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SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES AND VETERANS,
SUSTAINING THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

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Closing Remarks:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. KAMARCK: Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. If you could get your places, we'll start the program. I'm Elaine Kamarck, I'm a Senior Fellow here at Brookings. I'm also a military mom, and military mother-in-law. So, I'm really pleased to be working with Blue Star Families again, which I kind of feel a little bit, you know, fond of because I was there at the beginning with Kathy, when she had no money and no staff, and it was just herself.

To get the program started, and will be up here a little bit later, but to get the program started, it is a real honor to introduce Sheila Casey, Sheila is the Chairman of the Board of Blue Star Families, and that's her function here today. She also has many other important roles in life. She is the COO of *The Hill Newspaper*, which we all read here in Washington, and she is a military spouse of 41 years. So she knows a little bit about what we are talking about today. So, I'd like to turn the program over to Sheila. Come on up. And please give her a good round of applause. (Applause)

MS. CASEY: Good afternoon. And welcome to the Blue Star Families 2015 Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey Panel Discussion here at Brookings. I don't have to tell you who I am right now, because somebody very nicely introduced me, and thank you.

This survey takes a proactive look at the current needs and priorities of military families and service members, and identifies the key aspects of military life to effectively target resources, services and programs that support the sustainability of an All-Volunteer Force. This is especially important this year, given the number of new security developments resulting in an expanded military presence into areas of concern, both old and new. Amid this environment the responsibility for keeping America safe is falling to a smaller force that will be asked to do more with less.

We are proud that the survey continues to be a highly-regarded resource used by the Department of Defense, the White House, Congress, research organizations and the media to understand how best to support military families, and sustain a healthy All-Volunteer Force.

But before we start, I'd like to give special thanks to Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, who worked in collaboration with us on the survey. And I'd also like to thank Brookings for hosting today's event. Thank you very much.

I would also like to recognize our sponsors, our survey sponsors whose generous support, as our private sector partners, helped to make the survey possible. And it is one great example of why collaboration across sectors, public, private and nonprofit is so critical. USAA is our presenting sponsor for this year's survey; also Lockheed Martin Corporation, United Healthcare, Military & Veterans, Rent-A-Center, Health Net Federal Services, Facebook and the USO.

Military Families are assets to national defense and local communities, they are central to the health and capability of the All-Volunteer Force, and are good neighbors actively engaged in making their civilian communities a great place to live. Our country can help support military families by learning more about the unique nature of military life, and increasing civilian and military collaboration, which is the topic for today's discussion.

So, to help frame our conversation, please me in viewing a video highlighting this year's key findings and trends.

(Video playing)

MS. CASEY: When our troops serve so do their families, which makes understanding the current state of this community all the more critical. Blue Star Families

Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey provides valuable insight into the experiences and challenges encountered by military families. Military families are much like the civilian neighbors, however, the unique demands of military service result in unique issues and challenges to sustaining the All-Volunteer Force, and a strong national defense.

Family is central in active-duty service members financial decisions and benefit use, 76 percent indicate their service member plans to transfer their post-9/11 GI Bill to a spouse or a child; 81 percent of active-duty spouses report being involved in managing family finances and the service members overwhelmingly welcome that involvement. The top five issues most concerning to military families include, military pay and benefits, changes to retirement benefits, military spouse employment, veteran employment, and service member and veteran suicide, drawing close to the 94 percent who join the military to serve their country, 82 percent join seeking financial security, but the uncertainty of a company's military life remains a dominant theme.

Active-duty service members and spouses and identified uncertainty in military life, military spouse employment, and saving for retirement as top obstacles to financial security. There are multiple obstacles holding military members back from feeling financially secure, viewed along with a lack of confidence and receiving post-service benefits, and you can clearly see a theme of increasing uncertainty in military life from this year's report.

Retirement planning and the high cost associated with a military lifestyle, especially due to frequent moves, are additional causes for concern. For the fourth year in a row, military spouse unemployment and underemployment remain the top concern. Fifty-five percent of active-duty spouses in this year's survey were not currently employed. Of those, 58 percent want to be employed. Military families with employed spouses experience greater financial security, better mental health and higher

satisfaction with the military lifestyle.

An employed spouse is also a strong asset when a military family transitions to civilian life. A working spouse enables their service member to take the time to find the best job, rather than just the first job. Low employment among military spouse has the opposite effect, making it difficult for families for transition out of the military, save for retirement and maintain financial stability during transition.

Childcare challenges and concern for children's wellbeing are also factors influencing military spouse employment. Additional support for flexible and affordable childcare remains a top request. Transitioning to a post-military life is a great concern for service members. Many veterans and active-duty families preparing for transition and civilian employment have little awareness of available resources. If the All-Volunteer Force is to be sustainable, America must support those who have and will continue to bear the burden of war fighting.

Military families are good neighbors, and actively engaged in making their civilian communities great places to live. Sixty-five percent of military families volunteered in the last year with 70 percent of that volunteering occurring in civilian communities. Service members are also likely to donate to charities. Military families are American families, and as such they aspire to the same types of opportunities and support desired by their civilian counterparts. Much of the support comes from the private sector and at the local level.

Our country can help support military families by learning more about the unique nature of military life, and increasing civilian and military collaboration on a number of levels. We can do this by supporting lifestyle factors, to decrease the uncertainty associated with military life. These positive lifestyle factors are important to the civilian community too. Help the resilient military communities help our nation

achieve local and national priorities.

As a nation, we have a shared interest in improving recruitment and retention, in order to sustain our All-Volunteer Military Force. Join us in strengthening military families and connecting America with its Military. (Applause)

MS. KAMARCK: Thank you, Sheila. That was great, and it was a great overview of a very extensive survey. I'd like to now turn this over to our Panel. The first two people on the Panel were actually responsible for putting this survey together, and they are going to give us -- start off the conversation about it.

To my immediate left, is Cristin Orr Shiffer, she is Blue Star Family Senior Advisor for Policy and Survey, she led a team of six analysts working in collaboration with Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans & Military Families, to develop this year's survey.

To her left is Dr. Nick Armstrong, he is Senior Director for Research and Policy and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families and Syracuse University. He is a U.S. Army Veteran, and he guides the Institute's overall efforts to conduct, facilitate and disseminate research that informs and empowers policy and stakeholders on veterans' and military families' issues.

And to his left, is the Honorable Brad Carson, he is currently the Under Secretary -- he was confirmed as the Under Secretary of the Army in February of 2014. In April of 2015, President Obama appointed him to serve as the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. We are honored to have you here, Mr. Carson.

And to his left, is my colleague Michael O'Hanlon, from here at the Brookings Institution. He is a Senior Fellow. He is Director of Research at the Foreign Policy Division here. He has a new book out about Land Warfare, which he is not shy about distributing, and we are very pleased to have him here; and also very pleased to

have his Center's co-sponsoring of this event today.

So, let me turn it over to Cristin, and then Nick to discuss the survey a little bit. I'll then ask Brad and Michael to say a few words, and then we will have time for audience participation. Cristin?

MS. SHIFFER: Thank you, Elaine. Good morning, afternoon. I want to do four things. I feel like we've got a really good kind of bite of what is in the survey. So I think there are a couple things that I can help to kind round that out and enrich that a little.

The first is the "why". The why is, because military families are hard to quantify, they are both hard to catch, they are hard to measure, right. They don't always take surveys, maybe that are sent by Department of Defense; I know I get a lot immediately, and I don't always take them -- sorry. But you know, sometimes it takes a trusted partner, somebody that knows them to send it out, and to say, hey, this is something that we want you take, and this is reliable and this isn't going impact anything. And so there's a trust factor, and a, oh, all my friends are taking this, so maybe I'm going to take it. So that's the "why" of why we do a survey that's separate than some other survey that might be out there.

The "how", we partner with a lot of other organizations, military family organizations, veteran service organizations, all across the board, to be able to reach a very diverse population, and to be able to get a large sample. We had over 6,200 people take the survey, which Nick does more surveys than I do, but he'll say that's probably a pretty good survey number. So, to be able to get a sample space of that that's large is not bad. So that's the how. We reach out through social media a lot, we also reach out through word-of-mouth to make sure that we do it.

A couple points on that, the survey respondents this year were a cross-

section. This year we had 53 percent who had more than one immediate family member associated with the military, so that does also talk to the kind of socialization of military for the next generation. We had 47 percent of the respondents were military spouses, so it gives you an idea that there is a large number that were coming from immediate family members.

We also offer the opportunity through, if you were a parent, or a sister or a brother to respond to the survey, the numbers are very low there, so again, this is very much military spouses active duty, 69 percent were affiliated with a member that was currently on active duty, and 89 percent were in the past -- No. Sorry, that's not right; 31 percent were in the past, and one-quarter were veterans. So that gives you an idea where the other part of the sample comes from, just to kind of give the picture. As we look at these members, who is this?

And then the two points that I think are really relevant to kind of drive it home. The video spoke to, but there are also things that I think the Panel will talk to. It's that military families are like other American families, but they have some extra challenges, right. We talked about military spouse employment being one of them. It's not that they want things that are any different than every other family that are out there, but they might have a few extra challenges that are structural, built into the job or the moving, that's where connecting with civilians can help overcome those, and that's largely an intro that I hope we are going to talk about today, how do we do some of that.

And the second takeaway is that military families are assets to local communities and national defense, but they are often overlooked. I mean how much have we thought about, you know, utilizing active-duty military families in our local communities, and also what can we do to align them with defense priorities. I think there's an opportunity there that isn't discussed very frequently.

And so then, I just wanted to talk about a couple trends to leave you with, that I observed, and that we talked about in the surveys, to frame the rest of the discussion. The top one being uncertainty with the military lifestyle, and this is, it doesn't mean people don't want to serve anymore, it doesn't mean that they don't like serving, it's that there's uncertainty attached to issues of benefits and economics, but there's also uncertainty about, is what I signed up for is what I'm still going to get?

And there is a question there. I think sometimes we think we are okay, we think we are grandfathered in for the new retirement for those of use that will be around for that, but there's still that nervousness, and it's not just the retirement benefits, it's other benefits. Under 50 percent of people believe that they would actually be getting their post-retirement benefit that they had. You know, we asked on a scale, kind of from 1 to 4, and the 1 in 2 being least confident, 3 in 4 being more confident, and 50 percent believe that they probably weren't even going to be receiving the benefits that they had earned.

If that was either disability benefits, VA benefits, or health care benefits. So, there's a healthy climb in convincing people of that. Lifestyle is expensive, 73 percent of active-duty families were reported incurring expenses as a result of moves. So it's a big number. People -- it costs money to move, and I don't -- everyone who is in the military gets it, but it's one that I think is not new, but as people look at all these other things that cutting away your nervousness, what we start to see, is things like that money that was kind of okay. Or, all right, maybe it's expensive to move this time, but there are other things that are taken care of. People are starting to notice these little bits and pieces add up. And so this is a trend of something that might be coming.

Finally, I think military families with employed spouses, we want to do a cross-section on this, this year; and they experience greater financial security, better

mental health, and higher satisfaction with the military life, and these are all statistically significant. They were valid findings, so this is not just that they liked it better, and that's kind of obvious, but that there was also a statistical significance associated with that.

So I think that's some powerful information that might frame what other folks have to say this afternoon, you know, about how we can actually use that to move forward, but on local communities and prove military communities, local communities and national defense. Thanks.

MR. ARMSTRONG: Thanks Kris, and Elaine. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you. I want to say, actually, thanks to Kathy and Elaine and Cristin for another great survey this year. I can't say enough about how great it is to be partnered with you on this survey. It's a very important survey, I feel. You know, every year to get that snapshot. I think this survey also gives voice to the military families in terms of what are the most pressing needs and challenges.

And so what I hope to do, is just cover quickly a few of the key themes related to transition, that came out of the survey, so I want to talk about three -- excuse me four key themes; preparation for transition, use of resources, challenges and attitudes. So when you look at preparation for transition, so in the survey there's a mix of both veterans and service members in this survey.

On the service member side, that 1 in 6 noted that they'd be transitioning in the next two years. On the other side, with veterans, about half said that they actually attended transition assistance programs, like Transition to the TAP Program, and Transition GPS. Of those a majority, just close to 60 percent noted that they felt prepared for civilian employment from that, which is a notable finding, a positive sign that our transition programs are working. I know a lot of working effort has gone into updating those over the last several years. So, we are giving important tools for employment.

Next, in terms of resources for transition, so when you look at awareness of resources we asked the respondents their familiarity with resources such as military and family life counselors, VA and state-level vocational rehabilitation counselors, Social Security, VA benefits, VA health care, et cetera. So, with the exception of the VA benefits and Military OneSource, the other services or other -- excuse me -- the other services in terms of awareness, we saw a much lower awareness across both veterans and transitioning service members.

In fact, even less than half knew that they could file for VA benefits within six months of transitioning. When you look at the use of resources in the transition process, we looked at what were the most useful resources in your transition, and so number one was TRICARE, followed, importantly, by friends and family.

So, that speaks to the importance of social connections, and in terms of helping them navigate that transition and gaining access to resources at the local level. And then that was followed by VA disability benefits and actually the TAP Program came fourth. So, a takeaway from that is, perhaps more could be done in terms of getting the information out to our families at the transition process.

Moving on to transition challenges, what were actually experienced in the transition process; over 2 in 5 of the veterans noted in the survey that transition was difficult or very difficult. Of those 40 percent expressed that they felt stressed, in about 1 in 4 of those expressed struggles with depression. Of those challenges that they faced, employment and financial concerns were the top-most.

Digging deeper into the employment issue itself, one key theme that came out was the importance of helping to find a match to skills, education in desired career field. About a half of veterans in the survey noted that they were not in their desired career field, which I think is an important finding.

Another note, too, was there's a bit of mixed expectations in terms of those who are leaving the Service, expecting to find employment sooner, or find employment at a higher salary or level of experience. So, I think the takeaway from that is a need to try to inform and educate and set expectations for transition service members further upstream in the process.

Finally, we want to explore attitudes and perceptions for transitioning Service Members, and those who had actually experience the transition itself. So, we asked about their perceptions of their time in the Service, and what they are experiencing now. And on the positive side, a great many felt very strong about how proud they were of their service, and that they would -- they felt prepared to take on leadership roles in the community and in civilian employment. And actually 80 percent would recommend service to their children which I think is very important today in a very dynamic environment that we face.

But on the other side, many found difficulty finding a sense of purpose in life, and in their employment, and so I think this points back to what Cristin mentioned about the importance of leveraging veterans and military families as assets in their community, trying to figure out ways to leverage their talents not just on the employment side, but in their communities themselves as leaders.

So, my quick takeaway is that it seems like we've come a long way in terms of helping the transition process, improving programs that could always do better on topics such as providing education further upstream, like priority transition, providing access to information on those resources, helping with navigation, that gets into the partnership, and working with the private sector, the voluntary sector to come together to help in that transition process. Thank you.

MS. KAMARCK: Thank you. Brad?

MR. CARSON: Well, thank you, Elaine. Thank you for the kind introduction. To Cristin and Nick, thank you, for the work in putting together this survey. I'm a great admirer of both the Blue Star Families, as well as what Syracuse has done with Institute for Veterans & Military Families. So, I'm honored to be on here with you. And of course with Michael, who I don't know well, but thank you for the book because what you write is indispensable, and in national security matters, and if you hadn't given it to me, I certainly would have purchased it. So I'm appreciative of that enormously.

As the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, I must say we do many surveys, and we collect an inordinate amount of data, but this survey, I think, has particular value to me and the work I do, in that the temperament of military families are people who have the Service but still are, perhaps, availing themselves of the programs that fall underneath my purview. Is less available to me, and as a result, as I said, I learned a lot from this survey.

And there's really been discussed some of the top-line results, but perhaps I could focus on things that, for me, as I read this over the last couple of days, I will aspire to do better in my current job. The first of those things is, communicate. There is, I think, some misapprehension about what's happening at the Pentagon, people rightfully appreciate the turmoil, the budget turmoil especially that the Department of Defense has been under for the last few years.

We have made some rather significant changes especially to retirement, these are not changes that were always easily understood by even the most financially-literate of people, and no doubt many people in the force can be somewhat confused by both what, both the intent behind this reform was, and what the results will be for them. And so when I read about the great uncertainty, I understand it from a larger sense, because these are uncertain times, for us all of who care about defense.

On the other hand, I can't say that I have much fear that people who serve today will not receive the benefits that are promised to them over time. Even the blended retirement system, which is a very progressive thing, given a 401(k) program, if you will, to our service members, most of whom will not stay 20 years, or take advantage of the Defined Benefit Plan. Just a little bit more than 15 percent of enlisted personnel will stay for 20 years, and half of the officers do.

So if you can come into the Military and leave with something seems a very good thing indeed. That's not to say that there won't be much explanation that has to be given out to the Force, that we educate people about what we are trying to do, that this isn't some sort of backdoor way to cut their benefits. It is in fact a way to make it more equitable across the Force.

So, I'm left with that kind of mission. I'm also humbled to read about some of the concerns about transition programs. We spent a lot of time and effort in the Department of Defense thinking about transition programs for service members. I was just, last week, at a research conference where, many people, some of whom in this room, were present, as well most of the top researchers from federally-funded research and development corporations, asking them about what we could do differently or better for transition programs.

So, we have an ambitious research agenda as we try to find out what works and what doesn't work, to try to have some kind of metrics associated with the these, as we deal with the problem that seems to be quite vexing and hard for us to get a handle on, which is not only veterans employment, but retention of those veterans in jobs over time, which is an issue that I still think we need much work both to understand and have programs in place to deal with.

The transition programs are ones that we are deeply committed to and

concerned about, and while think different installations do it better than others, the notion that many people are getting ready to transition out aren't even aware of them, is a source, again, it comes back to communication, that not that we have to explain what we are doing better, but even to just make people aware of many of the programs that we are doing.

I think also, what you see here is something I spent a lot of thinking about and courting controversy off on the Pentagon and discussion which is the changing demography and psychography of the military family and of the service member. The world is changing around us rapidly, the expectations of people the family structures that people bring with them into the military or acquire over time, these are things that are very different than when the All-Volunteer Force was put in place now more than 40 years ago.

As a result, I think there was an open question, whether the Department of Defense is cognizant of that as much as we should be, and whether the personnel policies in place recognize what's happening. So take, for example, military spouses, you have a lot of great data about military spouses, data that is concerning, data that I have seen in previous work sometimes, but I still struggle with how we actually kind of solve this problem.

But take just the unique of dual military couples, 60 percent of women who were in the Air Force or in the Marine Corps are married to another service member; 40 percent of women in the Army or the Navy are married to another service member. We all know from much work that's been done, that even in the most egalitarian of marriages women still bear a disproportionate share of household duties.

So you have incredible stress of being in the Service to beginning with, a dual military couple has some kind of exponential level while still trying to juggle all the

duties of raising a family and maintaining a home. As a result you see extraordinary attrition from women in the Military. They of course don't join up in the numbers that we would like them to do, and then when they come in they leave with at nearly twice the rate of men.

So, how do we get to these issues? I don't have obvious solutions to them, I have maybe partial ones, and they are not ones that are universally accepted. But when you read the data you can see, say, underlying much of kind of the findings, or the changing nature of both the military and of the family members who are now part of it, and for whom we have to be as concerned as we do the service member, himself or herself.

It's very sobering to me about the need to both talk better and talk more about what we are trying to do, and learn more from service members and their families, from retirees, from veterans, about what we can do better to educate them about the many programs, that we are working very diligently to execute.

MS. KAMARCK: Thank you. Mike?

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks, Elaine. Thanks, everyone. It's a pleasure and a privilege to be on this Panel, and I admire very much the work of my good friends; so, Kathy Roth-Douquet, and everyone else involved in this process. I will make just three points as the person who maybe is furthest from the immediate military and from the work of these distinguished Americans, that stand out for me in sort of broad policy terms, as things we all should be cognizant of, as we think about everything from military budgets to how we interact with the military and think of our nation's armed forces.

So just three points that are based on the findings; one is that this number that is, I think, lower than I would have guessed, and I believe lower than it's been in the past, that only 57 percent of military families would now recommend military

service to younger folk. And anybody who knows Kathy's work, knows that she wrote a path-breaking book in the 1990s about how had a disconnect between society at large, especially in areas like Washington, D.C., and some of the, you know, more affluent, northeastern corridor areas, and the nation's armed forces.

And that problem, I think, is still there, although maybe elements of it have evolved a bit through the post-9/11 period, but the problem is still there. But we are seeing another problem which is that even military families are increasingly doubting whether they want to wish the same life on their own children, and that's, I'm sure, not out of any lack of patriotism, or any lack of a sense of public service.

It's an awareness of how hard it can be, and how hard it can be obviously in the post-9/11 world when there's a lot of deployment, but even as we may be coming out of the most acute elements or acute periods of that time period, there's still a sense that it's hard. And I think some of the anxieties about the future of pensions and retirement, but also how you integrate and interact with an American economy, and American society that's changed so much, and how you do it, when you are being moved from base to base, and when you are otherwise dealing with the difference that the Military faces in life compared to most of the rest of the country. This should be concerning.

I think generally speaking, we've done a very good job, we as a nation, and especially people like Secretary Carson, and the other individuals here, we've done a good job maintaining a strong All-Volunteer Force in the Post-Cold War era. It's been the best downsizing that we've ever done as a nation after a major conflict, or challenge to the nation's security. Although it's getting to be sort of ancient history to talk about the Post-Cold War downsizing, and now we are in the Post-9/11 world, and I think what we are learning, is that we've got new challenges.

That even though the broad sweep of personnel policy over the last 25 years has been fairly good, we've kept military compensation pretty strong, we've provided a number of benefits, some of which, perhaps, in certain cases could be debated on public policy grounds, like TRICARE For Life, if you'll forgive me. Nonetheless, we haven't addressed some of the legitimate and very real anxieties of military families, and it's captured in that 57 percent. So I hope we'll have some more discussion about that.

Obviously, we still have military families that feel a great sense of loyalty and service, and 57 percent still do recommend service to their descendants or other younger folk. So it's still a pretty good number, it's just as good as it used to be, or maybe as I would have expected. And that probably should cause us, at least, some concern.

Then getting, perhaps, to some of the specifics, two other points that I'll make and then I'll be done. One thing that I really learned a lot in reading the survey, was this issue of spousal employment, and Secretary Carson just alluded to it, and especially in regard to people whose spouses are in the military, but let me then focus, instead, on people whose spouses are not in the military.

And what we are seeing, even though we know that statistically military compensation is pretty good, compared to people of the same age, educational background, and experience in the civilian economy, that nonetheless there are a lot of big challenges, and reasons why we shouldn't be complacent about military compensation, or feel that we should cut it. And one of those reasons, of course, is the obvious, that people in the Military are risking their lives on behalf of the nation, and serving in ways that require even more complete commitments than for many of us for whom a job is an important part of our lives, but simply a part of our lives.

And so, certainly, the degree of service, and the degree of risk when being deployed, or even here at home in training is higher. But on top of that, having to move from base to base, from one part of the country to the other, means that spouses often can't get work; and we saw the statistics earlier, apparently more than half are unable to find work, and of that group that are unable to find work most of them would like to work.

So, in other words, what I'm wondering and let me actually throw out a couple of very small policy suggestions. I'm wondering if the next time we do a quarterly review of military compensation, there actually should be an adjusted metric that tries to acknowledge this effect, and factor it into the calculation about how well off military families are, relative to other families. Because I don't -- I admit I haven't poured over every single graph in that very comprehensive and very excellent quadrennial report, but I'm not aware that there is such a calculation right now.

And it will be hard to do. You'd have to make a number of analytical assumptions. But I think it would be worth trying to get at that. If nothing else, it would sensitize people to the fact that military families do face these special challenges.

And then secondly, I wonder, the policy suggestion coming off of this broad concern. Is that I wonder if the services can study each other's best practices. I wonder if out of that statistic, for example, some services are doing a little better than others at spousal employment. We know for example that, well, the Marine Corps is a different kettle of fish, right, because it has the fewest number of married service members, and yet it has also the smallest number of bases. So, at least in theory the Marine Corps could consolidate people at a single location and keep them there longer.

In practice, I'm not sure the Marine Corps really tries to do that, or is able to do that, but it raises interesting questions. Now, the Army has moved over the years

towards trying to have a couple of mega bases in a couple parts of Texas, for example. Has this been a successful experiment? Are people who are based there, able to maybe do a couple of tours in a row at the same location so that a spouse could keep a job?

Is that maybe part of the answer? I don't really know, and it would be interesting just as a future research question, either for Blue Star Families, or for the Department of Defense, to maybe look at these best practices and ask -- leave aside the issue of overall compensation. There are some things we can do within the Department, that we are not currently doing, that would improve the prospects for spousal employment.

And then finally, the issue I wanted -- the third then of issues, is about veterans. And I know that Blue Star Families is perhaps most notable for focusing on active-duty families, and this is very important, and I'm very glad they do. I'll just go into a couple of specific points on veterans and then turn over the floor. One would be that what jumps out at me, again, these are not surprises to those of us who have been paying attention to the news for the last 10 or 15 years. There are some special challenges that veterans face, especially in those early post-Service years, but you know, indefinitely.

And the post-9/11 generation of veterans, see some financial volatility, some higher prospects for unemployment in many cases, at least in the early years, and also there are a lot of mental health care issues and concerns. And so for me we have, in my mind, an open question, a number of issues are raised here, but I'll just mention one and then stop; which is, have we gone far enough in the veterans' affairs system, with the Choice Act, or, do we actually need to expand it?

So that we can tackle waiting lists for veteran's care, and especially veteran's health care, even more aggressively rather than asking people to wait a certain

period of time before they get the option of going to a private provider. And maybe they want the privacy of going to a private provider, and maybe we should bear that in mind, especially for mental health care issues. So, as I see veterans continue to struggle in a number of areas, it makes me wonder if we should be thinking about a few other policy options in that domain as well. Thanks very much.

MS. KAMARCK: Thank you very much. Let me ask a couple questions for the Panel right now, we'll open it up, but I'd like to start with Brad. One of the themes in this year's survey was uncertainty, and obviously uncertainty is affecting not just the Military, but every piece of the Federal Government, but it's just worse, I think, in the Military because there are so many other stressors, and so many people who are directly employed by the Federal Government, so many more than the rest of the Federal Government.

Now that there seems to be a budget deal, right, and which will carry us through the year, and now that you all have had experience sort of navigating in this uncertainty, do you see a way to reduce the levels of uncertainty that could help military families? Is there a way to smooth out some of these budget crises?

MR. CARSON: I don't know if there's a way to smooth out the budget crisis, as much as we welcome the developments over the last few days. And we've come to expect them year in year out for the last two decades really, to have continuing resolution... to have budget hijinks, and to have many issues that causes great concern in terms of how we plan to spend money over the year, over the five-year plan.

And I think we can do a better job, perhaps, and your survey suggests that I need to do a better job myself, of communicating to the Force what the plans are. And there is a lot of competing issues that I'm sure service members are hearing about, one of which is that Department of Defense needs more money, full-stop, for many

programs, for acquisition, for operations, for readiness questions, but also for compensation. They hear that compensation has increased over time, and perhaps you'll find Senators, and some people who assert that it's increased too much, it has to be dialed back.

They are aware that in this year's NDAA, for example, although vetoed but likely to reoccur. There were some modifications in compensation for basic allowance for housing, for pay increases, for base pay relative to inflation. So these are things I think people hear about, they are perhaps are looking in through the glass darkly a bit at what we do at the Pentagon. These are out in, you know, in the atmosphere, they'll hear them and they don't know quite what kind of context to put them in.

They do know about the retirement system and moving away from -- for people who come in at 2018, and who won't necessarily have the same defined benefit that you do if you are serving today. And the grandfathering aspect of it, right, might be alluding to many people as well. So I think basically, right, we have to have a communication strategy that recognize we have real challenges, that there is extraordinary uncertainty in the American political system right now. And this is something that affects everyone, but the DoD, as the single largest agency in government, especially so, will find a way to mitigate that to the service member.

Whether it's kind of educating people about the compensation issues, or discussing kind of our vision for a future personnel system, that's how we have to do it. But in the end that uncertainty is a little bit inescapable, I'm afraid, given the dynamics of American politics today.

MS. KAMARCK: Michael, you've written an entire book on the Military budget, so I was just wondering if you had anything to add to this.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, not a whole lot more, except to say I am very

happy to see a budget deal apparently emerging. And let me mention something on the morale side of that. I think that even though in recent shutdown, showdown sequesters, continuing resolutions, the Department has tried very hard to make sure that troops are paid in full. I know a lot of troops worry about, and Secretary Carson and his colleagues can try as hard as they want to, to reassure people, but it's unfair to expect that they'll be fully successful, because every new crisis has some new convoluted, crazy identify of its own, that is going to leave people inevitably wondering.

And so we just have to get out of this habit, and thank God, at least this time it didn't last any longer, or it appears not be lasting any longer than a month, which is already too long. But also, we did an event two months ago with Bob Hale, who of course has been Controller of the Pentagon, and Congressman Don Beyer, who represents Alexandria, and therefore a lot of Federal workers and Pentagon workers, and they were talking about the effects on civilian morale, which I realize is not directly relevant to the survey, but it's certainly relevant, Elaine to what you've worked on, and I think, you know, Federal civilian employees are real people too, and they have real mortgages, and they are real patriots.

And we can have whatever policy debate we want to about whether there 3 percent too many, to 6 percent too few, or issue area A, B or C, but the ones that we've got we've got to take good care of. For one thing we want them to be excellent, motivated people, and we want this to be a kind of government -- a kind of job that's of interest to future generations who have a lot of choices, and so on the budget front, I'm just breathing a huge sigh of relief that we seem to be headed in the right direction this week.

MS. KAMARCK: Cristin and Nick, I have a very different kind of question for you which is the -- There's an observation that military spouses, most of whom are

women, now because they are working, or just really busy, seem to be not doing the kinds of traditional support roles that they used to. I mean I know my daughter every other week is rushing off to an FRG Meeting, something or another. And Kathy's book has wonderful stories about Kathy's initiation as a modern woman into the role of a military wife. Could you talk a little bit about that, I mean, and the sort of unintended consequences here?

MS. SHIFFER: Sure. You go first?

MR. ARMSTRONG: You go.

MS. SHIFFER: All right; I'll go first. I think a couple things, the culture is changing, the role of women in the entire American culture is changing and it's less likely for them for them for them to be staying home, it's more likely for them to be working, and it's not any different in the Military. I think another point that I've actually heard you made, too, Mr. Carson, is that, you know, kind of like marries like. If you want great people in your military they are probably marrying other smart great people, and they don't want to lose their jobs, just because they happen to marry someone who is in the Military.

And so I think these are important points. I think DoD has started to change this perspective a bit. I've seen it myself. I'm also a military spouse of 15 years almost, and I've seen it, it's a very different change even from when I first came in. And I think as DoD evolves a little bit more and thinks a lot of the changes that are suggested in the Force of the future about keeping people in the same place a little bit longer like, and I can talk about.

Also, changing the expectation for commanders on what the role is for their spouses to play. It is concerning that we are moving away from the paid position in the Army for that, that is a concern. So, the people who used to help out and do a lot of

the work that used to fall traditionally on the spouse of the commanding officer, that's going to be coming back onto people, and so there is a question there.

So I think, I'm encouraged by a lot that's happening. I think it's moving forward, but I would caution that we are going to lose a lot of good people especially as culture continues to change, as the imperative for dual income becomes more relevant in our society, if the Military doesn't mirror that, we are losing, there is a large opportunity cost that's lost there.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. Any other comments on each other's presentations? Or on any other questions for each other before I open this up?

MS. SHIFFER: Sorry, I've got one.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay.

MS. SHIFFER: I just wanted to touch base on that. So, on the recommending service, 80 percent of veterans were willing to recommend service to their children; 57 percent would recommend -- of all survey respondents -- would recommend service to a young person close to them; 45 percent were willing to recommend service to their own child.

MS. KAMARCK: Wow.

MS. SHIFFER: So that's almost even more interesting, I think, just to kind of touch base as time went on, and remember our survey did have a large this year, a subset of older veterans. And so I think that 80 percent comes there, but those are -- I think that's interesting just to kind of make that point.

MS. KAMARCK: That's great.

MR. CARSON: I mean, two things you've said, Cristin, are of great interest to me, and I've talked about them a lot in other forums. And this notion of like marrying like, the Military in my mind doesn't do as good a job as I would like to see it do,

and as I think, Dr. Carter is pushing it to do. To say, who are our high potential officers, and enlisted personnel, the people we want to keep, and groom them for the very highest positions in the services.

We are doing better about that, but it is clear that, as you've said, people who are very smart; typically are very smart, accomplished people. I was in a meeting the other day with some Army personnel, and a Guardsman there, it was terrific that this man was a Guardsman. He was a West Point Grad, Rhodes Scholar, went into active duty, he married a woman who was a PhD HIV Researcher from Stanford, received her PhD there, but you can imagine that couple that, right, moving from Fort Riley to Fort Polk, to Fort Drum, to Fort Sill, to Korea.

Well, this is going to be a very difficult thing for them to do. And so he left the active component and went into the Guard. That's a terrific thing that we kept him in the Guard, not an easy transition, another issue worth talking about at some point. But that's the story more and more of our officers. You go Harvard Business School, I've been there many times, and you find practically it seems like a whole range of regiment has decamped to go to Harvard Business School.

And you ask them why they came here, and there is a few of them who say, you know, I wanted to serve 5 years or 10, years, and I was never going to be a lifetime Army person. But many of them say, my wife is a lawyer, my wife is a doctor, my wife is a business woman; or my husband is those kinds of things. And you know, I can't live this life and have that -- have my wife find a place in it as well, a great challenge.

I think the second issue is about the seeming decline in family recommending their family to join. It says a lot, it's worth kind of teasing out, but one of the concerning things is this is a family business we are in, lots, increasingly so, more than 80 percent of the people who join up have a family member who served, almost 30

percent have a family member, their mother or father who served. And something like close to 20 percent had a family member who retired from the service.

And so it's very much a family business in the military, and that's a great thing in lots of ways, an incredible tradition, an honorable tradition of service where, you know, I can go to Jimmy McConville the G1 in the Army, and he has had an amazing career, and he has three children, a daughter and two sons in the U.S. Army. That's not uncommon in any way, shape or form. And so this notion that families themselves aren't recommending service, augers ominously for what the future might bring to already a difficult recruitment environment going forward.

MS. KAMARCK: We usually have a microphone out there. Do we today? Yes. Great. Okay. Let's start with some audience questions back there.

MS. KAUFMANN: Hi. I'm Kristy Kaufmann; I'm Executive Director of the Code of Support Foundation. My question is for Secretary Carson. One of the things that the survey found was suicidal thoughts among spouses, I think it was 7 percent, and the concern about the mental health impacts deployments had had on their children. Then last year's DNA, we finally got something in there to get DoD to start tracking suicides among family members, believe that was that report was due in June. I don't think it has happened yet. Can you give us an update on when that's going to happen?

MR. CARSON: I don't know when it will exactly happen, but I was working on it just last week and talking to Keita Franklin who runs the Suicide Prevention Office for me in P&R, and so we are working on that trying to get better data, trying to get the services who track this data mostly, to give it to us in a way that we can use it. So, we are hopeful to do that, and if you want to leave me your email address as we leave here, I'll give you an update from them about when we think publication of that might come.

MS. KAUFMANN: Do you think (crosstalk, no mic)?

MS. KAMARCK: Soon, yes. So I would think. I would think.

MS. KAMARCK: Other questions? Yes, right up here.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Patricia Klontik, from the National Military Family Association. This is for Secretary Carson. Most of what you spoke about is communication and coming up with a communication strategy, but you spoke mostly about communication with the Services; anything in that strategy with communication to, directly towards the military families and the military spouses?

MR. CARSON: Yes. I'm keenly interested in that. I spend a lot of time talking to MSOs, VSOs, going out and talking to families when I visit installations across the country. In the Military, times more it's probably good for my own reputation talking about these kinds of issues a lot. So, I think it's an important thing to do, and I seek more venues to do that, because as it's often said, we recruit the individual, we retain the family, and so we try to get this message out to military families is very important.

We do it in social media increasingly, so it's an ambition for ours, although I think the obvious channels to do that aren't well trod, and so we are trying to find new ones as well.

MS. KAMARCK: Another one. There must be another question. Yes, back there.

MR. SIMONS: Hi. My name is Josephs Simons, with the Guitars for Vets. My former Commanding Officer used to talk a lot about how it wasn't actually deployment that was a problem for his family, but coming home. So, he'd be gone for six months, and at that his wife and family were able to kind of plan for his departure and get the kids to school, et cetera. By coming home, especially at his level, as an O6, every week he'd be going to Commander Conferences, having to travel across the country, and

he actually found talking to his wife about it after being in the Service for 24 years, that it was really the time at home that was most challenging for them.

Leaving for conferences on a Sunday, being away with the wife calling and saying, where are you? And he said, I'm in Tampa, didn't you know that? So, I'm wondering if that's an issue that any of you have been tracking, and if not, I appreciate the opportunity to bring it up, and respectfully that maybe you think about it. Thank you.

MS. SHIFFER: So, we know that reintegration is a challenge. We also know that some of the best ways to overcome that, according to our survey, are to have those families integrated into civilian communities that are strong, and that give -- So I would suspect that a lot of what happens in those kinds of environments, is the whole work changes. You go away for the deployment, right, and the survey will talk about this too; when you are there and you build parallel support structures that are outside of the service -- outside of the service member in your relationship.

When you come home you have the expectation that those support structures are still there. And sometimes in some jobs, I would suggest that this might not always be the case, it might also be more unique because of the rank of the person that you were speaking to, travel happens. And I think of the Navy, there are workups all the time, right? So, it is some other services more specifically. But I think creating those parallel support structures anywhere they are, traditionally, before there were Family Readiness Groups, Process Groups, that stuff.

Now, we don't see that as much, we see virtual, but we also see this opportunity to do that on the civilian side. So one of the things that our members and respondents to the survey this year suggested, was more opportunity for those support structures within the civilian community, so it's not a perfect solution, but one way that you can still kind of have DoD do what they need to do and then free up some of that

space, you know, for the support that's not coming directly from the traditional military family support FRGs, Spouse Clubs, whatever they are, is to provide that in the public sphere instead, in local communities, because they are not going anywhere.

They are there, they have that support already, so I think that's one thing that we heard in our survey this year, is creating those kinds of relationships as a support system that then will free up a little up there. So it's not a great answer, but --

MR. CARSON: These are the kinds of things that I think about a lot, I hear anecdotes like that, and I think the data exists probably that this is a widespread problem. I must confess, I have no easy solution to it, you know, the up-tempo for an O6 in the Army is a brutal one, and I don't know how to deal with that on an adequate basis really. We have many transition programs welcoming people back home, trying to reunite families, after that. But the problem you raise is a vexing one, and I don't know really what to do about it.

MS. KAMARCK: Over there.

QUESTIONER: Speak loudly, if you can.

MS. STERN: We are all the way back there. Hi. I'm Lisa Stern; a gray-hair doctoral student at George Washington University, actually studying, well, my dissertation will be focused on veterans' retention in the civilian workforce. So I was very happy to hear more one person talk about retention, because finding a job is not as easy as keeping a job, or is easier than keeping a job. My question is actually geared to Dr. Armstrong, but anyone certainly can answer.

You mentioned that 50 percent of those who attended, whether it was the old TAP, or the Transition GPS Program, that just over 60 percent of those felt prepared for employment. So, my question is, is there any plan to then follow up? Because it's one thing to feel prepared for employment, it's another thing to actually then

find employment, and then to actually feel like you have meaningful employment. So I just didn't know if there were -- because that would be a great way to be looking at retention, if there was any follow up studies that you were thinking about for that particular population?

MR. ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Well, in terms of following up those individuals, I don't think there are plans for the individuals in the survey, but I mean, you raise a great point, I think in terms of veteran employment in general, we are seeing positive trends as a whole population but there are pockets of challenge, particular the younger veterans that are transitioning out. And if you really narrow down into certain other pockets based on gender and race, ethnicity, there are other challenges.

And so the retention issue also becomes one of, not just finding a match, but you are helping employers understand that it's more than just the nice obligation, the nice thing to do, that there is an actual business case behind employing and retaining veterans, and so the next good study is not only focused on veteran performance and retention, but also what are employers doing to actually realize that business case for retaining veterans in practice.

So I think there's a lot still left to be learnt from different employers who are doing really great things, and of course that varies by different sectors and things like that, so that's what we hope to pursue over the next year. Thanks.

MS. KAMARCK: Let's see. I think that there was someone over here. Yes. Oh, you are right next to her.

MS. RAEZER: Hi. Joyce Raezer; with National Military Family Association. I want to thank Blue Star Families for doing this survey, we always find things to tease out of it, you confirm a lot of things that we hear from sources, and it's information that we can all use as we develop programs to support military families,

speak on behalf of military families. So thank you for doing this.

My question is, okay, now we have the information, what do we do about the uncertainty issue? There is the -- there is just the uncertainty that comes from military life. Deployments, frequent moves, behavioral health issues, just the military spouse challenges, unemployment, there is just some uncertainty inherent. But what we also have is the uncertainty caused by budget issues, political pressures, back and forth and, you know, advocacy groups trying to, you know, fight for certain benefits, money getting in the way, budget conflicts between the department, and Congress, where you have the department saying, we've got to protect readiness. Congress saying, well, we think you are okay.

So, how do we, as a group, address some of these uncertainty issues to support our military community? Secretary Carson mentioned one, and that's the communication, how do we work the communication to be maybe a little more transparent but also the positive as well as the negative. Are there other -- are there other ways, we, as a community can address the uncertainty and alleviate some of it?

MR. CARSON: I'll take that up, Joyce. Good to see you again. Thank you for the great work your organization does. As I said before, I don't know the answer to that. I'm humble enough to say, it's a very difficult problem, the Force is massive, the scale of the problems is vast, I don't know, other than to think that these kinds of meetings are constant discussions, you are talking to your members is very important.

And perhaps the most important thing, as someone who is a catalyst for a lot of this change in the Pentagon these days, is to put this into a larger picture of what we are trying to do. This isn't about when we talk about reform, or the Pentagon, or policy changes that cause people to be questioning what the future might be. It's about making a better situation for service members, not a worse one.

Not simply putting a Band-Aid on problems, but something like, we need in my mind, I'm squarely in the camp that we need to reinvent Pentagon, full stop. And that is a good thing for our service members. And I'm in charge of Personnel now, and so that's why I spend my time thinking about it. But this is not a way of saying, hey, you know, you are being paid too much, or we are going to crack down on you in some ways, but saying, no, you know, we can make this better for us all.

You know, what someone at Brookings, no doubt upstairs would say, a Pareto optimal improvement. One that, you know, can help save us money and make sure life is better as well. So, when the Army comes forward and they say, do you know what, we are not just going to be worried about spending bonus money in the future, we are going to see if people want, instead of a bonus, perhaps, by post of station, or guarantee graduate school, or branch of choice.

These are the kind of things that are relatively costless to us that, you know, change the way we think about the problem. And so these are ways to make the value proposition of military service better not worse. And I think that's what we need to talk about, is that the bureaucracy of the Pentagon of which many of these changes address, right, is not commensurate with the value of the people who serve this country; or to my mind, the needs of the nation for national security.

And so there has to be change. But the change is about making it better and improving the experience, not a worse one. And like I say, I need your help and -- you know, and to the other MSOs, VSOs hearing, because they are out. Like, we are trying to make this better or you. And I do think that all these reforms we talk about are the ones that do improve the life. They can come in now and leave with a defined contribution plan, so that's a remarkable thing. It's, you know, hundreds of thousands of young men and women was some kind of nest egg for their career, that's a great thing for

us.

It helps us too, because while this demand makes the force is better over time, is just one more tool to do that, but it's better for the service member too. And so that's what, I guess, we need your help in doing. So, I don't have a good answer, other than to say, repetition with the blunt tool of events like this, of what we do.

MS. KAMARCK: Yes. Go ahead, Nick and then Mike.

MR. ARMSTRONG: I'll just add a quick -- just to add to that comment, so the Secretary mentioned communicate more, communicate better, but I also believe that the communication falls on those in the VSO space and the public sector, or private sector as well. You know, what we find is that there's a lot of services and resources available, but what we find is there's more of a gap between those organizations in terms of information sharing and coordination in that, so I think a lot can be done in terms of increasing -- moving from collaboration to actual coordination of effort. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: The point I'd make -- By the way, I don't say Pareto optimal very often, I wasn't even trying to get out, but I do believe in writing, and what I'm wondering is if someone with stature in the military but not of the department at that moment, because even though people of the department at that moment are outstanding Americans, there's always the concern they are speaking from what their political bosses are telling them to say.

Someone with stature, to look back on the history of the all-volunteer force, especially dating back to the Reagan administration, and basically point out, in sort of a readable form, not a huge, long book, but 20 pages, that we've been pretty darned committed to our men and women in uniform in the modern era, as a nation. This is something, again, Secretary Carson alluded to earlier, I agree, and I would commend everyone who has been in public life who has contributed to this. There are such

compensation such as TRICARE For Life, that I actually find bad bargains for the overall good of the Force.

But leave that aside, we can debate specifics, the thrust is to see that in the '80s, '90s, 2000s, and now 2010s, we have seen military compensation more than hold its own relative to whatever analogue you want to you want to try to create, or whatever benchmark. And, you know, some periods it goes up more, some periods it sort of stays flat and then goes up again later, but the trend line is very clear. And I -- you know, a lot of people in the Military are a lot younger than I am, and they may not remember all that history, and so it's probably good to extract this from the immediate political debate we are having this year, with a given proposal for how much military pay should go up, and are given TRICARE Reform, you know.

And actually look at the big picture, and try to get this information more available. So maybe organizations like yours could do this, and publish something that, you know, a Retired NCO, as opposed to a Four Star, or maybe an NCO plus a Four Star together might do with a little bit of data in there, easy to digest graphs. To basically underscore the political point which is the key point, our country is committed to our men and women in uniform and their families, and the veterans.

And while we get a lot of things wrong, that overall storyline I think is pretty well backed up by 40 years of history. So, I think you can document it, is my point, and you can still debate whether we do enough but you can document that we've been pretty good as a country for four years, and I don't know if there's an easy reference that people could find today. So maybe we need to make that available to them.

MS. KAMARCK: Anyone else? Let's see. Ah. We've got two back here, and those will probably our -- or three -- and those will be our last three. Yes, right there?

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MS. GOLDBERG: Hi. My name is Brooke Goldberg; I'm from the Military Officers Association of America. We've talked a little bit about managing expectations, and we talked it more -- you talked about it more in relationship to veteran employment after transition. My question is, with one of the survey statistics showing that 30 percent of the respondents are not able to cover their rent with the BAH, we are getting more cuts. How much expectation management do we need to do? Is the Pentagon and Congress completely out of touch with what's going on in the general population with 70 percent of families living off the installation? Or are families not understanding what is supposed to be covered in their compensation package? Because it seems to me that that is a real heart of the insecurity here, so I'm curious to see what your answers are on that.

MR. CARSON: A great question and one which I will try to obliquely answer, if not directly answer. I don't think we are out of touch with the people in the Force. I don't think the Sergeant Majors who I speak on an every-other-week basis at the services are out of touch. But it's always a danger, it's a vast organization, and it's extraordinarily hierarchical as you climb to the very rarified heights of that hierarchy you can lose track of what's happening with the E3s, and a lot in Oklahoma, for example, and their concerns.

So, that's something that's very real, and that's why I say we come to events like this, you have members who you speak for and represent, it's a valuable thing for us, one more input into trying to understand the vastness of this Force. So I don't think we are out of touch with it. I do think, as I mentioned, that some of these compensation reforms have caused insecurity because people aren't sure what's happening. I do think the NDAA sets in path, an approach to BAH that people can track over time.

So, if there's uncertainty, I think there will be less of it, there will be disagreement about the policy choice, but we now have an approach to BAH for the next four or five years, that the Pentagon is more or less coalesced around. So, I think it's a danger always worth considering, and the notion that we are out of touch is not one I take lightly, and because in an organization like this you can be, but I think people are trying to understand and balance a lot of competing interests in an austere budget environment.

You know, readiness needs are critical, critical to morale, critical to our ability to fight. The equipping, and some services is vastly underfunded, the Army most notably. And so an incredible game of triage that people at the Pentagon had to undergo in the last few years, about what they are going to put money into. So, don't underestimate the challenge that confronts us as well.

MS. KAMARCK: Let's see, there was a question over here, yes. And then we'll take -- we've got more too, and we'll be -- let's see if we can --

QUESTIONER: Thank you for letting me speak. Actually I'm a new immigrant here, so I have no right to be speaking, but I thought I would kind of break the silence in the taciturn, you know, and all these things that are quite nasty and going on for a long time, so I'll take the plunge again, where the GPS kind of strategy is very, very rampant. And I'm a Tibetan from India, and we have a monastery, as like all Military. Do you know what I mean? Where we have the highest regard, and best source of guidance and protection, but they have polluted and re-polluted by the same old, you know, next neighbor, or whether you call it Indian Locals, or whatever, the Mexico, and up there in Lhasa, in Capital City of our real country. And I'm a political refugee, by the way.

So I just want to see that -- first of all, I want to express my very sincere belief that it's quite shameful that we are talking all these things, and all these things have been happening for the U.S. and military families, and veterans that keep begging on the

street in a wheelchair. And I know we have these rascals, and bitches, and punching kids, so using the gadgets to break yours and probably mine in the future, because I'm speaking up again texting hours, and all that, and using the cyber, whatever power, and I have, yes, so --

MS. KAMARCK: Is there a question?

QUESTIONER: Yes. So I just want you guys to be aware of and which you guys should be, if not to -- it's highly, highly important to screen and rescreen whether 80 percent get cut or, you know, 90 percent get cut, make sure --

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Because the world is getting more competitive.

MS. KAMARCK: Thank you very much.

QUESTIONER: And I know we have reputation for goodness and all that. And so right now I'm a Journalist so I hope you guys will trust expression, and of course I will try to document all these things. Okay. Thank you.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. Thank you. Let's see, we have question back here, and then I think we'll have time for you. Yes, right over here. Hello? Microphones, microphones, yes.

MS. WOLFE-DAVIS: Thank you. Hi. I'm Kelsey Wolfe-Davis, with Code of Support Foundation, and an active-duty military spouse. I was just wondering pertaining to veterans with families and children who don't have access to the VA, has there been any discussion on how we can integrate community organizations into the TAP's curriculum so that families stop falling through the cracks, and there's collaboration there?

MS. SHIFFER: You know, I think there are people who talk about that within DoD, and certainly within our organizations, you know, I think, Rosemary -- that's a

topic that's been on a lot of the employment issues is when we get briefed on a lot of this, of course Spousal Network is a -- DoD runs a meeting quarterly to update all of the different service organizations on what they are doing in the spouse employment space. And we frequently hear about things like that.

How do we bring them in? They bring in different organizations; they bring in different parts of government. So they will have Labor one week talking. So we know, kind of, on either side of a DBT14 what to kind of expect. So they can bring people in and push them through to the other side. So I think that collaboration is happening, and so we hear it, but it probably doesn't get pushed down as far as it -- I mean, I'm probably go through this myself in our organization.

We think about it, we learn, we live here in D.C., frankly it's hard to push that out to our membership, and teach it, and have that awareness there, so I think there's a -- just like Mr. Carson is saying it's important to keep repeating it, and to keep talking about it. There's a lot that exist that does try to merge this together, but also, what Nick is saying, there needs to be more collaboration, strategic collaboration, but the bandwidth is not always there. You know, so that's something that -- Yes.

MS. KAMARCK: Okay. We have one last question, and I want to leave time for the Founder of Blue Star Families to close. Right here, over here?

MS. DeCARLO: Hello. I'm Danielle DeCarlo. I am from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Policy and Planning. So, be nice. The office that I'm in; we are actually doing a Veterans Research Policy Agenda and one of the focuses is reintegration, and the role of the family and children on integration for the family; and I was just wondering if the Panel had anything to say about that.

MR. ARMSTRONG: I should also explain, so I see Rosemary Williams, who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Communities and Family

Policy, is vigorously raising her hand.

MS. WILLIAMS: I'm happy to address your answer, sir.

MS. KAMARCK: Oh, wait. Can you can give her a microphone, would you, please? Right there?

MR. ARMSTRONG: I will outsource to you, Rosemary.

MS. WILLIAMS: So, DoD is working in close collaboration with VA on this agenda, and one of the things we are looking at that has our undivided attention, is about the families and that transition space. So we know the service member is eligible for certain benefits throughout a good period of time, and then the family may or may not. So one of the things that we are trying to emphasize, and communication is something that is near and dear to our heart in Military Community and Family Policy, and Mr. Carson. And we are increasing it through Military OneSource, and Pay Digital Strategies, which is the first time that we have engaged in this.

Military OneSource has all the resources and programs necessary for a smooth transition, we feel, and it's available for 180 days after transition, and we think that that's going to have a great impact. Getting the word out again is going to be something, and we are looking at what would happen if it was extended to a year. Where, again, the science is catching up with us, reintegration is turning out just as much education, entrepreneurship and employment, but also a wellness issue. And that's where our focus is right now. And we are happy to partner with the -- on their agenda and other works of such.

MS. KAMARCK: Great. Thank you. Well, that was fortuitous, huh. Listen, before we adjourn I'd like to welcome up to podium, Kathy Roth-Douquet. I first met Kathy on a helicopter that followed President Clinton's helicopter, me and Kathy and Alice Rivlin, three Bryn Mawr grads who happened to be in the White House at the same

time, got to go with the president on a trip up to Bryn Mawr College where he was making -- trying desperately to save the congressman who -- congresswoman who is now the mother of his son-in-law.

He didn't. But anyway we all got to go, and I don't know if it was on that trip, or on some other time, but Kathy along the way, being a White House political operative, advance person as a young woman, she fell in love with a Marine pilot, who happened to fly the President around; so a pretty important Marine pilot, in our view.

And I've known Kathy and followed her work ever since, when my daughter became a military spouse, she was one of the earliest volunteers for Blue Star Families, and Kathy is a writer, a lawyer, an activist. It is just so -- An author of a wonderful book called the *AWOL*, which I encourage all of you to read. And I think you can still get it on Amazon, right?

QUESTIONER: Yes.

MS. KAMARCK: Still get it. And Kathy has founded this quite remarkable organization. She has grown it. They actually have people who they pay these days. I don't think they ever paid my daughter. And I'm going to go sit down there so I can take pictures of you to send to my daughter in Hawaii. But I want to welcome up here, the Founder of Blue Star Families, Kathy Roth-Douquet. (Applause)

MS. ROTH-DOUQUET: I want to thank you so much, Elaine. Elaine was the favorite student of my favorite teacher, Mark Roth, so I was always impressed and a little jealous of her. So, it's a great pleasure to be here. And Mike and I went to graduate school; we went to the Woodrow Wilson School together, so it's all homely.

It's such a pleasure for Blue Star Families and for me personally to be here, Brookings Institution is an important organization, there's a lot of dignity in you all recognizing us and our work and hosting us here. In one of our early surveys we saw

that military-connected people don't want to get their information from official sources. They don't want to hear from their boss' boss, or from the Pentagon, they want to hear from friends and neighbors, that's us, and from popular culture. From brand names that have a meaning in the world.

And so we reached out to organizations like that. Brookings is an organization like that, it has a meaning and when you all host us here, it tells our community that you recognize us and you care, and that in itself is an accomplishment. So, thank you to Brookings. I want to give you a round of applause. (Applause)

When my husband and I were deciding whether to get married almost 20 years ago, he was a Captain, I earned twice as much as he did, and we had to decide whether he would leave the military and join my glamorous world then in New York, or if I would come back down to Washington and he would continue for a while.

I thought it would be a short while, and when we did discuss making that move, he said to me, if at any point you are not interested in doing this any longer just let me know I will get out. And I don't think that's an uncommon thing for people who are in the Military to say to the people they love, because this is a family business you have to all be in it together, or it really doesn't work. There were many times in the preceding years where I thought long and hard about whether or not I wanted us to get out.

We got married in 1997, and we moved, and I had to leave my job behind to go to Okinawa, and I had been a career woman my whole life. I had gone to Bryn Mawr and Princeton, it was my intention to work but I was unemployed, and I had to learn how to do that, of course the war happened, when we were in San Diego and I was in law school to pick up a career that could move a little better than my previous work, my husband deployed while I had an infant and a 4-year-old, and I finished law school and studied for the Bar.

And then he deployed again when we were in Jacksonville, North Carolina, the place that I couldn't work even with my law degree, because we were there for two years, and my 4-year-old would wake up in the middle of the night and go searching the house calling for his father. I didn't have a support structure there because that's very far away from the things that I know. I didn't have a church because we are Jewish and there is not a temple in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

And the next time he deployed we were in Parris Island, South Carolina, and my daughter went from 12 to 13, she turned into a young woman and her father was gone. And it was at that point that we were all involved, many of us here in this room, and started Blue Star Families.

Those weren't the only times that he deployed. He went to East Timor to deliver humanitarian supplies. He went to Liberia to evacuate civilians; he went to Afghanistan to support General McChrystal in planning. And each of these times were in a different city, sometimes a different country, we were alone. My tenth grader went to 10 different schools. We had to always value -- we always had to weigh: Can we keep doing this? Is this good enough for our family? Are we being good to our family at the same time we try to serve the country?

We ultimately continued to make the decision to serve, because service is very gratifying, but it's hard. And when you go to Afghanistan in 2009, and people say, are we still in Afghanistan? And you move to Europe and people say, why are we still in Europe? It's hard to remember sometimes why we do choose to volunteer in this way; none of us have to serve. We don't serve the Pentagon, we serve the American people, and so in order to make military life sustainable for families, and therefore possible for all-round-year force, and therefore give us a healthy country, we need to find ways to make this happen.

We need to help -- boost our families, those are our survey so we can help tell Americans who their military is, not just anecdotally but with facts. And then we can find, and we have found that spouse employment and isolation, the separation from military, are two of the biggest problems. Spouse employment directly addresses this problem of, do we want a 1 percent, or 1.4 percent, or 0.8 percent pay raise, because none of them are going to solve the problem.

Seventy-five percent of American families, working families, have two earners working, and it's about 40 percent for military families because the field isn't level for us. We can't continue to disadvantage military families over other American working families and still be strong. If we have working spouses, right now 26 percent are underemployed, 32 percent are -- 26 percent un, 32 percent underemployed.

If we have working spouses we don't have to worry so much about some of these other tiny little figures on the defense budget. We can afford to send our children to the schools that we want them to go to, or get the childcare; 32 percent -- 35 percent of us can't even get childcare right now, and a significant number of us are paying up to 4 or \$500 a month out of pocket.

If we can solve that problem, that will be a wonderful thing, if we can engage Americans in solving our problems, then we can keep serving, we don't need DoD to find us jobs, we need to partner with Americans to express this need, express the fact that we have 60 percent college-educated, 24 percent with master's degree or higher, more credentials than civilian counterparts. So these are people who are excellent employees with a robust economy, we can solve this problem. And other problems, but it takes us working together, it takes expressing that this is a problem that matters not just to our community, but to America because we want a robust all-volunteer force, that's why we are all here today.

It's beautiful to see such a full room, it's such an honor to have Brad Carson and Mike O'Hanlon join us on this panel. This is the kind of thing that gives us hope and excitement, so I hope we can continue to work together to make this difference, so we can continue to have families serve. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: I thought that was great.

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