

“Warfighting from the Homefront: Senior Leaders Perspective”

Voiceover:

Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen, your attention, please. Please join me in welcoming the Deputy Chief of Space Operations for Human Capital for the United States Space Force, Katharine Kelley.

Katharine Kelley:

Hello and good afternoon. Can everybody hear me okay? Excellent. Excellent. Welcome. I'm so excited to have everybody here and for this really excellent panel that we're going to have a great discussion with senior leaders from both Air and Space Force. So thanks so much for being here today. Very much appreciate it and absolutely honored to be up here on stage with this panel. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Kate Kelley, I'm the Chief Human Capital Officer or the S1 if you will, A1 equivalent for Space Force and it's absolutely my privilege to be here with this leadership panel here today to talk with all of you. Thanks for being here and thanks for everyone's attention. We're going to talk a little bit about senior leader perspective on a couple of really interesting themes and topics this afternoon. And thanks to AFA for pulling all of this together, this opportunity for us to be on stage and hear from our great leaders here this afternoon.

So without any further ado, let me please just open as moderating the war fighting on the home front, senior leadership perspective panel. And so we've set this up to get their thoughts and views on certain topics. I'd like to welcome and of course thank General Chance Saltzman, Chief of Space Operations, General David Allvin, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Chief Master Sergeant Joanne Bass, and also Chief Master Sergeant Roger Towberman respectively, Air Force and Space Force. Thank you all so much for being here today. It's an honor for everybody in the audience to hear from you.

So this year's AFA Symposium theme is dominate Air and Space Forces to deter and fight and win. And with our Airmen and Guardians as well as their families, it's critical that we have that ability and it's critical that we have the ability to perform our mission in order to build the strongest teams possible because we really feel strongly about the value of what we bring for Airmen and Guardians to be able to do that. During this panel, I'll be asking some of our leaders here questions focusing on the challenges that Airmen and Guardians face today, as well as the initiatives for improving things like quality of life, things like resiliency, community relations, and the military experience that all of you are part of and all of us on stage are as well. And so taking care of people and supporting our families will be part of our theme here today.

We want to help ensure that we are fielding a combat ready force that will deter, is ready to fight and will win against our adversaries. And we know that part of doing that is not only opportunities like this, but getting feedback from senior leaders on their perspective on some key issues. So my first question, I'm going to open to General Saltzman first, sir. Sir, in your 30 plus years in the military, you've moved several times, many times I suspect, and each move comes with change and uncertainty and challenges for both the military member and of course their families. So what assignments have made the biggest impression on you, on your sense of community and what advice do you have for military members to quickly establish their place in that new environment? Sir?

CSO Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

Thank you Kate, and thanks to AFA for putting on this symposium. It's always an honor to talk to Airmen and Guardians and like-minded Americans about some of these important challenges we face. And I think this is a particularly important panel. So thanks Kate for putting this together. I think I may be one of the more fortunate people on the stage. In 30 plus years, it's always plus when you go above 30,

right, Orville? 30 plus years, but only 17 moves. And so that may be fewer than my compatriots here. That's not very many for that long of a career. But it's enough that I know all the headaches, I know all the inconveniences, I know the trials and tribulations of moving families from coast to coast and you thought you were going to be somewhere for three years and it turned out to be eight months.

And again, this crowd understands those challenges in great detail. But it's also fun when you're the old guy and you think back on all those moves as inconvenient as they were, there's something kind of nice about them. My family, we talk about how it kind of pulled us tighter together. You know, spend 30 hours in a car moving across a country and you get to know each other really well, all the ins and outs. And so I think there are some strengths to being a mobile force, if you will. But for me, a couple of key assignments give me this sense of community that I've reflected on more than once. The first one was my very first duty station at Malmstrom Air Force Base as a missileer. And what I remember thinking about was that we were all there basically at the same timeframe of life. We were all doing the same kinds of things. We had the same challenges, the same struggles, and we were learning from each other continuously.

And I think back to what a great place that was to be a lieutenant and try to figure the Air Force out and how great the people were that were around me that were teaching me what it was like to be in the Air Force and that sense of community. Whether it was the very old majors and lieutenant colonels that were teaching me about how Air Force worked or whether it was my peers, the lieutenants, showing me what they were struggling with and making me feel like I'm not by myself in working through these challenges. But I think also what's important to know is as you move through your career, your circumstances and life change. And so I also think about my time as a squadron commander at Vandenberg Air Force Base at the time now Space Force Base. And that was different because now I have a family, I had two children at the time. And so it's a very different kind of base community when you're going through the struggles of raising a young family.

But when you're in that base community and the kids are running around playing with kids their own age and how safe we felt letting the kids just roam the streets on base there and the old adage stay out till the streetlights come on or it gets dark and come home. And all of that I think built a sense of community again, where my neighbors were helping raise my kids the same way I was helping raise their kids. We were all in it together. We were all kind of experiencing the same challenges. And I think back on that kind of community and at that time Air Force, now Space Force for me, it was a second family. It was an extended family that helps you get through all the trials and the tribulations that come with military service. And so I think very fondly about those two experiences. But it was just that we were with a group of people that we enjoyed being around, like-minded Americans, like-minded patriots going through the same kinds of things. And we were all in it together and I think very fondly about that time.

Katharine Kelley:

Thank you, sir. Could I ask General Allvin to address the question too?

VCSAF Gen. David Allvin:

Sure. And thank you very much. Well, I tell you what, CSO really brought out a lot of the very important things when you talk about the community that are of like-minds and like-experiences. And so we all understand that we are the same community because we have a same reference point about the transition and the mobility that's required. I think I'd like to talk about two times where it was most impactful on me in the Air Force community and the community that we moved to. I'd say the first one was at Grand Forks, North Dakota. It was the summer of 2001 and when we got there, we could not

hear enough from the community how appreciative they were about how Grand Forks Air Force Base helped save the town with a terrible flood of 1997. This is something that happened four years before, but they were effusive and they were so sincere that this was a group of people that lived on a base just outside of town.

No, not exactly Metropolis, but still they were separated by a little bit of geography, but came together because external events really brought us together and sort of solving the same problem together. So a couple months later, 9/11 hits and the very same thing. We all found ourselves in a new environment trying to figure it out a little bit scared, a little bit nervous. We hadn't done this before. Now that happened within the gates and that happened within the community. And this idea that there's so much more that connects us than doesn't was really very impactful on me. And that was an example where external events really brought the entire community together. And then the next one is absolutely Altus Air Force Base. Now there I was fortunate enough in AETC, and I know it's all different now, but at the time you felt like that you were not quite mainstream AETC and that was the great part because AETC, they'd call up to you go, "How's it going up there?"

'Cause I didn't know much about what Altus did, "Allvin, how's it going?" "Oh, it's good." "Need a thing?" "No, I'm good." So it was this fantastic opportunity, but there was something and still remains about that community that was more than just this transaction will take care of the folks on the base. And I know you could be cynical and say, well, you need to do that because you want to be BRAC proof. That wasn't it. Altus, the community of Altus loved its Airmen, loves its Airmen, loves the entire family. And you could tell that in everything that they did. I have friends for life from Altus, and the one story that I probably hear as many as any other was is one of the most touching to me.

I was brand new wing commander trying to figure out what that meant at Altus. And the first thing that they had was this thing called of a committee of a hundred. And it was a hundred of the businesses around Altus. And again, I'm not being pejorative, but Altus doesn't have 10,000 businesses. So a lot of that community comes out and they came out more for the youngest Airmen and their family than they did for the senior leadership. And I remember standing up there and I'm trying to introduce myself to this community and about halfway down, one of my three kids, our youngest who was three at the time, was trying to get away and Gina was trying to hold her back so it wouldn't embarrass dad. And she breaks free and I'm just trying to get my legs underneath me and communicate to this audience.

Very similar here, comes running up on stage and looks at me. And so I give her the mic, she turns around, she says, "Hi, my name is Reagan and I'm three." And that was it. That was all. I was the most popular guy and just because of her, I could do nothing wrong after that. But it just showed you that this community really is something that you don't have to necessarily have a shared current experience, but if you have a shared love and a shared common values and interests, then it doesn't matter if it's a community inside or outside the base. That's what makes us strong. And those are two times that really reflect and keep in my mind.

Katharine Kelley:

Thank you. Great feedback and obviously a theme of community and a theme of support in those two initial responses, which is perfect because my next question, I'm going to tee up to Chief Bass and Chief Towberman, whoever wants to take it first, up to you. We wanted to talk about resilience in the force and resilience as individuals and resilience as Airmen and Guardians. So what issues and barriers do you find most impact on resilience and what ideas and recommendations do you have for this audience to think about when we talk about resilience as a community and as Airmen and Guardians?

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

You want me to go?

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Yeah, you go.

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

Does anybody have a three-year-old I can borrow? Okay. Okay, good, good, good. Hey, first of all, good afternoon, AFA. Awesome, very excited to be here. Thanks so much for moderating, I'm very excited to be with my fellow wing men and brothers on this stage. When it comes to resilience, I'll be honest, there's not probably a venue that I go to or an all call that I go to where resilience, wellbeing, health comes up and I would offer, I think there's several barriers when it comes to us being able to be our best self. One of those that I know for certain is the stigma of just going to get help. And so we have worked really hard to try to help get beyond that stigma that it is okay to get health because if you've heard the Secretary of the Air Force, in fact say it right, mental health is health.

And so we need to all of us, every leader, every Airman, every wing man, every Guardian, be able to really help get after that stigma on being able to seek help. The other challenge and barrier that we have is the capacity to be able to go get the help when we need it, which is really what informed our rollout of the spectrum of resilience. And hopefully you all saw it, hopefully you didn't do an auto delete when the email came your way. But that spectrum of resilience really speaks to what is that whole continuum of resilience throughout an Airman's life, throughout their career, and what are all the different touchpoints that we can have before we do go seek mental health or need that support. Certainly there are things that we can do to be able to help take care of ourselves. I'm a big fan of the comprehensive Airman fitness pillars that we have.

What are the things that we can do to be able to help our own family members, our fellow wing men, the people on our right and left. And so those are some barriers which really, and my teammate Chief Towberman may expand upon this, which really informed the Fortify The Force initiative team that both he and I championed to help get after the barriers that are not helping our Airmen, our Guardians, our family members, our veterans from being able to gain the help that they need to be able to fortify themselves. And so that Fortify The Force initiative team has really... It's hitting its one-year anniversary this month and they have done a lot of grassroots efforts to bring to the senior leaders things that are barriers from our people getting help. And some of those are policy things as well. And we're knocking those out. Towby, any thoughts?

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Yeah, so I mean, first I think it's important we got to say one thing because I know we are creatures of habit. We like this regimented life that we live as military members and former military members. So I know this a huge audience and most of you didn't read the fine print. You assumed that if we were going to be on stage, we would have our spouses with us. And the only reason you're here was to see Rachel and she's not here. And so I apologize that I'm by myself and you have to only listen to me and not the enlightened perspective of my beloved wife who's at home hopefully watching this and yelling at me through the cats right now. But thanks for being here and thanks for putting this on. So we are doing a lot with Fortify The Force. I should say, they're doing a lot.

And I think that that's probably to me, the biggest barrier that any of us face. And that is this ridiculous notion that we're supposed to live our lives and deal with our problems by ourselves, which is the most unnatural, abnormal perspective we could possibly have. Everything we've done from the beginning of our species, we've done together in groups and for some reason these days we want to deal with our

challenges alone. And nothing could make challenges more difficult than trying to tackle them on your own. And so from a Space Force perspective, it's why Guardians ask for connection as a value. It's why they are embracing it so well. And so naturally we have to have our teammates, we have to have our families, we have to have help to navigate this very difficult thing that we call life. I don't think there's more noticeable a barrier, but also no more easier barrier to conquer than just stop trying to deal with it by yourself.

You've got teammates who care about you, who love you, you've got family, you've got friends. And the Fortify The Force Initiative is bringing together people to help solve their problems together. And that's the most important part of the whole thing. And so we're lucky when our barriers are so easy to identify and frankly, so simple conceptually to conquer. We've just got to make that decision. Stop living in isolation, stop trying to solve your problems on your own and reach out to your teammates and reach out to your friends and reach out to the people who want to help you and then help others and judge your success and know that what makes you valuable as a human being, as an Airman, as a Guardian, as a leader, what makes you valuable is the lives that you change and the difference that you make in other people's lives. And invest in their biographies and yours will write itself.

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

Can I add one more thing, one alibi on that?

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Of course. You always add on my stuff.

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

When we talk about the capacity piece, it's interesting when I talk to most of our mental health professionals, and I don't know if there are any in here today, but typically I'll talk with them about the challenges that they have in that business and in that space. And when I talk with most of them, they share with me that out of the 10 people who might come into seek mental health at the mental health clinic, that only about two of the folks that come in actually need clinical mental health support. The other eight simply they need support and they need help. Most of all, they just need to know if somebody cares. And so that is really a profound thing. And we talk about the capacity piece. Our nation is short mental health providers, which means the Department of Defense is, which means your Air force is, but what we're not short of is leaders.

And what we're not short of is wing men. And it gets back after what you said, if the person on our right or left would just be there for each other and then help try to figure out within that spectrum of resilience how to get after this, how much better will be. But again, the number one thing I often hear is our people just need to know that somebody cares. Thanks.

Katharine Kelley:

Thank you both. Obviously there's a theme here on... We heard a little bit in the opening discussion about teams around you and being supportive, both family, communities, but also making sure that you're taking care of each other. And so on that note, we've got a perfect segue into the next thematic question that I wanted to pose. And so I'm going to go to General Allvin first. And sir, we're talking about quality of life now and obviously a little bit of what's already come up in our first conversations, but can you give us a little bit of a sense of where you're seeing things going well with respect to quality of life for Airmen and Guardians, and if you have any thoughts on areas where we need to continue to work?

VCSAF Gen. David Allvin:

Yeah, I do and I appreciate the question. And I think it's interesting because coming off of the very serious issue that both the Chiefs just talked about, when we talk about quality of life, I think a lot of things... We all almost say it in the same sentence or paragraph in support to the families. And so I just want to bifurcate this, and I know I'm doing this in a dangerous way because the subject matter we just talked about, there is a definite support for someone who is suffering from an ailment or there are also other areas where we have people who have been subjected to terrible things and they've been a victim of experience and they need support. And there's a certain characteristic and attribute of that support. I think that we also need to understand when we're talking about supporting families, it's not like they're victims.

This is a rockstar team. This is a fantastic team that we're a part of, and these families are a part of that team. And so we're talking about quality of life. If you have an all-star team, you don't do things to make that team perform better to support them because you feel sorry for them. You do that because they are going to not only help the team, they're going to help themselves personally, professionally. And so a lot of these quality of life initiatives are truly that because we have offered to join our team in one way or another, either by raising your right hand or by marriage or by any other... That part of the team has agreed to be here. And so the sacrifice is something we in some way, shape or form have submitted to doing and it's a fantastic team.

So that's where the responsibility comes, I think, in and making sure that that team can help reach the full potential. And so some of the things that we are dealing with, I really harken back a little bit to what the Secretary of Defense did last fall with his supporting people memo. And it talks about some of the things with helping moves. How do you help moves? We all know moves or transitions. Transitions can be tough, especially when you're trying to find housing. And so this idea of temporary living expenses extending that Department of Defense is doing that. Childcare, which we'll probably talk about later as well, enhancing childcare because that's meeting where our rockstar team where they are, lots of those teams have children who are going to grow up to be rockstar team members as well. We need to make sure we care for them.

So while we have work to do on gaining the right facilities and making sure we have the proper capacity, we also need to make sure we're hiring the right folks and we have rockstar teammates who could be a part of that force. And in order to do that, we need to make sure we're paying them appropriately and incentivizing them appropriately. And so that's when the Secretary of Defense put in that supporting the people memo about for the children of those who would might come on board and be CDC employees that make sure you have at least 50% of a discount. Well, the Air Force has gone a little further than that. We said a hundred percent discount for the first one, 25% discount for all those beyond. So reaching further into that, we're really getting into those things that I think are a little bit enduring issues for quality of life that we should always be working on.

And so that's where I think we've made some progress in those. But at the same time, if I were to say where we could have improvements, it's on those same things. And that's why I really appreciate what Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Saltzman along with the Chief and CSO are on this Five And Thrive piece. It's these five elements. They're not new to us that we want to make sure we maintain focus on housing, healthcare, childcare, education, spouse employment. These are things that are going to ensure that this rockstar team that we have continues to perform the best for the team and for themselves. And so there's two things I would say for improvement. One is speed. We live in a time where the pace of change is quickening, but our bureaucratic decision making isn't. And when I say bureaucratic, that's so royal. We're part of United States Air Force, which is part of a Department of Air Force, part of Department of Defense, part of an executive branch, part of US government.

All those wheels have to turn and the world is turning pretty fast. And so when we see some of our Airmen and families having to deal with exigencies of the environment that the bureaucracy hasn't put in place in a timely enough manner, the solutions for that becomes a bit of a challenge. We can always work on that. And the other part is follow through. When we come up with an idea or an initiative or a project, we work very hard to get that across the finish line. That may not be the finish line, that finish line of getting the project started or initiated or funded is really the start of the next journey. The next journey is following up on execution, follow through. What did we expect that thing to do for us and how long should we let it go before we decide to try something else?

Or maybe the problem is in execution, it wasn't the problem with the initiative at all. We have some of the greatest solutions that nobody's ever heard of because we haven't communicated them properly. And that's why some of the things that the Five And Thrive initiative is doing is constantly having these monthly updates and having access to those programs so people can at least try them. And then we'll realize whether we are on the right track and we have poor execution or maybe we need to go back to the drawing board. And so I would say speed and follow through on the initiatives that we know we need to work on or maybe we could have some improvement.

Katharine Kelley:

Thank you, sir. Chief Bass, anything to add?

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

Absolutely, I don't think a day that goes by that we're not always thinking about the quality of life, the quality of service and welfare of our service members and their families. It's always interesting to me when I'm out talking with our Airmen and their families because I always hear, right, I wonder if General Brown knows about this or I wonder if Chief Bass knows about this, I wonder if they know about the COLA reductions over in Japan or Guam or Italy or wherever. I wonder if they know that some of our commissary shelves are empty, right? The answer overwhelmingly is yes, because your senior leaders across your major commands, your NAFs and your wings really do inform us well on those challenges. And it gets back after Vice Chief, what you said, which is how do we respond in this bureaucratic system at the speed of relevancy? And to make it even more challenging is just how fast we're trying to keep pace with some of the things that challenge your quality of life like inflation and like housing costs and et cetera.

And so we are really working hard and I'm actually really proud of our department of the Air Force for being very proactive with OSD to help get after some of these, taking care of people and their family members thing. And for us being able to have that voice to the Secretary of Defense to say, Hey, here's what's really happening boots on the ground and here's how we have to get after some of those challenges. Improvements, there's always improvements that we need to make. This is why one of my focus areas really is while we've been successful for the past 75 years, we have to be very forward-thinking in how do we take care of today's service member and their families. And that means we really have to just dig deep into all of our processes and all of our policies. And if it was good enough 10 years ago does not mean that it's good enough today. So we have got to constantly look at how do we modernize and how do we get more responsive when it comes to quality of life of our service members and their families.

Katharine Kelley:

Great. Thank you so much. Great thoughts there. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chief. I'm going to turn a little bit now to General Saltzman and Chief Towberman on a slightly more nuanced topic, perhaps more

relevant to Space Force, although clearly impacts on some Airmen as well. Space Force is geographically concentrated in certain parts of the country, sir. Many units employed in place, a different construct arguably from many of the services and so what I would like to explore as part of the panel today is what you see as unique challenges in that construct and also what opportunities might that present to Space Force having that particular nuance.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Sure. So I'll start, I think especially when it comes to recruiting and retention, and I say this a lot, it's never the stuff as much as it's does the stuff meet the expectations. And so I think we have to be from day one honest about, Hey, we're in a few places and if the only reason you're coming in the military is to get stationed in Crete, then probably Space Force is not your gig, right? Crete's awesome, by the way, had a lot of good times there. I think we have to be honest about that. But with these few main operating locations, number one, there's plenty of opportunities. I mean, just in the last couple months alone, we've visited Guardians all over the place, in really exciting places. So there is certainly opportunity to still see the world, but at our main operating locations, there's different types of opportunities.

If you know that you have the opportunity to come back to a community repeatedly, then you make different investments in that community emotionally and perhaps financially you can put down roots in a different kind of way. So I think we've got to really talk about our ecosystem honestly and openly and then recruit to a base that is attracted to this unique lifestyle that we live where 75% of the force is employed in place. And that's hard and it has its own challenges, but it also has some really cool opportunities to have a different kind of lifestyle. So to me, it's really mostly about correctly framing the expectations and then allowing the choice and control as much as we can with Guardians to be able to capitalize on the opportunities that are there. And then of course there's the mission piece threat, you probably want to talk about.

CSO Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

Yeah, but let's not skip too fast past what Chief Towberman said, join the Space Force, go to Florida, California and the front range of Colorado, right?

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

They are horrible places, right? Yeah.

CSO Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

I wanted to talk for a minute about employed in place because this audience of course knows that that happens and it happens in the Air Force as much as it does quite frankly in numbers as it does in the Space Force. But from a percentage standpoint, the vast majority of our operations are conducted from our home stations. And this creates opportunities and challenges and we have to make sure we're accounting for all those and the differences. Growing up in the Air Force, there was definitely an emphasis that you had to be ready to be an expeditionary part of the force. And that didn't always resonate with space people or when I started in the ICBMs, but I recognized that that was what the majority of the Air Force was about. It was about moving out to austere places to provide air power for the nation.

Now that we're a separate service, we don't have to think about a deployment model as being the central theme for how we do operations. So it's important that we understand what the distinction is with employed in place. I thought back to a time when I was a much younger person... Actually General

Whiting mentioned this morning to a crowd that a much younger Saltzman and a much younger Whiting were on the ops floor at Vandenberg watching in real time the Chinese destroy one of their own satellites. And we talked about how that was such a game changer. Literally the space domain had almost in an afternoon shifted from the way we grew up in a benign environment to one that we recognized was going to be a war fighting domain. And the reason I bring that story up is because I remember getting in my car and driving home that afternoon and my son asked me if I would teach him how to throw a spiral with the football.

And I literally am trying to process what was going on at work. The entire domain that I'm responsible for has shifted to a war fighting domain and I'm processing this and my 12-year-old son is trying to figure out how to throw a football. And the mental disconnect that I was having in the backyard trying to process that was really nothing when you think about... We were just at Buckley yesterday talking to some of the young Guardians down there who were on the ops floor when the Russians attacked Ukraine and they watched hundreds of missiles go into Ukraine from their screens. And they did an amazing job of reporting one of the largest attacks that we've ever seen since we've had these sensors on orbit. And then within hours they're sitting at home watching the news reels of the devastation, the tragedy that was unfolding in Ukraine.

And it suddenly hit a lot of them that, wait a minute, those dots I was just watching on the computer screen that's turning into combat operations and the warning that we provided is trying to save the people that I'm now watching on the screen. And they struggle with that because that's different. It's different to be in an op center in a combat environment and then two hours later you're sitting on your own couch. For those of us that deployed, and I know that's the vast majority of this crowd, there is something about a deployed location that gets you mission focused and you by necessity almost have to put the people that are back in the States on the back burner and focus on what you're doing. And it's very clarifying and you have to focus on it. And it's tremendous amount of work.

But I remember spending 27 straight hours in the kayak after a particular attack. Never once did I think, I feel guilty for not calling my wife because she knew that where I was, I was deployed. But when you're employed in place, that is running through your mind, I got to get home for dinner, what's going on? And in space, it's even more problematic because we get home and then we can't talk about it because most of what we do is at the top secret and higher levels. And so we stare into the distance sometimes and they know something's wrong. Our spouses are pretty savvy, they've learned us and they know something's wrong and they know we can't talk about it. And you almost just kind of stare at each other and you hug and you hope that that's enough. But being employed in place and doing combat operations from Colorado for example, we have to understand that all the stressors of life are playing out while all the stressors of combat operations are playing out.

Now, is it the same as kicking a door in? No. But do you feel the stress? Do you feel the weight that you doing your job is actually protecting people and saving lives down range? Absolutely. And so do we have the chaplain support? Do we have the resiliency teams? Do we have the doctors, the medics that are there to think about resiliency of our forces doing combat operations in Colorado, in California? And I think that that's a leadership challenge for us to make sure that we don't forget that dealing with the stressors of life is tough and you have to be resilient just to deal with those. And when you layer onto that combat operations, it can change things dramatically. And so I think I speak for everybody up here that has missions that they know play out like that, that we are committed to understanding those nuances, understanding those challenges, and providing the kinds of resources that our Guardians and Airmen need when they're conducting those operations employed in place.

Katharine Kelley:

Thank you both. I will tell you, I relatively just joined the Air Force and the Space Force from another service. And I want to go back to a point that Chief Bass made because it actually underpins a lot of the conversation here from the panel today. The voice that the Air Force and the Space Force are presenting to OSD and to Congress in support of quality of life and resiliency and taking care of people is a strong one, maybe the strongest. And so I think you all should be very proud of what is happening in terms of acknowledging what needs to take place, what might need to change, what might need to continue quickly and deliberately, but also know that there is no doubt that this particular department is leading the charge in terms of making it known what is necessary to become part of a resilient team that is Air Force and Space Force.

So I think on behalf of everybody in this audience, thanks for all of your support and your leadership and helping do that. You've just illustrated not only the why of that, but also what you all are championing and doing for Airmen and Guardians today that is so powerful and so strong. So thank you all very much for that. I have a few minutes left and I did have a couple of what I call hold teaser questions, but because this is such a strong panel, they've addressed some of them already. One was about the challenge of childcare that we acknowledge across all of our portfolios, and we heard a little bit already on some of the initiatives that are happening in that area. And the other one was about pay and compensation.

And so I was just very briefly ask Chief Towberman and Chief Bass if they have any thoughts on this because the quadrennial review of military compensation is by law in place and happening. In fact, we had the first kickoff with OSD last week where there's a board of directors in air and space are represented on that board of directors. But I know this is near and dear to your hearts based on your testimony last week. And so before we go to our final question, I wanted to just see if either of you had any thoughts you might want to share on the power of that particular review and why it's so important to the themes we've talked about today.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Yeah, thanks, ma'am. So I know that I don't have to remind this room that the most decisive military advantage in the history of the world is the enlisted force of this nation. And that force has never been more educated, has never been more skilled, has never been more empowered, has never been more important. And the question for the nation is do we value that advantage commensurate with its importance to our freedoms? And so I think we both are looking forward to the QRMC and the hard look across multiple lines of effort that the President has asked the department to look at. And there's a process, and I think at least from my perspective, I'm not interested in guessing, I'm not interested in just throwing good ideas out.

We're interested in following the data and truly looking at age-old formulas, some of them that go back to the Vietnam era, they go back to the draft that this is how we figure out housing, this is how we figure out pay, this is how we decide what the value proposition of serving is, and it all needs to be reevaluated for the modernity in which we live and the real world in which we have to recruit and retain the greatest advantage that this world has ever known. There you go.

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

Absolutely, I think, if this is very much the CliffNotes version, we both testified in front of Congress last week, and so we didn't get fired, so that was good.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

We got to testify this week too, so there's still time.

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

Yeah, yeah. That wasn't good, but I would say, go back to that... But the one thing that I want to add onto that is this year we are celebrating our 50th anniversary of the all volunteer force. Our goal is to make sure that in five years from now we have an all volunteer force and in 10 years from now we have an all volunteer force. And so the piece that CMSAF talks about on valuing our people is critical. We need a holistic look at today's military paying compensation writ large for all of our service members, again and for all the reasons that you listed, but we need that and we need it sooner than later to make sure that in five years from now or 10 years from now, we continue to have that competitive advantage and that all volunteer force.

Katharine Kelley:

Thank you both very much. I could not have asked for a better segue into our final question, and so I'm going to just go there and I will open it up to the panel for whoever wants to jump in first. But the segue's perfect. So all volunteer force, I hope many of you know, and if you don't, spoiler alert little bit of facts here. We are facing a data set that suggests that there is a significant declination, if you will, declining rates in people's willingness to serve in our nation, in our military, meaning our younger generations. We see data where we have a declining propensity to serve.

And so knowing that and thinking about where we are right now as an all volunteer force, what I wanted to ask of all of you, because I think it's so powerful for all of us as ambassadors of our brand to hear from you, your thoughts on what military service has meant to you and specifically your service to the Air Force and the Space Force, and how would you advise this group of people here? How should we be talking to young people about the value proposition of service? And there's been a theme throughout today's discussion about community, about supporting each other, about getting after things that we need to fix, about the power of team. But all of that can't be said any better than what your heartfelt words might be. So my close question is essentially what would you advise this audience to talk about what's powerful to you with respect to military service and how can we continue to be an all volunteer force?

CSO Gen. B. Chance Saltzman:

So I have no idea what to tell this audience because you have your own stories and your stories are probably enough because you don't spend a lifetime in public service and military service and not have all those stories. When I sit here, I think instantly that it's been the honor of my life to serve my country, but I think it was 32 years ago when I was commissioned, Mike, you were there. Listen, the only person more surprised than I'm sitting here is Mike because he was watching me get commissioned. But I think it's important to recognize that the things that maybe get you into service aren't the reasons you stay. And we have to think about this as a continuum of service and continue to tell the stories. My entering the Air Force back then was pretty transactional. They pay for college. There's a job waiting on the other end, and so I'm in. But that's not why you stay for the second tour because all of a sudden there's relationships and people you like and respect and it's a fun group to hang out with.

And so you take the next job and you take the next job and before you realize that you have this sense of purpose because you go home on leave and you watch your friends from high school and the jobs they have are... They're making good money, but they don't have this calling, this sense of duty and they respect so much of what I was doing. I just started to feel this sense of purpose. And then before you know it, in the blink of an eye, you're the old guy on base and now you have this desire to give back to the institution that's given you so much. And so I think it's all of those stories along the way. Public

service is an amazing journey because the people that are in it, the people that do it for that long, do it for these esoteric, unbelievably patriotic and heartfelt reasons.

It's not about chasing a job. And again, I know we're a little bit lecturing to the choir but if you tell your stories, if you tell the best parts of military service, it's a calling, the profession of arms. If you tell those stories, they're going to be inspiring and people are going to follow your footsteps.

VCSAF Gen. David Allvin:

Man, I wish I'd gone first. Said what I was going to say only a little bit better. So I do believe it is about stories, it is about narratives. I think there is a narrative out there and as everything else, the pace of change quickens. So does the ability to get a narrative out there and get it to be crystallized and polarizing. And that's a problem because the narratives that are out there are sometimes not necessarily totally factual and sometimes without context. And so I'll use the example of... I've served, we all have served with heroes for the last three decades plus who have done America's work and some of them paid the ultimate sacrifice and some of them are still suffering from the wounds of it. And so thank God we have organizations that are here to take care of them. Sometimes that's all that America sees though. And so it becomes this picture of a place where people need to be fixed because they were broken.

And while that's true and we should be so thankful that there are those among us who are willing to do that for those within our formation who need that help, that's not the only narrative. There's another narrative out there and it just needs to be told and it needs to reach those who are going to follow on and be able to have that narrative to talk about in the future. This idea that Gen Z-ers and the youth are different, they don't really care that much, that's becoming debunked more and more. It's a human thing to want to be a part of a team. It's a human thing to want to live with purpose. It's a human thing to want to matter. And so value proposition, here's a value proposition for you. You get to participate in history rather than just watch it.

Kid grows up in the backdrop of the Cold War, decide he wants to fly, finds out his first assignment is in Germany, gets to be there when the wall comes down, gets to stand over Wenceslas Square when Vaclav Havel is talking over 300,000 people in a peaceful revolution and changing the face of Europe. Then that kid gets to come back to the states and participate in one of the biggest operations in a long time in the thing called Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and gets to see the most beautiful and terrible sunrises and sunsets and all those things that are happening in that desert war. And then gets to go through the rest of that next decade challenging himself in the most technical way, lucky enough to go to a place called Test Mile School and in the intellectual way to a place called SASS. And then gets to be a part of a team that when the world changes after 9/11 gets to lead that team into trying to transform that into a place where the nation can feel safe again.

And then is allowed to keep moving on and participate in three strategic reviews about how we might want to alter the strategy of the defense department, gets to come back and work on Air Force strategy, gets to go over to Europe and build a war plan for a command that was a relationship command that so Putin started screwing around the first time. And then gets to come back and speak in front of our audience about three plus decades worth of that story. Now, just because that was me I was talking about, you don't have to be a four star to get to do all those things. Everything I did, each one of those I did as part of a team, being part of a team in a time that matters in a place of consequence who could want more as far as a purpose filled life, there's your value proposition and that's what we have and that's what you're all living right now. So I agree with CSO, tell those stories. We are the value proposition. We should be living those and telling that rather than letting the story tell us.

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

Oh no, we're going by age. You first. You first.

CMSSF Roger A. Towberman:

Wow. When I was 17 years old, I packed up everything I owned in my 1976 Pontiac Catalina and I pulled away from my mom's double wide to be a rock star. You can see how that worked out. I messed up my life in every way imaginable. Between 17 and 22, I've stolen food to feed myself. It doesn't matter what I do, I don't think my debt with the United States Air Force and now Space Force will ever be paid. We've got to tell our stories, we've got to tell our stories and we've got to play offense. We can't just sit in our echo chambers and tell them, we can't just come into friendly confines and tell them. There was a time where maybe our brand was so significantly impenetrable that playing defense was good enough, and that as long as no ugly articles made the paper, we were okay. That time isn't now.

We've got to challenge the people who would twist the reality that because we choose to tackle the greatest ills of our society, that somehow that means we have more of those ills than anyone else. We've got to challenge that narrative with real stories of teamwork, of love, of second chances, of late bloomers. We've got to take this narrative to the streets. We've got to mobilize the nation that seems at times to be ripping itself apart. If you wear this uniform, you are what makes this country great. You are what unites us. And every single one of you can tell that story and we've got to play offense. It matters so much. Thank you for your service can't be just some polite thing people are supposed to say. It's got to be something that more people inherently understand. And so thanks in advance for getting outside of your echo chambers and helping to tell your story. I think the rest of the value proposition sort of works itself out. But you wanted to go last, so there you go.Smarty-pants.

CMSAF Joanne S. Bass:

This one, you can learn a lesson or two from your elders. I should have went first. There is no more nobler cause than to be able to serve one's nation, but I think it's important to appreciate that everybody joins for a different reason. And if you look along this stage, and if you heard what everybody said, we all join for different reason, transactional at times. When I look back in almost three decades, three decades this week it'll be, but I joined to get my GI Bill, figure out life. My dad told me that four years in the military never hurt anybody. I'm still trying to figure out what four years he was talking about. And then I tell people all the time, I only re-enlisted at the four-year mark to pay off my Honda Civic, like real talk. And then it was probably about the eight-year mark where I really joined our Air Force and I understood what it means to wear our nation's cloth.

And so today we have to appreciate that everybody joins for a different reason. And that's okay. I actually tell our Airmen all the time, "I don't actually care if you sign up to do four years, six years, eight years, 28 years, most of us just signed up to do four quick years. What I do expect you to do is to make our department of the Air Force better. That is what we need for you to do." Especially at a time like this where we're serving in the most complex times ever. And so that is a value proposition that I might offer. I would also offer that we also have to value the fact that we have five generations that are serving in today's workforce. And when people talk about Gen Z, Vice Chief, as you talk about that, you know what we've learned about Gen Z is Gen Z, by the way, actually wants to serve.

They just want to serve in their own way. And so we've got to figure out those different pathways to allow them to be able to serve their nation and really be able to serve in this noble cause. And so with that, thank you all so much for your time. Thank you for your service. And on behalf of all of us, please thank your family members and your loved ones for their support to you so that you can defend this nation. Thank you.

Katharine Kelley:

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much. I have failed miserably as the moderator I am over time, but if you got something out of this, if you've got a lot out of this, a huge round of applause for our panel. And thank you all so much.

Voiceover:

Thank you so much would K. Kelly and our Esteem Panel, please remain on the stage for the Joan Orr Spouse of the Year presentation. Will Meredith Smith, please come forward and join our panel stage center?

Mrs. Meredith Smith exemplifies outstanding volunteer service through her diverse and ongoing support of military spouses. She established a 5 million dollar pilot fellowship program in a variety of industries and led a team of 85 people as they manage 65 military spouse professional networks. Smith hosted a 101 professional development workshops helping military spouses fine tune their resumes and LinkedIn profiles. She also collaborated with industry and nonprofit partners to hire, train and advocate for military spouses. She advocated for a military spouse employment through a military spouse employment summit that included two congressional speakers and 381 participants from seven countries.

Her advocacy on behalf of military spouses was elevated all the way to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Office of Personnel Management and the White House. She was instrumental in the support for Operation Allies Welcome and assisted with workforce resettlement training for Afghan refugees. The Air and Space Forces Association is pleased to present the 2022 Joan Orr Spouse of the Year Award to Meredith Smith. Thank you and congratulations to Meredith Smith and thanks to our panel. Ladies and gentlemen, please remain in the ballroom. The next panel will begin momentarily.