

2015 Air and Space Conference

Chief Master Sergeants Forum

14 September 2015

MODERATOR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and our distinguished guests. Thank you for being here this afternoon with us.

And thank you to AFA for providing this opportunity, this forum to ask questions and have discussions that are sort of relevant to the enlisted population of our Air Force. The rules of engagement for this afternoon are that you have question note cards. You should have them in your seats.

If you have a question that you would like to ask one of the panel members, please write the question on that note card and hold it up and we will have somebody that will come by to get it. If you would like to address a question to one individual, please do so.

And, if not, we'll be able to select one of them to answer it for you. Or if you'd like for all of them to answer it, please just let me know through

the note cards.

We are limited on time, so without any further -- I was going to say adieu, but I don't want to do that based on a conversation we just had -- without any other pause, at this time I would like to give the panel members an opportunity to introduce themselves and provide a brief opening comment, and then we'll get right to the questions. Chief Kirksey?

CHIEF KIRKSEY: Yes. For the first time, I am not the last one to be formally introduced. So I'm Cameron Kirksey, Air Force's Air Command Chief. And I [Inaudible] serve in the 70,000 citizen airmen. 75 percent of us are part timers. 75 percent of have started serving since 2001.

What an honor it is to stand before you -- or sit before you -- this afternoon to take your questions and to share some insights from the Reserves' perspective.

CHIEF HOTALING: Good afternoon. I'm Chief Master Sergeant Jim Hotaling. I'm the Command Chief of Air National Guard.

And whether we're serving home or abroad, it's definitely an honor to be here today to answer your questions. We know we don't have a lot of time, so we're going to just get right to it. No need for fluff right now. We'll fill it in on the answers.

CHIEF GAMBLE: Hi. I'm from Air Mobility Command. My name is Vicki Gamble. And looking around this room, I appreciate all ten of you that made the trip here today. I look forward to your questions.

CHIEF CARUSO: Yes, I'm Matt Caruso from Air Force Special Operations Command. General Heithold and I are honored to lead the team of AFSOCs men and women, and just great to be here to today and I look forward to all your questions.

CHIEF THOMAS: Chief Farrell Thomas, Air Force District of Washington. We handle more than things just in D.C. We have a worldwide mission so we're pretty proud of that.

I always say I'm here to support a lot of people. I think this is a great opportunity to be in our Air Force today. I mean what a great place to be

and to serve. So I look forward to your questions.

MODERATOR: Okay, thank you. And while we wait for the questions I have a couple that I can go ahead and start with. And the first one I would like to do is address to Chief Kirksey and Chief Hotaling is what advice would you give airmen related to the use of social media and discussions of Air Force policy?

CHIEF KIRKSEY: So after I say don't do it, certainly it was a word of caution. We do want to echo the message embrace the ability to tell the story. But first and foremost we have to be reminded of the fact that we're still a part of the military.

And there are guidelines and guidances and stipulations that we must adhere to despite the fact that we are from a part time perspective.

CHIEF HOTALING: I think it's pretty simple. For starters, it's not like you're going to close down social media. It's here to stay, so you actually should embrace it. I believe we actually should embrace the dynamic instead of telling everybody to

turn your devices off during meetings and all that kind of stuff is bring them out. Bring them out, learn off of them, use them to research, all of those kinds of things.

I think that's the dynamic that we're working in in today's environment, and we should just lead through that. Just like anything else, if you want to grow your hair out of standards then I'm going to tell you to fix it. If you're not going to wear your shoes right, I'm going to tell you to tie your shoes.

And if you go off the reservation in social media, I'm going to come after you that way, too. So it's just another standard that we would enforce militarily just like anything else.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chiefs, for those answers. Chief Gamble, what will be the biggest challenge we will have to confront to ensure we successfully implement forced distribution on 30 November?

CHIEF GAMBLE: So I know that some will

agree and some will disagree. But the biggest challenge is always that we have is not picking the best people, but holding on to the best people because we don't want them to leave our organization.

So I just ask everybody to look outside of your own organization and say that this person is a strategic leader in our Air Force, and these are all big positions that affect many, many of airmen, airmen that will eventually come back to us. And so if we can go in with that kind of attitude, then we will have no challenge this fall. Release your best people.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chief Gamble. Chief Caruso, will developmental special duties impact promotions in the future? In other words, is it a must have?

CHIEF CARUSO: I think we always have to be careful when we say must have or will do or blanket conversations about policy and how it would affect promotions, because as we know with our promotions, certainly to senior NCO, it's a whole person concept.

But I certainly appreciate, and I know our Air Force does, and the Air Force leadership got behind this.

Chief Cody and the enlisted Board of Directors certainly full in on all of this. We've said fully that we appreciate airmen, the best of the best that get teed up, put in for and accepted to the developmental special duties. So from that light, I think we're going to get better, faster and stronger on who we do promote.

But again, I don't think we should ever get to a point where we say it will have to be a prerequisite for a promotion to a certain grade, or to a certain position for that matter, because our Air Force is way too diverse for that. But I think overall we've been tweaking the DSD each round with good transparency, good input and we're getting right and better each time.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. This question is for both Chief Jim Hotaling and Chief Thomas. In today's fiscal reality of less funding available for family programs, how do we in the future keep our Air

Force bases a community versus just a place of work?

CHIEF THOMAS: Well, from an Air National Guard perspective, I see it through a different lens a little bit. I live on Andrews Air Force Base now, where the base is the community. Big golf courses, large shopping areas, child development centers and all that.

From an Air Guard perspective, the community is our basing. We are a community-based organization. So the family program dynamic is completely from a guard-based USA perspective than from a [REG APP] perspective.

So speaking in my wheelhouse from the Air Guard, it's critically important that we do have programs nationally that are able to make sure that we have the right level of childcare and family programs available out within the communities because there's a guardsman in every zip code in America. And sometimes there are hundreds and hundreds of miles away from an active duty base.

So we just have to make sure that the

policies are in place and that the DOD recognizes that there are this geographically separated organizations that will provide that same level of care across the board for all airmen.

CHIEF HOTALING: As our senior leader said earlier, I think it is something that we have to look at. As Chief Cody said, I think it was, the answer's going to come from you.

I mean that's where the answer is going to come from. What is important to us as an Air Force? What is important to us as a community? You can go back 20 years and look to now. Things are a lot different. We've shrunk. We've closed certain things, auto hobby shops, bowling alleys, things like that.

So it is different already. So I think the answer is going to come from us. We're going to have to voice our opinion on what we think is important and how we want to continue as an Air Force to make this, like you said, not just a job, not just a place to come to work, but still a community and a family.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chiefs. This is to Chief Kirksey. Chief, the Air Force Reserve counts for a very small portion of the budget and provides nearly 20 percent of the capability. Do you expect an increase in responsibility for the Air Reserve Command?

CHIEF KIRKSEY: With a deep affectionate passion for an affirmative yes. And I will tell you based on comments from Secretary James, Joe Welsh, we will put more capability into the Guard and Reserves. In essence, that's why we exist. We provide that capability, that structure, that capacity that in times of need, you bring us off the shelf.

When we aren't needed, we're back on the shelf, we're doing our home issues, we're out in pick a city USA, doing what we do. So that's the basis of why we exist as citizen airmen, and we will continue to be a part of the fight.

A couple years ago we had a phrase that we're all in. Well, from day one we've been all in and we will continue to be.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chief. Chief Hotaling, do you have a mantra that has served you throughout your career? Any advice that you've held close to your heart during your incredible career?

CHIEF HOTALING: One of them that I talk a lot to airmen and actually with all our chiefs also is one of the things that I've lived by is victim or victor. And I think this is just a very simple mantra to live by, and something that we all should really catch ourselves on.

There's always going to be drama in our Air Force. There's always going to be drama in any organization. We're going to have good times, bad times. But it's what you personally make out of it.

In every scenario that you face, you can either be a victim of it, or you can be victorious and thought in action. And each individual has to look themselves in the mirror and make that decision. So you can kind of have that saying you can look outside of the window and blame everybody else, or you can look in a mirror and say that you can be a problem

solver.

Victim or victor, and if you think about it in those terms, and if you catch yourself with a victimized statement, take a step back, take a deep breath, and try to be victorious in thoughts and action.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chief. That is some great advice. Chief Gamble, will the Air Force improve or change the recruit intake requirements?

For example, better psychological testing. What else will help reduce the suicide rate?

CHIEF GAMBLE: So that's a great question and I think that's something that the Department of Defense is looking on for all service entries. Certainly there are indications that it could be proved by some psychological testing.

But what kind of test that looks like, how is that supplied evenly and fairly is something yet to be determined. But I think it's definitely something worthy to look at. Our suicide numbers have increased dramatically, especially for active duty.

We've having a suicide prevention summit in the very near future here. And so we take this seriously because we take all airmen lives seriously. And it impacts more than just that airman.

It impacts all of us at every base that it happens. It's such a tragedy. And if you've ever had a suicide occur in your unit, you know exactly what I'm talking about. And so one is too many, and anything we can do to lower that number I think we're open to looking at.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chief. Just to break a little bit, I would like to give any other chief on the panel an opportunity to also respond to that question if you would like.

CHIEF CARUSO: Yeah, I'll touch on the suicide piece. And Chief Cody captured it obviously two sessions again when he talked about our suicide numbers.

But what I'd ask is I see a lot of senior non-commissioned officers out there, and you are the messengers. You are the futures of our squadrons.

And I need you to message a few things.

We found that units that have strong enlisted leadership in them have less suicides. I mean when we have strong leaders in our formations talking about how much we care about one another and then demonstrating it through a various amount of activities in a squadron.

And you all know. You've been part of great squadrons. I would ask you as you assume your roles as senior non-commissioned officers, and future roles, keep that alive and message it out.

Message it out, please. That's important. Commanders -- if there's commanders in the room as well, young officers out there, we're doing very well in the Air Force as a culture and getting better as a family.

But we think down to the unit level, we're losing some of that at the unit level. So please -- we found that that's being affected in AFSOC, and I'd like to kind of share that with you out there if you get it out there.

QUESTIONERS: Thank you. Chief Caruso, do you think the Air Force is ready for enlisted pilots? Do you think the current officer enlisted structure will look different, or what will it look like with enlisted pilots?

CHIEF CARUSO: So I don't think the Air Force is ready for enlisted pilots right now. However, it's being looked at, and it's being looked at hard -- very much so at the Air Force level from what I understand.

Particularly in the RPA realm of which we just have two squadrons out at cannon. But I don't think we're ready yet because we just haven't analyzed. We haven't spelled out what it really means.

We haven't talked about the authority to drop weapons. Even though our sensor operators are putting the laser on the target, and the pilots are actually authorizing the use of deadly weapons against our enemies and high value targets, there's some implications and legal aspects of that we have to walk

through, not only for the Air Force, but for the nation as we do what we do for our nation's enemies, and working with the joint partners and the coalition partners as well as the world's security environment changes.

We get after more niches and nodes of enemy. So I think we've got some work to do. And I don't think we're just ready just now. What was the second part of that question?

QUESTIONER: How do you think the officer and enlisted structure in the Air Force would look, if it would look different with enlisted pilots?

CHIEF CARUSO: Well, depending on what happens, we'll do it just like we do anything else. We will get along. And we have command structure, we have leadership and we work as a team. Commanders-in-chief at the wing level, aircraft commanders and their NCOICs, squadron commanders and their senior enlisted leaders, this is a team sport.

So whatever shakes out of this, it'll be just fine. We've just got to figure out if this is

the right thing to do down the road, depending on what the analysis says.

QUESTIONER: And Chief Gamble, there is one person in the audience who is interested in your view on the same thing.

CHIEF GAMBLE: Okay. So not to contradict - well, we've been down this before, so we actually had enlisted pilots before during the times that we needed them. And I think if you'll look now, we have a pilot shortage, not only in the Air Force but as a nation.

So it was interesting this morning when they showed the slide about air space nation. I wish we could go downtown and show it to every civilian that walks in front of us, and show them the importance of air fire because we need it on both sides, in both capacities.

So I would say that we need enlisted pilots when we have a need for it. And I would say we have a need for it. And so it's definitely being looked at hard, and I can't wait to see it come around again.

MALE SPEAKER: I would just say it's not like airmen don't have the capability to be a pilot. From an Air Guard or an ARC perspective, the state command chief of Alaska is a 747 Czech pilot.

My resource advisor when I was a squadron chief was the highest tenured regional jet pilot for American Airlines. So airmen do fly right now that are commercial pilots. So it's not like it's a capability that we don't possess.

QUESTIONER: I would just like to take a moment to say thank you to you all. These are some very good questions. Please keep them coming.

Chief Thomas, as far as developmental special duties goes, how do you ensure that absolutely the best and brightest get vectored? For example, someone that gets vectored but doesn't want it versus someone that wants a vector but doesn't get it.

CHIEF THOMAS: So I think that's a great question. DSD is something that I love to discuss and talk about. I talk about it every day.

And I was telling someone over the weekend

that sometimes you get vectored to do something that you don't want to do, but it ends up setting up a great Air Force career for you. For example, I was vectored before it was vectoring to work for the chief [Inaudible] Air Force.

I worked for two of them. When you say do you want to travel 300 days a year, that's not something I wanted to do. I mean it's just not something I wanted to do.

But it was something that helped me grow as an airman, and something that helped me in my career, and something I ended up loving to do. So when you talk about developmental special duties, this is something that is best for the person, best for the individual that will help you out.

And I can tell you the people I talked to that get into these special duties, most of them love it. So here in D.C. we have the Air Force Honor Guard. We've gone through DSD for a couple of rounds. We talk to them.

A lot of them say nope, this is not

something I would have picked. But when you get to go to a ceremony when you're doing those dignified transfers, when you're representing our nation, it's just something that after they do that for a little while, they have so much pride in what they do.

And then when they go back from that, we send back a much better, much more well-rounded airman to the field that if they were to go back out there and lead and share their experiences. So I think this is a great thing and it's going to continue.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Again, this is a question I would like all chiefs to possibly address if you have something more informative to state than the person in front of you. Especially in regards to the youngest airmen, what have you noticed is the biggest challenge in their attitude and culture? Yes, Chief Kirksey, you can start.

CHIEF KIRKSEY: So I will start out by saying we kind of want to measure the new talent we have coming into the Air Force by who you once were. It's not hard to say that these young kids, they

certainly ain't what they used to be. And I would say you're absolutely right. They're brighter, they're more aggressive, and they're certainly more in tune to today's environment. From a senior leader perspective, or a senior [Inaudible] perspective, our challenge is to be more engaging, to teach these young airmen what this Air Force is really all about, to create that pathway to success, to prove that mentorship.

Because at some point, the members sitting at this panel, we had that handed to us. So therefore, it's incumbent upon us to do the same for the next generation.

I'm certainly stoked and I'm certainly proud of each and every one of our airmen in our United States Air Force. And I can't wait to pass the baton and release -- release the dragons, so to speak.

CHIEF HOTELING: Yeah, I think from a senior enlisted perspective, we've got to get out of the way. We've got to understand the airmen of today.

The institutional Air Force has done a very

good job of building the type of airmen that we want. And, in particular, as we've incorporated this airmen's week now, we are producing incredible airmen that are empowered.

And they understand what it's like to be a professional airman. They understand that meaning. They truly can articulate the core values from their heart and not just to recite it. They feel it now.

And so senior leaders have to really understand the perspective is totally changed now. And we've got to understand them instead of forcing them to understand us. I think that's incredibly important.

I just came back from having lunch with an airman that came back from airmen's week, and they are so empowered. They love the Air Force, they understand it and it is from their heart. And we have to understand that, too.

I just came from a company grade officers panel last week, and I had a company grade officer stand up and go what do we do about them, and he meant

young airmen. And I said, "Well sir, how old are you?"

And he said, "I'm 28 years old. What do we do about them?" And he was talking about millenials. And I told him that he's a millennial also.

So we have to be very careful when we believe that we're in leadership positions that younger generation just isn't like us. I would say it's the exact opposite.

CHIEF GAMBLE: I would say that. I would even say they're probably better than us. So when I enlisted, we were in the Cold War. And there was little thread of doing much of anything.

It was 680,000 people, tons of bases, tons of airplanes. And basically you could hide from the rest of the Air Force. Our airmen today that come in, they enlist. We're in the middle of a war.

We've been at war for a really long time and they serve. And so I applaud them for that. So we often talk about our former generation, and we refer to them as I stand on the shoulder of giants.

And you'll probably hear that because it's the 68th anniversary, as we should. But one day they will say that about you. And I would say are you leading them to where that will be fulfilled.

CHIEF CARUSO: I was going to bring that up, but non-commissioned officers and the responsibility to get after helping the new airmen in this question about attitude and culture because that's a big part of it. So they usually come to us, and our new airmen actually have an exceptional attitude.

And they don't know what our culture is except for what they get in basic training. And now they're getting airmen's week, which gets to the heart of what it means to be an airmen.

And then they learn the culture in the Air Force in their first unit and first supervision. The first group of individuals that create the environment to either thrive or go in the wrong direction.

So it's up to us as non-commissioned officers, and we're all NCOs -- we just happen to be senior NCOs up here -- to make sure we defend that and

we guard that. But overall, I think attitude and culture of our new airmen is not an issue. What I think we see an issue with is their inability -- and these are young airmen, so it's not a slam on them because we've got to teach them how to deal with this -- their inability to deal with ambiguity or change or an uncertain environment.

And also in a lot of cases, with the maintenance airmen especially, long hours. And I know many of our airmen across the Air Force are working long hours. But that's something that maybe new entrants are not used to. And we've got to teach them that.

So to be direct with the question, it was ambiguity, long hours and then sometimes this funding and problem we're having as a nation, as a DOD, sequestration. That's something that also they're like, I thought we had all the money in the world. I'm like no, we don't. That's why we don't have parts.

CHIEF THOMAS: I think like everyone said

first line supervisors I think are the most important in this. So I have a 15 year old son. I'm his first line supervisor.

And it's hard to get him to take out the trash or do the dishes or anything like that. But when you're telling him to do those things, when you look at him, he's sitting on the computer, the desktop. He has his laptop on his lap.

He's texting on his phone, and he's watching a movie on the TV all at the same time. So it's like how do you tap into that potential, because this kid is smart. He doesn't want to take out the trash, but he's smart.

So before this job I was the Command Chief of the 81st training wing at Keesler. And I can tell you the folks being produced at BMT, we're getting a great airman. A great foundation is being produced at BMT, so my hats off to the ATC team.

And then when we put them through tech school, however long that is, we're continuing to build on that foundation. So I can tell you, first

line supervisors, especially, when you get a person from tech school, when you get an airman from tech school, you have a good foundation already built.

I always say though the first line supervisor can destroy that instantly with your first interaction with that airman. So that's what I would say is for all of us senior here. Help first line supervisors learn how to lead these airmen, because that's where it is.

QUESTIONER: Thank you for those answers and to whoever asked the question. And for the rest of you, the one thing that I would just like to add is there is an excellent book if you'd like to read it.

It's by Hayden Shaw and it's called Sticking Points. And it talks about all the generations that are in the workforce and how to work with them. So if you have the opportunity to get that book I'd highly recommend it.

For Chiefs Kirksey and Caruso, please address how you feel and how you talk to airmen of all grades, military and civilian, of the importance of

being in and supporting professional organizations such as AFA and APSA.

CHIEF KIRKSEY: So for the reserve component, and I will attempt to speak for Chief Hotaling. We live kind of a different animal based on the fact that we are a part time force.

But at the end of the day we certainly wear the blue and an understanding that there are certain things that we know from the blue side of the house that we can do and there are certain things on the civilian side of the house that we can do. So giving them that toolset, that skill set to understand who and what -- the platform they should be representing is critically important to the success -- not only of the ARC or the [Inaudible] components, but for our military as a whole.

My first objective is to ensure that they understand what is lobbying really mean. What does it mean in their wheelhouse to be able to go up and speak to a Congressman during their town halls?

So we have to present the optic of showing

them the rule sets, all the rules that are [Inaudible] if you will, so they understand as a citizen airman my latitude is a little bit longer than what can be extended to our active components. And then I try to educate them on the importance of understanding what is their platform.

What do you value that's most important to you and which organization that best supports that need.

CHIEF CARUSO: Yeah, same thing. I mean I'd just continue to emphasize. And at this point where I'm at -- where we're at with our positions, we get to see the strategic level and impact of this organization AFA, AFSA, NCOA and so on.

So we've got to get that message out to the command chiefs, to the senior enlisted leaders, to the commanders. And then we've got to make sure we're checking their homework and they get it down to our young airmen, who become the new members who are putting together the activities that go on on an individual basis and chapters of these organizations

and keep it alive.

We make sure we educate them on the importance of speaking to the representation in Washington, same kind of vein. We really got to get to the point of that. So that's a lot of things we talk about.

And then certainly is how does it relate to them personally? Like to the Chief's point, where is their story tied into what AFA is doing for the Air Force and Air Force Sergeants Association.

Why is it important to you? Find out the why for the airman you're talking about. That's how we talk about in Air Force Special Ops. And also, the last thing I tell them -- everybody tells me what the legal team would tell them about, whether or not I can go in uniform and talk about AFA or AFSA and support them.

I said, "Look, do it right and you'll be fine." Pick an organization that you're passionate about and support it and stick with it. I'm a lifetime member of two and I'm glad I am.

I've been with both of them for about ten or 15 years and I appreciate it. And I think that that's something that most young NCOs should latch onto.

CHIEF HOTALING: I would just like to say one other thing. We just launched the little blue book. And when you open that up it talks about the Profession of Arms.

And you're starting to hear more and more from the Profession of Arms Center of Excellence about how this is our profession. This is what we do as airmen.

And if you think about that, if this is your profession, think about doctors or lawyers or firefighters or policemen. Every single one of them belongs to their professional associations.

You name me a doctor that is not a member of the American Medical Association. You name me a law enforcement officer that's not in the Fraternal Order.

So as this is your profession, you need to be a part of associations that represent you and your interests. This is our profession.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chiefs. And Chief Hotaling, while you have the microphone, here's a question for you. How are we bridging the gap for in-residence professional military education courses without funding being available in a lot of cases?

CHIEF HOTALING: Is this Guard specifically or just at the level of our correspondence courses?

QUESTIONER: I'm guessing since it was addressed to you it's probably Guard specific.

CHIEF HOTALING: All right, great. Well, for starters, one of the biggest things that a significance difference in the last 18 months or so, Chief Kirksey and myself have participated now in the Enlisted Force Development Panel. And one of the first things that came out of the Enlisted Force Development Panel is the recognition of potentially PME not being at the same standards.

There's eight categories of priorities and the ARC was a category eight, which was the lowest and the REG APP was a category one. With us all moving towards this one Air Force concept, all three

components now are a category one priority for PME.

That's a significant factor. Speaking just for the guard, an example would be last year we sent 700 airmen in-resident to ALS. By going to category one in FY15, we now can send 3,000 airmen in-residence.

That is a significant difference just by the Air Force, the institutional Air Force, recognizing the priorities for the ARC. But we can't get 100 percent in residence.

It will just never happen because of our citizen airmen construct. We will always try to achieve that, but more than likely it won't happen. So what that drives is the level of distance learning has to equate to an in-residence experience.

You never get that experience, but the value of that education level has got to be the same. And that's what we're pushing towards right now. The first step was already accomplished and we're working towards that every single day by being equal partners with the Air Force in totality on the Enlisted Force

Development Panel. And good things are going ahead for all three of the components.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chief. Chief Gamble, what advice do you have for a young dual military couple in regards to both having the same opportunity to be successful in their careers?

CHIEF GAMBLE: Don't say no to opportunity. So my husband and I are dual military, and we've been that way for awhile. And it is not always easy.

But I would say it's not easy for a military spouse not active duty as well. There's always decisions that have to be made, some of them tough. Sometimes he'll go forward for a little while and I'll kind of stay.

And sometimes I'll go forward and he'll kind of stay. And you just have to have a good family meeting to get through that situation. It is possible. I'm a great example of that.

I see other examples in this room of dual military couples that have had it all. And so it can be done. Just make sure you never say no, but that

you always talk to your significant other before you never say no.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chief. Chief Caruso, how do you keep morale high among squadrons when we are asked to do more with less, and there is constant worry about losing benefits due to Congress' budget constraints, especially for NCOs with first term airmen? My squadron just can't retain airmen.

CHIEF CARUSO: So I appreciate the retention point of that question because it's part of the conversation when you have to prioritize for your airmen. Whether you're in a supervisory role directly over a section, or you're making input to the squadron command or the DO, the deputy, what have you -- whatever position or level of leadership you're at, you've got to have a say so in the prioritization of work tasks, objectives and mission.

We have to be careful because we are a portion of society that comes in the Air Force, and in my view, we've very caught up in trying to multitask. Multitasking is a myth. We have to get back to doing

one thing at a time and doing it well.

We're trying to do that in our formations because in fact APSOC has to do one thing well and that's mission. And then we talk about people and then we get after our resources and then we get after training transformation.

And those are our four priorities and we don't want to do anything else, but we prioritize them. And we get it down to the unit level.

And for the person who asked the question, it's appreciated because I see it in a lot of the Air Force where we don't prioritize anymore. In fact, USSOCOM is seeing this across all five of its components.

And the four stars asked all of his component commanders and their staffs to develop a priority matrix on what we're going to concentrate on. And I know the Air Force leadership has been talking about this for the last couple of years.

And what they attach to it is balance and having balance in your life. So for young NCOs out

there -- and we ask you to do a lot and not necessarily more with less -- it should be less with less, which means prioritize and have balance.

Nobody should be yelling at our commanders to get things done absolutely now. Actually, if we're putting too much stress on there, that's a toxic leadership style and it causes accidents.

So we tell our folks slow down, think about it, prioritize. You have a commander and a chief to make decisions to get after it. But that's just my insight from 28 years of doing this.

CHIEF HOTALING: Chief, if I could add. When you hear about people are worried about what's going to happen with the budget and stuff, the one thing I always remind people is the Air Force is still a great place to work.

I mean this is still a great organization. And it's more than a job. A lot of times when someone says what kind of benefits are you going to give and things like that -- yeah, I care about benefits, too.

But it's more than just a job. It's a

lifestyle. It's something that I chose to do. It's the way I want to live my life. It's what I want to give back to my country. So some of that we have to bring I think some of the patriotism back to it.

And we have to talk about service before self sometimes. So I always like to remind people of that. The Air Force is still a great place to work. You just have to be patriotic sometimes.

QUESTIONER: Sorry, go ahead, Chief Kirksey.

CHIEF KIRKSEY: So from my perspective, I will tell you it's certainly refreshing to understand the willingness of our young men and women and the resiliency that we see in the light of uncertainty.

More importantly, from the Reserve command specifically, we've 14 years running met our recruiting goal more times over consistently, with the understanding that at the end of the day we're a part time force. We're not going to get the check of the month at the 20 year point.

It will be sometime well into the future. And oh, by the way, we are at 90 percent retention

rate. So we're to beg these young men and women to go home.

This is just simply what we do. This is what America does best. Patriotism at its finest. The challenges for us senior leaders in the room is to take advantage of that and to leverage that. To present the opportunities that best fits the individuals' needs.

And the only way to do it is to get to know them. They're great Americans and it's our job to lead them.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. And for Chief Thomas, there's two questions I have that I'm going to try to combine them without it being too awkward. With the push for diversity in our Air Force, will we ever see a female chief master sergeant of the Air Force or even another African American or Hispanic chief get to hold this position?

And then the second part of this question is from the second one. How are we postured within the wings NAF centers and majcom to make this a possible

option?

CHIEF THOMAS: I think this should be left for Chief Cody. Well, I'll give it a go. When you look at diversity -- and I'll talk about the enlisted corps first -- when you look at diversity in our enlisted corps and you look at the enlisted Board of Directors, I think we have a diverse crowd.

I really do think there are great strides that have been made to ensure it's diverse. I heard a question about the chief master in the Air Force before. Being a minority, if you all don't know it I'm black or African American.

But that's something that yeah, it would be a great honor. But I would never want to say I was selected to be the chief master in the Air Force because I was black, never. So do I think there will be a minority female -- or something like that --- chief master of the Air Force one day? Yes.

But I can tell you based on what I've seen from our leadership, that person is not going to be selected just because of their ethnicity, racial

background, gender or anything like that. I think they're going to select the best person for the job.

So when you look at the majcom, COCOMs and NAVs, I think it's very diverse, as I've said before. And I think it's postured good enough to have potentially a chief master of the Air Force that's either black or female or a minority. Was there a part two?

CHIEF GAMBLE: Can I answer that?

QUESTIONER: No.

CHIEF GAMBLE: Okay.

QUESTIONER: No, go ahead. I'm sorry.

CHIEF GAMBLE: Mine was just going to be funny. So I was in Chief Cody's office the other day. And I don't know if any of you have ever been up there to the Pentagon.

But he has a really nice office. I mean it is nice. And had I know that earlier, I would have tried harder.

QUESTIONER: I should have stuck with no. Sorry. So for Chiefs Kirksey and Hotaling, either

both of you or either of you to answer this question. After the National Commission on the structure of the Air Force report to Congress, have there been any changes in regard to the Air Reserve components in the Air Force?

CHIEF HOTALING: I can start off. We'll give some examples. I think there's been tremendous strides, to be honest with you.

But to start off with, the relationships are the most important thing. And I would say the relationships between the secretary of the Air Force, the chief of staff, the chief master sergeant of the Air Force and then both of the ARC commanders and the director and the two chiefs here, the relationships have been very solid.

We talk from an institutional Air Force perspective. It is the United State Air Force. And there's three distinct components within that United States Air Force.

There's the REG APP, there's the Air Force Reserves and there's the International Guard. None of

the individual components could actually perform the mission set of the United States Air Force.

It takes all three to do the mission. That is today's reality. And the decisions that are being made, the National Commission was a forcing function to answer a certain set amount of criterias that we had to respond back to Congress to.

But this relationship that we have with the command structure, we are actually getting tangible things done. And there's 100 different examples, one that I quoted you earlier about PME is a great example about how it wasn't that way in the past, but it certainly is now because we recognize the one Air Force concept.

And it will always be consistent. One of the directors of the International Guards, matter of fact his first pillar to the success of the total force is very simple, that although our status in the International Guard is different, the standard will always be the same.

And as long as the three components

understand that, then you will produce great airmen, despite the fact that there's three distinct components, it's one Air Force.

CHIEF KIRKSEY: So from my perspective, Chief Cody and I Steve Hotaling, we kind of shook our head and said it's about time. It's about time the Air Force kind of recognized that we were already out in front of this.

In large part, we were doing things from a leadership perspective based on the information in the report that was driving us to do. Well, we had already checked that box.

For the first time we have a commandant down at the First Sergeant Academy, member of the ARC. We have members in Chief Cody's office, both from the Guard and the Reserve.

We have a member of the Reserve command that sits in the Chief's group. So it's not like it was new news for us to take on this challenge. We were out in front of it. We'll continue to be out in front of it.

But the elephant in the room is how do we develop those skill sets that translate to where we're more parallel, and that's the discussions that we're having now. Even the [Inaudible] we certainly are not left out of the discussions when we talk about any decisions that impact our United States Air Force.

So the challenge is still set on the table, and we're hitting those marks. And we're certainly covering down on a lot of things that they actually told us we needed to.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. And I know that we're coming to a time ending here. I have just real quick two more questions for Chief Gamble, one.

What advice would you give to a squadron commander regarding what's more important: an enlisted developmental team vector or a developmental special duty opportunity?

CHIEF GAMBLE: Say the choices again.

QUESTIONER: An enlisted developmental team vector or a developmental special duty opportunity.

CHIEF GAMBLE: So I would say the most

important is what the need is. So if the need is greater -- if you've got the only person that can do this enlisted team vector, then that of course is the most important.

And if there's several candidates competing for that, then maybe it's not the most important. Maybe it would be the DSD nomination.

So it depends on the need and how many of that quantity of people we have at the time. That's what would drive the importance of it.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Chief. And this last question will go to both Chief Caruso and Chief Thomas for a brief answer. What is your view on how the promotion process for E7 was implemented this past cycle?

CHIEF CARUSO: I think it was awesome because our promotion rates were excellent. So we were very happy with it. But no, really the fact that we promoted folks to MAS ARM with the Board this year -- and there was a lot of apprehension going into that.

I can tell you that, folks, it was well thought out. It's been in the works for over a year. A lot of very smart people, officers enlisted chief master sergeant involved to a tenth degree -- very well thought out.

And one thing I think I can appreciate from the process and all of our airmen appreciated was that we continue to hold fast and steady on the whole promotion concept, just like we promoted our masters to senior and our seniors to chief because we get that right. And we want to make sure we got the master on right out the door.

We learned some things along the way, but I think if I may say so it was an overwhelming success.

CHIEF THOMAS: I think it was very good also. I saw firsthand where someone probably under our old promotion system would not have been promoted, but that I thought deserved to be. Well, with this Board process they were promoted.

So I was pretty happy with that so I think it was good. All the feedback I got was good. Even

with people that weren't selected, I think it gave them the nudge of -- hey, I may need to buckle down a little bit more and maybe study a little bit more to be more competitive, so I think it was great.

QUESTIONER: Before I turn this over to the panel for final statements, I would just like to again thank AFA for this opportunity. I'd like to thank the senior leadership in attendance and the rest of you for being here.

If your question was specific to one of the chiefs and I was not able to get to it, I would invite you to find this chief as soon as we're done here and come up and ask your question. And I know they would be extremely happy to answer it for you, especially the one question that somebody had for Chief Gamble that I didn't get to. Chiefs, a final statement?

CHIEF KIRKSEY: So I'd certainly like to end this session by saying thank you, AFA for allowing us this opportunity to sit and field questions. And on behalf of our citizen airmen commander Lieutenant Joe Jackson, thank you for allowing us to be a part of

your United States Air Force. I can't tell you the honor, the pleasure for us to sit in the room at the table to be a part of these discussions.

We are certainly not the Air Force Reserve Command of the yesteryears. We're certainly a relevant part of our future and we will continue to be. Thank you very much.

CHIEF HOTALING: The statement that I'd like to leave you with for this enlisted panel is -- and it's directed for the enlisted members out there. Have trust in your leadership. Have true trust in them.

The organization is filled with a lot of stress right now. There's crazy dynamics that you'll see through this entire week about how we talk about the budget, how we talk about the mission sets, how we talk about all the other outside pressures that face our great Air Force.

But the one thing you do need to have confidence in as you sit at this conference and when you leave it is trust in your leadership. I can

honestly tell you that I see it with my own eyes about how many hours that they lay awake worrying about you.

And you may disagree or not understand a lot of the decisions that are made, but they're all made with your best interests at heart. And sometimes they're made because of the parameters that we have to work under.

But the one thing that you have to have is faith and confidence in your leadership because we are looking out to make you the best airmen that this nation needs. Thank you.

CHIEF GAMBLE: Thanks for coming today. You know, we serve the greatest nation by far in the world. And we serve in the greatest Air Force in the world.

That is undeniable. So thank you for serving. I really appreciate that. I ran across one AFC airman one day and he said, "You know, Chief, there ain't nothing that can stop us short of lightening [Inaudible]." And with that I agree. Thanks again.

CHIEF CARUSO: That's right. And it is truly an honor to continue to be able to wear the uniform and lead airmen. And certainly I know you all would echo sentiments, officer enlisted, it doesn't matter.

But what I'll leave you with as I go around the Air Force and see what I can do to help special operations airmen and any airmen, I say this, especially to social media: Do me a favor. Defend the Air Force.

We know there's naysayers in our ranks that think they know things, the barracks lawyers, the folks that would tell us how it is and they're not really part of the conversation or don't want to make positive contributions to the conversation or the issue at hand. So when you see it, defend the Air Force.

Stand up for the Air Force. You're in the Air Force. And I certainly expect that -- we expect NCOs to do that when they see something wrong. And then the second part of that is that servant

leadership piece, serving for something better than yourself.

We all know it, but echo it down to those that are struggling with their development. I'm reading a good book called Leaders Eat Last by Simon Senyk.

And it gets to the heart of what it really means to have an environment that non-commissioned officers are responsible for an environment that you have to create for airmen and families to thrive. At the end of the day, that's our job.

Our commanders command, they lead and they expect NCOs at all levels to create an environment for airmen and families to thrive and to prevent all those negative things that could happen in an Air Force organization. So I'll just leave you with those points, and thanks again to the AFA for a wonderful venue here today and this week.

CHIEF THOMAS: I'd like to say thank you to AFA for the venue. I think most of the chiefs already covered it. That's what I get for going last all the

time.

Everybody said everything I wanted to say. But I would say -- the one thing I want to leave you with is everybody in here looks like they're in uniform, so thank you to your families. And please say, on behalf of this Air Force, thank you because I think a lot of times our families sacrifice more than we do.

So please thank your families for me, and I'm proud to serve along with each and every one of you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Chiefs. We are adjourned. Thank you.

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