

# **Airmen are committed to protect nation's freedoms**

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*Remarks to the  
House Appropriations Committee Military Quality of Life and Veterans' Affairs  
Subcommittee,  
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and committee members. I'm honored to speak to you on behalf of 690,000 Airmen proudly serving our nation... active, Guard and Reserve... officers, enlisted and civilians.

It's a pleasure to collaborate with my fellow warriors on Joint education, training, and quality of life initiatives for all of our military members and their families.

I want thank you and this committee for your wonderful support. Your efforts pay huge dividends for all our military personnel and their families. Because we are an all-volunteer force, your support has a direct impact on our recruiting, retention and overall combat readiness.

America's Airmen know what it means to be at war. Our Airmen have been continuously and globally engaged in combat and contingency operations for nearly 17 years. We deployed to Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and we never left.

Today we engage in a vast array of missions around the world and here at home. Spreading their wings over America following 9/11, Airmen of Operation Noble Eagle continue to protect our nation's air corridors and maritime approaches.

More than 5,000 Airmen serve "in-lieu-of" Army soldiers in Iraq, in addition to more than 25,000 Airmen deployed to U.S. Central Command. Our Airmen operate more than 230 aircraft in Iraq and Afghanistan from 16 expeditionary bases. Air Force space professionals provide national space capabilities vital to America's security and the global economy.

In total, at any given moment, over 210,000 active, Guard and Reserve Airmen engage in combat and other direct actions contributing to Combatant Commands, contingency operations, humanitarian efforts, and Joint and Coalition Forces around the world.

America's Airmen are truly in the fight. We view quality of life as essential to Air Force readiness. Our Airmen, along with our sister services, 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 success.

Therefore, we're striving to do more to develop and care for our Airmen. Knowledge and innovation are inherent to our Air Force heritage and service culture, so we're particularly focused on training and education. Our Airmen - enlisted ranks, in particular - 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 knowledge and skills training throughout every phase of their career, and we're offering more specialized educational opportunities along the way.

We're also emphasizing post-deployment support and assisting Airman 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 we want to build upon those successes with more job placement, education and training opportunities for these great Americans.

We also strongly advocate education and employment initiatives specifically targeted to mitigate some of the economic disadvantages our military families currently face. Consider that nearly half of all service members are married and have children, and these children move three times more frequently than their civilian peers. Seemingly simple bureaucratic issues such as transfer of school credits, in-state tuition eligibility, and interstate credentials and licensing for military spouses can become difficult for military families, and can easily affect a service member's decision to re-enlist or 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.

Every Air Force leader understands - we recruit Airmen, but we retain families. We're working hard to continually improve how we develop and care for our Airmen and their families. And we're striving to maintain America's edge.

Nearly 17 years of continuous combat 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. 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, have an impact on retention.

To successfully meet future challenges, maintain our advantages and maximize results, we must ensure they have the best equipment, facilities and resources available. With your continued support, I'm confident in our success in maintaining our nation's global vigilance, global reach and global power advantages - America's edge.

In closing, I want to thank you and the committee again for the outstanding support. We fully recognize the link between readiness and the comforts that extend from our Airmen's homes to their duties around the world - on the flightline, in the operations center and on the battlefield.

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.