

February 26, 2014

# United States Air Force

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## Presentation

Before the House Appropriations Committee,  
Subcommittee on Military Construction and  
Veterans Affairs

## ***Quality of Life in the Military***

Witness Statement of  
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Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

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## **Introduction**

Chairman Culberson, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your continued support and commitment to the quality of life in our military. It is my absolute honor to be here today with my fellow service senior enlisted advisors as we represent the fine men and women who serve our great nation. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share with you the concerns of 690,000 Total Force Airmen and their families.

We know the support of this subcommittee is absolutely vital to our continued success around the globe. We rely on your efforts, actions, and legislation to protect and support our service members' and their families' entitlements and benefits. The continued support and commitment you have for our veterans' is recognized and appreciated by all those who serve in our military, past and present. We also appreciate the visits House members have made to support our Airmen in the field and our Wounded Warriors in health care facilities.

## **Force Management**

The Air Force faces a significant challenge over the next several years as we move toward a new normal of operational tempo and fiscal constraints. We will need to significantly reduce the size of the Air Force by to up 25,000 Airmen who have proudly dedicated their lives in service to our great nation. To reach these numbers, we are instituting multiple voluntary and involuntary programs that have been structured in a logical, deliberate and responsible manner, with voluntary programs available first. These programs are not quick fixes, but rather a tailored effort comprised of many initiatives aimed at managing the force along a continuum of service. These actions are necessary to facilitate critical modernization and restore force readiness. The

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capabilities and credibility of our Air Force to meet our core missions are essential to national defense and these efforts support that end.

We recognize how difficult these actions are on our Airmen and the importance of transparency during this process. Air Force senior leaders announced the programs as early as possible to ensure Airmen and their families had time to plan for their future. Every Airman has been individually notified of their vulnerability for voluntary and involuntary force management programs. We also understand the importance of communication and support for our Airmen and their families. Through a deliberate communication effort, supervisors down to the unit level understand they must stay well versed on the different force management initiatives and how they affect their team. We are committed to sitting down with each individual Airman to talk through options and refer them to support agencies as appropriate. As we push forward through the turbulent road ahead, our commitment to our fellow Airmen will be resolute and the bond that holds us together.

### **Sexual Assault Prevention and Response**

Last summer, the Air Force established a multi-functional Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office--a directorate-level organization, led by a general officer whom reports directly to the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff. This office leads a robust focus on sexual assault prevention, advocacy, investigation, accountability and assessment and enables the Air Force to better synchronize with the Department of Defense lines of effort. As a result, the Air Force has been able to provide broader, more comprehensive victim support. The Air Force has also benchmarked a Special Victim's Counsel Program. It is through this program that victims of sexual assault have personal, direct access to an attorney representing only their interests in

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the judicial process as well as advocating for them in any collateral discipline issues and assisting them in any case issues whenever necessary. Additionally, "Every Airman Counts" is an initiative that our Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, General Larry O. Spencer launched as a forum to promote Airman-to-Airman dialogue related to Sexual Assault that also provides the opportunity for Airmen to provide suggestions to senior leaders. Furthermore, the Air Force hired and trained Air Force Office of Special Investigations agents for the exclusive purpose of investigating sexual assaults. Our Air Force Chief of Staff, General Mark A. Welsh III, continues to make it crystal clear that sexual assaults have no place in the Air Force. Air Force commanders must initiate involuntary administrative discharge processing for any Airman (officer or enlisted) who is convicted of a qualifying sexual assault offense. The Air Force team has already conducted focus groups with 1,400 Airmen, including 30 sexual assault survivors, male and female, at 14 installations worldwide and obtained valuable insight from the junior Airmen, all levels of leadership, and survivors of sexual assault. Lastly, the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office works jointly with its Department of Defense counterparts to streamline future survey efforts, to include a 100 percent transition to the Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Survey.

### **Recruiting and Retention**

The Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) has successfully met All-Volunteer Force requirements for the past 14 years and is currently positioned to meet FY14 requirements. As a result, AFRS has placed the right Airmen into the right jobs and at the right time to fill the Initial Skills Training pipeline with the number of Airmen necessary to meet career field requirements across the Air Force. Despite a shrinking pool of age-qualified youth, a decreased propensity to

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serve in the military and reduced budgets, we continue to recruit the best and brightest our nation has to offer. Currently, 99 percent of our recruits are high school diploma graduates and 18 percent have at least 15-semester hours of college. This punctuates the Air Force commitment to produce a high-quality enlisted corps capable of meeting the challenges of today, and tomorrow.

Currently we are on track to meet Total Force enlisted accession goals for the Active Duty, Reserve, and Air National Guard components. This fiscal year, over 11,000 of America's young men and women have completed or are currently attending Air Force Basic Military Training (BMT). Additionally, there are approximately 9,000 recruits already contracted to attend BMT this fiscal year.

During these unprecedented budgetary times, it is imperative we continue to invest in programs that attract the high-quality applicants the Air Force requires to meet evolving career field needs. Our ability to meet our recruitment goals and sustain the quality enlisted corps we require depends on Air Force Quality of Life programs and initiatives.

As we work through force management objectives to balance our force, it is crucial we remain sensitive to the impact this has on recruiting. A critical component of our recruiting success is built on a foundation of strong community relationships that take years to cultivate. Accession cuts and forced separations threaten to undermine these relationships by suggesting to these communities that we are no longer hiring or that we no longer value the service of their sons and daughters. We will continue to work with these communities and strengthen our relationship to ensure we maintain the quality all volunteer force into the future.

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## **Quality of Service**

We sincerely appreciate continued congressional support and funding for quality of service initiatives. We believe these to be an overwhelming factor in the decision Airmen and their families make to continue serving our nation. We place a great deal of importance on the sense of community in and around our bases. We focus on four main areas: health and wellness; Airmen and family support; education, development, and employment; and Airmen and family housing.

## **Health and Wellness:**

### **Assistance to Severely Injured Service Members**

Our Airmen and their families are our highest priority; I am proud and humbled by the sacrifices they willingly make day in and day out to serve our nation. I find myself simply in awe of our combat wounded, especially their resilience and perseverance when the effects of war forever alter their lives. They are proud to serve the country they love and proud to be a part of the United States Air Force. Therefore we match their commitment through a lifelong promise to provide them the care and support they need, and so rightfully deserve.

We have built a program of care and support for our combat wounded. We also realize our seriously injured and ill Airmen and their families face many of the same challenges as our combat wounded and have many of the same needs. They have to endure the recovery, persevere through their rehabilitation and face the possibility of a transition out of the Air Force...the full continuum of care. So we have embraced our responsibility to the entire combat wounded and seriously ill and injured population through our Recovery Care Program.

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By strategically placing Recovery Care Coordinators in 43 locations around the world, we provide face-to-face, individualized service and support to our Airmen and their families when and where they need it. This personalized effort gives a face to our commitment and an advocate to help our wounded, ill and injured navigate the complex road to recovery and achieve personal and professional goals. Our commitment is unwavering whether our wounded, ill, or injured Airmen is returning to active service or transitioning to civilian life. The Recovery Care Coordinators also support the families and caregivers of our Airmen by identifying needs, connecting with support groups, and working to ease the burden brought on by their current circumstance.

Along with our Recovery Care Coordinators, we provide Non-Medical Care Managers who act as fiduciary agents on behalf of the recovering Airman and as advocates for the recovering Airman and his or her family with other government and non-governmental agencies. They work with Recovery Care Coordinators, medical care providers, chaplains, commanders and other providers as a single Recovery Team to meet the needs of our wounded, ill and injured and their families.

We've learned many lessons over the course of this war, perhaps none more important than the support we must provide to our Airmen when they are faced with a long recovery and an uphill climb to get the benefits and support they have earned. We must not fail them; we cannot fail them.

## **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

As might be expected with fewer deployments, the Air Force has seen a slight drop in newly diagnosed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) cases between 2011 and 2012. Our

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data is not yet complete from 2013, but we expect the slight reductions to continue. Our overall rate has remained relatively low, and our current rate for newly diagnosed PTSD is under 0.4 percent. I am proud to say that historically we have retained approximately 75 percent of our Airmen diagnosed with PTSD.

The Air Force remains committed to helping our Airmen through improving early symptom recognition and offering evidence-based treatments. We continue to screen our Airmen for PTSD symptoms at set points in the deployment cycle, to include screening through Pre- and Post-Deployment Health Assessment and Reassessment, and provide training to help counter the stressors on our Airmen with each deployment. Our Airmen in the Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Security Forces, Medical, and Transportation career fields are at higher risk of developing PTSD and receive additional education and training on how to recognize symptoms of PTSD along with available treatment and supportive resources. The Deployment Transition Center (DTC), Ramstein Air Base, Germany, continues to support Airmen in our high-risk career fields with two days of training and time for reconstitution before returning home. A 2010 study showed Airmen who participated in the DTC reported at least a 6 percent lower rate of post-traumatic symptoms, problematic alcohol use and interpersonal conflict after having attended the program as compared to a control-group of deployed Airmen who did not participate. Two follow on studies are being conducted to measure the continued effectiveness of the DTC. We continue to collaborate with the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs to advance research on prevention and treatment of combat related injuries, including PTSD.

## **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) rates in the Air Force remain very low. However, we are expanding our efforts to ensure our Airmen seek medical care for mild traumatic brain injury, or concussion, in any setting. The vast majority of TBI cases in the Air Force are from non-deployment related injuries. We identify deployed individuals with TBI symptoms upon return home through the Post Deployment Health Assessment and Reassessment, with referral as appropriate. The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury and Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center continue to serve as valuable partners in facilitating a combined effort between all services, the Department of Veterans Affairs and civilian subject matter experts to develop clinical practice guidelines for our primary care providers. Our efforts are closely coordinated with the other Services through our TBI Quad Service Working Group to make sure we incorporate the latest in TBI research into clinical practice. The National Intrepid Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury serves as a premier referral center for those deployment-related cases with more significant symptoms.

## **Suicide Prevention**

Suicide prevention remains a high priority for Air Force leadership at every level. Our prevention program is an integrated network of measures that focuses on reducing suicide through community support, education, early identification and treatment of those at risk. The program was designed with 11 overlapping elements to enhance the capacity of the Air Force to recognize and respond to Airmen in distress. We are encouraged that the rate of suicides has

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been declining, however, we know one loss is too many, which drives us to place significant focus and resources toward eliminating suicides in our force.

We are committed to strengthening and improving our program. Some recent suicide prevention initiatives include live training for all installation suicide prevention program managers and Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Point of Contacts, release of the revised Air Force Guide to Suicide Risk Assessment, Management, and Treatment for mental health providers and staff, and efforts to expand the Air Force's strategic communication plan for suicide prevention and promoting the Wingman Culture.

## **Health Promotion**

The Air Force is committed to promoting a healthy, fit, resilient, and productive force. Our Health Promotion target areas include Tobacco Free Living, Nutritional Fitness, Physical Activity, and Healthy Weight. Consistent with our war-fighting mission, our Airmen have rates of obesity and physical activity that compare quite favorably with the civilian population. Smoking has seen a steady decline; our current smoking prevalence of 14 percent is lower than the national average of 18 percent. In the current fiscal climate, we are committed to implementing low-cost, high-reach policy and environmental interventions that promote healthy living as the default choice and social norm.

## **Child and Youth Development Programs**

The Air Force has continued our commitment to deliver readily available, affordable, and quality childcare programs for our Airmen and their families. These programs ensure our Airmen are able to focus on the mission while knowing their youngest family members are cared

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for through quality Child & Youth programs. In FY 13 we delivered high quality child care programs to 58,000 children.

In addition to brick and mortar facilities, our Air Force Expanded Child Care program provides assistance in a home-based setting for Airmen who need care during unusual shifts, extended duty hours and drill weekends. This type of care is mission-critical particularly in those locations where community-based care options are both few and costly. Through programs like Extended Duty Care, Missile Care, Supplemental Care, and Returning Home Care, the Air Force is able to provide a wide range of support to our active and reserve component families. We expanded this capability in FY 13 by implementing new childcare programs to assist wounded warriors, families of the fallen and those with unique needs due to medical circumstances.

Additionally, our Air Force Youth Programs have taken a comprehensive approach to resiliency by integrating elements of resilience concepts throughout the experiences we provide to youth. We recognize the importance of providing meaningful opportunities during the out-of-school hours which can be peak times for "at risk" behavior, particularly in light of reduced school district and community service budgets. Our Youth Programs had 642,000 enrollments in a variety of fitness and health, deployment support, resiliency building, academic enrichment and community service activities offered to Total Force youth around the world. The Air Force Teen Council continues to offer advocacy opportunities and leadership skills while helping our teens strengthen their personal resiliency and contribute to the larger Air Force community. The newly implemented quarterly Teen Movement Projects have created a network of involved teens at each installation. New for 2013, our Youth Program members participated in the first ever

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Military Youth of the Year competition, an initiative in partnership with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Showcasing the stellar achievements of military teens around the world, Air Force teens were awarded an astonishing five out of six regional awards garnering a combined total of more than \$70,000 in Military Youth of the Year scholarships. In addition, through another key partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 4-H Youth Development Program, over 1,000 Air Force youth participated in the 2013 National Youth Science Day event and we were able to reach 14,000 additional youth through partnership with 4-H county extension agents.

## **Airman Education Opportunities**

The Air Force has the most educated enlisted force in the world. Every Airman entering service is automatically enrolled in an associate of applied science degree program through the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF). Since April 25, 1977, CCAF has awarded more than 427,000 degrees that correspond to each member's career field. Many view the CCAF degree as the start of their path toward higher education. Currently, more than 22,000 enlisted Airmen have bachelor's degrees or higher and 26 have earned a doctorate degree.

Air University's Associate-to-Baccalaureate Cooperative is helping Airmen who have completed CCAF degrees apply those credits toward a bachelor's degree. This program has grown to encompass 55 civilian university partners offering 200 bachelor's degree programs. Over 23,000 Airmen have participated and 1,735 bachelor's degrees have been awarded through this program alone. Additionally, 46 of these graduates have become commissioned officers.

We are also focused on professional credentialing to broaden the development of our Airmen. The Airframe and Power-Plant certification program is one of four credentialing

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programs that codifies the training and experience for over 75,000 aircraft maintainers, enabling them to earn the Federal Aviation Administration's mechanic certification.

Finally, CCAF is currently engaged in developing credentialing pilot programs and policies that support the White House Veteran Employment and Credentialing Initiative and the FY12 National Defense Authorization Act, Section 558 mandate.

We are convinced that opportunities like these directly increase Air Force recruitment and retention as well as enhance our Airmen's professional capabilities. Our focused efforts result in highly capable Airmen ready to contribute to our nation's defense and equipped for professional life outside of the Air Force. We continue to explore new programs that enhance our ability to educate the force, being keenly aware of the associated costs and need to seek efficiencies.

## **Airman and Family Readiness**

We continue to foster better communication to family members through our Key Spouse Program. The program designates one volunteer family member in each unit to disseminate information from installation leaders to other unit family members. This builds a greater sense of community, especially when families are separated by deployments.

We continue to make steady progress in support of Air Force dependents attending public, private, DoD Dependent, home, and virtual schools. Civilian (or Military designee) school liaisons and staff at our Airman & Family Readiness Centers provide support to base leaders and families through advocacy with local and state school administration and school boards.

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Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation to establish an Interstate Compact on educational opportunity for military children in state and local school districts. The Interstate Compact ensures military children are not negatively impacted in school by their families' service to the nation. It provides educational solutions on class placement, records transfer, graduation requirements, immunizations, and exit testing, and allows late entry to extra-curricular activities and sports teams. The work done to ensure we don't penalize our families as they move around the world is an important quality of life factor for our Airmen and their families.

About 50 percent of Air Force spouses seek employment with each military move, making spouse employment a consistent challenge. In many cases spouse employment constitutes almost half of an Air Force family's income. It is no surprise that Airmen report this as their most pressing quality of life concern. Our Airmen have benefited from your support and White House efforts to help military spouses enjoy consistent and productive careers despite relatively frequent relocation.

Unemployment compensation for spouses of service members continues to be critical to Air Force families. Support for unemployment compensation acknowledges military spouses need reasonable time and resources necessary to find suitable employment or meet licensing or credentialing requirements each time they move. We look forward to all states properly compensating spouses that move because of their military obligation.

Our Exceptional Family Member Program provides targeted assistance to Airmen who have family members with special needs. In FY13, we continued strengthening this program to provide our families with access to greater resources that will assist them in effectively balancing

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mission requirements with family care responsibilities. We have 35 full-time family support coordinators at Air Force installations with original high numbers of EFM of 175 or higher. In FY11, Respite Child Care was launched at seven locations to provide support to families with special needs. The program is now in 64 locations and has provided over 37,000 hours of skilled respite care allowing families a break from the stressors of caring for a family member with special needs. Through the generous support of the Office of the Secretary of Defense 100 accessible childcare playgrounds and community nature parks are in various stages of design and construction and will support family members with special needs.

## **Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) and Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA)**

The AAFES remains focused on their longstanding mission of delivering quality goods and services at competitively low prices, and generating earnings that provide a dividend to support Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs. AAFES' first duty is to provide value, service and support to authorized patrons, but we must never forget the unique and important role within the military departments in which they serve. AAFES returns more than 60 percent of earnings to support Army and Air Force MWR programs and reinvests the remaining dollars to ensure shopping facilities are safe, eco-friendly and modernized. In the past ten years, AAFES has contributed more than \$2.4 billion to support Quality of Life programs such as youth programs, arts and crafts, aquatic centers, golf courses, bowling centers and more.

AAFES' greatest honor continues to be serving those who serve. AAFES provides services that help Airmen, Soldiers and military families thrive, particularly during budgetary challenges. Annually, the organization provides a cost-savings benefit of \$6,600 per Airman, and

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a contribution of \$224 per Airman for MWR programs and facilities. AAFES employs over 40,000 associates; 36 percent have a military connection, including Wounded Warriors and Veterans, and 24 percent are military spouses and family members. To keep the forces “mission ready,” AAFES operates facilities in 33 countries, 13 of which support contingency operations.

DeCA shoppers save an average of more than 30.5 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices. A family of four shopping regularly can save more than \$4,200 on their total annual grocery bill. Single service members can save \$1,500 a year. The customer satisfaction index commissary score of 82 exceeded the commercial supermarket of 77. Military related employees make up 64 percent of the DeCA workforce: military spouses 28 percent, dependents nine percent, retirees 12 percent, Guard and Reserve two percent, and other veterans 13 percent. DeCA is committed to evolving the organization to find ways to reduce operating costs. The value our Airmen, their families, and our veterans place on commissaries should not be understated; many junior enlisted Airmen and fixed income retirees rely on these savings for basic sustainment.

## **Housing**

Quality unaccompanied and family housing ensures our Airmen and families have a strong supporting foundation. We are providing this through military construction (MILCON) and housing privatization. In 2013, we made great progress in privatizing more than 99 percent of housing at each of our Air Force installations in the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The Air Force has currently privatized over 53,000 housing units at 63 installations. Housing privatization continues to transform our installations and create efficient, modern communities where our Air Force families choose to live. It allows us to deliver high quality

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homes to our members quicker than ever before, and at significant savings to the taxpayer. We have eliminated over 30,000 inadequate homes since the program started in 1998, with another 6,600 privatized homes to be replaced or renovated in the next five years. We also continue to invest in sustaining and modernizing government-owned housing overseas. We are thankful that Congress approved \$76.4 million this year to upgrade housing infrastructure at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan, and to upgrade infrastructure and improve family housing units at Misawa Air Base, Japan. Another \$389 million is programmed this year for leases, family housing operations and maintenance for government-owned homes at our overseas installations, and for privatized housing oversight.

We are also deeply committed to providing quality dormitories for our unaccompanied Airmen. Our focus remains on providing an environment of care, development, and mentorship for our Airmen. Our dormitory campuses are not just a place to sleep; they are a place for young Airmen to adjust to military life and build a strong sense of community. As with family housing, we are making great strides to eliminate inadequate dormitories from our inventory of 939 dormitories. This year, we will invest \$57 million to build new dormitories at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada and Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico. After these investments, the Air Force will still have 62 remaining dormitories in need of improvement or replacement.

We thank you for your continued support that allows the Air Force to sustain investment in these areas in order to provide thriving housing and dormitory communities, and more importantly, to take care of our valued Airmen and families.

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## **Military Construction**

For several years, the Air Force has chosen to take risk in infrastructure in order to invest in modernization efforts. We continue to prioritize our program to cover our most critical MILCON requirements to enable core Air Force capabilities and take care of our people that make the mission possible. In this fiscal environment, we expect our MILCON program to focus on our most critical, minimum essential requirements.

Since 2000, and with the generous support of Congress, the Air Force funded 124 military construction projects totaling \$834 million for child development centers and fitness centers. This represents a significant investment to improve readiness and the quality of life for our Airmen, but requirements still remain. Again, the continued support of this subcommittee is vital to the success of these MILCON programs supporting our Airmen and their families.

## **Conclusion**

Chairman Culberson, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent the incredible Airmen and their families through this testimony. This past year has been extremely stressful on those serving in our Air Force. All members - Active duty, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and Civilian Airmen - have endured significant uncertainty and churn with respect to mission capability, compensation, and what it means to serve in our Air Force. The budget challenges we face have not been lost on our force, and you would be proud to know their first concern is how to accomplish the mission. We've stood down flying squadrons, furloughed civilians, and seen our readiness levels significantly decline. Our Airmen are truly doing amazing work around the world every day, from delivering relief to typhoon stricken regions in the Philippines to supporting combatant

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commanders from all corners of the globe. They continue to serve honorably and proudly in defense of our nation.

Our Air Force families are also a critical component to our success. These men and women serve alongside the service member by taking care of the home front while we employ and enable airpower around the world. They stand strong while loved ones deploy to war zones in foreign countries. Their faith and support is critical to our Airmen and enable the focus and dedication our complex missions require. Thank you again for your continued support for our brave Airmen and their supportive families.