

CMSgt Brandy Petzel
"Enlisted Evaluations &
Weighted Airman Promotion Systems Changes"
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CMSgt Petzel: Thank you so much for joining me.

I'd like to start and follow the theme that General Welsh and Secretary James and our Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force have kind of started us out this week and led us through the last few days.

General Welsh is so awesome about presenting our heritage. My husband makes fun of me because every time we hear him speak I get all weepy and teary-eyed because I have so much pride. You swell with pride when you see our history and our heritage and where we've come from and the aircraft that we've flown. The things that our Air Force has done over the last 67 years as of tomorrow.

To play on that, Chief Cody showed us where we've come as far as our force. How small we were when we started, and how large we were at one point. Now being the smallest Air Force since inception.

So to kind of play on, again, our senior leadership themes I want to kind of paint a picture for you.

We started flying the F-16 in 1978. We're still flying it, Block 52s primarily. And at that time we had come out of Vietnam and we were over a million strong. So we've seen the aircraft that General Welsh has presented us and we've seen the numbers that Chief Cody has presented us. Our Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force -- Chief Arian and Chief Harlow -- really put together what we now call the Weighted Airman Promotion System over their tenure. So we developed that system, in 1968 and two years later is when we fielded that. That's 45 years, come next year, when we're going to roll out all of these changes.

We have had the same promotion system for 45 years. With no significant changes.

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Now our evaluation system, we've been about 25 years now, we've been going with the current evaluation system. In the early '90s we transitioned from our APRs to our EPRs, so we've had some form changes over the years, but primarily we've really had that same system for about 25 years.

So we are a force that thrives on innovation. Like the Chief of Staff has said, bigger, faster, stronger. We have made amazing strides -- technology, communications, ISR. Everything that we do every day we do better the following day, the following year.

I loved the end of Chief Cody's presentation this morning. You got to see three senior master sergeants that are working on the development of the KC-46, the Pegasus. Enlisted Airmen that are at the ground floor, working with industry to build an airframe that is going to support our force. An airframe that we deserve. I like to call it a fifth-generation tanker. No different than the Airmen that we have working on the F-35 Lightning right now. We have enlisted Airmen that are working on a new fighter for the Air Force. And we've had multiple aircraft over the last 45 years. Again, same promotion system.

So this, the Weighted Airman Promotion System changes and our Enlisted Evaluation System changes, I like to call that, this is my KC-46. This is my F-35 promotion system and evaluation system. This is what we're going to give you. Because our enlisted force deserves a fifth-generation promotion system and evaluation system because we're a completely different force than we were in 1970 when we started using this system. When we were over a million strong Airmen that were using this system and now we are down to less than half a million.

So where are we going?

At the end of July the Chief of Staff and the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, sent a letter to Airmen, which kind of gave you an idea of what was to come, and we've been talking about this for years. Just like the former chief master sergeants of the Air Force said before lunch, we've been working on this for years. Those gentlemen will tell you that they started some of these changes, and it wasn't the right time in

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the Air Force history to go ahead and go through with them. We were either entering into war or there was something else that was going on in our Air Force that we just didn't get all the way through. Now is the right time. This is a Total Force initiative. Our ARC partners side by side with us in this which makes it even more exciting. Just like they fly with us on that KC-46 and that F-35. They're right there with us.

So at the end of July they kind of gave us an idea of what was to come. Then we followed with some very deliberate communication to the field of where we're going to make these changes and how we're going to make those changes.

We've told you already, the next 18 months for our REGAF up to 30 months for our ARC partners is how long it's going to take for us to roll this out. Which is okay. Like I said, we developed the first program in 1968 and didn't field it until 1970, so it took two years before. A year and a half I think is pretty good.

Last week we gave you a little bit more information about where we're going. Kind of gave you an idea of what our time line is, so I'm going to walk through that with you for anybody who didn't read it or anybody that has questions about those changes and how we're going to implement them.

The first thing that we did is we started static close-out dates. A new acronym for the Air Force. The SCOD. So a static close-out date or a fixed close-out date. Every Airman by rank will have their evaluation close-out the same time every year. You change rank, your close-out date changes. Same as our Guard and Reserve partners which is also awesome because if you transition to the ARC, guess what? Your evaluation's going to close out on the same date. So it works very conveniently.

That static close-out date is married up with our promotion eligibility cut-off date. That's a REGAF thing our ARC partners don't have the PCOT. But all of our evaluations are going to close out on the PCOT and on that static close out date. So every Airman every year that is promotion eligible will have their evaluation that closes out and that's what's going to

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count for that promotion cycle that they're getting ready to meet.

So we made that change. Our tech sergeants are first. All the tech sergeants in the REGAF that were affected got an email a couple of weeks ago that said hey, congratulations, your evaluation's going to close out on the 30th of November now. When we get ready to transition for our staff sergeants we will do exactly the same thing, and our staff sergeants' evaluations will close out the 31st of January. Then again in a couple of months we'll send the same thing out to our senior airmen and below who have an evaluation that's in the system and they're going to have their evaluations close out the 31st of March.

Right about that time we'll be getting ready to implement our changes to our Weighted Airman Promotion System. So with our '15 promotion cycle we're going to start changing everything in the Weighted Airman Promotion System. Our EPR points are going to change. The weight of EPRs will weigh more heavily than anything else in the Weighted Airman Promotion System because our senior leaders have already said performance is number one.

We need our performance, our sustained superior performance to count more than anything. So we're going to change our EPR points, we're going to change the way we calculate our EPR points, and then we're going to reduce our time in grade and time in service. All of that's going to start next year with our FY 15 promotion cycles.

And then in May, exciting time. We get to field the new chief master sergeant EPR and start utilizing it. Our Guard and our Reserve and our REGAF chief master sergeants are going to start using this new EPR. We've shared it with the field. We tested it during the command chief's screening board this year. It worked wonderfully. There are some areas that we're going to probably tweak. That's why we tested it. Get it out there, see how it works. No different than flying that KC-46 and seeing how it works and making adjustments and modifications where we need it.

Then a couple of months later we're going to roll out a new Air Force Form 911 senior NCO evaluation form. Along with that

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senior NCO evaluation form are going to come some very significant changes for the senior NCO corps and how exactly we capture performance and how we make promotion recommendations for our senior NCOs. The senior NCOs that are competing for promotion to senior master sergeant and to chief master sergeant. So we're going to make some restrictions on senior rater recommendations and endorsement.

So right now by and large you have all of your I's dotted and your T's crossed and you've done everything that you need to and you're eligible for senior rater endorsement, and many of our senior NCOs received that senior rater endorsement. Next year we're going to restrict that. Ten percent of master sergeants and 20 percent of senior master sergeants will receive senior rater endorsement. If you are not within that 10 percent or that 20 percent your evaluation will be signed by a deputy evaluator. And that's okay.

It's actually very consistent with the way that we do our stratifications today. It's just we're going to restrict that. It helps the board. It also helps provide a tiering for our senior NCO corps. Those folks, where they sit amongst their peers. And in years that you fall below that promotion line, you have the opportunity the following year to rise above it. And I will tell you, today there are more Airmen that are promoted to senior master sergeant and chief master sergeant without a stratification than those that do receive a stratification. So we're going to make those changes.

Then next fall we're going to give you the new Air Force Form 910 for our tech sergeants and below. And along with that Air Force Form 910 is going to come force distribution, which is not a new concept, but it is new to the enlisted force. We're going to restrict the number of top promotion recommendations that we make on our junior enlisted evaluations. For our promotion eligible junior enlisted. So let's talk about who is promotion eligible, seeing as how we've kind of walked you through the next year and a half-ish.

So when you get promoted you're not eligible for promotion in many cases for up to two years. It's your time to grow into that new stripe. The responsibilities that come with that

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promotion. The increased responsibilities of that grade. So you're not promotion eligible.

So the years that you're not promotion eligible we're not going to give you a promotion recommendation. So if I was to talk about like today, the years that you're not promotion eligible you wouldn't get a 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1 on your EPR. The years that you are promotion eligible are the years that you're going to have forced distribution, because those are the years that we are going to take those promotion recommendations and we're going to apply those to the Weighted Airman Promotion System. So you can see that we can't change one part of the system, the promotions, without changing the evaluations. You have to take everything into account that you're changing with the evaluations because it ties directly to what we're doing with promotions.

So that will be great for Airmen. Sustained superior performance is going to count. You're going to have to be on your game every year, regardless of if you're promotion eligible or not. Regardless of if you're going to have a promotion recommendation or not that year, you're going to have to be on your game, and that's exciting to me. That means duty performance is just going to be off the charts. I know it's going to be.

Those are some of the things that we're going to change. Oh, but wait. We're also going to do a master sergeant evaluation board next year. So the Chief of Staff and Chief Cody have talked about this for over a year now about us looking at doing a master sergeant evaluation board. We tested it, we've looked at it, we've ran the numbers, and this is the right thing to do for our Air Force. Promotion to master sergeant is a huge thing. That's entering the senior NCO corps. To do it, however, we're going to have to use a couple of different tools because if you took in to account the total number of tech sergeants that we have eligible for promotion every year, that's a lot of records to review. That would be like a board that lasted two months.

So what we're going to do is we're going to implement what we're calling a hurdle. You have to make board. All of our tech

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sergeants that are promotion eligible are going to test the same as they do today. You'll go in and you'll take your SKT and you'll take your PFE and those points will be added with your decorations, your time in grade, your time in service and your EPR points. Then by AFSC we are going to take the top 60 percent of each of the AFSCs and those Airmen will move forward to phase two and actually meet the evaluation board at AFPC. That evaluation board will be exactly the same as the evaluation board that we already hold for our senior master sergeant and our chief master sergeant promotions. Those board members will look at those records across those AFSCs and then they're going to rack and stack. They're going to create the order of merit, is what we call it. Here's our top guy, and here's our bottom person. Order of merit based on that board score.

And during that phase two, once that board score has been implemented, we're going to take that board score and we're going to take that EPR score and we're going to replace the EPR points that you received during round one, phase one, and we're going to replace that with the board score. So you'll have your board score, your time in grade, your time in service, your EPR points. And that is going to create your WAPS score, your phase two WAPS score, and that's what we're going to determine your promotion selection on, is that final score.

This is going to really change the way that we look at promotions. I think it's awesome. I'm so excited about it. I know there are a lot of tech sergeants out there that are excited about it. We've been talking about it for a while and I think it's the right thing to do for our Air Force. It's the KC-46 of promotions.

All of these changes, our Air Force should take them as something exciting. As Chief Hotaling said yesterday during the MAJCOM Command Chief Forum, we can be victims or we can be victorious, and as an enlisted corps we should embrace these changes. We've been asking for them for years. You can catch any of the former Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force out there and they will tell you these are things that we have wanted to do for decades. We have looked at the evaluation and promotion system four times in the last 45 years. We've reviewed the WAPS systems. We do a revalidation. Every single

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time that we've done that revalidation there's been a recommendation that we make adjustments. And it hasn't been until now that we've actually taken those recommendations and we're going to move forward with them.

What is even more impressive is the number of Airmen that have put their heads together to make this happen. Enlisted Airmen that are sitting down and analyzing and crunching the numbers and looking at what is going to be the best for our Air Force? Some of them are sitting right here in the front row. All of our MAJCOM command chiefs have input on these changes. Our Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force provided input on our changes. Our Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Services, my boss, Lieutenant General Sam Cox is right there, all of these changes, all of us side by side, doing what's right for Airmen, and I really truly believe that this is what's right for Airmen and we all believe that. We're all excited about it. We can't wait for it to happen and I hope that you guys are excited too.

I'm sure I have a little bit of time so I'd be happy to answer some questions.

"What is the plan for strategic communications to commanders? Look around the room, almost exclusively enlisted, but commanders will be giving promotion recommendations."

You're exactly right.

Strategic communication on this roll-out has been key. It's something that every single level of this process has been intimately involved in, and I will tell you that our Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, our A1, our AFPC commander and the CSAF and the Secretary are all about making sure that we roll this out to Airmen and we explain what's coming.

But this is a big elephant. That's my analogy. It's a big elephant. We're not going to ask you to eat it all at once. Every single piece of this process plays on itself. I will promise you a year and a half from now you'll be able to look back and you'll be able to put everything together and see that everything was deliberately released for a reason.

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Commanders, we're going to explain to commanders what this means. We have to. Commanders are the ones that are responsible for executing this program. No different than we're going to explain this to the personnel community who are going to be responsible for executing it. And we're going to explain it to the enlisted community because it impacts all of you. But it's going to be explained in iterations. We gave you a schedule last week, a time line, an execution time line of when we are going to release each one of these programs, each portion of the time line, when things are going to roll out. And at each one of those milestones we're going to tell you what's coming, how we plan to move forward, what the policy changes are going to be, how that affects you or your Airmen. Each thing will be explained and we'll provide those explanations to commanders. We'll explain to commanders what that means.

Commanders understand the enlisted promotion system. But we're really going to rely on enlisted leadership to really explain to them. We're going to rely on our first sergeants, our command chiefs, our squadron superintendents, and we're going to rely on many of you to explain the importance to commanders. How these changes are different from how we executed the program last year. But at the same time we'll make sure there's deliberate communication, that we have slides, and talking points, and we explain what those changes are, and what it means for these commanders when they are making promotion recommendations. How each one of those recommendations correlates to a point, and each one of those points correlates to a WAPS score and ultimately to a promotion, selection, or non-selection. We'll make sure that they understand that before they get ready to execute these things.

"With the new EPR, if I have a shop of four personnel that are easy 5's in a larger unit, how do you go about strating them against each other and their peers equally? They're all promotion eligible at the same time."

This is going to be a commander responsibility. A commander's going to have to take all of the Airmen by grade in their unit and they're ultimately going to have to rack and stack them. You can take this entire room and we could put them in order if

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we had to. It's going to be hard, but as Secretary James said, this is going to need bold leadership. Bold leadership. You're going to have to perform. If you're not on you're A Game, it's time to bring you're A Game, folks.

Commanders are going to be responsible for this. Airmen are going to really write their own future here. If they're all easy 5's then the commander I'm sure is going to be able to recognize that based on that performance.

"What's the number one thing you need from officers and commanders to make the new EES and WAPS system successful and to work as intended with these changes?"

What I need is what I know that we're going to have, and that's support. Trust in the system, trust in the changes that we're making and that they are for the right reasons, that the Air Force needs them. That we need them. This is our fifth-generation promotion system. Everybody in the room should be like super stoked that we're moving to these new things. Faster, stronger. We need trust in the commanders in the system, we need buy-in, but we need that from more than just commanders and officers, we need that from all of you.

I would tell you that I think commanders are going to embrace this. I need all of you to embrace this. There are far more enlisted people in the Air Force than there are officers. I need every single person in this room to embrace it. To walk out of here knowing that we're doing the right thing for the Air Force, the right thing for our Airmen, the right thing for each one of you -- your peers, your subordinates, your supervisors, and that these changes are needed. Not only needed. You guys deserve them. We deserve to make these changes for our Air Force. And if we have that trust, and we have buy-in and we have Airmen that know that we're doing the right thing, that we're making the decisions deliberate and that our program is going to be better than it was yesterday, it will all work out just fine. We're going to be better for it.

"I understand the creation of the new evaluation report, but how will this fix the problem of over-inflation? A 5 still beats a 4 no matter how good or bad of a job you do."

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Force distribution is what changes the over-inflation. You know, at the end of the day there are only going to be a certain percentage of Airmen that are promotion eligible in each unit that are going to be recommended for a top promotion recommendation. And those that aren't in that very top tier will be recommended for the second top promotion recommendation. And those that don't fall in that tier, then they'll fall into our third tier.

In July we released the Airman Comprehensive Assessment. I think it's a revolutionary way to do our feedback. Those of us that have been in the room more than 20 years will tell you this is the way that we did feedback when we were Airmen. Everything that's on that form, Airman First Class Petzel had her supervisor talk to her about all of those things. It wasn't on the form, we just talked about all those things. Everything from finances to making sure that the grass in my front yard was not more than an inch and a half tall if you lived in base housing.

So if you become familiar with the ACA, as I know everybody in this room has, you'll know that we need to be honest with our Airmen. We need to accurately and honestly capture performance and give feedback to our Airmen on how they are performing. That will correlate over to our new evaluation. If you become intimately familiar with the ACA I can tell you, you're going to have a pretty good idea what the new EPR is going to look like. Because they're made to complement each other. That feedback, that deliberate feedback that supervisors are having with their Airmen is what is going to drive how we utilize the new EPR. And it's going to help make those decisions for commanders I'm sure much easier.

But Airmen are going to know where they stand. They deserve to know where they stand, and that is going to correlate to their evaluations. And the beautiful thing is, the years that you're not promotion eligible, you're still going to have to be on your game, like I said. You have got to sustain superior performance every year. And guess what? Every year that the guy next to you gets promoted leaves a spot for somebody else to move up, doesn't it?

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So the system will be an ebb and flow, and people will move up at the appropriate times in their career, and then you'll plateau. Then you'll move up and then you'll plateau. Chief Cody will tell you, I've heard him say it a million times, as soon as you sew on staff sergeant you're probably not the best staff sergeant in the Air Force, are you? I know I wasn't. It took me years and years of being a staff sergeant until I was ready to be tech sergeant. Then I was pretty much at the top of my game, I'd like to think. Then when I sewed on tech sergeant, I was not the best tech sergeant in the Air Force. I had to work at it. You have to grow into those stripes and the responsibilities that come with those stripes. That's going to be I think something that is going to be captured through our new Performance and Evaluation System.

"How do you intend to evaluate whether the program is successful?"

That's a good question. It takes years and years and years of executing a system before you know that it's successful. I will tell you that one of the things that we do when you're looking at making monumental changes such as these is you try to take a snapshot in time and then fast-forward it. If you make all these changes, what will happen in 20 or 30 years from now? Statistically you can take the force and you can look at implementing these changes and then you can look at what the force is going to look like in 20 or 30 years. That's what our senior leadership has done. If you don't like what that picture is, then you need to adjust the policy before you execute it. We have done that.

There are many other things that are due to roll out that are more than a year from now. We will make those decisions as we get closer because we have to analyze every single change that we make. That's also one of the beautiful things about executing over a period of time, because you eat that elephant a little bit at a time. And for every single change that we're making, we analyze it to make sure that we're doing the right thing. It's no different than any other community in the Air Force. Any time you change your program, you analyze how the program is changed and you make adjustments where needed.

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I will guarantee you when that KC-46 gets delivered to the force there will be things about that aircraft that those senior master sergeants may not have thought of, or we will put it into a situation where it will perform differently than we expect it and we'll make adjustments.

"Will line numbers be issued differently?"

No. Line numbers will be issued exactly the same measure they are now. Line numbers being calculated by your time in service and by your time in grade. So none of that will change.

Our changes to the promotion eligibility cutoff date will not change the promotion eligibility of any of the Airmen. If you are eligible for promotion before we adjusted the dates, you are still eligible for promotion now.

I'm going to pass this question off to my ARC partners.

"How do we anticipate the new enlisted evaluation system will affect selectively manned units who hire the best of the career field?"

I've been so fortunate to be a member of some selectively manned units and I will tell you after being a member of those units that not necessarily the absolute best of every career field is represented in a selectively manned unit. They're probably the most eligible and the most qualified that were applicants or available at that time.

I was very fortunate to be a member of the United States Air Force Thunderbirds for a tour. I will tell you that the 120 Airmen that served on the team with me were not the best Airmen in the Air Force. There's absolutely no way for me to decide whether or not there was any other Airman in the Air Force that better than those, but I can tell you that we were not the absolute best Airmen in the Air Force. I'm sure there were personnel Airmen at the time far better than I was. But I was there to represent the best of the Air Force, and I was one of several that applied for a job and was eligible, met the qualifications, was able to move, and then my job was to be in that unit and represent the best of what the Air Force has. No

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different than our 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year this year. Who I do think are some of the best Airmen in the Air Force. And there will be Airmen that come after them, and there will be Airmen that come after those in those selectively manned units that will far out-perform the Airmen that there were previously.

The evaluation system and the promotion changes will capture those Airmen no differently than any other Airmen in the service at any other unit. We will not have to make modifications to those units.

Being assigned to that unit alone is representation that you met the qualifications and were a cut above the majority of your AFSC that were eligible at the time. But we're not going to handle the selectively manned units any differently than we will handle any other unit in the Air Force. That's okay.

I hope that you're as excited as I am about the next year and a half and what the future of our evaluation and promotion system has yet to come.

I know that our senior enlisted leaders are excited about it. We are embracing these changes. We have Airmen working on the development of these changes, no different than our Airmen working on the KC-46 development. And we're doing it on behalf of Airmen. We're taking into account each and every one of you and how it will affect you in your career.

Thank you so much for your time, and I really do hope that you embrace it and you look forward to the next year as much as I do.

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