



U.S. AIR FORCE

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## Commander's Talking Points, Background & FAQs Below-the-Promotion-Zone (BPZ) and Merit-based Reordering

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### TALKING POINTS.

- The foundation of ALL of our transformation efforts are the four core competencies required for success as an officer and leader built on a foundation of character. All transformation efforts must trace back to these with regard to what we value and therefore what we measure:
  - How well do you accomplish the mission you have been assigned?
  - How well have you led the Airmen entrusted to your care?
  - How well have you managed the resources provided to accomplish your mission?
  - How well have you improved your unit during the rating period?
- During the summer roadshows, we touched on but did not discuss in detail the transition to order of merit promotion sequencing in place of BPZ as career field briefs were still in work.
- In reviewing our early work on developmental categories, it's clear there's a benefit in elongating certain experiences or creating additional space in our career timelines for new experiences and assignments.
- Managing time, to ensure Airmen gain needed skills and experience, is just as important as agility when it comes to development.
- The character of war is changing. We are transitioning from wars of attrition to wars of cognition where information and data provide the asymmetric advantage defining winners and losers. Our officer development strategy must create the officer corps with the right balance of breadth and depth to compete, deter ... and if deterrence fails ... fight and win in the information age.
- Under our current Below-the-Promotion-Zone (BPZ) approach, we often provide less time for our Airmen to develop, particularly among those selected for early promotion (up to 3 years less development time for those selected 4 years BPZ).
- Our current BPZ approach can also have adverse quality of life and retention impacts for both those designated and those not designated Below-the-Promotion-Zone.
- BPZ can also limit our ability to recognize emerging talent as it blooms or even worse, it can lead to us leaving talented officers behind—this is sub-optimal in a near-peer fight where we need every single officer in the force to contribute at their maximal potential.
- Last year Congress provided us with a new officer management authority allowing us to tie promotion pin-on sequencing to merit vice using seniority (e.g. date-of-rank).
- Moving to merit-based reordering translates the promotion board order-of-merit directly into the pin-on sequence—Airmen with the highest scoring records of performance can be elevated to pin-on first.
- Combining our developmental category work with the new merit-based reordering provides us an ability to maximize both development quality and development time for all our officers.
- Transitioning out of BPZ toward merit-based reordering is the next step on a journey that eventually leads to us implementing a multi-year promotion window that is zone agnostic. This is another authority provided by Congress where officers can be promotion eligible for up to 5-years without zones and without an up-or-out promotion requirement. Under this eventual destination, officers

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will be eligible for promotion up to five times in a single zone. Depending on development pace and performance, officers may be competitive for promotion at the front, middle, or end of the window without zone designation or up or out considerations. This authority will take us a little longer to implement and we are looking to move to this window system in late 2021 or early 2022.

- Our goal through these efforts, and others, is to unleash the capabilities of our people to be ready for tomorrow's fight.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.

#### **Q: Why is the Air Force moving toward merit-based reordering and away from Below-the-Promotion-Zone promotions?**

**A:** Below-the-Promotion-Zone promotions have allowed the Air Force to accelerate the careers of highly qualified officers that show exceptional potential to serve in the next higher grade. However, this practice also comes at the expense of development, in the form of over-accelerated timelines and/or missed opportunities for certain experiences (e.g. full joint tour, instructor/recruiting, staff/strategy, PhDs, etc.). Moving toward merit-based reordering allows for continued acceleration for those who show the greatest potential, while also allowing for increased experience and development in order to foster a more lethal and ready force.

#### **Q: Is the Air Force permanently discontinuing Below-the-Promotion-Zone promotion opportunity?**

**A:** Below-the-Promotion-Zone promotion is a statutory authority for the SecAF, not a requirement to execute (permissive, not instructive). For the foreseeable future, the SecAF does not intend to exercise this authority and will move toward merit-based reordering for promotion to Major, Lt Col, and Colonel in all categories.

#### **Q: Without BPZ, what incentives remain for me to perform above my peers?**

**A:** Individual performance remains a key tenet of our talent management system. Selection for Squadron, Group, and Wing command will remain a competitive process as will selection for many other key positions. Selection for schools and limited development opportunities will likewise remain competitive and depend on performance as the key delineator between Airmen. Under merit-based reordering, performance will be the driving factor in when officers pin-on new rank. Those whose records of performance place them at the top of a promotion list will continually promote up to 11-12 months ahead of some of their peers. Although not as fast or early as being promoted in today's BPZ system, being promoted at the top of the list to Major, Lt Col, and Colonel will advance officers 12-15 months earlier than peers and provide equal numbers of months earning higher pay each time.

#### **Q: Without a chance to move faster, why would I stick around longer?**

**A:** Although there will not be an opportunity for those demonstrating exceptional potential to get promoted BPZ, there are still incentives and increased opportunities for those who perform above their peers. Command selection, selection for key jobs, schools and more remain and merit-based re-ordering allows those with demonstrated performance to pin-on ahead of their peers as well. The tradeoff is the potential for increased family stability, increased time for deeper and broader development, and what we believe will be a chance to be better prepared for greater success at higher ranks...particularly when working and leading the more complex missions/operations we know we will encounter.

#### **Q: How have promotion line numbers traditionally been determined?**

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**A:** By-law, line numbers today are determined by seniority, primarily dictated by current Date of Rank, Total Federal Commissioned Service Dates, and other tie breaking factors. However, the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) gave Service Secretaries authority to allow promotion boards to recommend officers of particular merit be placed higher on the promotion list, rather than by seniority. Only when there are ties in an order of merit list will date-of-rank be used to resolve those ties.

**Q: How much of a promotion select list will now be ordered by merit?**

**A:** The SECAF has given authority to the Promotion Board to order up to 100% of a promotion select list by merit.

**Q: Will the portion of a select list ordered by merit be annotated on the public release listing?**

**A:** Line numbers have not traditionally been published when a promotion list is announced and the Air Force intends to maintain this practice. Like today, individual Airmen will be provided their line number and they will know the total number of officers promoted. Like today, they will be able to track when their line number is scheduled for promotion. In this way, Airmen will have information indicating how they ranked compare to other officers on their board, but the full list showing the complete order-of-merit will not be a public document.

**Q: Will the order of merit (line numbers) be kept for other talent management purposes?**

**A:** No. The order-of-merit and line numbers will intentionally not be stored in any of the databases used for talent management. This intentionally prevents potential requests to assign people of certain merit to positions or assignments. Example of behavior being avoided: "This position requires officers who were in the top third on their promotion board."

**Q: Who do the BPZ and order of merit transitions apply to?**

**A:** This transition applies to all RegAF (active component) promotion boards to the grade of Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel across all categories.

**Q: When will BPZ and order of merit transitions take effect?**

**A:** All officer promotion boards convening on or after May 2020.

**Q: Are there any future changes to Officer Promotions coming? What is our end state?**

**A:** Another authority provided by Congress allows officers to be promotion eligible for up to 5-years without zones and without an up-or-out requirement. We intend to eventually transition the system further to take advantage of this authority. Under this eventual destination, officers will be eligible for promotion up to five times in a single zone. Depending on development pace and performance, officers may be competitive for promotion at the front, middle, or end of the window without zone or any up or out considerations. This authority will take us a little longer to implement and we are looking to move to this window system in late 2021 or early 2022.

**Q: How will the initial transition from BPZ to merit-based reordering affect promotion opportunity?**

**A:** Transitioning toward merit-based reordering as a change from Below-the-Promotion-Zone promotions will not affect the overall promotion opportunity for any given promotion board. However, as there is no longer a Below-the-Promotion-Zone population competing for the limited number of promotions, the promotion rates for those in and above the zone should increase slightly.