

America can be proud of her Airmen

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and committee members. I'm honored to speak to you on behalf of 685,000 Airmen proudly serving our nation... they are active, Guard and Reserve... officers, enlisted and civilians.

I'm honored to collaborate with my fellow warriors on quality of life issues impacting all of our military members and their families.

Sir, I want thank you and this committee for your invaluable support. Thank you for supporting pay raises and continuing re-enlistment bonuses.

We are having success with our privatized housing effort and we appreciate the authority you gave us to pursue this new avenue to better house our Airmen and their families.

Thank you for visiting our wounded warriors and their families. And thank you, especially, for taking the time and effort to visit our deployed Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Coastguardsmen.

Your efforts pay huge dividends for all our military personnel and their families.

Because we are an all-volunteer force, and because the Air Force mission, especially, depends on highly educated, trained, focused and experienced Airmen. Your support has a direct impact on our recruiting, retention and overall combat readiness.

America's Airmen are in the fight. Our Airmen have been continuously and globally engaged in combat and contingency operations for over 17 years. From Desert Shield and Desert Storm, throughout the 1990s, to the ongoing engagements in the Global War on Terror.

In total, at any given moment, over 208,000 active, Guard and Reserve Airmen directly contribute to combatant commands, contingency operations, humanitarian efforts, and Joint and Coalition combat operations around the world.

Spreading their wings over America following Sept. 11, Airmen of Operation Noble Eagle continue to protect our nation's air corridors and maritime approaches, having flown more than 51,000 missions.

Nearly 7,000 Airmen continue to serve "in-lieu-of" ground component personnel in Iraq, in addition to the 27,000 Airmen deployed to 112 worldwide locations to fight in the Global War on Terror. And they're taking the fight to the bad guys. Over the past 12 months, Air Force strike missions against enemy locations and forces have increased 171 percent in Iraq and 22 percent in Afghanistan, proving their effectiveness in counterinsurgency operations.

But we also believe the maxim, "Where there are roads, there is progress." Therefore, your Airmen have directly taken on projects to rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan. Building schools, digging wells, building roads - rebuilding lives, winning trust, and forging enduring relations. Our Airmen interact daily with allies and host nations, and they showcase America's image of strength, freedom and hope.

Quality of life is key to success. Our Airmen deserve the best support available, and we are committed to providing the highest quality of life standards possible - a commitment that points to our recruiting and retention successes. Our recruiting standards remain high. We've achieved tremendous recruiting success and continue to select new Airmen from among the most educated, motivated and highly-qualified volunteers.

Knowledge and innovation are hallmarks of Air Force heritage and service culture, so we're particularly focused on training, education and professional development. Our Airmen are the most highly educated in our nation's history. We firmly believe it is an indicator of future mission success.

America's Airmen now receive core and expeditionary knowledge and skills training throughout every phase of their career. We're also offering more numerous and specialized educational opportunities along the way. We're emphasizing post-deployment support and assisting Airmen as they reunite with their families and return to their communities.

We've had considerable success in providing care and assistance to severely injured Airmen and their families, and we want to build upon those successes with more job placement, education and training opportunities for these great Americans.

The civilian job market actively seeks our trained and technically qualified Airmen. We must continue to offer viable and competitive reenlistment bonuses and special duty pay in our critical job areas to retain our qualified Airmen. We appreciate continued Congressional support as we work to meet our retention goals and resolve shortages we have in some critical Air Force specialties.

Additionally, every Air Force leader understands - we recruit Airmen, but we retain families. Our Airmen's retention in the Air Force, effectiveness in executing their missions and professionalism in representing America to the world, directly reflect how well we support them and their families.

We strongly advocate education and employment initiatives specifically targeted to mitigate some of the economic challenges our military families currently face. Nearly half of all service members are married and have children, and, of course, these families move frequently. Issues such as transfer of school credits, in-state tuition eligibility, and professional credentials for military dependants can become particularly difficult for military families, and can easily affect a service member's decision to continue serving. We're eager to work with Congress and the States to find solutions.

Our Airmen and our fellow service members should never have to choose between caring for their family and serving their country. Mr Chairman, we're working hard to continually improve how we develop and care for our Airmen and their families... emphasis on families.

Our base commanders and their local service providers are, of course, on the front lines of our efforts to maintain and improve services to our Airmen, their families, veterans and retirees. Local control of real property and resources, combined with the natural responsiveness of direct customer feedback, has proven to be the most effective, efficient way for service providers to respond to customer needs, prioritize projects, and tailor services.

We're preparing for tomorrow's challenges. We must set conditions today to realize future victories. Nearly 17 years of continuous global operations have put extreme stress on our people and equipment. It's become exceedingly difficult, costly, and time-consuming to maintain worn-out aircraft and equipment of declining military utility.

These are frustrations I hear and see everyday, especially from our deployed Airmen. Quality equipment and work environment have a lot to do with job satisfaction and, therefore, impact morale and retention.

To successfully meet future challenges, maintain our advantages and maximize results, we must keep pace with the talent of our 21st Century Airmen and ensure they have the best equipment, facilities and resources available. With your continued support, we will maintain and sharpen our nation's Global Vigilance, Global Reach and Global Power advantages... America's Edge.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and the committee again for the outstanding support you extend to all of our service members and their families.

We fully recognize the link between readiness and the issues that extend from our Airmen's quality of life to their duties around the world - on the flightline, in the operations center and on the battlefield.

America's Airmen, your Airmen, stand shoulder to shoulder with their fellow American warriors, defending this great nation and our way of life. A new generation of America's Airmen continues to do what our Airmen have always done. In peace, conflict, crisis, and war, they set conditions for success across the entire spectrum of military operations. It's been more than half a century since an American servicemember has been attacked from the sky. Today, the airspace is secure.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear with my fellow warriors and represent America's Airmen before you today. I look forward to your questions.