

Teammates,

Let me start with thank you.

Thank you first to the Airmen out there, for all you've done during the past few years. Thank you for welcoming Tonya and I with open arms, for helping us get our feet under us as we adjusted to life in the public eye. You have inspired us more than you know. Each time we were able to get out of the Pentagon, you welcomed us into your home bases and lifted us with your smiles, your stories and your love for our team. Each hand shake, hug and selfie reminded me of what all of this is about. It brought home the idea that leadership is truly an honor that comes with tremendous responsibility. That each decision and policy must be about taking care of you, our greatest asset.

Thank you for showing us the love. I never thought I'd have the distinct honor of being immortalized in memes, but I have to admit, they really made me smile. While I appreciate the support, it was actually Team 18 who deserved the admiration. I will never be able to thank my teammates enough for their dedication, and for the long hours they put in to serving our Airmen. They are the great secret behind my success and I will always be grateful for their leadership and friendship.

All that Team 18 accomplished would not have been possible without my amazing bride's support. The time on the road without her was definitely difficult, but when we were together she stood by my side, and often out in front, as a true champion for military families. She's my rock when I need to lean, and my coach when I need a pep talk. Thank you baby for walking with me ... pushing me forward, and keeping me grounded. I look forward to repaying your selfless love over all of the years we have ahead.

Of course, none of this would have happened without a bold decision from one of the best leaders I've ever known. Thank you to my Wingman, General Goldfein for choosing me as his connection to the enlisted corps. I am especially grateful for the late night talks, the laughs and the tough conversations he never shied away from. He and each of our three Secretaries of the Air Force have stood by Team 18 in good times and bad. They have trusted our team and supported our efforts with their whole hearts. I will always be grateful for that.

Although we left it all on the field, it wasn't a perfect game and I'll be the first to tell you that we didn't get everything across the finish line. I take with me some lessons learned that I hope will lead to growth for myself and each of us as we continue our leadership journeys. We made solid efforts toward giving Airmen time back, helping evaluate them based on leadership potential, retaining skill and rewarding innovation, but there is still much to be done. At the end of the day, I know we won't be remembered for the policies we updated, or the programs we put in place. Please don't think of Team 18 as the folks who got rid of A1C EPR's and distance PME. Instead, I hope you think of us as good people who cared about Airmen, and as a team who tried to make things a little better. We valued progress over perfection – and woke up every day to do whatever we could to help Airmen succeed and to reach their goals.

But it's not going to be hard for us to hang it up because of leaders like Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass and Team 19. We leave knowing that Jo will forge a path centered on the principal that Airman must come first. That's who she is at her core ... taking care of Airmen is what drives her. She won't be doing it alone. Over our time, we've watched with awe as young leaders have broken the mold and helped us drive toward a culture in which asking "why" is welcomed. These new leaders have

learned to listen, and to make decisions with their hearts as much as their heads. That's why I know we are in good hands with Jo and Team 19. And it's why I'm especially proud to hand her the reins and to watch her lead.

While I'll put on the uniform for the last time this week, I will always be an Airman. Although I won't serve in a position with the power to affect change on an enterprise level, I hope to always be a champion for you and your families. I will always be grateful for your hard work. And I will rest easy knowing that you are supporting and defending this great Nation. I will never forget the sacrifices you make every day. The early mornings. The deployments. The unexpected challenges that you overcome through sheer determination and will.

I've learned so much from this experience and I want you all to know that you've changed me forever. You've shown me that no matter how difficult the circumstance, no matter what the mission, you will find a way to carry it out. You've shown me that there is no replacement for mentorship; and there is no shortcut to a healthy team culture. That it takes caring leaders who understand that "tough love" starts with love. I've learned that people can recover when we allow them to. And that there is no better teacher than failure – as long as failure is met with support from above.

Before I go, I have one request. Please look after each other. If you are blessed with the title of "leader," lead with compassion and trust that you will be rewarded with excellence and the admiration of those you lead. Trust each other. Trust that we are all worthy individuals, who deserve respect and deserve to serve with dignity. No matter what challenges we face, we can always overcome them if we are united. Please don't let those who are set on dividing us win. Don't let them drive us apart. Treat your teammates like the sisters and the brothers that we are, no matter how different we may seem.

Remember that we are all Airmen serving in the World's Greatest Air Force ... and we will always, always be family.

Thank you.

KWright