or just



distracted or whatever was going on, and then the kids would come to me and say, "What's wrong with dad?" I said, "It's okay. It's all right. Not about you. Dad's got some things he's working through." So just the idea that even those who are home dealing with that family life, they have to be aware also as they see their military member come home, or even if you are dual mil, you have to recognize when they too need a little bit of time just to be able to relax or maybe to separate, whatever the case may be.

But then that adds a little bit of stressor to the person who is at home or who's managing this because at home and working, because you are working, believe me, you are working to raise that family. It can be stressful depending on the day that you had, so where do you get that extra effort to be able to take this on? And this is where we were talking earlier about the harmony, I love that word, between the two because it goes back and forth, back and forth, and some days are way harder than others. And so he has a phrase, every day is a good day, but some days are harder than others. We all feel it.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Better than others.

Sharene Brown:

Oh, sorry, better than others.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

Ms. Sharene, that's that harmony and compromise that we have to get. We were talking last night. We were talking about, "Hey, we're about to be on a panel. Let's not hose this up." And we were talking about give and take, right? Because we all can't be 110. We just can't. So there's times where he was giving 80 percent and I could give 20, and sometimes he took college classes and sometimes I did. And again, that's that compromise that we take. I'll never forget one time we were in Germany and he came home and he kicks off his boots and he turns on ESPN, and I'm like, "Dude, what's going on?" We had a lot of things going on. We need to make dinner, we need to get the kids, we need to do this. And he's like, "I just need to unwind." I'm like, "Bro, I need to unwind, too," so we're going to have to figure out, and again, communicate and compromise because you ain't going to be able to turn on CNN every night, right? Or not CNN. ESPN, right? Okay. Okay. ESPN.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Thank you. Thank you. Okay. Chief Towberman and Mrs. Rush. Ms. Rush, let me start with you. In the spring this year you wrote an article for Military Spouse Magazine about challenges that come with being a spouse and why finding purpose and connection is important. Can you tell us a little about the article and what some of those meaningful things that you found that helped you?

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

Hey, before you go, am I supposed to have been getting you flowers?

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Yes. The answer is yes.

Rachel Rush:

He lets me acquire cats, so it's fair. We have three now. I did write an article and I wish I could hologram myself here and just type in the background, because I do better when I can write. It's very nerve



wracking for me to speak to people. I wrote this article and it was based on a poet I like, her name is Mary Oliver, and she said, tell me what it is you will do with your one wild and precious life, and I think it's... Woo, yes. I think it's very prophetic for anybody, but I think it's very important for a military spouse, and I say that because I think sometimes we can lose sight of our life.

I remember when I was active duty, I felt comradeship and purpose and I never felt isolated. I don't know. I never struggled for any connection. And when I became a military spouse, I had friendships and I had connection, but I had to work so much harder to keep those things, and I'm sorry. I'm losing my train of thought. And so I think as a military spouse, we have to be deliberate in trying to retain what it is that means something to us, and that doesn't have to be a career. It doesn't have to be a family. It can be whatever you want it to be. I had a friend who was another senior enlisted spouse and she didn't have a job, but she did really cool things all the time, like she just took salsa classes and cooking classes and she just filled her life with things that made her feel joy, and I really appreciated that about her.

I think, like with my life with Toby, sometimes I felt, and I mentioned this in the article, I felt kind of like a plus one to his life, like I kind of just tagged along. Like I was at events and I'm like, "Do they really care what I have to say?" Are these friendships going to last when we retire? I think it's just important to really ground yourself in the life that you have and to make things real and pertinent and you have to do things for yourself because although you have the journey with this person that you love so much, it is still this one wild and precious life and you have to do what makes you happy, and we all have to be there to support one another. The people I meet, the spouses I meet are brilliant and they're creative, and I find so much capability and competency in so many of them, and I think that they're almost fearful of trying to do something with the skills and the beautiful characteristics that they have because we have to get up and move and we have to...

It's hard to build roots sometimes, and I just want spouses to feel comfortable and to do what makes them happy and to find their purpose and to not look back and think, "I should have done this. I should have done that." Because I love this man more than life itself, but I love myself as well, and he thankfully allows me to be selfish sometimes, and I think that allows us to have a really beautiful life together. So I just encourage everybody to maintain, to find what makes you happy. Thanks.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

I'd like to ask-

Sharene Brown:

Can I just say real quick to Rachel?

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Yes, ma'am.

Sharene Brown:

I applaud you for being able to speak honestly to so many of our military spouses. It resonates so well with me and I'm going to lose it in a second. Because just this morning a friend of mine shared with me an article that was written by a spouse in Military Spouse Magazine, and it was called Confession by Megan Brown, and she said, "I am not resilient. I am resentful." And it talked about a lot of the challenges that military spouses go through and having to sacrifice so much in so many ways, and so as you talk about being happy and finding those places, I also would encourage you to find others to connect and release or vent those feelings of unhappiness. Because what you find is that when you see others are going through the same things, even though we say sometimes misery loves company, it's an



opportunity to get it off your chest, and sometimes that's exactly what we need is just to get it off our chest, and it's an uncomfortable space because other spouses are going through the same thing.

And we don't judge. It's just an opportunity to say, here's where I'm at. And so then once we do that, I think we can find, or at least go forward, we encourage each other and then we try to find a place where we can be happy, wherever that may be. So I applaud you so much for being able to speak to this because I think a lot of our spouses are dealing with this and just as we don't want to say anything because we think it might harm, it's difficult and we need to say something, even if it's just in a small group of friends, because it can start with friends, but if we need to seek even more assistance, then hopefully we'll be able to find that, so thank you for that.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Thank you for sharing. Thank you. We only have a few minutes left, so I would like to give each couple a moment to provide any closing comments that you would like to share with this large group. So Chief Bass, we'll go ahead and start with you.

Rahn Bass:

This microphone keeps finding its way to me. First, I just want to thank AFA for creating a space for us to come up here and just share some real experiences and what it's like. A lot of obviously relates to everyone in there. I'd like to thank General Brown and Mrs. Brown for the service that we have shared because this is our last AFA together. I'd like to thank Toby and Rachel. This is our last that we'll share together, and General Saltzman and Mrs. Saltzman, just being able to share the stage up here with you. We're honored and thank everyone out here for your service and to the family members.

CMSAF JoAnne Bass:

Thanks. We always talk about we recruit the Airmen, we retain the families, so we all have a role and a responsibility to make sure that we are doing our best to help make sure that we are connected with our families and that we're there to support those families. Realizing also, as I said before, that today's military family looks different and that's okay, and we shouldn't put pressure on family members to be something that they're not. It was funny. When we got selected for this position, Rahn being an Army guy, he said to me real quick, "Hey, man, I don't do teas. I don't do spouse teas." Right?

And I said, that's okay. I said, we're going to have football parties at the house, and so we have football parties at the house and we bring families into the house. We figured out... Wait, but you have done some teas, right? He's done some tea. He's done some teas. Secretary of defense's wife loves Rahn Bass. But anyway, he's done some teas. But that said, we have to figure out how to do this life together, realizing that we're also very different. But nonetheless, we recruit the Airmen, we retain the families. To all the family members who are here, to all of your family members who are not here, please pass our thanks to them on behalf of every single one of us on how much they do to support you so that we can do the things that we do as service members.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

General Saltzman?

Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

For those that were here yesterday and heard me say it was our 31st wedding anniversary. I didn't have flowers, so this is what I'm trying to do here to make a big deal out of this. Honey, I invited 18,000



people to celebrate our wedding anniversary. I think this panel proves beyond a shadow of a doubt this is a team sport. I can't say it better than Chief Bass just said. We recruit the member, but the families make the difference, and not only are they the ones that help retain the member, but they even make it possible for the member, the military member, to be successful in what they do. I'm living proof of it. Actually, I know everybody up here is living proof of it. So thanks to the families, thanks to the members, thanks for continuing to keep your hand raised and answering the call to defend our nation. It's just an incredible honor to serve with everybody. And to Toby and Rachel, we'll miss you. Definitely. Thank you.

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

You want me to go, ma'am?

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

Yeah, sure.

CMSSF Roger Towberman:

Look at this. I'm the luckiest human being in the world. You get to be you. I think too many of us too often are in an unhealthy relationship with ourselves, and we can't figure out why the rest of the relationships aren't working. You get to be you. In fact, we need you to be you, and I'm so glad that I eventually figured that out and that I found somebody that would help me figure that out, so thanks for letting me stress out Rachel one last time by making her come up on the stage, and thanks for everything. Thanks to these senior leaders on the stage that have been just great teammates and taking such good care of me and better care of my wife. I appreciate y'all. Thanks.

Rachel Rush:

Real quick, I just want to say thank you to everybody up here. All of you hold a very dear place in my heart, and Rahn, Sharene, Jennifer, Molly Raymond. I don't know if she's here, but you've all accepted me and given me grace when I couldn't be present, and this has been a beautiful, beautiful ride for me, and I'm going to miss it so much, and I love you guys. Thank you.

Lt. Gen. Caroline A. Miller:

General and Mrs. Brown, you want to close it up, please, sir?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Sure. First of all, I appreciate everyone that's here today to help us participate in this particular panel, and particularly to those here on the panel, to the Towbermans, Toby and Rachel. Good luck. It's been a great... I've enjoyed every one of these panels we've been able to do with you and with the rest of the team here, and this will be the last time we get a chance to, this group will be all here together. I think the thing that, one reason I enjoy this panel and we just, we're able to show that we're real people just like you. We've just been doing it maybe a little bit longer in some cases. But the thing that I often think about, and I kind of mentioned it yesterday, is that those of us in uniform raise our right hand, take an oath, but our families, they either marry into it or born into it, and they don't always get a vote.

We got to remember how important they are to what we do. I think about our core value, service before self. The sacrifices that our family members make are tremendous, and so I want to thank all of you and I realize that we've got a lot of military members here, and you have, your families are back at home, and you go home and tell them thank you. Thank you from this panel. Thank you from your department



of the Air Force leadership, and thanks from a nation that doesn't always understand what we do, but it's important because we guarantee the freedoms for every American. Thank you for what you do.

Sharene Brown:

We were sitting here talking about whether who should have gone first or last. I say the same. This is a panel that we've enjoyed over. It's scary to be up here, I will tell you, but it's been a delight. It's been a delight to be up here with the friends that you have, and this leadership panel has been amazing to include our folks who were here before, the Raymonds. I think Rachel hit it on the head when she said, show some grace for yourself. We've come through a lot of things over the past few years and as we go forward with this, I think if we don't show ourselves a little grace, to include our military members, I think we strive to be the creme de la creme, the best of the best, and we are that. But we have to show a little grace even to ourselves as we go forward, and for our military spouses and the support systems that they have.

As Chief Bass said, we're a modern military family. We look a lot like our civilian community. So to have a little grace, because we know going around the corner, there's going to be some barriers, there's going to be some challenges, but we just have to deal with it in the moment and take a step at a time. But we thank you and we thank everyone for what they do and their contribution to help our military members to get to where they are. So thank you for being here today, and thank you for sitting here and listen to us be ourselves this morning.