

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James  
"State of the Force"  
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**Secretary James:** Thank you very much, George, and good morning everyone. I hope everyone had a great day yesterday. I know I certainly did. I was right here in the front row for most of the presentations. I found them to be very interesting. I carry around with me at all times a small book. If I ever lose that book I feel like I'm going to lose my brains because I do take copious notes, and I found all of the presentations to be very very good and very interesting.

I want to thank particularly the Air Force Association and very particularly the Central Florida Chapter for all the great work that they did. It's enormous work to pull something like this together and I think they did a fabulous job for all of us.

I also want to comment just briefly, many of you, some of you at least, were there last night. I thought last night was just an enormous amount of fun. A good time was had by all. As a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs I was especially pleased that we were honoring members of our National Guard and Reserve last night. I always have a special place in my heart for our Citizen Soldiers and Citizen Airmen. Back when I was in that job in the 1990s and I have purview over all seven of our reserve components across the Army and the Marines and the Navy and the Air Force, I used to refer to our air components as the superstars among the Guard and Reserve. Last night made me realize that I like to be right and I certainly was right in that assessment.

Also thanks to the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, and to all the employers across America who support our Guard and Reserve, but even beyond that who hire our veterans, particularly our wounded veterans. All of you really rock, and many of you who have done that good work are here with us today.

The entertainer last night I also thought was very cool. His name was Andy Childs. Personally I was not familiar with him, but really enjoyed his performance and he -- Willie Nelson and that Elvis impression he had going on was one of my favorites. But I think my absolute favorite was the first song that he sang which some of you will recall was Save the World<sup>1</sup>, which Eric Clapton originally made famous. But I love that song, Save the World, because that's pretty much the way I feel about our Air Force and what our Air Force does day in and day out, and why it is that I feel so proud to be part of this team, so proud to be the 23<sup>rd</sup> Secretary of the Air Force. It truly is for me a great team and it is the honor of my lifetime to now be part of it.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the song is Change the World by Eric Clapton.

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Lastly, I want to say I was so happy to see that we paid tribute to Craig McKinley last night. So well deserved, so special, and I was thinking all through the evening I had to work this into my remarks this morning and just how to do it. I had to give this some thought.

I always knew that Craig was a senior, underscore the word senior statesman, but I must say I never quite realized that he was right up there with the likes of George Washington and Ulysses S. Grant. [Laughter]. Boy oh boy. Rumor has it they were a year or two ahead of your year group, right? But it's a good thing we did that honor last night, because Craig, you're getting a little long in the tooth. I'm just saying. [Laughter]. Anyway, a great time yesterday and last evening and we're going to have a good day today as well.

I'd also like to begin by saying that our relationship with the Air Force Association is extremely important in the Air Force. We value it a great deal. And I personally am so glad to be here with you in Orlando. My initiation as an AFA speaker, not to mention one of my first public events, was actually at an Air Force Association breakfast last month back in Washington. I had intended to be with you back in November in Los Angeles at the Pacific Air and Space Symposium; however, my nomination was still pending before the Senate at that time so I wasn't able to join you. You all, I think, have heard about that lightning speed confirmation process and the way they do it in Washington and in the Senate. Of course it's not as lightning speed as somebody like me would have liked who was very anxious and very pleased to have this opportunity. So it wasn't as fast as I would have liked, but it all worked out in the end and it was well worth the wait.

When I finally was confirmed back in December, again, it was the culmination for me of 30 years of my life of service on behalf of defense. The greatest privilege of all is working alongside our amazing Active Duty, Guard, Reserve and Civilian Airmen, plus their families, many of whom I've been able to meet over the past two months, plus our industry partners. Together all of these categories to me comprise our Total Force team.

I don't have to tell this gang just how great our men and women in uniform are. You heard plenty of those stories yesterday, but you know what? You're going to hear at least a few more from me today because it's impossible not to be a cheerleader for these fine, fine Americans.

So now that I've been on the job for two months let me tell you, it has gone by in a flash. There is so much to see and do and

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learn and there are so many issues happening all at once, it's extremely exciting.

So today what I thought I'd do is I thought I would share with you some of my impressions from the first eight weeks, some of the issues that I've been working on, some of the places that I've been. Then I'd like to evolve into what are the top three priorities that I've laid out, that the Chief has laid out. You've heard these themes before, but today I'd like to share them with you in my own words and how I think about them. Then as I begin to wrap up, I'd like to also talk to you about some thoughts on how we're going to reinvigorate our focus on ethics and on the enduring Core Values that define really who we are and our essence in the Air Force.

So let's start at the beginning with some first impressions.

No doubt about it, this is an extremely, extremely exciting time to serve in whatever capacity you may be serving -- either in uniform or out. Our strategic environment is extremely dynamic. Although the wars in the Middle East appear to be winding down there are still plenty of threats out there on our horizon. These are threats from traditional state actors and then there are non-state actors as well.

The fiscal environment also remains extremely challenging and yes, we have some temporary relief under the Bipartisan Budget Act where we have gotten away from sequestration in the immediate future, but it's temporary and it's still a very very challenging environment, though we're extremely grateful to have this respite that we now have.

So I look at all of that and I believe that we need to continue to work on growing and maintaining an Air Force for today's needs as well as tomorrow's challenges. This is of extreme importance, and we have to always keep in mind both the strategy of what it is we may be asked to do when the nation calls, but also the likely budget that we are likely to have in the future. If we don't put those two things together, then in my opinion our plans, no matter how good they may be developed, they simply won't be realistic.

This is why as we look to the future I am certain that the future of our Air Force means that we will be a smaller Air Force overall, but it is our charge to make sure that we are an Air Force that remains on the cutting edge of technology and able to provide that important capability when the nation calls to fulfill the nation's needs.

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I've begun to just scratch the surface, I will admit. Only scratch the surface on these issues during my first eight weeks on the job and I've done this in meetings at the Pentagon, briefings, as well as earlier this week we had our CORONA South meeting. But beyond the headquarters level type discussions, I've also tried to make it a point to get out beyond the Beltway and to see our Airmen at work.

So since December I have visited Airmen in eight states and in the District of Columbia. I also made some calls New Year's Eve to our Airmen in Afghanistan. I told them how proud we are of all the work they're doing and how I hoped to be able to get over there to see them soon and to see their leaders as well. And by the way, you'll be very pleased to know that I thought morale was sky high. They were very motivated. They were missing families, but they were well in touch with families and it made me feel that we were in good hands in the AOR.

In short, I am finding out what many of you already know in great detail. That is that our total team is extraordinary and that our people underpin everything that we do. We're very very fortunate to have them and I've been very impressed with them wherever I have traveled.

One lesson that I learned very early on is that it's hard, if not downright impossible, for a Secretary of the Air Force to fly under the radar, shall we say, to make a low key impromptu visit anywhere. I used to pop in on people. I'm finding it harder and harder to pop in these days.

A case in point, I was taking a few days' vacation out in California and I realized literally as I was landing on my vacation that right there at the Los Angeles Airport was the Los Angeles Air Force Base, which is one of the hubs of our space mission. So I came up with the idea, just spur of the moment that I wanted to visit Los Angeles Air Force Base. You know where I'm going with this. I called back and I didn't think it would be a huge deal, but I called back to the Pentagon and I talked to my military assistant to say "Hey, I have this great idea. Three days from now when I'm back at the airport ready to fly home I'd like to pop in on Los Angeles Air Force Base and talk to some Airmen." Well, rumor has it that there was a run on blood pressure medicine that day at the Pentagon, but somehow we all got through it and it was a terrific visit. Too short, and it just means I'll have to go back.

I've also learned directly about the compassion and honor with which our Airmen serve. Believe it or not in my first four weeks I went to Dover Air Force Base three times. So Dover Air Force Base three times in the first four weeks. Two of those three

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times were to welcome home fallen Airmen, the solemn occasion know as the dignified transfer. This is also an opportunity to meet with families, all of whom are going through enormous grief. Enormous pride, but enormous grief at the same time. And believe me, it was a sobering and humbling experience. So personally, I will never forget David Lyon, Sean Ruane, Chris Stover, Dale Matthews, Afton Ponce. These two dignified transfer events involved the downing of a helicopter in Lakenheath in which we lost four of our Airmen. David Lyon was a logistics officer who died in Afghanistan from an IED.

I was tremendously impressed with the care that these Airmen were given and their families, the chaplains who were ministering to them, the men and women of Air Force Mortuary Affairs, the Joint Services Team at Dover Port Mortuary. Great, great people who are performing an extremely important mission, one that the families will remember forever. And it's extraordinarily hard because it's very stressful on them as well. But an example of how we in the government take care of our families and our Airmen from the beginning right up until the end.

I then returned to Dover a third time to meet with Airmen at the aerial port who support our air mobility mission there. I've seen our Total Force in action at the 512th Airlift Wing which is an integrated reserve associate wing that works side by side with our active duty Airmen of the 436th Airlift Wing performing C-5 Airlift missions.

At Dover I also got to learn more about the National Guard and Reserve, the specialized missions that the Delaware Air National Guard performs in the area of aeromedical evacuation. And by the way, one of my other first public presentations when I became Secretary, was I had the opportunity to testify before the National Commission on the Future Structure of the Air Force. I told them and I would like to tell you all today, that although I cannot share the details of the FY15 budget roll-out, that is still a couple of weeks yet ahead of us, I can tell you this that we will have greater reliance on our National Guard in the future -- not less, but more. We will have more integration, we will have more collaboration, and there will be a variety of details that we'll be able to share with you as I said several weeks from now to illustrate that basic point.

I also had a terrific visit to see Basic Military Training. I visited with the trainees and their instructors at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, as well as had a visit out to the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. So I saw how we were bringing our new young people, both on the enlisted side and some of our commissioning sources, into the officer corps. If you ever want to be wowed, if you ever really want a wow factor, then

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these are the locations that you should travel to and meet these young people.

I also want to give a shout out. We have some young ROTC cadets with us here today. I met a number of them yesterday from Embry Riddle and Troy and UCF, so this is the real future of our Air Force and I call them the "wow factor."

I also have been to the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile bases at FE Warren and Minot and Malmstrom visiting our bomber forces and our nuclear missileers then on to the Global Strike Command at Barksdale. Although a number of these Airmen have been in the headlines recently for serious integrity failures, I want you to know there are thousands more that are performing with dedication and excellence every day and I am very proud of them.

Before coming here to Orlando, I went and I visited Eglin where I got to see for the first time the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter mission. I talked to pilots, maintainers, people who are training, people who are involved with testing. Talked about the aircraft, its capabilities, some of the challenges. And my mother taught me never to brag so I never brag, but I just wanted to point out that I did kill a MiG in the simulator. It was a clean kill. Just saying. Not bragging, just saying.  
[Laughter].

Then closer to the Pentagon I had a chance to go over to Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling. I visited with our Honor Guard, our Air Force Band and learned more about the positive impact that everyone who's lucky enough to see these great Airmen, that it has and the work that they do for us in the Air Force.

While I was at Bolling I learned that the Air Force Strings were playing in an upcoming Black History Month event at the Metropolitan AME Church in the District, so I said "Hey, I'm going." I was thrilled. I wanted to be there. Believe me, it was a phenomenal performance on the part of the band, but I was also struck by one of the comments that one of the church leaders spoke, in the introductory remarks. She talked about the church's great history, its role in the Civil Rights Movement, for this church had been a destination on the Underground Railroad during the time of slavery, and the pride that the congregation should take in all of these achievements. But her main message to everyone assembled was this. She said it's not good enough to just learn about our legacy, it's not good enough to just celebrate our legacy, we are charged with living our legacy. We live our legacy and we carry it forward, we pay it forward.

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That sentiment really struck a chord with me, and I think the same can and must be said about our Air Force. All of our Air Force, all of America, really, should take pride in our history and our heritage. The last century's accomplishments were huge. They were beyond imagination. We talked some about this yesterday. We are standing on the shoulders of those pioneers who came before us. But we can't be content to just celebrate that past because Airmen, of course, look to the future. So we are living our legacy today with today's innovative Airmen and with the innovations with industry, because you're our partners too. Together, all of us have to figure out the way ahead and how to pay it forward for our Air Force and our nation.

Let me now turn to the three priorities that I identified for the Air Force. The themes are similar to what you've heard in the past, but this is me in my own words and the way that I intend to proceed.

So priority number one for me is without doubt taking care of our people. For you see, in the three decades that I have had a working life -- including time on Capitol Hill, the House Armed Services Committee; I had a tour in the Pentagon as Reserve Affairs Assistant Secretary; and for 14 years I've been in industry. So whether I've been involved with defense policy as it pertains to people or whether I was in industry delivering services and solutions to the government, across the board people were the most important thing -- having the right people in the right job at the right time who are trained and developed. It always comes down to people.

So here in the Air Force taking care of people, what that means to me is recruiting, retaining and shaping our force so that we have the right people in the right jobs for our immediate future as well as thinking ahead to the longer term. As I said, we are going to be becoming smaller. We will be going through a force-shaping set of procedures which will include mostly voluntary measures. We may do some involuntary as well. This will be a big deal over the next year or two in our Air Force. People are thinking about it a lot, some people are worried about it a lot. We have to keep communicating on this so that we get this done right.

The other part of taking care of people is compensating people fairly. And I think as everybody knows in this room, compensation has gone up quite a bit in the last dozen years, and I think what we're going to see over time is a leveling off. We won't see the rate of growth that we saw in the last dozen years, but that doesn't mean that we should take our eye off the ball. We have to always make sure that we remain competitive with the

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private sector and that we get the right people in those right jobs.

Taking care of people to me also means growing our leadership, developing our people, and getting more diversity of thought at the table. That includes people who come from diverse backgrounds. Different people with diverse backgrounds have different approaches to problems and I'm convinced that we will always have better solutions if we get that diversity of thought.

It means protecting family programs. Achieving a work/life balance which is really hard for some people in the Air Force. A lot of people, because there is a lot of work to be done and it's hard to remember to get that work/life balance in there.

It means leveraging the best talents against our Active, our Guard, our Reserve and our Civilian teams. It also means that we need to ensure a climate of dignity and respect for all, all the time, period. Whether you're on duty or off duty. And as I've traveled around to these bases one of the issues that I'm tracking on is sexual assault and sexual harassment. I'm listening and watching to see what kind of changes have been made over the last year or two. I will tell you, I've been impressed with what I have seen. I think our top leaders, without question, get the importance of it. They're on it. We're working it. That's the way it needs to remain. Persistent focus is the way that we will eventually create an Air Force where this kind of behavior simply won't exist anymore.

Many facets to people, but taking care of people is job one.

Number two is balancing today's readiness with tomorrow's modernization. I want to say up front on this one that when it comes to today's readiness I have the utmost confidence in our Air Force if they are called tonight to go do a mission halfway across the globe, I have utmost confidence that they will step up to that job and they will do a magnificent job.

With that said, I wouldn't be truthful with you if I didn't tell you that readiness has slipped in recent years. Last year during sequestration was a particularly difficult time. You're aware we had to stand down some of our flying squadrons and take other actions. So readiness has slipped. We need to reverse this.

The Chief is committed, I'm committed, we are all committed to returning the Air Force readiness to higher levels than what we have today. We owe it to our Airmen. We owe it to our country. So that's what we're going to do.



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With the immediate relief that's been provided in FY14 and FY15, we are going to take most of that and we are going to beef up our readiness. It doesn't mean it's going to be perfect, it doesn't mean that that's going to fix it, it doesn't mean that we wouldn't like to do more and that we need to continue to focus on it for the years to come, but it is going to be a top priority moving forward.

That's today's readiness. Then there's tomorrow's readiness which is my way of talking about modernization and the need to recapitalize our platforms to ensure that we stay ahead of the threats and remain able to control the skies, project power, and extend global reach for the years to come. So here's where, as you all know, our top three programs, they remain very strong with us.

The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the Lightning II; the new KC-46 Tanker which as you heard yesterday we have named the Pegasus; the Long Range Strike Bomber. These are our top three. There are others, of course, but these are our top three. We don't have a formal name for the Long Range Strike Bomber yet, however I did pick up yesterday General Field I thought had a good idea there, and whether we get it through the censor police on names back in Washington, but he said Badass. I kind of like Badass for the Long Range Strike Bomber. So we'll see if we can pull that off. [Laughter].

Anyway, balancing today's readiness with tomorrow's readiness, meaning modernization, is crucial. Getting that balance correctly done, believe me, is not an easy deal.

The third is make every dollar count. Add value to the taxpayer in everything we do. I am so happy that all the conversations I have heard over the last day or so here at AFA, everybody is on that one. Everybody is talking about that. That is so very important. Because you see all of us in one way, shape or form, we need to be good stewards for the responsibility to deliver value to the taxpayer. Make sure that our programs are on budget, on schedule. We need to ultimately deliver auditable books of how we allocate and spend our money in the Department of Defense. Currently we still can't do that. So all of these factors are involved with making every dollar count, making sure that we deliver value and getting our costs down.

I want to say just a few more words about the importance of industry in this equation. Next to our military people and our civilian people in DoD, there's no more direct contribution that can be made to military capability than that which our industry partners provide. So I absolutely understand the importance that industry brings to the table. I know this on a variety of

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levels, not the least of which is I just a few short months ago was walking in your shoes in the private sector. So I certainly understand that. I understand very well how the budget uncertainties have made planning extremely difficult across the board. It's true in industry and it's true in government. I recognize all of the recent stops and starts that we have gone through in the government and the impacts that they have on our large and small businesses. But the good news, there's always a bit of good news here, we do have a bit of a breather. We have a bit of certainty now going forward for the next short run, so I think we need to use that time wisely.

Part of that is having better communications and relations with industry. We're going to be looking for ways to do more of that. We've already started that process right here and right now at AFA, but I want to thank all of you in industry for your help in reaching affordable solutions for us so that we can meet the difficult challenges that we face, but within perhaps reduced budget levels.

The details on how we plan to advance the three priorities I laid out -- so that's taking care of people, the readiness of today with the readiness of tomorrow, and best value for the taxpayer -- the details on how we'll do all of that will be rolled out in March as part of the 2015 budget. Shortly thereafter General Welsh and I are going to head to Capitol Hill and we'll start the posture hearings and talking to Congress and explaining our point of view.

But I'm going to tell you right off the bat, all of my time on Capitol Hill, my previous time in the Pentagon and knowing what I know about the budget as it will be rolled out, we had to make some very hard choices in the Air Force. I think that's true across the board in all of our military services. And when the total details are known, I guarantee you there are going to be some things that you like and there are going to be some things that you don't like. There are things that we don't like. But when you're faced with budgetary choices in a tough situation, this is why leaders are leaders. They're expected to lead.

For example, you may well see that there could be retirements of entire fleets of aircraft. I already mentioned the force shaping proposals that we have. There will be headquarters reductions. There will be a number of areas like this where we will be reducing.

I'm telling you all of this now to get you prepared and ask for your help in helping us tell the total story of how we need to achieve these savings, sometimes in very unpopular ways, so that we can take those savings and reinvest them into some of the key

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areas -- people, readiness, modernization -- that I talked about earlier. I hope that we can count on all of your support to help us sell this total package. Even though there may be individual pieces that some of you will disagree with. That's what team work is all about. So I ask you here and now for your help on that.

Let me shift now, and this is the final topic before I close. That is the topic of ethics and our core values in the Air Force.

Last month based on the findings of an OSI investigation we announced that there are 92 missile crew members, all of them young lieutenants and captains in our Air Force, in Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana that had some level of involvement with a cheating incident involving a monthly proficiency test on nuclear weapons. Some of these officers were directly involved in cheating; others knew something about it but for whatever reason they failed to stop it and they failed to report it.

The week after we announced the cheating incident, I personally decided I was going to clear the decks, whatever else I had on the books that week was not as important as this, and I went out to the missile fields because I wanted to see it, I wanted to talk to some of the people involved and learn more about it very directly on the ground. By the way, General Welsh did exactly the same thing, but we weren't together on our trips. We were on separate trips. We were essentially criss-crossing the country, hitting ultimately the same locations. But the idea was to fan out and to talk to as many people as possible.

In my case, again, I went to FE Warren, Malmstrom, Minot, the Air Force Global Strike Command at Barksdale. At each location I received command briefs, I took tours, and very importantly I talked to Airmen. I did this in big town hall settings, but I did it in small focus groups where it was just me and the Airmen and it was my effort to get a conversation going in a less stressful environment. What I found from the totality of this research was really quite enlightening.

I am convinced after all of this, that number one, our nuclear mission is safe and secure. One test does not make or break anything and there are plenty of outside evaluations and inspections which demonstrate to me that these Airmen know their job, they're performing it well, so our nuclear mission is safe and secure.

But that still leaves us with what to me is just an absolute failure of integrity on the part of some Airmen, and of course that's the bad news. So how did all this happen? And most importantly, what are we going to do about it?

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I don't have the answers for all of you today on that. We do have an ongoing investigation including a Commander Directed Investigation and a Force Improvement Study. General Wilson has set those up and those are still ongoing. We'll know more by the end of March. But after my base visits one of my initial observations is we definitely need to reinvigorate our Air Force Core Values. Just as a reminder, that is *Integrity First*, *Service Before Self*, and *Excellence In All We Do*. As the Chief said yesterday, if there are Airmen who disagree with these three points, that's okay. But you shouldn't be in our Air Force because you're not one of us.

So Airmen need to be reminded. And I'm not just talking about those in the missile career field. All of our Airmen need to be reminded. WE need to look for ways to build this in at all levels throughout the careers of all of our Airmen. Integrity First means you are charged with acting in a matter of integrity for you as an individual; but equally important, the charge, if you see something wrong in your environment, if you see even a buddy or a friend doing something wrong, integrity requires your loyalty to the Air Force first. That means you need to let us know what's going on. You need to do something to stop that wrongdoing.

In this case the coming forward, the letting us know part, that's the part that didn't happen. So we need to make sure that we are taking actions to remind people about their responsibilities and what integrity means in the Air Force.

By the way, you may have read that Secretary Hagel plans to appoint a general officer to his senior staff who will be advising him and all of the services on issues focused on core values, ethics, and character. So you might think of this as a senior advisor for military professionalism to the Secretary of Defense. So we will certainly in the Air Force be a major component of that work yet ahead with Secretary Hagel.

One more time, although this is a bad failure of integrity on the part of certain Airmen, I do want to reinforce to you that the majority of people out there, the vast, vast majority, are working hard, they're working to great national importance. This is the nuclear Airmen and others as well, and they are performing magnificently. But when something like this happens, and by the way I think it's the same story in industry, my company had a few bad apples and the damage that a few bad apples can do to the greater whole is just enormous.

As for the challenges we have, we will address them and people will be held accountable appropriately. We didn't get here

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overnight. I'm sure we're not going to fix it overnight either, but we will get there. Reminding each other about the core values is going to be part of it. Again, just as I said earlier when I talked about sexual assault, sexual harassment, what's going to fix that is the same thing that's going to fix this, that is persistent focus, persistent leadership, and persistent action. That is what we're going to deliver here. Core values is not a program in the Air Force, it's a way of life.

Let me now close by saying that although we face challenges, I'm a firm believer and I've learned throughout my life that with challenge comes great opportunity. I'm convinced that the future of our Air Force is extremely bright. The nation has a go-to force and that go-to force is the Air Force, for we are involved with everything that goes on across the joint world. We're available to the President's call at a moment's notice, providing global reach, global power, and global vigilance. We're flexible. We provide options to the President and to the National Command Authorities in minutes and hours -- not days and weeks. And our military, the rest of our military simply can't operate nowadays without the capabilities that we bring to the table.

So our future is very very bright and I like to remind everyone of that any time I get the opportunity to speak.

So whether we're flying an aircraft to project visible air power capability; or whether as we did last night we successfully launched a satellite from our facilities in Florida to provide GPS for the nation; or whether we're guarding a missile silo in the Great North; or refueling an airlifter over the Pacific; or providing close air support in Afghanistan -- our security depends on these amazing Airmen. The more time I spend with them, the more I see that they carry out these indispensable missions, the more proud I am of them and of their families for the sacrifices that they endure, sometimes in very remote locations, deployments around the world. Our Airmen are very dedicated professionals. They are steadfast in their commitment to America. And they are living our legacy every day.

So to our friends at the Air Force Association, to all of you who have assembled here today I thank you again for the opportunity to be with you and remember, I'm going to give my own motto here -- Air Power -- Living the legacy and Paying it forward.

Thank you very much.

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