

**2015 Air and Space Conference
Air Force Senior Leaders and Spouses
Airmen and Family Programs Town Hall
14 September 2015**

MR. BARRETT: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to our first ever Airmen and Family Programs Senior Leader Town Hall. We're very excited this year to have sessions intertwined throughout the conference for all three days that focus on Airmen and family issues. These are noted in your program and are open to all. To start off our Airmen and Family Programs Sessions, we have a great opportunity for interaction with senior leadership of our Air Force and their amazing spouses. On stage, we have Chief Master Sergeant in the Air Force, James Cody, and his wife Athena. [Applause] Our Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Mark Welsh, and his wife Betty. [Applause] And our Secretary of the Air Force, Deborah James, and her husband, Frank Beatty. [Applause] I'm also very pleased to have my good friend, Mr. Dan Sitterly joining us as a moderator. Mr. Sitterly is the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Dan, over to you.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, thank you very much. Our Top Three Leadership Team truly does believe taking care of our Total Force Airmen is priority number one. So this forum and several of the other forums this week for Airmen and Family

Programs are in fact historic, so everybody out there, check in on Facebook, invite everybody here, Tweet them, Instagram them, do whatever it is, bring them all in, so that we can ask our top leadership some really tough questions directly. So here are the rules of engagement. This is how this is going to work today. In front of everybody is a card where you can put some questions. As you put those questions down, if you'll just wave your arm at somebody, the Airmen in the middle will come and collect your questions, bring them on up here, and then I will address that question to the appropriate panel member. So to get us started, as you might have noticed, our leadership is all sort of type A personalities, so behind the stage we flipped a coin, and we determined who would go first and get the first tough question. As you might of guessed, the Secretary won, so --[laughter] all the hard questions will go to Chief Cody. I wasn't born yesterday. So Madame Secretary, would you care to share with us something that perhaps has surprised you the most in your role as the Secretary as you go around visiting our Airmen?

SECRETARY JAMES: Well, first of all, thank you, Dan. Thank you, Mark. Thank you to AFA for putting this series together for Airmen and our families. I'm really glad we're doing it. I can't even half believe we didn't do it before, but glad we're doing it now because it's a terribly, terribly

important subject to be able to discuss. I guess if I think about things that surprise me, particularly from a quality of life or family perspective, I have to always begin with I served in the 1990s, so I can't help but remember how things used to be, and now here I am the 23rd Secretary of the Air Force, and I'm seeing it all for a new time, for a second time if you will. So I was extremely pleasantly surprised by several things. First of all, the quality of our child development centers I think is leaps and bounds better today than it certainly was during the 1990s. I can remember back in the 1980s all of the workers in our child development centers were not appropriated-fund employees, and the wages were very low, and there were concerns about the quality of the care and the rest of it. So I think our child development centers are just way, way a cut above certainly what I remember.

The other pleasant surprise for me has been the quality of family housing of what I have seen in a lot of different locations, and I think the privatization efforts perhaps have gone a long way toward achieving what I think is much, much better family housing, and then I'll conclude with just kind of an interesting vignette. The first time that I ever traveled with Frank it happened to be at the Charleston Air Force Base, and as part of our program, we did a round table discussion with the Key Spouses there at Charleston, and boy oh

boy, you want to talk about tough questions, they were nailing me on a lot of tough questions, and they were nailing you as well. So the spouses -- this is not surprising -- very well informed to a degree, but the flow of information from Airman to spouse isn't always 100 percent perfect, right? So there's where I could tell that communication, communication, communication is as always very important.

SECRETARY SITTERLY: Thank you Madame Secretary. Mr. Beatty, you have a rather unique role being the civilian spouse of the secretary. How's that been for you?

MR. BEATTY: Very interesting. I really enjoy it, and I really come from a totally different space. My entire professional career has not been in the military. My civilian Airman career goes back 18 months, but that's it. I've been now with Debbie on eight different base visits, and every single one we have lunch with a spouse group, go to the daycare center, the rec center, but I think the best part is at the lunches with the other spouses where they talk about a lot of their issues, and it was very eye-opening to me the main topics are the local schooling, whether to home school the children or not. A lot of the spouses have professional degrees, a law degree, or nursing degrees, and they're having trouble working at their location because they don't have the license in that particular state. So all these things added up. It's pretty eye-opening to me.

Stuff like that, I'd never thought about before. And the Key Spouse Program, I think has helped a lot of those issues. So that's my take so far.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, sir. Chief, anything surprise you these days?

GENERAL WELSH: Nothing surprises me. The biggest thing that surprises me about our Air Force spouses and families is the support they continue to provide. And most of us came into an Air Force where we were relatively static. We might have gone TDY for training during the first 15, 20 years of our career, but it's not like we deployed constantly into combat operations like 90-plus percent of the Air Force has been doing now since the day they joined the service, and their families have supported them through these deployments. They worry about them while they're gone. They worry about them leaving again once they get back, and yet they still support the Air Force, their Airman, their unit. They serve as key spouses. They serve in support of family support centers and Airmen and Family Programs. They're unbelievable. They always have been. All of you who are here are unbelievable. But these younger spouses who have grown up in this environment where that's all they've known and yet continue to support this 110 percent effort are pretty spectacular.

MR. SITTERLY: Great, thank you Chief. Mrs. Welsh, I

actually have a question from the audience for you, and also for Mrs. Chief Cody, and the question is what do you recommend the response be from a Key Spouse to a commander who says he has never worked with families and has no plans to start?

MRS. WELSH: Oh dear. [Laughter] Well, I would encourage her to have a sit-down and meet with that squadron commander and outline exactly what a spouse can do, what a Key Spouse can do for the squadron, what they can do for communication, how they can be a conduit to help the Airmen and their families, which will make his job easier. I think that part of that is probably if he has not been involved before, he doesn't realize the power of a key spouse, of a spouse in general, the enthusiasm, support that they can lend to him, only making the squadron and their Airmen stronger.

GENERAL WELSH: Daniel, let me add one thing to that.

MR. SITTERLY: Please, Chief.

GENERAL WELSH: She should know that there is one thing, one thing that I send a letter every year to every squadron commander in the Air Force about, and that's the Key Spouse Program, and I tell them this is their program. They're responsible and accountable for caring for their families, good or bad issues that they deal with, so she should mention that to the squadron commander while she has this conversation.

[Laughter]

MR. SITTERLY: Excellent, thank you. I told you that you got to ask the questions directly to the leadership. Okay, Chief Cody, I have a question for you. This is from the audience. What is being done to fix and update the Air Force Exceptional Family Member Program, and how can I be a part of the solution?

CHIEF CODY: So certainly you can be part of the solution by articulating your particular concerns, so unless we fully appreciate the impacts of your situation, we're not going to cover down on probably how we can best provide support to those with exceptional family members. And to be honest with you, we have the aperture wide open on how we continue to provide support to our military members that do have exceptional family members. The challenge is, is how we are able to track this and then how we are able to transition these folks -- these families as they move throughout our Air Force. There's no lack of commitment by Secretary James or General Welsh or Mr. Beatty or Mrs. Welsh or Athena and myself in wanting to support the families, but you have to balance that against the Air Force mission requirements and where we can actually provide the type of care necessary maybe for the family member. There's a lot of legislative interest in this also. There are also certainly some great backing, and we are constantly being asked what can be done in that front to kind of support if we need to make some

adjustments to policies or if there is something that they can do from the legislative branch, but it really first comes down to making sure we have a full appreciation in acknowledging what the challenges are. And I would put this out to those families that do have exceptional family members. You just can't pick and choose. So sometimes we run into a very challenging environment where we have been able to identify a family that does have a situation that requires us to track them as an exceptional family, and we're able to work within that, but then of course that does in some cases place limitations on where they might go and their opportunities, understanding that's a great level of frustration, so some people are hesitant to let us know. And then we'll move them about our Air Force. They'll go. We don't know about these things, and they'll get to some place where we can't provide them the necessary care, and that creates challenges, first and foremost for the family member. So we ask to have that open dialog, but there are some particular things we're trying to work with within OSD on how we can -- and this is an OSD-level effort -- so throughout the Department of Defense where we can smoothly transfer care of our exceptional family members from one area to the other because sometimes one of the greater frustrations is they might be receiving care in one area that is very good and in certain situations, it's critical to the family member, and then when we

go through these transitions where we will be able to PCS the family and the member, there's a lag when they can start receiving care from the next folks. So we are deliberately working on some better processes by which we can authorize care before you actually in process. So that's a pretty big effort.

MR. SITTERLY: Great. Thank you very much, Chief. Mrs. Chief Cody, question for you. Are we working with businesses to provide distance working opportunities such as telework for our spouses?

MRS. CODY: I would actually say that we're probably doing better now than we've ever done before. If you spend any time with Military OneSource, SECO (Spouse Education Career Opportunities), MSEP (Military Spouse Employment Partnership) -- any of those programs -- you have all the right people in the right places from the President and Mrs. Obama all the way down supporting all military families and spouses. The opportunities that exist today never existed 20 and 30 years ago. All we have to do is communicate those opportunities. Make sure that people know that they're available and that they're there, and that's probably the biggest obstacle as we travel on, and we speak to family members and spouses, is they just don't know it's there. They don't know that the opportunities are there. The simplest one, and the one that I generally open with is the four thousand dollar scholarships that are available through SECO. You know,

how many family members do you know of or spouses that would take advantage of it if they just knew. So I don't think that we could be doing a better job. The only way we could do better by spouses is figuring out how to communicate that information.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, ma'am. Secretary James, please.

SECRETARY JAMES: Could I make one point --

MR. SITTERLY: Absolutely.

SECRETARY JAMES: -- in relation to that, and that's about a new program that I recently learned about. It's called VWISE. VWISE stands -- I believe I've got this acronym correct -- for Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship. It's a collaboration between the VA and Syracuse University, and the approach -- it's targeted at female veterans as well as spouses of military members. And the idea is to put them through a crash course on how to start your own home business, how to start a small business of some sort, which could be a home business, and so I thought, wow, this is the first I'd ever heard of this program. Several hundred people go through it at a clip. I had the opportunity to speak with that particular class not too long ago, and I walked away really, really impressed with it. So that's just one other resource to check out, VWISE, which is a collaboration between the VA and Syracuse University.

MRS. CODY: If I could add just one more thing. SECO just did a Webinar. In fact, it filled so fast on the entrepreneurship courses that they're going to come back, and they're actually going to do it again. Additionally getting back to the last piece of the question that you asked before about overseas teleworking, I believe that they're going to do some webinars after they do a little bit of research on that as well. So there's a lot more to come through that organization. You've just go to tap in and look at the calendar.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you. So this question is for General Welsh, and you might have to have a help line from Mrs. Welsh on this one. General Welsh, you seem like an incredible family man. How do you create the time to impact the Air Force in such a great way, but also give your family the time they deserve?

GENERAL WELSH: I don't think I've ever given my family the time they deserve actually, Daniel. It's one of the things that I worry about all the time. And I don't think I'm an incredible family guy. I just love my family a lot, and I married the right woman. She has done a remarkable job of raising our children while I've been deployed like so many of you, doing other things in other places, wishing I was home or at the events that would have been more meaningful for my kids. I spent most of the time my kids were growing up wondering if we

ruined them because we moved them so many times and took them out of schools and didn't get to do all the things that I would have loved to do with them because we were doing something that both Betty and I thought was important. I was just blessed with someone who carried me through all that and carried our family through it. My kids will now tell you looking back that they wouldn't change a thing, and it was mainly because of the greater Air Force family. It was all of you. It was the people they grew up around, the people they grew up knowing, the role models they had living next door. We have a son who is a Marine today because he called us one day and said, you know, I've been working in the business world for five years, and I can't find the people I grew up around. It's time I served and stood for something. So any success that I have had in this role is because of the beautiful lady sitting to my left and all of you who have been friends for a lifetime. [Applause]

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, Chief.

MRS. WELSH: Dan, I'll just add to that. I'll just say, I do have to count my blessings every morning, and of course, Mark is one of my greatest blessings, and I will say that this career obviously has taken a lot of time away from the family and home, but I have known that every day when I wake up that Mark has time to spend with us, extra time, that he does choose to spend with us, and that carries us a long way on many

a day, knowing that that's where his heart is and can be with us.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, ma'am. Secretary James, when will AFSOC be open to women?

SECRETARY JAMES: Well, we currently have in the Air Force the most open of any of the military services number of career fields to women. The vast majority of our jobs are already open, but there are seven, and they all fall within the Special Operations world. There are seven that at the moment today are closed. As the audience probably knows -- most of you know -- about two years ago now, our former Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, challenged across the board in the military that we should open up remaining closed career fields to women. We should of course make sure that we have proper standards for those who are applying for these career fields, and we have been putting in place ever since what those standards ought to be, so these are going to be gender neutral and operationally relevant standards against each of the career fields. So put a different way, the standards need to be the same for men and women, and they have to be the type of standards that relate to the type of job you need to be able to do, whether there's physical strength involved or whether it is a certain mental capacity. You've got to have what it takes, and it has got to be the same for men and women. The Chief and

I are going to be sending our recommendations about what to do with these seven remaining career fields that are closed to women to the Secretary of Defense on or about October 1st, and then -- each of the military services will be doing that by the way -- and then we will have, I'm sure, discussions within the Pentagon with the final plan due round-about the first of January from the Secretary of Defense. So my expectation -- however, we haven't yet gotten the full recommendations from the field -- but my expectation is that once we have those gender neutral and operationally relevant standards in place, I don't see any barriers to opening up those remaining career fields. I say, let the best person, whether that person's a man or a woman, let's compete for the job, just make sure that under no circumstances we lower the standards.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you Madame Secretary.

[Applause] Mr. Beatty, how are we improving support to our male civilian spouses? Most of our programs seem to focus heavily on ladies lunches and even call spouses women. Are efforts being made to be more inclusive for social events?

MR. BEATTY: The answer is yes, there are efforts being made, but there isn't much. There is a lot more needed improvement. Now I committed to Debbie when I joined as the First Spouse that during her time as Secretary I would double the participation of men in some of the spouse groups. Of

course, Debbie not falling off the truck yesterday, if there are 30 people at a meeting, there are two men, including myself. So she said, well you're only going to add two more people, and I said, no, that's 100 percent improvement. [Laughter] So that's a commitment, but to answer the question, no, there appears to be the male thing going on where it's not manly to participate in some of these things, which is absolutely wrong. So hopefully by being a representative there, we can turn some of that around because the programs out there are really good. In fact, there are a number of them. Oh boy, Betty, help me out on this one. A couple of the male websites --

MRS. WELSH: Macho Spouse.

MR. BEATTY: Macho Spouse is one. That's one of the great ones. We had the founder of that with us last year, and it's a great website, and it seems to be doing very well.

MR. SITTERLY: Great, thank you very much. Chief Cody, what is the Air Force doing to combat increased suicides in the total force?

CHIEF CODY: So obviously not enough to be honest with you. You know, we're struggling with this significantly in our Air Force, and we're trying to get our heads wrapped around it in a lot of different ways. We're preparing for a summit to talk about just this very issue. General Welsh asked the team to come in, so we're going to bring in a lot of different people

all the way from every demographic within the field in Air Force, but a lot of outside experts in this area to try to figure out how we're missing the mark because I would arguably tell you, and anybody that's been around our Air Force today, we do more today in our Air Force to try to increase resiliency of our Airmen and their families than we have in the history of our Air Force, and it has always been a building effect. So it's not that anybody prior to us wasn't putting effort towards this. They put significant efforts toward it, but we continue to do so, but it is not necessarily manifesting itself with the results that we would like, and certainly would be lessening of suicides with a goal of not having any in our Air Force. But we lose far too many Airmen by them taking their own lives on any given day. I wish I had a good answer to how to get after this. What I do promise you is we will continue to get after it. We will continue to explore every possible way we can to increase the level of resiliency within our Airmen and their families and to make sure that every Airman realizes that nothing is so hopeless that they would think to take their own life or their family member.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, Chief. Mrs. Cody, this is more of a statement than it is a question, but I'll let you comment to it. It says, I work at a base and get e-mails about promotions, job fairs, food discounts, and other FSS events.

How come these spouse programs aren't in the same mass mailings?

MRS. CODY: Can you read the last part of that? I missed it.

MR. SITTERLY: Why aren't spouse programs included in the mass mailing that folks get in e-mails about other things going on at the installation?

MRS. CODY: Oh, you know, the Key Spouse Program since it has come in place, it has been an evolution, and I think we're getting better and better all of the time. You really can't -- you can't put information for spouses and family members -- I don't mean this bad -- out to the member. Because here's what we do know. If you send it to the member in a mass e-mail, it doesn't get home. When I -- and I say that having worn the uniform for a few years, let's just say, and I used to say when I had the uniform on, oh, we're really bad at communicating. That used to be the word that I would say, and nothing's malicious or intentional, but now that I'm stepping on this side, it's not bad, it's horrible. I'm just going to say. So we have to figure out how to evolve and get the information to where we need it to be through channels that we know exist, and I think the longer that we work at it the better we are going to get, but as it stands right now, the communication flows through the Key Spouses to the spouses within the units or the organizations as long as the spouses are available or open

to receiving that information. I think that the hardest part is you don't know what we don't know, and I think sometimes spouses think that they don't want that information, but you kind of have to try it to see how it works before you say no to it, and I think that's really where we're going to get after really communicating and getting information to families, so that we can leverage all of the programs and opportunities that exist.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you very much. General Welsh, how do we balance quality of life programs with mission necessity and operational requirements? It seems that investment in these programs have waned since we need to continue to recapitalize weapon systems. What is the balance?

GENERAL WELSH: I don't know the right answer to that, Daniel. It will change every year from year to year. It has for the last 15 years. When budgets are good, we can add a lot of money to quality of life programs as we did about 15 years ago. As long as the budgets stay good, you can support them, they grow. Our people do a great job of organizing and putting them in place and expanding the services provided, and then budgets start to get tight, and the force starts to shrink. Then you have to decide what you take away from those quality of life programs, and we go through phases where we will identify our core programs, and then our core of core programs, and the core of the core of the core programs, and we try and figure out

how do we prioritize year to year and what is most important to our families. I don't think there is one answer that's going to be a good answer for the next 10 or 15 or 20 years. I think it will continue to change, but those things that we have identified as core support for family programs -- youth centers, childcare centers. All those things that we have said we are going to fund these things, and we are going to provide them for our families, we should continue to do that, and not continually change that group. And there are some things like childcare centers -- my personal opinion is this is the one area that affects more people than anybody in our Air Force and is more of a concern for especially young families than anything else in our Air Force. We should expand our investment in this and figure out how we can do that legally. But I don't think there is an answer that will last the test of time. It's going to continually change. The good news: We've got the right kind of people who worry about this every single day and try to get it right constantly.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, Chief. Madame Secretary?

SECRETARY JAMES: Could I add a point on this, and this gets to another pleasant surprise that I have had as I have gone around, something I did not know about, and it really didn't exist back to the 1990s, and that is we increasingly are having the partnership program with local communities. They

call it P4. So it's Public-Public-Public-Private Partnerships. And sometimes these are expanded use lease and other types of arrangements where we can do construction and do mission-related work, but oftentimes these P4 arrangements go to quality of life types of issues. So this is a new trend where we've been seeing communities and military leaders get together and come up with ideas where we can have mutual benefit, cost share, and in days of tight budgets like the days we're living in right now, that's been helpful. So I can remember seeing these sorts of arrangements for libraries and auto body shops and swimming pools and golf courses, and there are also mission essential types of partnerships as well. But I think this is a very positive trend, and everywhere I've gone, I see communities who are yearning for let's get together and do more of these partnerships. So that can be a helpful thing to our families as well.

GENERAL WELSH: Boss, I think you're exactly right. The next generation of discussion though is going to be should we go to the base as a workplace, which would essentially mean we draw down services. We rely on local communities to provide all those kinds of things, and this discussion is one we have to think through very carefully in my view because this will change the fabric of the Air Force and the Air Force family over time. And it may be something that we're forced into because of

budgets, but everybody's voice needs to be part of this because it will change the game. And that discussion is going to be starting here in the very near future just because it's going to be resource driven. So make sure you know what your people think about that and be ready to weigh in with your opinions so everybody's voice is captured in this.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, Chief. Chief Cody, what is your advice for balancing high ops tempo, higher education, and family? And I guess I have to call this out: Team Rescue Rules.

CHIEF CODY: So you know, this goes to work-life balance. It really does. I speak about this a lot. I think you heard General Welsh and Mrs. Welsh comment on it, how it is a struggle, and you have to kind of realize that you can't do it all at once, and you have to kind of figure out what the right battle rhythm is for you, and you have to have some support along the way. So is your family ready to support you? Is the mission going to facilitate it, meaning having meaningful purposeful conversations with your supervisor? So certainly at the heart of it, we have to do the job first. If we're not doing the job, we don't really need to be here, and you'll have plenty of time to do those other things. So at the end of the day, we're going to get the job done. That's who we are and why we're here, but as we do this for a lifetime and a career, you

do have to have this stability, have time with your family, meaningful time with your family, do the type of things that you'll remember for a lifetime. You have your own goals whether it be personal education towards what you'd like to do in life in the future or educational goals that will enhance your ability to do what it is we do as Airmen in our Air Force. I just think you have to really think about this in the context of you're not going to get it done all the time. And when I say work-life balance, I think we have to have that conversation about what's reasonable and sustainable, and it's not this scale that's 50-50, doing this much work, and I get this much time. It's never going to be that way. It will never work out that way. It's about when you have to be getting the job done, get the job done, and then the leadership of our Air Force has the responsibility when we're not at that level of tempo and pace, then we have to give you some pretty directed time to go out and do the things that you need to do -- connect with your family, work on some of your personal goals. So I know Secretary James, General Welsh, and myself, we've been talking about this our entire time, when we talk about our people, when we talk about getting this right. We just don't have a good track record with it. What we have a track record of doing is pushing people beyond what is reasonable and sustainable. Because we have such phenomenal Airmen, because they're supported by pretty

phenomenal families, we haven't changed that DNA strand in our Air Force in any appreciable way, but in the dynamics of what our Force looks like today and what the foreseeable future is with the amount of uncertainty that exists in it, we're just going to have a different conversation about this. We're still going to have to work hard. We're definitely going to have to get the job done. But we're going to have to be really paying attention to our people or we're going to lose our very best people if we don't get this right.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you. Madame Secretary, what is the Department doing to allow transgenders to serve?

SECRETARY JAMES: So at the moment, we are engaged in a Secretary of Defense directed six-month review that is looking at the various issues concerning Americans who are serving who are transgender, and we're looking to see are there ways that we can make reasonable accommodations, what to do in the future about whether to permit accessions or not, and in the interim period of time, the decision on whether or not to involuntarily discharge someone who is a transgender has been elevated to a very high level. I think the approach is one of a lean forward approach, an approach which says no matter who you are and no matter what you look like, if you are capable at doing your job, if you're a good Airman, if you believe in integrity and service and excellence in all we do, then we're trying to lean forward

and say, you're the type of person that we want in our Air Force. But again, this is undergoing a full review. There are medical issues to look at. There are practical matters that have to be worked through. I think we'll have more to say at the conclusion of the six-month period.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, Madame Secretary. Mrs. Welsh, with the explosion of social media, Facebook pages, and everything else out there, do you feel there's an issue in the control of misinformation being distributed?

MRS. WELSH: Absolutely. I think that -- Athena and I talked about this a lot -- communication. First of all, it's just amazing to us that with the social media and all the things that we have at our disposal now that there is -- it is hard to communicate, but then also, so often, the communication that gets out there is not -- is not correct. Social media, blogs, people -- General Welsh will say people used to go to the bar on Friday night or as spouses we used to get together and go out to lunch and talk and complain about things. Now people go to the blogs, and everything explodes and goes across the Internet. So the entire world knows what's happening, to see who's complaining about what the issue is, whether it's true or not, and everybody believes it because they read it, they see it there on the blog. So I think we do have a real issue with that, and I think the only way we can control it is by just not

responding to it. I just think that that's -- we have to know what is right, what we can put out there, what we can control, just control what we can control, and not respond to the things that we can't control and all of the misleading information that gets out there.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you. Mrs. Cody, has the Key Spouse Program become an officer or an enlisted spouse program? What is your advice to keep this program connected to both officer and enlisted spouses in the Unit?

MRS. CODY: As we've traveled across the Air Force, I see that it's equally distributed. I don't see that one or the other -- it really is -- I think about the right person. And just about everywhere that we've been, you hear very little problems with the Key Spouses other than the fact that they don't have enough of them. You know, if you circle back around to the first question about commanders or first sergeants, chief superintendents leveraging their Key Spouse, I think you look at this great opportunity, and from the member's perspective, when you haven't had an opportunity to experience it -- I don't want to say you're hesitant because it almost looks like it's one more project, one more task, but as you embrace the opportunity is what you find is that it has all these second and third unexpected benefits that come about all the way down to unit morale, so it's really about the right person with the right

mental and emotional maturity and leveraging that person as a team, as a leadership team, and how you do that is unique to every place, and all we see when it's embraces as that team are great successes, so much so that commanders, first sergeants, and superintendents are actually very surprised at what it does for the unit morale of the uniform wearers.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you. Mrs. Welsh?

MRS. WELSH: I was just going to say if anything I think we have found that it has united the enlisted and the officer's spouse. Many of my base visits I will meet with groups, Key Spouses, and they will say how much they have enjoyed getting to know each other, how involved the enlisted spouses have gotten, and how they've realized that the field is really -- they're the same -- it's open, that the involvement comes from both sides. And it's really important that our enlisted spouses get involved because a lot of our folks are enlisted, and they're not -- the enlisted spouses in the squadron are not going to feel as comfortable coming to the commander's spouse or the Officer Key Spouse as they are the enlisted, so we really encouraged the involvement from both sides in cooperation with the two of them and equally.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you. So we are down to about 2 minutes remaining, and so I'd like to just toss out the last question here and let all the panel members just take a

stab at it, and the question is as AFA works to take care of our Airmen and our families, what areas can we expand to take better care of our Air Family? Don't be shy. Madame Secretary?

SECRETARY JAMES: So one thing that I would welcome is I would welcome more input from AFA based on your membership and based on the communications that you're receiving. What do you think the most important family issues, quality of life issues, and to the extent you have specific suggestions for us, I would certainly welcome that input going forward. An immediate issue on our plate -- it's an Airmen's issue, but I think it's a family issue as well for many. I know AFA is already on to this one, but right now we're in negotiations with the Congress on the authorization and the appropriations bills, and you heard me say we've got to get these done. We can't have a long-term CR, but there's one particular provision which is worrisome to me, and this provision if it were to become law would strip away a good amount of basic allowance for housing in the case of a dual service couple. It would strip it away from the more junior member of that couple. It would do the same for unmarrieds who are rooming together, living off-base, pooling their resources so that they can be in a different location or get a bigger house. We think that's fundamentally unfair and to do so would be a big detriment to that individual Airman and to those families. It would be a major hit to military compensation. So

there's one right now today where all of our voices if you agree ought to be heard so that we don't allow that to go into law if we can help it.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you. [Applause] General Welsh, would you care to make some closing comments?

GENERAL WELSH: No, I'll jump on that bandwagon. The Secretary's right. That is something that just doesn't make any sense. Benefits should come to the individual. They've each earned it. Dual BH should be fine. I would also add that I would encourage AFA to continue your focus on family programs. Thank you for doing it. I think the last few years you've kind of revved up the effort. It's tough to get it started. I understand that, but we need to continue it, and we should help you as much as we can in that effort. The other thing -- anything that benefits spouse mobility in their career or in their education or children's mobility in terms of educational requirements counting in one state as you move to another or counting in a DOD school as you move back to the states. There has been a lot of effort in this regard. There is still a communication problem as Athena mentioned, but I think there's even more we can do here, and as a long-time spouse of someone who gave up their career early because they had to be recertified in every state, and then when we went overseas, that was just a hill too steep to climb, and so Betty has reinvented

herself I don't know how many times in different careers --

MRS. WELSH: Fourteen.

GENERAL WELSH: Fourteen different career fields.

Not that she's keeping track of this and will pummel me with it later, but I just think this is really, really worthy effort.

MR. SITTERLY: Thank you, Chief. Chief Cody?

CHIEF CODY: So I certainly would echo what the Secretary and the Chief have had to say. I would ask if you want something tangible is when we're telling our Air Force story, and we're reinventing this aerospace nation I think is important, but I think it's important as you're telling that story, which has all the implications that it does, that you tell our Air Force story in the way that it's an all volunteer force in unprecedented times in the history of our country and realize that it is the family that serves and the greater impact on that. Maybe you tell some of those family stories. I like to read the *Wingman* magazine, so this is to AFA, right? This was their question. So I read that *Wingman* magazine. So maybe telling some of the phenomenal stories about our Airmen's families and the things that they do and how they overcome them because they're inspiring to other families when they're trying to say can I make it through this, right? So the members will always step up to the plate, you know, it's just who they are, and sometimes we fail to see what is happening to the family

every time they do that, and sometimes when you tell that story of how they've overcome that adversity, it's motivational and inspirational to others. So it might be worthwhile.

MR. BARRETT: Thank you. Well thanks all of you for your time today. It's obvious to us that this wasn't nearly enough time, and I promise all those questions that came in that we didn't get to, Dan's got them, and we'll make sure the leadership gets a hold of them. So on behalf of the Air Force Association, thank you all very much for what you do for our amazing Airmen and for their families.