

2015 Air and Space Conference

**Q&A With Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James Cody
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CMSAF CODY: [in progress] but I think they communicate a -- what they do [inaudible] helps. And whether you affiliate with AFA or one of the other private organizations, you need to think about that, because they speak for us in a way that we can't speak for ourselves. And you all have a voice to your [inaudible] representation. You should use it.

If you're not satisfied with what's going on in the country, I encourage you highly to use it. But what they do is, they speak with the voice a hundred thousand people, and I promise you, they get into offices that you might not be able to get on, and as a single constituent that -- and they speak volumes for us.

So, I appreciate you doing that, especially in these times where official challenges that our country faces are clearly impacting our military and clearly impacting our ability to do what we do as

Airmen in the Air Force, and they're impacting our families' lives, in the ways that they're talking about their compensation, and whatnot. So, it's important that we have folks out there advocating for us. So, thank you for doing that.

So, this is really just a Q&A session to talk about whatever it is that's on your mind. Certainly, it can cover down to stuff that was in the presentation. A lot going on in the Air Force. A lot of you were in here for Chief Petzel's presentations, so that's usually one of the big topics, talking about the evaluation system changes and the way there were promotion system changes. It's all important.

But there's a lot of other things going on in the Air Force, too. So, what's on your mind? We're hanging out. I'm hanging out that way. I think they locked the doors too unless the fire alarms go off.

SPEAKER: Sir, can I be heard?

CMSAF CODY: Yeah, please, sir. I think they're going to want to get you the mic, just so people can hear you.

SPEAKER: With the recent -- the emphasis on volunteerism and education in Air Force Times in relation to the whole Airmen concept, would you mind talking about what the --

CMSAF CODY: Sure, I'll talk about that.

[Simultaneous discussion]

SPEAKER: -- whole airmen concept means to you and the way ahead with the new performance evaluation?

CMSAF CODY: Yeah. No, I think that's a good point. And I like how you quantified the source of that information. [Laughter] So, God bless the Air Force Times. They like to tell the Air Force story in the way that only the Air Force Times can tell a story, not necessarily always the same way we would tell the Air Force story.

But nonetheless, it's a publication that our Airmen, our leaders go out there. I read it. Just want to be prepared to answer questions just like yours [Laughter]. What did you have to say about this? So, there's a lot of folks that you know, ask

questions in the Air Force Times, and they get input from other folks, and that's great. Everybody has their opinion and they're entitled to express it, and that paper certainly details that. But they they take things and the kind of things for which they're writing the article, and they present the information to tell the story the way they want. So, certainly, there's a quote out there by General Kelly that talks specifically -- so, I know what you're talking about. It's about volunteering.

SPEAKER: Right.

CMSAF CODY: And in no way, shape or form did he say that we don't value volunteering in the Air Force.

SPEAKER: Right.

CMSAF CODY: What he said is, and what has always been true, to be honest with you -- but the emphasis of his point was, you know, you're not going to volunteer your way into a promotion. And I don't believe we've ever had people that volunteered their way into a promotion on the fact that this is an all-

volunteer force. And yeah, we promote people in it, so there are quite a few volunteers amongst us.

But the idea that extra things and this whole person concept -- and it was a person that did everything but their job and volunteered for everything was the one that we were advancing before others. I completely, completely disagree with that, and I would say it was unfounded, because then, we would have to look at everybody that we promoted over time and say well, geez, you're just a really good volunteer.

You're really not good at your job. You don't really lead very well. You didn't really do [inaudible], but you're a heck of a volunteer, and that's what we put the most value on. That's not the truth. It's a little bit disrespectful for the people that work really hard and have done what was needed to be done, to be honest with.

What we had tried to, and what we have done with this change is, is we have clearly emphasized in every way possible that first and foremost, it's about

how you do your job -- your primary duty. And if you do your job at the levels that we expect you do it, those other things are still important. Right? But it's not just volunteering.

It's under the context of what else do you do as part of this profession of ours -- if you want it to be just about your job and nothing else at all around the clock, then you clearly a technician. You are not necessarily part of a profession that is bigger than yourself. You do a task. You do it well. You're great at it, and that's it. Right?

And we do actually hire people to do things just like that and expect nothing else from them. Right? But if you're doing a job really well and you're part of this profession, there's a lot of things you can do that we should consider, and that we do value as we represent the American people, as we do things for others. Right? That's what professionals do -- larger than our vocation.

So, maybe you volunteer, and maybe you just sit down with five Airmen in your unit, right, and you

do something that just brings up and elevates the esprit de corps within that unit so it's a more effective and functioning unit as a team, right? It could be me asking you to go out -- it could be me asking you to come up at AFA and sit there and talk to somebody about the Air Force story, and you represent our Air Force.

There's a ton of things that you could do that would fall into the whole person concept that we would value as an Air Force. And that's really the context that we're talking about. But we're not going to talk about any of that, unless you're good at your job, because if you're not good at your job yet, you need to get good at it. And once you get good at it, there's other things that we're going to look at. That's really the essence of it.

So, we have kind of readjusted the form so it doesn't look like that's the primary area. We're readjusting everything and the way we talk about it, to put it in the context of what it is. But we're not going to say that those things aren't important, and I

think it's really, really, really important that we don't sit there and somehow think differently about ourselves, like we were advancing the wrong people for the wrong reasons.

And I have given ourselves a lot of credit for that. We've got a lot of smart people out here. We've got a lot of capable people doing a lot of pretty phenomenal things, and it wasn't because they built 22 homes for Habitat for Humanity or something. They might have done and it meant something somewhere. And we should acknowledge the fact that people go out and do stuff for other people. Right?

Airman Stone. He wasn't wearing his uniform. He was on vacation with his buddies. Right? He stepped up and did something different. Right? It wasn't until he did the [inaudible] and he stuck his finger in the guy's neck to stop his bleeding, that he was actually doing what we trained him to do as a medic. Right?

So, my point is, right, he helped his fellow man and woman. I mean, he got in there and he stepped

in. You can put that in a lot of different contexts. Right? So, yeah, let's not get too far with it. I mean, it's about the context and what we're asking everyone to do. Does that sound fair? Does it sound right?

SPEAKER: Thanks, Chief.

CMSAF CODY: Okay. What else? I know Steve's over there. You follow the Air Force Times, Steve [Laughter]. We have a very open relationship [Laughter]. We have a very open relationship. It's good.

SPEAKER: Chief?

CMSAF CODY: What else? Please.

SPEAKER: Chief, I think you used the term pockets of excellence when you were describing unique Air Force organizations that recruit the best of the best across the Air Force, White House Comm, [Inaudible], Thunderbirds.

CMSAF CODY: Yeah.

SPEAKER: What has been your message when answering those questions as you travel throughout the

Air Force in regards to force distribution on and inside these units?

CMSAF CODY: Yeah. So, we do a really good job of assessing talent. Right? We do a really good job of assessing what people's potentials are. But we're not perfect. Right? And everybody that's good at one thing isn't great at the next thing that we ask them to do. And that's okay. That's all of us. That's me. That's every one of us.

But the fact is that when we're looking at people, we're looking at you, where you're at and what you're doing. And yeah, you might be with a lot of great people. So, we understand we have these pockets of communities that can do a significant amount of screening to ensure that we have, maybe a higher level of confidence that they're the right person at the right person for those jobs. Right?

That doesn't make those jobs any more important than any other job in the United States, ever. They're absolutely not any more important. They do just require a different level of discernment

when we select people to go do them. Make sure it's the right time for lots of different reasons. Right?

So, when they go there, we expect them to perform, and they are performing against everybody else that's right there with them, performing. And that's who that commander is going to evaluate them against. That's the bottom line. And I think it's really presumptuous when people say, well, if I stayed back at my old career field, I would have got it. Really? Let's see. Let's put ourselves in the time machine and send you back and see what would have happened. Right? That's pretty presumptuous, that where you were, not, working with people you were not working with, you somehow believe and have so much confidence in yourself, you would have been better than all of them.

Well, if you can be that good there, maybe you can be that good at where you're at and do it, and we'll do that discernment. So the fact is, is that over time, this is going to happen to everybody. Right? You could go to a regular unit that's not one

of these folks that we've selectively manned for different reasons. Right? And timing's everything. Right? You could go there, and man, you're actually really good compared to everybody else [Laughter]. Right?

But then, a whole new group of people come in, and you're not quite so good anymore. Right? I mean, that is the way it is for all of us in all of our careers, in your primary functional areas and where you go do other stuff. So, you've just got to do what you've got to do where you're at. Be the best you can be.

You know, this is not a competition between Airmen. Airmen need to go and do their best every day, depending on where they're at in their development, where they're at in their careers, they will be at different places throughout the cycle, and I promise you, we're going to move the right people to the right places over time. It's never the right time for anyone. Chief, it wasn't the right time for you. Right?

So, the only day I was satisfied that I got promoted, was the day I put that stripe on. Right? The next stripe, I was satisfied that day. The next day, I was ready for the next one, in my mind. In nobody else's mind, but certainly, in my mind, was ready. Right? That's how Airmen are. I mean, that's just human nature. We just have to work through that, and realize, we just want you to do your jobs and be the best you can be, work as hard as you can work. You'll have good days and bad days.

If you stick with it, you'll be sitting in here soon. You know that, because you did it. And that's what our job is -- for all the senior NCOs in this room, for all the folks that have been living this a lifetime, it's your job to reinforce this with our young Airmen that are hearing something different, and in some cases, don't even understand the system that they've been part of to understand what the new system is going to be and the level of discernment.

And you've got to walk them through that in the right way, because you've got to have enough faith

-- right -- you've got to have enough trust and confidence in our organization that we're going to value the right things and advance the right things. People, if you don't, there's really no reason to have a conversation, because if you don't have that, it doesn't really matter what you say anyway about it. What are you saying? What else?

[No response heard]

CMSAF CODY: You know the Thunderbirds? You know, we already go out as model works. You know the titles that go on the Thunderbird? It's very competitive. Right? Extremely competitive for those pilots to get in. Destined for greatness if they get selected. Right? That's what I would use as a term.

But when they're down there working for their promotion recommendations, right, which for officers, when they're in the zone, you know, [inaudible], they don't get any more. They compete with everybody else. That's just the way it is. Right? But hey, I'm a Thunderbird. Good for you, do good [Laughter]. You're destined for greatness.

Right? Just like every other Airmen in the Air Force, you're destined for greatness if you work hard and you do well. What else?

SPEAKER: Chief?

CMSAF CODY: Please, yes.

[Simultaneous discussion]

SPEAKER: Sergeant [Inaudible] from Joint Base Andrews.

CMSAF CODY: Yeah?

SPEAKER: My question to you is, what do you think the reason was in the last year, so many airmen pressed the volunteer set button? And in recent papers of the Air Force Times [Laughter], it was stated that we let too many people in certain career fields go, and that the Air Force is asking for those critical positions back.

CMSAF CODY: Yeah, so I feel --

[Simultaneous discussion]

SPEAKER: Do you think that we possibly made a mistake on --

CMSAF CODY: Well, I know we make mistakes

all the time, so let's just be honest [Laughter]. You know, we go into things with the best of intentions, but anybody who would stand there and say we did not make any mistakes -- there were certainly things that we learned as we went through force management that we would do differently if we went through it again.

But, we took a completely different approach this time in force management that we had to start for a lot of the right reasons. So, while there's been a lot of focus on some of the things that didn't work well -- and that's maybe we should shine -- to put a spotlight on them, so we can fix them. Probably far less of a spotlight on the things that we did better than we've ever done before in the history of the force management for exactly the amount of time that we actually gave people to make the decision.

That was probably the best thing we have ever done for anybody if we were going to say you had to leave the service, and we gave more time than we had ever, ever given before to kind of work through that. Maybe volunteer, maybe understand what my other

options are. I mean, we really did that.

So, from that, you know, that just kind of set the tone. But we learned a lot, and we would do things differently if we had to do it again. But this idea that, why do I think so many people left -- well, not enough left. Right? We would have been happy if everybody had volunteered to leave to get to the number that we had to have leave, which was about 17,000. That didn't happen.

So, those overwhelming numbers that people out there that said people were running out the door, well, to be honest with you, if all 17,000 would have ran out the door, that would have been okay. We were all right, because it would have been their decision. We wouldn't have had to make that decision for them, and we would have much preferred that. And did we lose good Airmen? We lost great Airmen. I mean, that's always hard when you lose great Airmen, but we had to. We couldn't afford to be that force.

But this idea that we're out there trying to get people back that we paid to leave, maybe, or told

them -- that's not true. I'm not sure where you're getting that. We're trying to get people to come back. Not the type of -- not the people that we left [sic]. Here's the deal. We can only be within a few percentage points of our end strength, by law. There's a little bit of leeway here in the law, just because you can't be that exact in when is a person going to go or come or what it looks like. But you've got to be close.

But at the end of the day, you can't exceed that end strength. So, what we had happen over time in our Air Force is we got out of balance. Significantly. Way over-manned based on what the requirement was for that career field and certain career fields, and significantly, hemorrhaging in other career fields with too few. And you know -- you're wearing four stripes.

Could I just take you as a defender and say, hey, you've got to come over and be an air traffic controller. Why don't you be a supervisor next week, you're a 7-level, let's do it. Could you do it?

SPEAKER: No, sir.

CMSAF CODY: And I couldn't come over and be a defender. I mean, because I'm not qualified to do that. So, the fact is, is we had too many staff sergeants or we had too many [inaudible] at this rank, we've got to go. That doesn't mean I don't still need new people coming in for those jobs to build that, that's the whole accession machine, this is a machine that never stops. You've got to constantly do it.

But if we've got too many of one population, they've got to go. And if we allow that to grow and don't have that need -- right -- which we have done. We have over retained. Well, then you get to this point -- now we're bumped up against end strength of what we can afford to have. We can't legally be any more and we're never going to fix what we're hemorrhaging.

So, what we're trying to do right now is, we are asking Airmen to come back fighters maintainers. But we didn't send any of these fighter maintainers out the door. We're trying to bring in staff

sergeants, tech sergeants fighter maintainers -- bring them back on, if they could otherwise serve, meaning they left under the right conditions; they would have been eligible to continue to serve. Right? But they left. So, we might -- we've asked if a few if they might, they're aren't big numbers. You know?

So, that's how we're approaching this. But all those career fields that we've involuntarily separated -- right? So, there were people that voluntarily separated in areas that we might still have a requirement, because we opened the aperture and wanted everybody to volunteer before we had to go non-vol to get to the numbers.

But if we were involuntary separating you, you can't come back. But we are going out there to see and we're working with the ART component to bring people on back, and duty orders to help us out in some areas. You know, we're doing some limited high-year retention extensions, if a commander recommends that Airman stay on for a couple more years to help us as we continue to try to fill this in.

But we are not going back to people that we just told last year to leave and telling them to come back in. It's not happening.

SPEAKER: Chief.

CMSAF CODY: Besides, just legally, we can't pay them to leave and then ask them to come back in. Thanks. It's important that we all understand that, too, because then it does make it sound like, oh my god, you know, what were we thinking. We were just -- you know, we woke up one day, had a thought, did it and then we woke up the next day and had a different thought and did something different.

I mean, that's not how it works. That's not how we're approaching any of this stuff. It was the hardest thing we did. I tell you, General Welsh and myself -- there was nothing that we had agonized over more last year was the fact that we were telling really good people that they couldn't serve in their Air Force anymore. Nothing we agonized over more.

You know, we were in here -- really, we're formers, right, and they were talking them up you

know, about things that happened during the tenure. This will be one of those things that happened during my tenure that I will not -- will not appreciate having take place during my tenure or at any time during our Air Force. Because it's the first time for the enlisted force. The officers have been doing it over for 15 years; having to go through what we did for the very first time. Unbelievable. What else?

SPEAKER: Chief?

CMSAF CODY: Please, chief.

SPEAKER: Chief --

CMSAF CODY: He's going to get you the mic real quick. He's right behind you.

CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT JONES: Chief, it's Chief Master Sergeant Christine Jones, Fort Meade.

CMSAF CODY: Hi, Christine.

CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT JONES: Just a quick question for you with regards to DSD.

CMSAF CODY: Yeah. You're loving it. Right?

CHIEF MASTER SGT. JONES: I love it. I love

it.

CMSAF CODY: Okay.

CHIEF MASTER SGT. JONES: Not really.

CMSAF CODY: Not really, huh?

CHIEF MASTER SGT. JONES: It's just changing. It's been kind of changing and morphing, and we're making adjustments. Do you anticipate that it's going to continue to change?

CMSAF CODY: Not much.

CHIEF MASTER SGT. JONES: Okay.

CMSAF CODY: So, I think you know, we have -- so again, I think you can take that as a positive or you can take that as a negative. It depends on how you want to look at it. Right? So, we have been changing it. Here we are in round four of it. Right? So, two years basically, of the implementation.

And it goes to just what Chief Petzel was talking about in the previous presentation. Hey, you know, we go into this with a good plan and a good idea, but then, when you start executing it, you learn. And every time you execute, you learn some

more and you get some feedback. You know, if we were so rigid and we wouldn't take that feedback and make the adjustments to make it better, I mean, that would not be very insightful on us. Right?

So, we have made some -- in some cases, some pretty significant adjustments to it. In others, just minor tweaks. I mean, just as an example, you know, we put up on the site now where people can kind of understand what jobs -- you know, what areas are closed out. We have a little bit more predictability, so they're not thinking oh, am I still going to get, you know, maybe called up for that job.

But at the end of the day, it's working really well. And I would say that there's still a little bit of churn in the force about it. But that will go away, likely, when us older folks go away. Right [Laughter]? You know? To be honest with you, that's how it is. When everybody leaves that knows how it used to be, and the people that are serving only know this system, this will just be what they do. This is how we do business.

So, there's a lot of around, and it will be likely for a little while, for some of -- you know, that go through that churn. I remember. I remember. Well, everybody remembers. Right? That's something different. But I think we're tweaking it right now, and what we did is actually, this last time, we made a commitment we're going to settle with this. You know, unless we find something that's broke, we're just going to settle and let the whole process settle where everybody just gets the predictability mode of okay it's this time and we're doing it.

But I'm actually proud of the fact that we took the feedback, and after every one of these cycles, we had a hotwash with our team down at AFPC, and we put that with the MAJCOM leaderships to see how it went, trying to make sure, hey, is this working better for us. Is this getting right? But the results -- so, maybe the process, needed to go through this maturation.

But the results of what we're getting is phenomenal, because if you talk to any one of these 10

special duties, the people that are responsible for receiving those folks the level of confidence, and the caliber of folks that they get is notably - is notably different in a positive way. Not that the folks before that were bad; but they're really seeing a difference when we put this level of discernment on the selection.

Again, right time, right Airmen. It doesn't mean that other Airmen at a different time won't be the right time, right Airmen. But thanks.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

CMSAF CODY: What else? Please.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon, Chief.

CMSAF. CODY: Hey [inaudible] --

[Simultaneous discussion]

SPEAKER: Good afternoon Chief, Sgt. Logan, Defense Intelligence Agency. I just have a question.

CMSAF CODY: Defense Intelligence.

SPEAKER: Defense Intelligence.

CMSAF CODY: Yeah, that sounds good.

SPEAKER: Imagine that [Laughter]. So, I

just have a question. Are there any updates on the retirement compensation reform?

CMSAF CODY: So, the only updates that we have is, you know, again, they've got to somehow come out of conference and present something that you know, is going to look like a blended retirement system. So, all indications are that there will be a new retirement system when it comes down to conference, because there's no proposals out there are to keep it the same.

So, the House has a version. You know, the Senate has a version. There are some discrepancies, and we -- in the president's budget submitted a version of a blended retirement. So, how that you know, comes out -- yet to be understood. Right? And you know, there's one version that it would -- you know, because I think most people understand the particulars on this, and defined benefit will go to 40 percent at 20 years or if it's a 2 percent increment every year.

And then, there would be a vesting option --

TSP type of 401K, you know, contribution by the government with some matching contributions along the way. There's minor variations of that between the House and the Senate. You know, our proposal was you know, it was a -- you know, the defined 40 percent benefit continues to grow if you serve after 20 years, and 2 percent all the way out.

You know, you would automatically have 1 percent, being you know -- contributing government when they do that, they would match it up to 5 percent. So, if the government puts you over six, you can put them up to five. It would be a total of 11. You would be vested at the end of your second year, meaning you would -- you know, what you then put in would be going to you now, after the end of your second year of service. That's what we proposed.

The House is probably the closest to that. The Senate is something different. So, I don't know what will come out of the conference. I don't know that we'll actually get a budget that has that detail in it, to be honest with you. So, that's the deal.

But the important thing for you to remember, while I do think it's important for us to all know about it and pay attention to it, it doesn't affect anybody in this room that's wearing a uniform, unless you choose to let it affect you, because there's nothing even in any of the proposals where we put [inaudible] in the House or Senate. It would say that everybody that's serving today would be grandfathered, if they wanted to be.

There would be an option for people to opt in. If you wanted to opt in, you'd have to do the math. Right? It's a math problem for you. Do the math. It could be financially beneficial to you. The way we look at it in the Air Force, the rough quarter magnitude, less than eight years. If you wanted to jump into it and if it was the one that we proposed, you put max contributions in, it could be a really good thing; probably worth more money, lifetime earnings, probably.

But if you weren't going to do max contributions or whatnot, then you'd have to stay away

from it. Certainly, thinking about getting out of the Air Force is a great thing. Opt in. Right [Laughter]? If you're getting out, opt in. You can walk out with some contributions. But that's really where it's at, and I don't know where it will come out. I really don't. There hasn't been a lot of chatter about it. Thanks. What else?

[No response heard]

CMSAF CODY: You have my undivided attention.

SPEAKER: Chief, will you discuss some of the [inaudible]?

CMSAF CODY: General Forthright [sic] here, and as you know, I heard stuff. You know [Laughter]? So, here's what we've done. So, my first measure of merit on this was, is I went out to MAJCOMs and I asked them how they felt about the results. So, the first measure of merit, right, is how we felt about it.

So, the data will tell us what the data needs to tell us about the demographics of the Force,

what it starts to make the Force look like. That's important, and that will help influence future decisions. That's important stuff. But the most important thing is how we feel about it. So, when we look at all of these folks that receive line numbers to master sergeant, then we say did we get it right?

And if the answer to that yes, that is good indication that we're on the right track and that we did it the right way. We have to do all of the analysis on demographics -- demographics by career field, demographics as far as the Force. What does it start to mean to the age of the Force?

And we predicted a lot of what we're seeing in the initial analysis is not [Inaudible]. So, we anticipated this would happen, because we actually did a test that kind of would tell us what it was going to look like. It was a little bit more dramatic in the test, but again, we did 10 AFSC rather than doing every AFSC. So you know, whatever was dramatic in a small sampling is even more dramatic when you get a large sampling, if you understand what I'm saying.

But it was good. I'm encouraged by it.

Here's what I do know -- we're not walking away from it. I mean, this is what we're going to do. How we got to value stuff and how we take action after it. So, this is what the feedback is going to be important for all of us. And you know, what wasn't in the record and what was in the record and what was important. Right? So, there was all of the discussion during your brief, Brandy about trying to figure out what to put in the bulletin. You know?

You'd get a great explanation about what the ACI kind of thinks, but my simple explanation -- do your job. Don't worry about a bullet. Don't worry about anything. Worry about doing your job the best you can. That will generate a bullet of some sort. You know? That ACA is not a checklist. When I hear that, it's just I cringe. I cringe, when I hear people say it's not a checklist in the context of you check off a lot, and I did this and this. It's a checklist to a conversation and a relationship with your Airmen. It's actually got much less to do with

what you write on it versus what you do when you sit down and talk with that Airman and connect with that Airman. A great relationship is founded in trust.

This idea that everybody wants to get the answers to the test - you're over complicated in what we're actually doing. All right. Our business is complicated. People are complicated. We're giving you tools to help elevate the Force to get to the right things, not the wrong things. If everybody's chasing -- I've got to do that, because I can't get -- that's the wrong thing.

There will be times, you know, when you talk about volunteers -- there will be years you don't volunteer at all. You don't have time. We've got you too focused on something else, and that is okay. That's the right thing. And that's what we need you to do as an Airman. And we'll acknowledge it and recognize it.

But you know, we've got to start changing this thing, oh, I've got to do this. And everybody wants this little score card over here. It's the

wrong thing. It's not how you work in a human capital. We're people. We'll go through the rollercoaster of life, the rollercoaster of a career - - things will change on us in an instant.

And if we're so focused on that, you can't see past that. We're not going to really recognize the right people at the right time. We're not going to really help elevate the talent that we have in the right ways. So, that. It was good. I don't want to give up in the state secrets until we've done the final analysis on it, and that's where we're at. Anything I would say right now would be premature. There's a lot of deep diving going on with the analysis of the board.

All I can tell you is the initial feedback is from commanders, from supervisors, from leaders, we're promoting the right people. And that's always got to be the first measure of merit. We will look out and say we got it right. Okay? If that feels good. Now, what does the Air Force look like because of that? And do we need to change other things

because of it? What else?

SPEAKER: Good day, Chief?

[Simultaneous discussion]

CMSAF CODY: Hey, how are you doing?

SPEAKER: [Inaudible] -- from [inaudible]
base [inaudible] --

CMSAF CODY: Good to see you, my friend.
One of our 12 outstanding Airmen from last year.

SPEAKER: They promoted you.

SPEAKER: Yeah.

[Simultaneous discussion]

CMSAF CODY: We didn't hold that against
him, either, Martin [Laughter].

SPEAKER: We talked about that earlier, so
now mouthwatering. [Laughter] Stratifications have
become a big topic, obviously, due to the
reinforcement of it. How should annual wing awards
tie into wing stratifications, in your opinion.

CMSAF CODY: Mm-hmm.

SPEAKER: For example, should your number
one for the year be in the discussion for a top

ranking if time-in-grade eligible?

CMSAF CODY: So, if I took the fact that that stuff came out in the 1206 [inaudible] -- right? So, I'm not talking about the 1206 that I happened to look at, and it happened to result in this person with the number one -- you know, recognized as the senior NCO is what we're talking about here for stratification. Right? That's what we're talking about.

If I took away the 1206 and I took the stuff that was written on the 1206, yes, it does matter, because that's what they did. And we're taking the performance of what they did -- all the same type of things that we consider on the EPR and we're looking at it on that form, of course we're looking at that.

I mean, you know, we're not being genuine here. You know, so, oh, are we recognizing a lot of people at the winnings? I mean, I can't answer that. You have this. You all do that process. You manage it. I don't manage it. You work that process. You know? All I do know is the first part of any of those

sections I had was your job performance. And there was other stuff on there, because again we already talked about that other stuff.

But these people are phenomenally good at their job, and we should recognize it. And we shouldn't be embarrassed by saying that that's important. Why would we? People want to be recognized when they work really hard. We owe it to them to recognize them -- to do that. So, I don't say it because you were the senior NCO of the year that you should be in that hunt for top stratification.

I say it as if you were the senior NCO, you must have been really, really good at your job, and that's the stuff that's going to influence who gets stratification. It's what you did. It's not the form that it came out on or somebody they gave you. Something it just isn't.

You know, it's amazing we talk about it in that way. Right? Because we'll talk about performance. Right? We'll talk about performance in people, and then we'll say, well, we should give them a decoration

if they did that. Right? If they did all that -- right? Think about all of these decorations that come out of [inaudible]. Phenomenal job performance that people do. Right? And they come out. You know, we feel compelled to recognize them with an award. Right? A decoration. Quantify it. Right?

So, if I say somebody won the Air Force Cross, how much more do I have to say? Really? All you're asking is give me the story on how they won the Air Force Cross. I mean, I know they did something pretty spectacular. Right? But that's kind of one of those things, as well. Enough said. All right -- if we have confidence in the process by which we select people for that award.

So, if we have confidence in how we select people to be the senior NCO of the year, first and foremost based on their performance, why would be having that discussion? Confidence, trust. And I tell you, it starts right down where you're talking about. That didn't start with the Air Force. It didn't start at our level. You won't find any level

of guidance that talks to you about that. We create these things on our own, and then, we create these urban legends around them. Oh, you've got to have this. You've got to have that. I can't tell you how many people don't have that stuff -- don't have that stuff -- that have been extremely successful, and impactful on our Air Force.

Everybody wants the test. Right? Oh, I've got to do that. I've got to do that. But the idea when people are recognized, that they will somehow look at that -- you know, dismiss that, that is just so wrong, to think it we would do that. So wrong. Devaluing how hard they worked to be recognized. What else?

SPEAKER: Hey, chief.

CMSAF CODY: Sir?

SPEAKER: What kind of upcoming challenges do you see for leading the upcoming post-millennial generation?

CMSAF CODY: The post what generation?

SPEAKER: Post millennial generation.

CMSAF CODY: Post-millennial. Here's the deal. I'm telling you what. This is -- I can't tell you what challenges that will present, but I don't take it -- you know, sometimes we automatically say challenge and think negative. And in this case, I think challenge, opportunity. And I think whatever that next generation is, they're going to do better than the generation before them, because that's what history bears out.

There's a really good book that I would recommend you read. Steve talked about it the other day. It's on the Chief of Staff's reading list from year when I talked about, by Haydn Shaw -- Sticking Points: Leading Across Generations. To get at the answer to your question, read that, because whatever that next generation proposes to us, it will fit right into this model.

But the fact is, you know what -- every generation is a little different. Every previous generation says the one that came after it is -- hey you got out in basic training. We're going to

graduate some folks here on Friday. Right? Six hundred, 800 Airmen, however many we have in there. They're going to be phenomenal young men and women, even more capable than anybody sitting in this room, I promise you. Greater potential than any of us ever had.

Because, just like I said earlier, the commitment that those that had -- that went before us, can elevate us up. That's what it's going to be. They're going to be better, because we're going to give them better things. They're going to be more educate better. We're going to give them better tools. They're going to come out better. And if we don't, then we failed. We didn't do our job the right way.

But I'll tell you what - there'll be an Airman that graduates on Friday. Right? And then two weeks from now, when they're in tech school, they'll make a comment about the Airmen that graduate in two weeks. They'll say, man, they just didn't go through it like I did [Laughter]. They're not like us. I mean, it's an instantaneous thing. It's happened with

every generation of Airmen. Oh man. They make it easy now.

I mean, there has not been a group that has ever gone through where some other generation didn't come after and make a comment about them. I'm telling you what. They're better than us. And that's a dang good thing they are. Right? It's a really good thing, yeah. So, the challenges and the opportunities -- and the opportunity is we need to figure out who they are, what they bring to the table, and then we can go leverage it like no tomorrow. What else? Please?

SPEAKER: Chief, a question. About two days ago, Air Force Times said that there was some disagreement on enlisted pilots. So, I was wondering, what is the Air Force really think about all of this [Laughter]?

CMSAF CODY: Steve, did you say that? Did you say there was a disagreement [Laughter] amongst - command chiefs, it never happens. I sit with this group. This group is always completely in sync, and

it never has any deviation in thought [Laughter].

None. We are so synched up, it's almost like we're one.

So hey, let me put it in context for you, and then I'll add some more to it. So, they actually weren't disagreeing with each other, and given I had more time to -- you know, give a more in-depth answer, and if you had a roundtable discussion to say, really where we are, you know, they're trying to make a pretty good plan.

So, what Chief Caruso was saying is -- he wasn't saying we shouldn't do it. What he was saying was we're not doing it right now, meaning we're not ready today to do it. And we're not. We haven't looked at it enough. We are looking at it right now. We are absolutely looking at it right now, and we're considering it.

And it's not a consideration of whether enlisted people can fly RPAs. We absolutely know they can fly RPAs. They can do anything. They're not a different kind of human being. They can do anything

that anybody else can do. If we train them, we educate them, we give them the right tools to do it, they can do it, like anybody else.

The real discussion is, is does this fit into the organizational structure properly? Should we do it, for the right reasons for the Air Force? And that's what Chief Campbells' answer was. Heck yes, we can do it. And what General Welsh and Secretary James just said, is they said the same thing. They just put their two comments together. Yes, but we are looking at it. We will be making the decision about it, but it's not a decision about do we think enlisted Airmen can fly RPAs or anything else.

It's a decision about is this the right thing for our organization, for our Air Force. Is it right? There will be no growth here in the United States Air Force. So, if we were to decide to do this, these Airmen wouldn't just miraculously appear as a new number of Airmen in the Air Force. We would have to adjust the organizational structure to do this. And we have to ask ourselves, should we do

that, could we do that, and what do you think about it. And that's the analysis that's going on.

So, let's make sure when we talk about stuff like that, we keep it in the right conversation. Right? Not this conversation about it, so they can't do this and we can do. That's just so ridiculous and so beneath us as the professionals that we are. It is actually beneath us to have conversations like that. This is a conversation about what is the right thing for our Air Force so we can employ combat air globally. Go anywhere and do anything any time better than anybody else. Does that sound right? Look at the music starts when I start saying that stuff [Laughter].

[Simultaneous discussion]

SPEAKER: Chief, Major Sullivan, an Air Force fellow.

CMSAF CODY: Yes, ma'am.

SPEAKER: One my highlights in my career was yesterday, just sitting in the audience watching Airman Stone find out he was become a staff sergeant.

It was a really great experience, and I got come and shake his hand this morning and congratulate him.

CMSAF CODY: Awesome.

SPEAKER: So, last night, I log into social media, to Facebook and --

CMSAF CODY: Stop it [Laughter]. Stop it. Stop logging in, Ma'am [Laughter].

SPEAKER: So, what do you say to those people who have now questioned the senior leaders? These are NCOs in the Air Force and officers, saying how dare we promote someone above other people --

[Simultaneous discussion]

CMSAF CODY: I hear you, Ma'am.

CMSAF CODY: Here's what I'll tell you. Now, the first piece of advice I got when I was elected to this position, I received from Chief Roy. He said, stay off of that stuff. Everybody's got an opinion. And I know there's officers and enlisted that are commented. I mean, people have come up and told me, but I'm not looking at it and I'm not reading it.

I'm not going to give them the time of day

and acknowledge these views. If someone wants to personally come up and talk to me, they want to be educated on how we made that decision and why, I'm happy to do that in a professional manner. This idea that I'm going to jump on the negative narrative and I'm going to try to defend our decision -- we don't have to defend anything at all. We did the right thing and we know why we did the right thing.

[Applause]

And that's what I say. I mean, I'll tell you what. You give people credibility when you give them credibility. When you just walk by, hey, I don't need to see it happen. I mean, that's all I can tell you, ma'am. We can't stop that and it is a challenge. And I know it disturbs you. And you know what? It tugs at my heart when it bothers our Airmen that people are doing that, because I know how they feel about their Air Force.

I know they love what they're doing, and I hate to see people tear it down. But you know what? We're better than that and we're bigger than that. We

just walk by. Be above it. I get asked that all the time. I can't tell you how many people said stuff about me that I have never met. I promise you, they don't know me. They don't know how I feel about anything or anyone. They just decided.

And guess what? They have their right to do that. And they'll do it. But I'm not going to bring myself to that. Again, I'm perfectly willing to engage with our -- and I'm happy to engage as to why we made that decision. Right? And you look at our Chief of Staff for crying out loud. How can anybody say stuff like that? There's nobody that has more heart. Nobody cares more about Airmen in our Air Force or making it better. You know? Shame on those people. Shame on people for making him feel bad about what happened. Shame on them.

But guess what? We feel good about it. So, we feel good. Who cares? Right? We're feeling good [Laughter]. I'll tell you what. When I went to bed last night, I felt good [Laughter]. And guess what? Airman Stone felt good, too [Laughter]. Always going

to be haters out there. Always going to be haters.

CMSAF CODY: All right. Let me kind of wrap this up, because we've got another forum that I've got to jump to. But I really, really appreciate your time, and just having this kind of open candid dialogue with you today. It's always the best part of getting to spend time with Airmen, answering their questions.

Again, I'm providing you my perspective and it's okay that you have yours. It doesn't always have to be the same. You know, we're doing a lot of different things -- a lot of different turmoil just because of the anxiety associated with changing that. But don't feel bad about being an Airman. Don't feel bad about what your Air Force is at. We are really, really good, and we're really, really good because of the men and women I'm looking at right now. And we're going to be even better because of the men and woman I'm looking at right now.

And we'll overcome all of this stuff. And you know, realistically, it's only when you're faced

with these type of things that you actually do advance. It's only when you're faced with these type of things that you move forward, because if you're not facing these things, you're just sitting back waiting for something to happen. And that's not us.

So, it's a real honor and a privilege to serve with you. And again, thanks so much for coming out and supporting the convention. I appreciate you.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

CMSAF CODY: All right.

SPEAKER: Chief, this is great. You know what I love about this, is you ask real questions to the guy who has the answers, or some of them, anyhow, and we let it hang out. And that's what we're here for. We're here to be honest with each other, and to tell each other what we know. And if we don't know it, we say we don't know it. And if it doesn't work quite right, we know that.

So, Chief, thank you. We appreciate your leadership.

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