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THE FUTURE OF RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND EDUCATION IN NATIONAL SECURITY

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OPENING REMARKS:

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PANEL 1: EDUCATION, RECRUITING, AND RETAINING TALENT FOR THE FUTURE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY:

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AMY KARDELL
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CYNTHIA SNYDER
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PANEL 2: RECRUITING TALENTED PEOPLE:

MARCOS MELENDEZ (Moderator)
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PANEL 3: RETAINING TALENTED PEOPLE:

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MICHAEL O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone. Sorry for the abrupt start to the day, but welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon. I have the privilege and pleasure of just briefly kicking things off today. I'm from the Strobe Talbott Center on Security Strategy and Technology. As our our military fellows and intelligence fellows that we're blessed and really privileged to host each year at Brookings. I've been here now almost 30 years, which means I've seen well over 100 fellows come and go, and they may come and go, but what they teach us and what they do for the nation both endure really from the point of view of Brookings. We could not ask for a better collaboration than to each year have between usually four and eight fellows from the U.S. intelligence, military, Department of Homeland Security, and sometimes Japanese self-defense force communities. And today, our four fellows of 2020 to 2023 have organized a conference, as you well know, on a crucial issue facing the country, which is really getting to the core of the people of the armed forces and the intelligence community. And how do we make sure that we get our best and brightest to want to join, to serve and to stay? So the topic today is, as you know, recruiting and retention of the national security workforce. And I'll let the moderators and panelists talk about the actual substance of the challenge in just a second. But I think you all know that because of a combination of COVID and general trends in demographics and perhaps to some extent cultural issues, perhaps a little bit the fallout of the kind of polarization we've had in our country in the last few years. We've seen some serious problems emerge in recruiting and retaining people for the national security enterprise. Just last week we had General McConville here at Brookings. You didn't talk about a recruiting crisis for the Army, but he talked about very serious problems and he wants to prevent the problems from becoming a crisis. And that's what today's discussion is all about. So I'm just going to say a word or two more. We're here for the next 4 hours. We hope you are two at 1215 will serve you boxed lunches and come back for the wrap up, which will be our Air Force fellow, Jason Wolf, interviewing retired General Lori Robinson, the first woman in U.S. history ever to run a combatant command. And 20 years ago, she was an Air Force fellow here as Lieutenant Colonel Lori Robinson at Brookings. So we're especially pleased to have her return. Unfortunately, that will just be virtual because she sprained ankle, but she's coming through, she's recovering, and her mind is as clear and ready to go as can be. So that will be our wrap up session before that. And starting with this panel, Scott Englund, our intelligence officer and intelligence professor and dean at National Intelligence University will moderate a panel looking at the broader national security workforce with a particular eye towards the intelligence world, which, as you know, is a crucial and quite large part of our national security enterprise. And a different kind of challenge presents itself when trying to recruit and retain this workforce. And it has its own challenges, its own problems today, even if they don't tend to make the news like the army falling x tens of thousands of soldiers short of recruiting in the past fiscal year after that, Marcos Melendez, our Marine Corps fellow this year and a logistician, will organize a panel on recruiting, which, according to General McConville, has been the more serious recent problem. But it's not the only problem certainly that we face in the national security enterprise. And then our Coast Guard fellow Brad McNally will talk about retention across the armed forces in general. And you know full well we now have six military services. Brad is from the military service that is housed in the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard, but of course, also part of the US military and under military command in time of war. So that joins the Space Force, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, the Navy and the Army as the full range of six armed services. So each each time we finish a panel, we'll have a brief coffee break and when we get through, initial commentary and conversation on stage will also involve you. And so please just stay tuned. Moderators will give you more detail as they get to the group part of the conversation. So without further ado, thank you for being here. And Scott, over to you.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Thank you. So can you hear me okay? Good. Thank you. I'm Scott England. I'm from the office of the Director of National Intelligence, and I'm assistant dean at the College of Strategic Intelligence at National Intelligence University. Lots of intelligence there. And this panel is three distinguished members of the intelligence community and former leaders of the intelligence community. To my immediate left is Cynthia Snyder. She is assistant director of National Intelligence for Human Capital. Before joining Udi and I, Ms.. Snyder served approximately 18 years in. Leadership at the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, most recently as the associate director of support, Ms.. Snyder joined the Defense Intelligence Senior Executive Service in 2007.

After 25 years of active duty in the US Air Force, retiring at the rank of Colonel. To her left is John Gannon. John Gannon served as CIA is Director of European Analysis. As Director for Intelligence. Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Analysis and Production. And as the Chair of the National Intelligence Council. In 2004, President George W Bush awarded Gannon the National Security Medal, the highest intelligence community award. He is a retired captain of the Naval Reserve and a Vietnam veteran. And to his left is my immediate boss. So be nice is Dr. Amy Kardell, professor and dean of the College of Strategic Intelligence at National Intelligence University. Prior to NIU, Dr. Kardell worked in the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security, focusing on information sharing, the intelligence, enterprise, governance and intelligence enterprise planning. Dr. Cardo earned her doctorate in organizational sociology at Texas A&M University in 2004. Right. So we're just going to dive right in. And what I do what I'll do is ask her maybe a little basket of questions on three different topics, and then we'll just go down the line and the panelists can give us their perspective on that. Right. So let's begin with the intelligence officer. No. How what do you what do we expect new intelligence officers to bring to various the 18 different intelligence agencies that we have in the United States? And what do we think that they'll need to do, need to have in the future in order to support the mission? So I guess the first question is what knowledge, skills and abilities standard cases should any intelligence officer possess, regardless of their discipline? And what will the next generation of intelligence officers need to bring to the intelligence community? And then as an aside, because I'm an academic and an intelligence officer, how does the academic study of strategic intelligence contribute to preparing ICI officers? And how do you see intelligence, education, both undergraduate and graduate programs in and out of government maturity? So Ada and I. Snyder.

CYNTHIA SNYDER: I can select one or.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Just just pick one.

CYNTHIA SNYDER: Yeah. I'll start with the first and certainly have comments about the second as well. But again, thank you all so much for allowing me to be here and certain to be a part of such a decision. So definitely looking forward to the discussion. Say over the past 15, 20 years or more. [Technical Difficulties].

CYNTHIA SNYDER: Okay. All right. Great. Say, over the past 15, 20 years or more, we've been laser focused on expanding and strengthening our STEM workforce. And that's understandable, because when you look at the technology explosion, having individuals with the technical acumen has been critical to ensuring that the United States maintain its technological advantage. But I think it's also very important because it's we definitely believe that a diverse workforce is critical to our future success and foundational to our national security. So when I think about a diverse workforce, I also think about diversity of education. Our humanities, our humanities, most think aren't important in the intelligence community, but they are very important in the intelligence community because it's through humanities that we gain a greater understanding of human culture. And so to understand our similarities and our differences, especially when we're doing analysis regarding our adversaries, that's so important. And also understanding human culture has also contributed to some of the technology solutions that's been developed to help enhance our analytic capabilities. And so as far as our future workforce, definitely diverse in education, critical thinkers, individuals that are comfortable making a decision, they're not fearful of thinking that if I say something wrong, that something negative will happen. So being courageous, being willing to speak up and being willing to do the right thing no matter what.

JOHN GANNON: Thank you. First of all, I'd like to say that I'm probably the longest naturally person on this panel from my career. It started in the Navy and then the intelligence community. But one of the experiences I had as assistant director for analysis and production in the late nineties coming in after the collapse of the Soviet Union took that job. I worked a lot with the military services, the Air Force and going to Dayton and San Antonio and looking at investments that were being made in education in a transformative environment as we're dealing with new challenges out there. How well-equipped are we going to be? How invested are the people that we

have working for us going to be? And with the Navy, the Marines, the Marine Corps actually was developing capability, and they went extraordinarily quickly, as the Marine Corps always does, and building their analytic capability down in Quantico. So I'd like you to be back. I'm delighted to be back with some of you now to show how much that overall effort contributed to improving our performance in the intelligence community. When I was chairman of the National Intelligence Council, actually, I always wanted to and did succeed in bringing the military services to the table when we had a national intelligence estimate to deal with that related to some of the expertise that they had. So one of the points I'd make about any people today coming into that chose security. First of all, they're bringing some particular expertise with them, are a very strong academic background with them. So I'm going to I want to look and see what kind of rigor has gone into what they have done, what have they have done to actually master the brief of the expertise they do have so that I can see how that's going to help us do that larger job we have in the intelligence community. And the second thing is, are they going to be collaborative in spirit? Because I think the intelligence community now is more than ever a collaborative enterprise. And it isn't just because it's nice, it's not Kumbaya or it's nice to you to get to know each other and to work with each other. But it's actually because we all have particular expertise that's relevant to the challenge that we're facing. And if we don't know how to reach out and get that expertise to work with us, we're going to have a lesser product and service to provide. I used to say, when. Chairman of the National Intelligence Council. I never wanted to be in a position of going to the president and saying, Mr. President, this is the best the intelligence community can be, can do. I want you to be able to say this is the best that can be done based on available information wherever it resides. And that means you've got to have an intelligence community that is into outreach much more than at any time in the past. So you've got to have individuals that don't do that. I would also say that I always look not just at the the academic or the military or the particular background of individuals, but also what personal qualities and personal qualities, meaning, maturity, judgment, critical thinking, so that when you throw a problem at them, are they actually this person going to help us to do the job that we have to do? And it means that for analysts, what it analysts do when you run out of data in the intelligence community, you don't quit. You keep going. You collaborate more. You've got to bring judgment to the benefit of policymakers. So you don't give up. So you're looking for people who don't quit, who persevere, who persist. That often happens, comes with military or military experience. And you also want to have people who will be able to collaborate with the private sector, which I think is more than ever an imperative now of of this business. So my basic answer to the question is I'm looking at the skills they have, how they relate to how significant those skills are, how they relate to the overall mission that we're facing now, which is obviously going to be a much more collaborative mission. And then how how that person will fit in that collaborative network that has to produce the kind of quality and effort that we want. Thank you.

AMY KARDELL: Thank you. Can you hear me? Yeah. Thanks, Scott, for inviting me today. And I'm very honored to be on this panel with this group of distinguished individuals who I couldn't agree more with what they said. However, I'm going to say something which maybe a little radical is that education hasn't changed much, and our demands on our students haven't changed much either with regard to the fact that they need to be good critical thinkers, communicators, good thinkers, good thinkers, good thinkers. Right. The truth of the matter is that every time we walk around, technology is always an issue. We always have to stay on the forefront of technology. But you can't emphasize that too much. Or can you? Because what we also find is that we start focusing all of our attention on technology, and we forgot to teach people how to write and think and communicate. And for me, one of the biggest issues we see at NIU is people are really strong and understanding their technical skill, our expertise. They have no idea how to communicate it well or effectively. In addition, we're working with a generation now that is thinking in 244 characters, you know, too short, too many too short of ideas, if you will. Everything's a bullet point instead of kind of well thought out complex ideas. And the world has become more and more complex. And so I know that for us, we're looking at trying to figure out how to make sure students know and our our young professionals, I'm going to say young, because while I may not be long in the tooth, I'm pretty long in the tooth compared to most of my students. You know that that they have to be able to manage more information and not just find the first five Google search items that they have. We're now focusing on things like what do we do when chat activity takes over and

people stop thinking completely for themselves? The ability to be a good analytical thinker and to actually know what to trust or not to trust is actually the the, in my opinion, a kind of a knowledge set and a skill set that our young professionals really need more than ever today. It's easily it's easy to get duped by bad information and to be able to know what your sourcing is and how to use that information in critical manner and then manage a lot of complex data. And by complex data I mean the narrative, not necessarily the numbers, is really critical. And we'll leave it there.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Okay. That's great. Thank you. Okay. So let's move on to recruiting. We've been hearing a lot about at the 50th anniversary of the all volunteer force when after the draft was ended, that the all volunteer force was actually the all recruited force. And so even though we're we're in the intelligence community, we're not recruiting in the traditional sense, we do have to do quite a bit of recruiting work in order to get people to come in. So potential intelligence officers need to be both willing to come to work in the U.S. So they have to want to do it. They have to be qualified to do it. You can want to do something but be utterly unqualified. And you have to pass a very rigorous background investigation. So you have to be. Competent or capable of taking on that job. So that's a pretty specific person. So one, where can I find motivated and qualified volunteers and how do we reach them? And I know Ada and I Snyder has an initiative called The Locker Room to the Situation Room, and I'd like to hear more about that. It's pretty interesting title. And how do we communicate with with Gen Z? I know that's another initiative of yours. And then the second part of that question is how can the IOC increase the pool of qualified people that are willing to volunteer without compromising essential national security requirements that's imperative to their community? Yeah.

CYNTHIA SNYDER: Okay. Okay. So I'll kick this off and I will probably go down talk about the recruiting and some of the initiatives that we're looking at and then talk about our Gen Z efforts. So and this ties in to there's another initiative, if I can wave that in, I'd like to take advantage of that as well. Great. Okay. Super. One of the things is we all know that the competition for talent is extremely challenging. And so what we've done is we've basically shifted, you know, instead of following the traditional ways of recruitment, we started looking into untapped talent pools that are often not thought about. And so in doing so, we were thinking about, okay, for an ICE intelligence community, intelligence community professional, you know, what are the characteristics? So, you know, individuals that are capable of understanding the importance of working as a team, they understand perseverance, not afraid to make a decision, especially being able to make a decision under pressure. Individuals that are disciplined and they understand what it means to sacrifice. So, you know, just a few of the characteristics that we discussed. And in doing so, I know the first group that comes to mind is the military. But we also know there's another group that we've not really focused on, and these are college athletes. When you look at our college athletes, most of us know that a large percentage are not selected for a professional career. But when you look at their characteristics, I mean, they embody the same characteristics that we're looking for in intelligence officers. So the Situation Room to the locker room was an initiative that we launched last year. And so my team has visited, have been in touch with about 60 schools thus far. And so they've talked to athletic directors and counselors. And so and they're also planning to attend a national association for the Directors of College Athletes Conference in June. And again, when I talk about untapped talent pools, we have a tremendous pool of talent. But again, we we tend to think very traditional when we start recruiting. And so we're encouraging ourselves as well as others to think beyond the to it to the traditional perspective. Also, we have another program which is called the Intelligence Community Center for Academic Excellence. And so this is a congressionally mandated program we're in my office manages. And so what the program does, it provides grants to colleges and universities in their four year accredited colleges and universities to establish an intelligence studies program. And so a lead college, a university, would basically team with several other colleges within a reasonable proximity. And so we call them a consortium. And so once they receive the grants that grant, those grants are distributed to the other universities that are part of those consortiums. And so they stand up their intelligence studies program. And one thing that we have seen very positive in doing so is that, you know, we create a very close knit team of I.S. professionals, as well as faculty members that are invested in these programs. And they spend a considerable amount of time ensuring that the students very well educated on the

intelligence community and also that they develop the skills they need to be successful when hired because we will hire them. So that those are two initiatives that we're working again, when again, looking at untapped resources, when you look at some of the consortiums, some of the the priorities of this program is to ensure that we are tapping into untapped talent pools. We have minority serving institutions, historically black colleges. We have universities and colleges that are located in rural areas where students wouldn't otherwise be aware of the intelligence community or even consider a career in intelligence. And again, the concern about compromise and security, we're not concerned about that because we do believe that we have the talent. It's up to us to come up to be proactive and come up with innovative ways to make sure that we attract the best talent.

JOHN GANNON: Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I would say first, a couple of things. One thing is I we're not just talking about the intelligence community and what it needs. We're also talking about the society in which we are functioning. And a lot has changed in that society. So I think the intelligence community is now in competition with the private sector and the attitudes of young people who want to quickest way to get jobs that will pay more. And there are opportunities now in a full employment economy out there that make it, I think, necessary for it for us to focus more sharply on on what what is the value proposition of getting into the intelligence community. I've taught at Georgetown since 2004, and I'm telling you, there's a lot of very talented young people who continue to want to get into the intelligence community. And what they want to do is they want to get into the mainstream of decision making where they can interact with policymakers, with the Congress. The excitement of having an impact on U.S. foreign policy. So that's there. But you've got to show it more. But you also have to be aware that the competition is getting greater. I was I did oral exams last week for the School of Foreign Service. Extremely impressed with the young people coming up, but also recognizing that those young people also have options, including in the private sector, that that they will entertain before they make a final decision. So the job is a little harder for sure to get the best that do jobs that way that we want to be done on security. I want to say that that has been a I don't think the challenges in security go away. I think what we have we have because to some extent, you're creating a closed environment for people to come into. And while all the pressures for us on the information, intelligence, ideas for more outreach to get out to where we can get the answers to the questions we have and have people who can get out there beyond really what our intelligence collection systems can deliver. We've got to get out to people who know stuff, and that's in academia and private sector and so forth. So that and then but then you have the certain requirements. They have they a long period of time. You have to wait to get a color carriage done. I think we have to help security to innovate along with the rest of us and what we're doing so that we can get to the bottom line on the best way to deliver the the people we want in the least time and get the best ones because there are delays, there are hindrances in the security process still. And by the way, I do applaud I think they in the intelligence community, they shorten the time it takes to get your security clearance, but probably not enough. And there's got to be ways where the security establishment can feel that their default position of saying no is not good enough. When I when I was chairman of the NEC and there were people out there that I wanted to hire former diplomats, whatever, who do security told me, no, we have a we have a problem. My response was, and I don't want to overstate my success in this, by the way, but I said, you are telling me what the risk is. I want you I want to tell you what the cost is not to having the expertise and skills that this person would bring to our effort. And then can we share the risk. I'll be responsible for pushing security on this, and in some cases it worked. And where it did, it was it was successful. I lost a lot of those battles. But I do think there has to be a healthy tension with security so that we get security to stand up. More to the challenge. To innovate the way they work, the way they do business, because I think it is a it is a it impedes, I think, our ability to get the best people to do the work we need to do in an increasingly complicated world. Thank you.

AMY KARDELL: Yeah, always. I feel like the third backup singer. I'm going to build on this because I think one of the things that we see happening is the social evolution that's taking place, a society which is embracing more things like your diversity, diversity of cultural backgrounds, of inclusion of the things which are bringing more voices to the table. And I think the ICI really can benefit from that and to the ICC effort and others. I think that's the one of the things I think will

actually blossom. The problem is those things take 20 years to happen because it takes a generation to change their mindset, to bring in the right people, to allow for the things to happen, to create a dynamic workforce that isn't so structured that it limits people and holds people kind of in place. For too long, this generation that we're seeing come through doesn't want a 20 or 30 or 40 year career in the single same place, same desk, same boss, starting from a year 11 or nine up to years 15, maybe get into the CAC ranks at some point in their their career. I think they're smarter than my generation because they understand that their life is about the experiences that they have and the opportunities. And I think of the ICI shifted that mentality so that you're doing more duties in different places to get different kinds of experiences. One of those which been coming to my university, for example, or to Brookings or someplace else, to do some advanced thinking, some perspective, taking, you know, some stocktaking of their career and the place and and the other people in the community or other communities, they can help inform us. And then still being able to come back into a job is really important. I was talking about it before we walked in here, which is the military has education well ingrained within their structure of promotion. The civilians do not. So our civilian agencies say, Do you want to go to school? Someone goes, Yes. The supervisor grudgingly says yes to it and they go off to school for a year. Maybe two depends on what the program is. And then they come back and their bosses forgotten who they are. They don't have a position. They've gotten out of line. They can't get back into line. And until our structure figures out how to maintain and support a workforce that doesn't lose anything by taking additional opportunities that actually expand and make them stronger in their career and their workforce, I think we're going to continue to be limited. Now, the good news to that story is a social evolution takes place. Those of you who replace myself and John and Anita, I hear, are, well, we'll do better. You'll you'll figure it out better for us. And I think the the better we can start building that structure for you now, the more likely that in the future the recruitment won't be the problem. It be it will be resolved because retention won't be so bad. And we have to be able to not only clear them to get them in, but we have to hold them once they stay, because we've invested a lot in these people and we want to make sure that their careers full and rich and diverse. I know we're working on programs to do better exchanges out with the private sector, but even those efforts get sometimes stymied a little bit because who's going to pay for it? How does it do it? What happens? My workforce, when I do these things, all those things take place. But I think that's that's where we have to start shifting the way we think about what the work place environment really is and how long anybody has to stay in one place for anyone period of time. Thank you.

CYNTHIA SNYDER: Can I just follow up? I just want to touch on and really appreciate your comments on the security aspect and just to share with you all, because this is a priority within the intelligence community. And one of the initiatives which some of you may be aware of is that our our director of National intelligence invested resources to help automate our security processes, because security systems, because you have a number of disparate systems and so on. And so being able to integrate those systems will help us to tremendously decrease that time as well as when you look at the end end to end hiring. It's not just the security process, it's the human capital piece of that. So the goal is to get the entire hiring process from application to onboarding down to 180 days. And so within the last. Yea, this process has on the average has been reduced by 100 days since the program was implemented. And the goal is we should see even more significant increases by the end of 2024. And regarding our the Gen-X question, and I did want to come back to that one thing. If you don't remember anything else that I say about Gen X, do please remember that it's important that we get to know them and they get to know us. When you look at our Gen Xs, I mean Gen Z's, what you're going to find is that they are on track to be well educated than any other generation, yet they are racially, ethnically, I mean ethnically and diverse than any other generation. They also have their voice is very important. They want to be heard and they want to feel valued. They also have when it comes to looking at potential work environments, they look at diversity, they look at the culture of the organization. They don't want to feel that they're they have to compromise their values, their personal integrity to work in that organization. If they believe that if they're skeptical about an organization that they believe conflicts with their value, they will leave or they won't accept an offer there. They definitely have a purpose and they want to feel like that they're contributing to a greater need. So when you look at some of their characteristics and we think about the intelligence community, we believe that they are prime recruits for us. Because, you

know, when you look at some of the challenges that we're facing in working today with cyber threats, with climate change, with global pandemics, these are all causes that they're very interested in. And so there's such a variety of opportunities within the intelligence community that we believe it's very attractive to our agencies. So, again, get to know them and definitely make sure that they get to know you.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Thank you, ma'am. We start with Amy because she kind of yeah, she basically answered these questions already about retention. So to set it up is that we know that working in intelligence community, working as an intelligence officer can be very rewarding, but it also means long period periods of long hours working away from family and friends on deployments and assignments overseas, cooperating with the necessary security requirements and all of that while maintaining cutting edge tradecraft and subject area expertise, regardless of the intelligence discipline. So you talked about it a little bit, Amy, about higher education, the role of education in retaining folks. Do you have any other ideas about what is the need to do better to retain qualified, motivated people? And what incentives do you think have proven effective and maybe what innovations could be considered?

AMY KARDELL: So it's a big question, right? Because for an educator who doesn't like online education, which is me, right, because I'm an antique, I love my students in class. But I think that the one of the critical elements that we can offer because we are getting people who have more education than ever before coming into the ICI. I know when I came out of DHS, INA, we hired everybody with a master's degree already. They're coming to us with, you know, GEDs or basic high school educations or anything. They're coming with advanced degrees from really good universities. But what we have to do with the ICI is, I think, continue and in national security. And I think that security does it pretty well. So I'm not going to I can I just I'm very much I think actually they do a really pretty good job is make opportunities for people to do continuing education during their workday. And we're really good at giving you. Okay of 300 hours of crazy training on something that you never use or do ever again. I'm Constitution Day was my favorite one. And that's just I mean, this is like, okay, I went through it. It was it was an hour of my life that I did every year, and I would have rather do something else. I would have rather say, hey, we desperately need people who speak foreign languages. Let's truly, truly incentivize time during your workday to be able to got a set goal of 35% of our of our workforce speaking two or more languages. Let's set a goal for it instead of like hoping people might come with us skills or might want to give up their French or whatever, let's actually start an active and aggressive goal to make sure that our workforce is continuing to learn and be and be educated to find out what the cutting edge things are. You know, we were I was at a conference us two weeks ago, and they were talking about the fact that one of the programs that I use for methodology, they're moving it into R and, you know, the panic that overcame me because I don't do coding in R yet. Yet, you know, I have to go got the training to do it on and find the time to get it done so that I can be at the forefront of the tools and techniques that are out there. But part of that is also a mindset, right? It's not just a skill, it's actually understanding how those things work and how they can be applied and where they can be applied. And that leads you into the next question and the next. I'm always really excited. We have at NIU about 800 or a little over 800 students, 600 of them fall under the college and 75% of those are evening students. They come at night by on their own time to take classes or on the weekends. And those are the most dedicated students I've ever seen. And if I could get the rest of the ICI and national security for workforce to have the same dedication that that 75% of my students have, which is to embed education as part of their continuous improvement process for themselves, I think then we would be winning because right now we've been talking to people and it's they they need to understand economics better. They need to understand culture better. They understand languages. These are still the basic things that we always need and we need to keep fresh on and keep people thinking. And so I think continuing education is critical and we maybe have to stop focusing as much on degrees as maybe certificates or certifications or just plain embedding. You know, one day a week, 20% of your workforce time is for education, and one day a week you go to school all the time and we just make it part of our culture that may be too radical. So don't tell the dad I said it. But, you know, that's an update. But I mean it. But I really think that that's what that's

when it changes is when you embed continuous improvement and continuous learning into your process. That's when you win.

JOHN GANNON: Can I add to that? I agree with particularly the points on continuing education, but I cite my own case. When I came into the intelligence community, I was hired in part because I had direct experience in the Caribbean at a time when the government was worried about Cuban expansionism, believe it or not. And and the Soviet Union was still active also. But after three years, I had doing this job, which was much appreciated by my bosses. I asked if I could go to the Office of Economic Analysis, and I knew I would learn more and see the problems from a different angle. They granted me that opportunity. Halfway into that, they asked me to go up and take a position in the President's daily brief staff, which I did, and my career went along that way where I wanted. So it wasn't just it was continuing the education, but it was in terms of career development. I knew when I when when the dividends were declining in terms of my of my excitement of the job, and I needed to get something else. And so my bosses, I always had a relation where I could get the next challenge that I wanted. So I want to emphasize that in my experience, not only having been an analyst, but having managed analysts for most of my adult life, leadership of the people for whom people are working is critical that leaders have to pay attention to the people working for them. They can cite when an individual is no longer motivated needs another challenge. When an individual is has grievances that need to be addressed. So and when you have recognized, you can also recognize real talent that needs to be developed. So I think and there's also the internal truth that people at lower levels are always looking at people, and this is true in the military to the people more senior level saying, is that what I want to be when I grow up or. They want to be the kind of leader that people will say, what would he do or she do in the crisis? The crisis that we're facing now. So that that mentoring, that role model is very important, but also the sense of responsibility that is put on leaders to take care of their people and to help to manage their careers and to keep their people challenged. And having having their concerns addressed is is a problem that I think all bureaucracies run into. And there are managers, including in the military, that don't do that well. And I think as a result, that does contribute to attrition. So leadership matters. Thank you, ma'am.

CYNTHIA SNYDER: Yes. Going back to education and educating and investing in education. When it comes to our workforce is a priority. To give you an example. The organization that I left to assume the job that I'm in today, one of the requirements as part of my evaluation and part of the all of the workforce evaluation was to complete 40 hours of professional or technical training each year. And also, we have and I see community, we have competitive what we call them competitive call programs where individuals apply each year to go off to school either full time over at NIU or another university that they've been accepted in to continue their education in our science and technology areas. They're sending folks out for PhDs. So education, again, with everything that's going on in the world, it's imperative that we ensure that our leaders that are managing the workforce that's coming in, that they have the same level of education because you cannot manage and lead in an environment with with the talent that we're getting or will soon get if we can't communicate with them and understand the technologies that they're familiar with. So that's very important for us in why we continue to invest in our mid-level managers, be it reskilling or upskilling, because they need to maintain the proficiency in their tradecraft. And also these individuals are performing analysis every day that's going to the White House and their decisions being made based on this analysis. So education, again, is very important. And as far as career broadening opportunities, we also have what we call joint duty rotations, which is what I'm on, which provides an opportunity for the workforce to go to other agencies for a total could be a total of three years, starting off with a year, then an option for second year and then opting for a third year to help. As we call, we build intelligence officers where everyone is familiar becomes more familiar with how the intelligence community operates. So when you go back to your agency, then you're taking back much more than you left with and you can become a more effective leader and intelligence officer. There's another program that we're going to be piloting this year, and it's called the Private Public Talent Exchange. And that's where we're developing agreements with industry to allow some of our folks to go out into industry and vice versa. And some of the areas that we're focused on is AML, data science, human capital, finance and economics. And I think those are the

main ones that we're focused on in space, of course, space. And so this provides an opportunity for our workforce to understand how industry works. There are some challenging problems that they're working that we're working. And so this provides that exposure as well as we are looking to reciprocate and bring industry in as well. So there are a lot of initiatives underway and as I stated earlier, it takes time. But the main thing that's important is that we're moving in the right direction. And because I don't think time is our friend, I think things with change are moving much faster than it has in the past, that we will see the maturation of these initiatives much faster than we would have would otherwise just because how fast things are changing.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Thank you, ma'am. We've got just limited time for some questions from the audience. So here's the rules of engagement. Raise a hand. And one of our research assistants in the back will bring you a microphone. So wait until you get the microphone so that everybody online. In here. Please identify yourself and affiliation. Please ask a question twice giving a speech and please be respectful to others and our time constraints. I can say I used to teach undergraduates in California so I know how to cut people off. So any questions? Sir?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm Peter Humphrey, an intelligence analyst and a former diplomat. I think you really nailed what I perceive to be a huge problem, which is the foreign language problem. Our country just is not investing in that. If I need to stand up a team of 20 Somali speakers tomorrow morning, there's just no way to do that without having Somali immigrants whose cousins might be in the government. I need to see those obscure languages moved to people whose relatives aren't connected to that country, and I see no investments whatsoever in that type of approach. That's true for eight Nigerian languages and on and on and on.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Thank you. It's not really a question.

CYNTHIA SNYDER: Can I comment on that? Okay. Just. You're absolutely right. And actually, we've had a couple of reports that's identified that we do have challenges in our foreign language efforts. And so I think it was a couple of weeks ago I participated on a board where we discussed, you know, how do we fill that gap? Right now, the the we have a foreign language executive group that's basically identified new requirements to basically increase the proficiency level to level three for our foreign language professionals. And also, you know, how do we fill that void? And right now, one of the one of several initiatives that's being looked at is starting with our K through 12, because, as you said, we have a lot of young people in high school that are bilingual. Their family members are some here, some are abroad. So to try to attract them into this area and also with our centers of academic excellence, that's another area that we've focused on. And we've discussed establishing a program strictly for foreign language to help increase that throughput, as well as enhance our language skills. So definitely recognize it's an area we are working that with some of the initiatives and recommendations that's come out of some recent reports. But I think the the the the very positive thing about this that you mentioned about those that have family members abroad, when we do security clearances, we do them on the individual. And so if the individual has done a lot of traveling, it's okay. So traveling abroad doesn't disqualify or having a family member abroad doesn't disqualify someone for from getting a security clearance. But what we're also doing is educating as we're continuing to expand the aperture to fill this void, we're educating the potential students are applicants on. These are the type of things we look for when it comes to a security investigation. So just so they're educated on that as well. And I think that's going to help us tremendously.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Thank you, ma'am. Time for just one more there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good morning, Nancy Springer. And I'm currently unaffiliated and question I have is about untapped talent pools specifically listening for a pool that you didn't mention as military retirees. I don't know. I don't know if that's because you're looking for people with a longer work horizon or whatever.

CYNTHIA SNYDER: Actually we do hire a number of military retirees. The agency that I left, probably close to 40% of the workforce are retired military. So definitely not untapped. And we're continuing to do that. That's never been an issue. And because especially with some veteran preferences and so forth, that's that's not an issue. So that's that's a talent pool that we are leveraging.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But not want to specifically mention. Was there a reason why I didn't specifically mention it this morning? Because I don't view it as being untapped. Okay. Okay. Thank you.

SCOTT ENGLUND: Well, that's all the time we have. Thank you to the panel for coming and participating here. I think we've all learned quite a lot. So if you'll join me in thanking them. Thank you.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: Well, welcome back, everyone. My name is Marcos Melendez. I'm the Marine Corps fellow here at Brookings. Thank you for joining us for our next panel, focusing on recruiting the people we need as we go forward into the 21st century. I'm joined today by our three panelists who bring a broad and deep range of expertise to our discussion. And I'll work kind of this way down the line here. Dr. Beth Asch. She's a senior economist at the RAND Corporation and professor of policy analysis at the Party Rand Graduate School. She's done extensive work on military recruiting and compensation and a host of other military and federal government personnel issues. Katherine Kuzminski is a senior fellow and the director of Military and Veterans and Society Program at the Center for for a New American Security who specializes in military recruitment, retention and talent management policy veteran and military family issues and civil military relations. Thomas Spoehr is a lieutenant general in the United States Army, retired. He is the director of the Center for National Defense at the Heritage Foundation. He's an expert on defense policy and strategy. He served more than 36 years on active duty in such storied units as the 82nd Airborne and first Armored Division. As well as time in the Pentagon, which is apt to happen working on Army modernization and reform strategies. So thank you all for joining us. And I thought I'd jump right in, which is asking, too, for each of you to open on your individual perspectives on some of the challenges that we seem to be facing with recruiting. I mean, it's been in the news a lot. Last fiscal year, the Army fell short by about 15,000 soldiers. And my service, although we made our goal, we kind of had to dip into that delayed entry program, which puts us on the back foot for this year. And then just recently we were talking about it a bit back in the green room, just the the Army's spokesperson and having to separate that relationship just when they seem to have a good thing rolling. So there's been a lot of attention paid to the struggles. But are they without precedent? Are we are we truly in a new era? And what are some of the drivers to to these struggles that we seem to be having? So I just like to open with that and get y'all's perspective on that. So please, Beth, and I have you go.

BETH ASCH: Okay. Thank you. And first, thank you for inviting me here today. It's really a privilege to be on the same stage as my colleagues here. So, you know, there's been decades of research on military recruiting going back to even before the beginning of the all volunteer force in 1973. And we have a lot of understanding of the factors that drive recruiting. But that said, so far, there's not been a real rigorous analysis of what's going on with recruiting. And so we really can't I mean, there's a lot of hypotheses out there, but with no analysis to sort of break down what are the most important factors, but what are some of those factors? Well, I mean, the kinds of things you've heard in the news. Low eligibility, propensity to serve recruiting resources, the state of the civilian economy, college enrollment, you know, and so on and so forth. So we know that, you know, of course, eligibility, about less than a quarter of young people are eligible to enlist. That figure has gone down somewhat. But it's important to recognize that eligibility has been low for for decades. So while it's certainly concerning, it can't be the reason. While recruiting has gone down in the last year or last few years. Similarly with propensity to serve, as some of you know, the Department defense surveys young people quarterly and asked them how likely are you going to join the military? And they say definitely, and probably you're positively propensity. That figures at about 10% of young people say they're positively repressed. It's ridiculously low, but it's been

ridiculously low for decades. So, again, that can't quite explain the new situation. The other reason is that actually most recruit, when we merge the survey data with actual enlistment records, most young people actually enlist from the negative group. Most enlistees come from negative, not the positive. So again, that can explain things. We know the civilian economy is very strong and strong. Heart research consistently shows a strong economy hurts recruiting, but it's also important to recognize there's a lot of things change in the civilian economy that aren't fully understood from a recruiting perspective, such as the decline in the labor force participation of young men, what young men and women, but more. It's been more among young men than women. That's why I mention it. And, you know, what are these individuals doing? The evidence shows that more young men are living. With their parents that older ages, they're engaging in more hours of leisure. You know, video, you know, the stereotype of, you know, in the basement if you're. I mean, there's actually evidence to support that. The question is, is what does that mean for recruiting? There's factors we don't fully understand. I mean, people have heard about declining trust in the military. There have been a lot of hypotheses out there about what's driving that, the withdrawal from Iraq. You know, PTSD, sexual assault, TBI, the DCI initiatives. You know, we can go on suicide food insecurity. But so far, there's not been rigorous analysis of the effects of those factors on recruiting, controlling for other things that are going on, such as the economy. And so where we are right now is we there's things we know and there's a lot we don't know.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: Thank you, Kate.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: Yeah. So I think we also can't underestimate just the impact of access to knowing someone who serves in the military. And COVID certainly affected that as well as we saw recruiters not on college campuses, not in high schools. And we see a delay in decisions of adulthood among American youth as well. So at the same time that the services are facing a recruiting crisis. Somewhere between a million and a million and a half high school seniors who said that they planned to attend college delayed that decision. And so in part it is episodic and related to COVID. But there's also some some more broad trends in perceptions of military service, not just among youth, but among their parents as well. And as we see the population of veterans aging, particularly those who were in the conscripted force, who served Vietnam and prior, and we see things like base closures in areas that may not have any other relationship between the military and the local civilian population there. There are implications for youth not seeing themselves as someone who could serve in the military. There's also, in some ways a perception among American parents that a successful rearing of your child means that they go directly from high school to college, and there's a false choice being proposed of military or college as opposed to military and college or military and then the military paying for you to go to college. So those are some of the aspects, I think, to the services have really wrestled with how to message with with the exception of the Marine Corps, that the Marine Corps has been pretty consistent with their messaging for the last 70 or so years. And I think one of the challenges over the last 20 years was that the services were really trying to touch on how military service can be like any other job, you know, with good benefits. And that's true. But I think that, you know, unfortunately, with with the way that the the be all you can be campaign is playing out that that was an excellent way to say here's how military service is unique from being a civilian and here's how you can stand out and I really hope that they're able to bring that campaign back in in in a new form.

THOMAS SPOEHR: Yeah. So thank you. And I'm honored to be on this panel with a couple of colleagues, Beth and Kate, who we have worked together in the past on this issue. I'm going to go a different direction, and that is I'm going to say the number one reason we're struggling with recruiting right now is complacency. Complacency because the military assumed that people would want to continue buying VHS tapes, compact discs and riding peloton bikes at home. And just like all these other market forces overtook and made those items obsolete. Military recruiting and service became obsolete right underneath the military's feet, and they weren't paying attention. And so they were working on the dials. And they do a wonderful job adjusting the dials. What's the bonus level? What is the how many recruiters do we deploy? Where should these recruiters be deployed? But we weren't they weren't looking at the big picture. And while they were doing that, the world was changing underneath their feet. Generation Z was entering the recruiting window

and they didn't know how to talk to Generation Z. They didn't realize that companies like Starbucks and McDonald's were offering tuition benefits, which were hollowing out the benefit of the Montgomery GI Bill right underneath their feet. So they recruiters would come in to schools and say, I'm going to pay for college. Yeah, I got that. You know, there's plenty of people paying for schools. What else you got? And they were kind of caught flat footed. And as Beth mentioned, we really lacked what we call in the army, at least the intelligence preparation of the battlefield. We didn't know what was going on. Our senses were all turned. Often we thought we were still experiencing the same situation we always had, where in fact it had radically changed. And so now they're scrambling to catch up. And I will say they are you know, they're all it has finally caught their attention. The army and the service I tracked the most closely is very much in tune with this problem. Others are are catching up as well. But they're late to the picture. They're late to the game and they're and they're now just trying to figure out what tools are going to get people into the recruiter's offices if in fact, that's the right way to go, even to get individuals in the recruiters office. So it's a difficult situation. I have watched all the services kind of take this for granted. You know, and again, I'm I love the Army, but I'll pick on the army. The army routinely puts people in charge of its recruiting enterprise who have never recruited or marketed a thing before in their lives. They would they would take a two star general and put them in charge of Army Recruiting Command, and they would be a very successful brigadier general elsewhere in the Army. And they would say, Well, surely this successful one star general can figure out how to recruit. I mean, how hard can this be? Right? And they would do the same thing with their recruiting brigade commanders. They were very successful combat arms or maneuver battalion commanders, and they would move them into recruiting brigade command. Again, not having recruited a day in their lives or any other corporation that treated such a key function, such as personnel and hiring the same way that the army and I'm I'm guessing the other services did the same thing as well. They would have no reason to expect that they would achieve success. And that's what's happening today. You know, I double down on all the other factors that my colleagues mentioned here. The one that we haven't talked about is demographic. The 18 to 24 year old demographic is about 30 million, and it's going to be 30 million as far out as the census people can see. And frankly, that's not all that bad compared to other Western societies. I mean, South Korea, Taiwan, Lithuania, the Baltic states, Scandinavia, they're all experiencing population declines. So if it wasn't for immigration, the United States would be going into decline as well. And so at least we're not confronting a declining youth population, but we are dealing with a demographic that is not increasing. And I think I'll stop there.

BETH ASCH: Can I just riff on one thing that General said, which is that you mentioned you talk about complicit complacency at the sort of aggregate level of not really tracking the trends that are going on in the competitive the market in which they're competing. And you said, but they're working on the dials of bonuses. So as somebody who tracks the working of the dials, you know, that's where I live. There's a lot of complacency there as well. I mean, the Army in particular allows a lot of things to lap, including just the management of the way recruit, the way recruiting fit in the organization. It was clear it wasn't working, but nothing was done about it. The way bonuses have been set, the way recruiters are managed, it's just the whole thing kind of was atrophying. So I would say even at the dialing level, it was also complacent.

THOMAS SPOEHR: Well beyond the the some of the risks were just pure numbers. We had the the chief of staff of the Army here last week and he talked about falling short. There's the initial falling short for that year. But how that propagates through the system three to 4 to 5 years down the line, what are some of the risks that if that continues, if services, particularly the larger services, if they continue to have these struggles with the composition of the force as we go towards the future, what are some of the risks involved there? And I'll just I'll just kind of throw that out there and see if anyone wants to jump out. I'll start. So this recruiting shortage that we've had now in the Army, the other services blossoming won't go away. So for example, the people that we've failed to recruit in 2022 is going to result in a gap in the rank structure in the Army for the next 25 years. We will have not enough staff sergeants and then we will have not enough staff to start and finish classes. And similarly, you know, and that will go all the way through until presumably we get through this recruiting thing. And that little gap will and we'll have to rapidly promote others who

may not be completely qualified to fill this gap because the military needs a set number of people at each rank to fill those those critical positions, platoon sergeants, sergeants, major, all those kinds of things. And so this gap now is not going to be just like a little temporary thing and it goes away. It's going to whenever we have a bad officer recruiting here, we have we feel this for 20 years because we don't have enough captains and then enough majors and all those kinds of things. And it's so it's going to be something we'll have to deal with for a while. The other thing I will mention, and this is probably obvious, is that this failure to recruit is really hurting American youth because they are missing. On on a key leadership and developmental opportunity that they don't even know they're missing out on. And so, as we all know, veterans are better citizens. They vote at higher percentages than non-veterans. They they participate in their communities, they volunteer, they lead in their communities. And so the fact that we're the military's failing to recruit enough people is, again, going to have a lasting effect, I think, in American society.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: Yeah, I would say, too, I worry about morale, burnout and the retention effects. And I know the next panel, we'll talk about that as well. But I think the services really need to do a holistic review of what the requirements are, because at the end of the day, that's what we're meeting. We're meeting military requirements. And it is a little concerning to see that, you know, the Army last year cut their their own budgeted and strength numbers out of the recruiting challenges, not because there were fewer requirements. And so it's really important for the services to actually be meeting those levels because otherwise we're asking people to do more with less. And that can work for a period of time because we are recruiting quality individuals who have a propensity to serve on teams. But it only goes so far with respect to the number of hours in the day and the military requirements that we're trying to meet.

BETH ASCH: I would add, too, I mean, I totally agree with both points. I would just add that I think in addition to this bathtub effect, you know, that we saw like the Air Force did this back in the you know, in the nineties and we saw this bathtub over then. You know, we've seen that bathtub go through of this too small of a cohort. So I totally, you know, see what you were talking about. The what I would add is that the the ramifications of the things they're doing to try to fix it. So, for example, the Navy has decided to significantly increase the among the lowest category affect, you know, low scorers, very low scoring, not just low, very low scores on the aptitude test. There's a lot of research that shows there's that people who score better on those tests perform better on hands on military tasks. And so by doing that, there's just a capability implication. You know, the Army's doing this sort of boot camp to try to get people to raise their scores. You know, I worry about that. I mean, it reminds me of when my kids, you know, we did Caplin so they could raise three of Katie by 100 points, you know, So, you know, my kids were 100 points smarter. They just did better on the tests. And I worry that what's happened is the Army is getting these kids to score better. They qualify, but they're not performing at the level they need to in order to do those military tests. So I think there's issues related to cutting force structure, as you're saying, the bathtub effect of just not having the right people in the right slots and also military performance.

THOMAS SPOEHR: Well, thank you, Beth. If I could just pull on that thread for for everyone. And I'm not trying to put any service on the spot, but as you look at the services, is there anything else that as slowly the battle starts coming around on this recruiting challenge, that initiatives that are that are good, that are that are, that are bad may may have some unintended consequences that you see out there from your perspectives?

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: I think looking at the Marine Corps right now.

THOMAS SPOEHR: I swear this isn't just about yeah, we're not we didn't conspire about the Marine Corps.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: So so one of the things that I think is unique about the Marine Corps besides its size, and I think a lot of times that the other services are quick to say like, oh, the Marine Corps can meet their recruiting requirement because it's so low. Not the Marine Corps actually makes deliberately different decisions. And for for most of its history, they've had roughly

85%. One term enlistment rates, a high level of churn. They're recruiting a lot, but they didn't have a retention model. Well, the Marine Corps is actually taking a look at what their new operational concept is, the IBO, and they have thoughtfully considered, okay, we need more people at mid-grade on the enlisted side, and we don't have a structure for that. And so they're actually taking a step back and using that as an opportunity to rethink their personnel, both their recruitment and their retention model. Now, it's too early to say what the impact of that is, but I do think that the way that General Berger has put his attention behind that and the way in which they're thoughtfully thinking through how they're going to recruit and retain the individuals who have the skills and experiences required of the operational concept. That's the way to go about it. And I'd like to see the other services really think about what is our operational demand and then how do we get not just the numbers but the types of peoples with the knowledge, skills, experiences, attributes that we actually need for those positions so that you don't get the trough.

THOMAS SPOEHR: Yeah, I'm going to I want to talk for a moment about the Army's future soldier leader, our future prep course. And Beth, you talked about it, and I don't know the exact answer to this. I do know that in the course itself, they are having tremendous success. And so people come in, they either have not scored sufficiently on the on the test or they are overweight and they are having about a 96% success rate in getting people to a higher level in the test or losing the necessary weight so they can begin training and their preliminary results in basic training and advanced individual training or offset once one station, you're training a very positive. And so these people, they have enough results now of people that have gone through the course that they are doing very well in the next phase of the training. But that does not equate to their first operational unit. So we don't have that data yet. And the Army's going to look at that. They are going to look at how these new soldiers do over the long term, the ones that went through the course versus those that did not. And, you know, I'm sure there's probably a Brookings researcher that could maybe help shed light on this question. That is, when you take one of these prep tests, you know, was it test taking that was holding you back and you have innate intelligence or were you just not that smart? I don't know what the answer is. I know it's a mix. I know not everybody takes tests well, and a little bit of test preparation can squeeze out points. And I'm all for that. That seems fair to me. You know, if you, you know, properly how to take tests. So I like the and the army is going to scale that program up. They're going to expand it to Fort Benning and some other place I can't remember right now. So they're going to have three sites that are going to be doing this because they're getting a lot of success of it from it. And they may even scale it nationwide so that a local recruiting station or a recruiting battalion might offer this type of preparation on the site so that the person doesn't have to come to one of these major bases and stuff like that. The other thing I will mention, and this is the new Army recruiting commander, General Davis, is paying a lot of attention to recruiters. And are they happy to assign recruiters back to places where they came from? So if you're from Chicago like I am, put me back in the Chicago area so you can talk about, you know, the bears and all that kind of stuff to potential recruits, whereas the Army paid little attention to that in the past. We would, you know, send you to Miami or something like that. And you grew up in Chicago. It's like a fish out of water. So they're looking at that and they're trying to make sure recruiters are happy. You know, as the old saying in the Army, if. Right, it's probably Texas. Now, I won't say it like that, but if your family's not happy, the recruiter is not happy. And that's and so General Davis is paying a lot of attention to making sure the recruiters are happy and that their family needs are taken care of and they have enough money to live in the local economy far away from any sort of military base.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: So as we've talked about some of the initiatives that are currently out there, how do you all see some of the things that need to be done to to address the problem? What are what are just broadly some things that the services could do differently or perhaps completely tearing it down? We talked a little bit about it in the green room about completely tearing things down, but that's probably not going to work because you're you're trying to fly the plane while you're trying to to make repairs on it. You know, you've got to put people in. You've got to keep the machine rolling forward. So how do you all see the future and some of the things that that have to change are or the services need to do?

BETH ASCH: I'll start the I think they need, you know, the short term and a long term strategy in the short term need to focus on the things they know that work and get them better. So recruiters, recruiters, we know are very effective. It's very important to have effective recruiter management. The as the general said, they are reworking on recruiter management. But I think that some of their initiatives, it's like trying to do a lot. They need to come up with ways of selecting, training, deploying and motivating those recruiters. They're working on some of those elements, but I think they need a more cohesive plan. We know bonuses work, although in the long run they're very expensive. They need to be targeted correctly, so the army needs to work on that. The we know advertising is very effective, very cost effective. But in a fractionated social media context, the army, along with the other services, all the services are sort of struggling how to be effective in a politicized social media fractionated environment. They need to figure that out. Eligibility criteria need to be revisited. And I think I just the eligibility criteria they need to be revalidated. Are these the right criteria? Are they are we essentially telling people they can't enlist based on, you know, old models? And we need to understand better why trust in the military has to. And some of those factors. And we need to understand what's going on in the civilian economy with the labor force. You know, we yes, we have a very low unemployment rate, but we also have this declining over time labor force participation rate where people are just not in the labor force. And what opportunities does that provide for recruiting? So, for example, we know one of the reasons is that more people, you know, gig work, part time work, temporary work. Well, you know, that might be an opportunity for recruiting for the reserves. So it needs that need to get a handle on what's going on. And some of these factors in the long run that we don't understand right now.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: I think, to rethinking the waiver process. And I know there's some work going on in the building right now, but, you know, there are a number of things that can invalidate you for military service. But there are a number of conditions. I mean, I cites one of them where the services issue waivers the majority of the time across all of the services. And so actually rethinking, you know, what you know, what needs to be a waiver and what is a you know, needs to have a paper trail, but doesn't necessarily need to slow down the pace of access that you have. I think to again, to my point earlier, you know, the service is highlighting how military service is unique and how that helps individuals to meet their own personal goals. And really taking a look at the research on Gen Z, who are between the ages of ten and 27, depending on who you look at right now, which is our recruiting population, I think a lot of it is based on assumptions about millennials who are now 40 in their forties and in middle management positions. Right. And so thinking about what are the things that are motivating. And Tom and I had a piece for CSI s Bad Ideas earlier this year thinking about what are those things that stand out to Gen Z? One of the things that we see in the data are that they want to have multiple experiences over their career path and will stay loyal to an employer if they're able to have evolving responsibilities and opportunities. That sounds a lot like military service to me, so that's something that I think the services can really capitalize on. And also remembering that this population has been advertised and marketed to their entire lives and they have been on screens and so they can smell that. Right. And so actually building those personal relationships. And again, that gets back to the importance of having recruiters are having a touchstone in their community where they have a personal relationship and not just what they're seeing in advertising.

THOMAS SPOEHR: Yeah, I'll mention three things. And so you asked what can the services to better I, I would expand that question to say what can the military do better and what can the nation do better? Because you are right up to this point. It has just been the services pedaling as fast they can with their little flippers underneath the water. And you hear nothing about the national military recruiting crisis from anybody in the White House or in the Pentagon leadership writ large. And so it's the service secretaries now by Title ten, they have the responsibility to train and equip and recruit people. I get that. But but this needs a bigger effort than what's being applied so far. And therefore and thus I see no effort that anybody gets it, that the military is going down for the third time. Nobody's throwing them a life ring that I can see. And so each of them are trying to, within their little spheres of influence, trying to optimize all the things that they can. And I think at least as a minimum, national leaders need to ask young people to serve their country. When was the last time you heard somebody say, hey, you know, you should serve your country or even tic

tac influence or whatever that is. And we need them asking young people to serve. But you don't hear that call. You know, it's it's up to individuals to kind of figure this out for themselves. So I think we need more of a national effort. We have a national strategy for dozens of things. We have no national strategy to combat this problem. And I think there's something to be done for that. I think there are departments like the Department of Education and others that actually could weigh in on this problem and help. But thus far, they seem completely uninvolved. The other thing I will say, or second thing I will say is that the services are working hard, but again, they're working individually. And so I asked a very senior Marine Corps leader, so how you know, how how is the sharing between you and the Army? And his response was, well, we get along great, you know, and if if we have somebody that doesn't quite meet the meet the Marine Corps, you know, thing, my our recruiting station can walk them down the hall and introduce them to an Army recruiter as like, well, walk them down the hall. You know, that doesn't seem all that sophisticated. What about some kind of data sharing agreement where you could actually send a prospect to somewhere and that does not exist? You know, it's all personal relationships, so everybody get along well. But there's no functional relationship between all these various recruiting enterprises, including, again, I'm I love the army, but there's not even a phone. And relationship really between the National Guard and the active in the Army. It's you know, it's separate organizations there. And then the final thing I'll mention, and Beth picked up on this, the drop in national confidence in the military's institution. And this is, you know, across the board, it's Pew reporting on this. It's Gallup polls, it's reporting on this, the Ronald Reagan report on this five or ten point drops in confidence in the in the American military by the public. And no one seems to be concerned or working on that issue either. And so to the degree that confidence in the military drops among the American public, so too will go recruiting.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: And so, Tom, you talked a little bit about those, the latest drops in confidence. And as we've gone through this year, you know, the 50th year of the all volunteer force, there's been kind of a circuit on these these kind of events. And so I'm curious for that. For the three of you, have you learned anything new this year? Is anything come to light or have you found anything intriguing as we've kind of deep dove this topic because of the 50th year anniversary?

THOMAS SPOEHR: Well, I'll just start it and say that your average American. I continue to, you know, I travel around and I continue to talk about recruiting. And most Americans are completely unaware that the military is facing any difficulties in recruiting. And I'm like, you know, here in Washington, D.C., like you say, we're having event after event. And and Kate and I are writing papers as quickly as we can. And but it has not penetrated to the American public. And so we don't need to recruit from Washington, D.C. We need to recruit from America. So this message has to get out and it currently isn't.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: Yeah, I think to what what gets lost in the decline of American opinions about the military is this overall lack of confidence in institutions writ large. We see that with every branch of government. We see that, you know, and I think in part it's because questions are being raised about institutions. And I think this is a modern kind of take on Robert Putnam's Bowling Alone. Right? We're seeing people really retracting from activities or going to anything organized. Right. And so there's there's a real societal challenge that I'm afraid is here for a longer term than just this recruiting challenge, I think, to thinking about, you know, not just being retrospective about what the last 50 years of the all volunteer force will look like. But also, what does it look like to get to the all volunteer force at 100? Like how do we make sure that the institution doesn't break? And also thinking about there are you know, we did move from a drafted, conscripted force to an all volunteer force, but there are still mechanisms in place for what if we did need a draft? And that's something that we haven't really tested in the history of the all volunteer force, but that we really have to think about, you know, essentially who serves when, when the need and the demand is actually there.

BETH ASCH: I don't have much to add other than I guess I've been, you know, just listening. I've been a little bit heartened by just the amount of effort that's going into it, notwithstanding Tom's

excellent point that the rest of America doesn't know it's this is going on. But I do, I, I, I would like to see me. This wasn't your question, but I say just more out of the box thinking about some of this. And there seems to be a little bit of that. And what I mean by that is, you know, thinking about, you know, this is something that based on what Tom just said, which is thinking about the marketing, it's not just, you know, the ad along, you know, the billboard along the road, but mobilizing veterans, retirees and even active duty, you know, to tell their story and create a forum for them to do that in an organized way, you know, making use of movies, you know, Netflix streaming services, you know, celebrity spokespersons, although we had a bit of a there's been a problem with that. But but the broader point is that the military really hasn't had that. And it just, you know, it works well in the private sector. So I do think there has there are efforts going on. I would like to see more out of the box type of efforts going on that haven't been considered before, including mobilizing the veterans population.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: Okay. Thank you. Thank you all. So I'm going to I'm going to go ahead and open it up for questions here in the room. And I think I've got some online questions that I'm going to refer to real quick. Just I know you all were here when Scott ran the program, but I will I will remind everyone again, please wait for the microphone to come around and just announce who you are and we'll get into it. So I think who's got our microphones, Kourtney and Sophia back there, both have a microphone, so we'll go ahead and open for questions. Sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good morning. I'm Mike Ingram, an Air Force fellow here in the in the district. Can you speak to the state of play as far as permeability between Title ten and title 32 status where people offers and more flexibility to go from active duty, interstate, Guard and Reserve programs or even sabbaticals for, you know, a couple of years during their military service. They're not just locked into one career path.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: Yeah. One of the the there's a couple of aspects that needed to be reformed a long way to make permeability more easy. Part of it was systems right It was pay systems. It's the health care system. It's all that. And the services have really spent a lot of time kind of put making patchwork solutions between those systems. The retirement points tends to be the big sticking point. How do we actually do the math on this? And I think this is actually an area where machine learning and AI would be really useful. You could actually have someone's entire portfolio and their entire career path and the computers can can kind of fish out what what point structure there is. And then that's at least the beginning point for a conversation with a human being about how to help make that work. I think, you know, we look at things like ADR and Iim-a days, and so we do have people who have been able to build careers flexibly through that, but they're the exception, not the rule. And I think that there is a lot more to be done on the title side. I think there are some legislative fixes that probably need to take place that will make it easier. But it's it's a much thornier issue than I think we even think it is because of all the systems behind the scenes to manage that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sir. Thank you, Constantine Torok. And I'm a reporter with Military.com. So from my perspective reporting on this issue, one of the things that has come up has been challenges both from recruiters and from recruits on systems like Genesis, which has the, you know, medical screening program that seems to on from both perspectives cause troubles. You know, nobody's got a perfect medical history anymore. You know, as soon as you break a leg, it requires miles of paperwork, that sort of thing. So my question to all of you is, from your perspective, studying this issue, you know, does that does that bear out on the academic side as well, these sort of systems gumming up the works? And then one of the things that I think came up was this idea of tweaking requirements, you know, And does that does that fit into kind of that theme that you discussed?

THOMAS SPOEHR: So I I'll start that. So may just it may just Genesis was the new program they brought online in 2022 to provide a lot of transparency into a potential volunteer's medical history, mostly and well-intentioned. I mean, who wouldn't want to know about a volunteer's medical history? Unfortunately, it came at the worst possible time. You know, there's this this old movie that

was probably most of you missed the airplane where the pilot says, I picked the wrong time to quit smoking. Well, the military picked the wrong time to bring on MHC Genesis because all of a sudden, all these things, which recruits volunteers, had not disclosed all of a sudden popped to the surface, requiring a lot more bureaucratic processing, waiver grants and things like that. And you were hearing stories of waivers taking months after months. 320 days was the number that sticks in my mind about to getting through the MHC genesis system. And so, you know, at the same, before we run on MHC Genesis, we should have brought on the the the close look at our standards because we we were hoisted on our own on top of our own standards by MHC genesis at the worst possible time. You know, I have heard like the Army for example, is saying, no, we are going to get on top of this. We are going to accelerate the waiver process and all those kinds of things. But again, late to need. And so that's MHC Genesis. I think, you know, it's it's was necessary. We needed it. It just came very poorly. I'll just mention in you didn't ask this question, but I will tell you that my sense is that many of the recruiting systems we use are not state of the art type A, customer relations software kinds of things. You know, that. So we we rely in some cases like recruiters being pushed Excel spreadsheets of potential leads and things like that. And they're supposed to check them off or things like that. And no other company again, would hope to succeed using some of the software that we we give our recruiters.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: Yeah, I think the challenge with MHC Genesis. So there were two advantages that are provided. One is that you will have a comprehensive medical history of an individual not just through their their military service, but then again when they're a veteran. And this was interoperable across systems. So it was very well intentioned. And I think it also highlighted a challenge that, you know, medical histories for a long time have been self-reported. And there were certain incentives for an individual and also for recruiters on be careful about just how much information you provide. And so the provision of that information, I think, was actually a good thing, and that's something the services need to know. But again, the timing was terrible and also the resourcing, right? So on the back end, we didn't have enough medical doctors who could review all of those or do case management to walk through the waiver process. And that's an area where you could really rely on your Guard and reserve component and resource to to the surge of all of this new information. And then strategically looking ahead, it's going to be an issue that continues. So that's something we might want to resource on the medical side to walk through that process.

BETH ASCH: The only thing I would add is this is about electronic records throughout the military. So, you know, this isn't going away, isn't just about the recruits. It's about, you know, all military personnel. And second is that what it has done is force the issue of eligibility requirements and the waiver process. And that's been a good thing, I know, at least for the Army, is now relooking at what actually has to be waivered. And that was a question they should have been answering a few years ago. But here we are, you know, but nonetheless, that that is a a good thing to have happen. And ditto with the eligibility criteria.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: Ma'am.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. Hi. Thank you all. I'm Melanie Sisson from Brookings. Thanks for doing this. It's been a really excellent conversation so far. I have a question about technology emerging and advanced. These technologies, we hear a lot about their role in military affairs broadly. I'm interested in how you see the effects on the people of the military, both in terms of recruitment, eligibility, skill sets, how we can access those people and whether or not you actually think some of those new technologies will reduce the total number of individuals we need for military service, removing some of the old dirty and dangerous tasks and so forth. Thanks.

BETH ASCH: So there's a whole labor. I mean, you're probably familiar in economics literature about what the labor technology substitution. And as you know, computers, you know, entered our our world. What happened to the demand for labor. And my understand that literature is that there was a substitution away from lower skilled workers. And in some ways, I mean, indeed that's happened in the military. I mean, in the old days used to I mean, I used to do a Navy work and, you

know, there would be, you know, young sailors who would chip paint. They don't chip paint. You know, that's not what we have seen. And now you can see the the the workforce requirements on ships are much smaller and more technology driven. So I think what we see in the broader economy with technology and that substitution has occurred in the military towards a requirement for more high skill people who can make use of that technology.

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: I would say as a personnel. I think that is heartening for me is seeing that the advancement of technology actually requires more of our people. So, for example, the pace of decision making rate can be increased because we have access to more data and more information in real time. But that makes the development of the character and leadership and decision making skills within an individual even more important because decisions are being made more rapidly. So I think, you know, to a certain extent it's requiring more of our people just in different ways, as opposed to replacing their role.

THOMAS SPOEHR: Yeah, I would echo that. And to say that the promise of using technology to substitute for service members has not arrived, and I'm not sure it ever will arrive. The you know, the Navy tried an experiment with a littoral combat ship and they tried to drastically reduce the crew and have it manned by like 15 people or something like that in the place of a normal 200 plus crew. And it failed miserably. It turned out that they that the automation, the systems were just not there. And so they had to put the crew back on the ship. And similarly with a UAV. So you think of a UAV, we'll shoot. We're getting rid of a pilot, right? This is we're saving people. But, you know, in terms of the crew to launch the UAV, to fly the UAV, to recover the UAV, you save no people. And I'm and saying, you know, the Army is playing with remotely operated vehicles and autonomous vehicles. I see no promise that that's going to reduce the number of people. There are still people that need to operate it. And really in the army, at the end of the day, they needed a four man crew for the tank, not so much operate the tank as to maintain the tank at the end of the day to fix the track, to do all the required services. And so I wish I could see it differently. But I don't think autonomy or advanced technology really has carries much promise, at least today, to substitute for people in militaries.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: Okay. I've got an online question here, and this is from Marcus, and he asks, As Generation Z, who identify as LGBTQ at rates of nearly 20% comes of age, how can the national security establishment work to recruit talent, given its historically strained relations with the LGBTQ community? And I'll take moderator prerogative just to broaden that a little bit, because I think it touches on what we talked about before. How can we work with maybe communities or pools of of folks that historically haven't been that prepared to serve while at the same time you can't just ignore the I'll use a metaphor, the fishing hole that's always paid off. Right. But then are you creating a warrior caste in this in this country by continually just having to go to that fishing hole? So how do you balance those two tensions, I guess, going forward?

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: I think on on one hand, it's thinking about what systems or processes are in place that are artificially keeping part of the pool out of service. And that's that is changed by policy and practice. And then I think there's the perception gap, right. Which that takes place over a much longer period of time. And so I think, you know, policies have changed or since in the last 11 years, particularly with respect to the LGBTQ community, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the downstream effects. Are are in place yet? I think. I think, again, pointing back to the value of military service, your contribution to the larger team, and then also what military service does for you is the way to go about recruiting from across American youth and not having artificial barriers to their entry. But again, that's a I think it's a longer term relationship.

THOMAS SPOEHR: Just pick up on your second question is about how much do how much time and effort and resources to be expended to make the the force more diverse. And this is something I grapple with, too. And so, you know, a recruiter in Vermont State could maybe get a volunteer every couple of months, whereas somewhere, you know, deployed in South Georgia, Alabama, three or four a month. And so do we try harder in Vermont or do we pull back from that market and send more recruiters to places that we stand, more likelihood of? I can see the attractiveness of

both arguments, but in the end, the military has to be made. It may meet its mission, it can't go without. And so for every recruiter you deploy to a a territory where you may not recruit that many, you are potentially that's a lost opportunity. And so I think today, at least the answer for me is go where you can achieve your mission. Go to that fishing hole if that's where the fishing the fish are.

BETH ASCH: I saw I'll give a researcher response, which is that, you know, I was interested for me that when all restrictions on women were lifted in the military, we didn't see this big surge of enlistments of women. And so the inference is it wasn't necessarily the restrictions, it was potentially other things. So we actually, you know, as part of this, having been complacent about recruiting over the last decade or so, I don't think we fully understand the market and the sub the pieces of the market and what motivates different segments of the market to enlist. So I just think we have the services are just don't I mean, you're mentioning specific populations, but I think there is just been lacking on an understanding of these market segments and what would, you know, speak to them in terms of enlistment.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: All right. I've got time for one more question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you for being here. My name is Tyler Valenti. I'm currently an MBA candidate in management science at Georgetown's School of Business, and I'm also an Army ROTC cadet. I'm scheduled to commission in May to join the Special Forces Group and National Guard as an Army officer. And my question pertains to the relationship between the active duty components and the Guard and Reserve. Are you able to offer any insight into the projected impact that the recruiting deficit will have between those three components?

KATHERINE KUZMINSKI: Yeah, I know there's been coverage lately on, you know, just how good retention is in the active duty, and I haven't seen the numbers on that, but I think part of it has been a messaging campaign about, you know, once people join the military, they really like it and they want to stay. But that has knock on effects for the populations of individuals that we would normally see affiliating with the Guard and the Reserve. And so I haven't seen the data on that, but I do think that's something that we need to be watching going forward.

THOMAS SPOEHR: And if there's significant recruiting problems going on in the Army National Guard, I'm not tracking them. And so I think as the active component has more and more difficulties with its recruiting, you may see the active component relying more and more on the National Guard to do these day to day missions that that frankly have to get done. But the active component may not have the resources to do it.

MARCOS MELENDEZ: All right. Well, that's going to wrap it up for us. Now, I'd like you to please join me in a round of applause for our awesome panelists. And we're going to put ourselves on break here and then reconvene for our third panel. And then after that lunch, which I know everyone's interested. So thank you very much.

BRAD MCNALLY: Okay. Well, good morning. I'd like to welcome everybody back to the future of recruitment, retention and education in the national security enterprise. For those of you that have been sticking with us all morning here at Brookings in person or online, we thank you very much. My name is Brad McNally. I'm a captain in the U.S. Coast Guard and I'm one of the federal executive fellows here at Brookings. And I'm pleased to be joined on the stage here with the group for our third panel, which is going to focus on retaining talented people in the national security enterprise. So starting on my left and moving down, we have Dr. Meredith Kleykamp, associate professor and associate chair of sociology at the University of Maryland. She's director of the Center for Research on Military Organization, and she previously taught at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Heidi Urben is a professor of the practice and director of external engagement and outreach in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University. She's a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and she's a retired U.S. Army colonel and career military intelligence officer. And then we have Mr. Jeff Williamson. He's vice president for human resources at Booz Allen Hamilton. He previously served as the chief

H.R. officer and executive vice president of the U.S. Postal Service. So thank you very much for joining us today. It's a pleasure to have you. And I will jump right in. So based on current and economic, social and global security issues, what do you see as limiting factors for talented people wanting to remain in the national security environment? And we'd like to include in this military service, federal agencies and private companies. Dr. Kleykamp we'll start with you.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: Darn. This is why I didn't want to sit in the first seat. Thank you so much. You know, retention, as we heard from the last panel, recruitment is getting a lot of interest and policy attention and research attention. I feel like retention often is sort of a secondary consideration when we talk about talent management, personnel management in the national security enterprise. You know, the biggest lever we have right now to to think about dealing with retention best should just come set up here for all of these panels is is the checkbook. But right now, we don't really have a retention crisis in the way that we have a recruiting crisis. So it's hard to say what are the important social and economic dimensions that we should be thinking about because they're on the horizon. They're not immediately in front of us as somebody who for a number of years was a military spouse. I do think one of the looming issues on the horizon when we think about retention for military personnel is how we think about how they manage their families in the context of a military career that asks sort of a family model out of the 1950s or 1960s that's based on, you know, a breadwinner with a spouse who's available to trail, to take care of children, to take out in the household. Six. And as you were as as you know, the military personnel might refer to those left behind and modern family life, modern economic life is growing increasingly incompatible with a single breadwinner model. Much less, you know, women, largely female spouses, male spouses as well, wanting to sort of actualize their lives through careers. So I think, you know, one of the impending concerns that we need to to think about in terms of retention is in the military space at least is how we think about taking care of the entire family. You know, the old adage of recruiting an individual, retaining a family, I think is is important and is true. Right now, we seem to be doing that. We seem to be retaining those families. I wonder for how long? I confess to being less well versed about thinking about the civilian enterprise in national security. But, you know, my colleague from Booz can tell us all about human resource management outside of, you know, the military enterprise where you can compel people and in different ways, people right now, you know, it's a tight labor market and there are a lot of job opportunities. And being an employer that individuals want to work for, not just in terms of combat compensation, but the mission people having job autonomy. Having pathways for, you know, to sustain a career seem to be at least top of mind for me. But I guess that's where I'd leave it.

HEIDI URBEN: A couple of things I'd start with. We tend to look at the issue of recruitment and retention as two distinct challenges or issues, and they're reinforcing, right? The recruitment. We can see the impacts to retention. We tend to underestimate the impacts of how retention affects recruitment. And so a lot of the issues that we talked about on the previous panel are germane to the issue of retention. And one of the things that I think might we might find ourselves we might find ourselves in a retention crisis that we're not in right now. And when you're not in a retention crisis, you tend to not be curious about why people leave the national security enterprise and building in some intellectual curiosity as to why people leave, even when retention rates are pretty good, is important and for all sorts of reasons, right, that we tend to lose sight of that when in the aggregate we're looking okay, from retention data, we don't tend to explore reasons for departure in the Intel community. I think one of the one of the leading factors that the DNI has pointed to, people leave if they think that there's a lack of promotion opportunities. We look at women leave at higher rates than men, certainly in the military, but also in other parts of the national security enterprise. And in the military, women only make up about 17 to 18% of the labor force there. So digging in do in in a real meaningful way. Why people leave can be useful not just to ensure we have the right policies in place to retain talent, not just numbers, but talent. But it can also inform recruitment strategies in the military. When somebody has had a miserable experience and they leave, they become a counter recruiter back in their communities. Right. And so we should be curious and I think we can do this in a meaningful way. Organizations like Rand can do this that are that are accustomed to doing quality surveys, exit surveys of of why people leave and to rank order factors. Right. Because you might imagine people leave the national security workforce for all sorts of reasons.

But knowing what the the dominant factor is, I think can be really, really important. And that can inform recruitment strategies to another challenge today that I think is shaping like what's new now, right? So there have been recruitment challenges for decades. We're at a really tight labor market, so it's pronounced and we might see indications of of cracks in the system that have to be addressed. But one thing that's unique right now, I think, is this incredible era of polarization and division in the country. And we see it manifest in low levels of trust and confidence in governmental institutions that tends to have a negative impact over time. And certainly we see the effect of politicization of the armed forces in a new way that we haven't seen in recent years. But there's been a longstanding, sometimes bipartisan effort to sort of demonize the federal bureaucracy and and the federal workforce. And yet most Americans are touched on a daily basis by the federal government and federal workers. And so I think trust and confidence in all governmental institutions is a concerning thing, period. It's concerning for trying to maintain and uphold a talented, diverse workforce. And we want people to be attracted to these positions, whether it's the military or whether it's the federal government. And we should work hard to, first of all, raise raised trust and confidence levels, but recognize that low trust and confidence levels will impact recruitment and retention of quality people to do the work.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: It's tough to top to top that. Thank you, first of all, for for having Booz Allen represented here and for the opportunity to be with you today. You know, as we think about it, Booz Allen sort of uniquely positioned because we've got, you know, both a federal contracting business, but also a commercial business. And I think the elements that you both sort of touched on are real. And the reality is everything that's driving talent attraction in the market today is driving talent retention inside organizations. Some of that has either hit you or will hit you soon. And so when you think about candidate attraction, we think about re recruiting our own talent inside of Booz Allen over and over and over again and really understanding not just what motivates those who might leave, but what's motivating those who are staying in the organization. And so, you know, when we think about our strategies for retention, it's both How do we continue to deliver technical talent, non-technical talent, mission focused talent to our clients, both in the federal space, but also how do we bring cutting edge capability to our commercial clients. That puts us at that intersection of competing with those organizations for technical talent that are not operating in the federal space. And so as we balance that, we find exactly that right. We are seeing candidates both internally who want career development and career growth. So how do we offer opportunities for individuals in the national security space who might be operating in a skiff, who are looking for more flexibility to see a different path, even if it is only for 18 months before they rotate back? And so for us, we're trying to bring those types of solutions so people can see their paths, they can see opportunities to try new things, to experience new things, to really build a much more sort of career focus than just a job. And so as we're balancing the federal and the commercial space, we see career development, career growth, we see flexibility. We've come out of kind of the pandemic, right? I mean, I'll be honest, the first in-person panel I've done since we came out of the panel, it's really cool to finally be back with people on stage. But when you think about what that means, we had a large portion of our workforce who supports the national security sector, who have been onsite since the pandemic started. They never left. They saw their colleagues work from home. They see this other flexibility that is now important. And so I sort of view this idea of the switching costs for people today to change jobs is much lower than it used to be. And so they're looking at new drivers like flexibility. How do I not have to be in a skiff, you know, 24 seven Can I get a different experience on a different type of project work, still back, you know, focused and passionate about the mission? I want to see it from a different angle. And then finally, when we think about, you know, retention, it really is about skills. Technology is moving so quickly. The challenges that individuals are facing in their roles and to see new roles, how do I upskill myself? How do I get access to new learning? And so we're building programs to help understand or help individuals understand what the art of the possible is from their own development.

BRAD MCNALLY: So you just touched on the word balance, which kind of leads me into my next question is can you maybe dig into some specifics about how we can best balance the needs of the national security enterprise with the needs and the desires of the individuals we need to support it?

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: I guess I can start I was I was just thinking about the conversation they'd had with a colleague and one of the services in the past about, you know, so many opportunities. Broadening the Army calls these broadening opportunities. I don't know what the Marine Corps calls these right. Either opportunities to get advanced education or opportunities to take an internship in industry, opportunities to be fellows at places like Brookings and Rand and the like, as well as now the ability to maybe take a career pause for family reasons, maternity, paternity policies, all of those things, Beau, you know, are moving the needle towards serving the interest of the worker. You know, be inclusive here. However, you know, I've been thinking a lot in the in the military context. In order to do that, you have to assume you've got a fraction. I don't know what the right number. I keep looking at Beth. She could probably tell me what the know what the number, you know, is it 5% of your force who's, you know, at any at any given time otherwise engaged in something, you know, in these broadening or individual accommodation policies. That means you actually need to increase the size of your force just at a time where we're having a difficult time doing that. So, you know, that's the first thing that I think about is if you want to keep bring people in and keep them for long term, you have to they have to be happy. They have to envision an ability to sustain a career over the long term, but in order to sustain people's lives. Right. For ten or 20 years, you know, their lives get in the way from an institutional perspective. Their lives are inconvenient, right, for the national security enterprise. And, you know, demographically, you might need to have more of them to be able to have a workforce that that you can manage to. To accomplish the mission, which makes things even more challenging. If I had a solution to this, I might be in a different position than sitting right here, you know, as a University of Maryland professor, soon going to Rand, I'd, you know, maybe be making those decisions. But I think the reality is to accommodate both to maintain effectiveness and readiness as well as accommodate. And, you know, which I think is very important individual need, frankly, you need a slightly larger force, which is a tough sell.

HEIDI URBEN: Great points in some of the things you were talking about. Remind me of Ryan Palace's recent article in War on the Rocks that should be required. Reading did a great job of kind of capturing some of the challenges of military personnel system. And I would just note I was I was commissioned in the Army in 1997, which was the first year of the Office of Personnel Management System 21, designed to serve the Army for the 21st century. That is still the operative personnel system for the Army. It was before we were at war, once we went to war and now in a post-9-11 era. And so one of the things that I think is required is senior leaders in the national security enterprise have to make this their top priority. We do a great job of saying we focus on people first and it's embedded into our priorities and so forth. But the reality is for senior leaders, modernization quickly becomes the top priority and acquisition reform becomes a top priority. And people don't tend to really be the top priority. And so we have an industrial age personnel policy in most institutions in the national national security workforce. And there's a tendency, I think, among whatever the generation is that's older at the time, right? So we tend to demonize whatever the youngest generation is. Millennials had their go where they were demonized, right? And now we've turned our attention to Gen Z as well. What's wrong with you? Why do you not have a propensity to serve? Why are you so high maintenance? And the reality is, to Jeff's point, that the things that we think Gen Z wants are what millennials and Gen X want, too, which is a little bit more flexibility, a little bit more adaptability. And that can only be baked into the system when somebody comes in and says, this is what I'm going to focus on for four years and it's going to be my, you know, unrelenting number one priority is to do some type of personnel system overhaul, and instead we tinker with it at the margins. And so to some of the points that Meredith brought up, right, you see the services, especially trying to do the right thing, like will have a career intermission program. So if you want to step out and go to grad school on your own or if you want to use this time to start a family will will allow this. You want to stabilize your family so your your son or daughter can go to the same high school for for three or four years. But that's built on a policy of exceptions to policy, Right. As opposed to a system that enables flexibility to do this. Now, it's hard when you're dealing with institutions that are enormous, right, to offer typically flexibility and adaptability or don't go well with institutions of hundreds of thousands of people. But I think these are this is kind of what's required now. And senior leaders have to take this on with the same energy and vigor that they

would in reforming modernization efforts and overhauling modernization. It tends to fall by the wayside. And so any type of reform can be on the margins and incremental. And that's sort of where we are today.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: I don't even think about it from a balance standpoint. I totally agree. You can't have one without the other in today's world. And the reality is, whether you're in the federal government or you're in, you know, a private entity, people make things happen, right? And so even if it is technology modernization, if it is, you know, supporting a mission being deployed, people are bringing that to life. And in today's environment, we need to be able to bring the whole person to work. That's when I think you get leaders who believe that if we're able to do this, engage our employees, create a positive experience, doesn't mean it's always going to be easy, doesn't mean you always get to do what you want to do. But they can see that on the whole, I have opportunities. I'm treated well. I do have the flexibility that I think is important to me and my family. And it's beyond just how are you dealing with me as an employee or as a federal employee or as a contractor? We're actually trying to treat the whole person. That's good business. That's not how do I balance. That's what for us drives our bottom line. Right? From a Booz Allen standpoint, we're a people business. We we sell services. We build technology, we deploy solutions and tools. But at the end of the day, we're a people business, and bringing our best talent to life comes through all of the items that we've been talking about here. Do they feel safe at work? Are we giving them the the mental wellness opportunities that we know coming out of the pandemic people are searching for? And so how do you balance all of that? I don't think it's a balance. I think it's a it's an absolute necessity in today's environment to bring talent, the best talent to whatever mission, whatever, you know, business that you're you're in.

BRAD MCNALLY: Well, thank you. I'd like to take a moment here on the next round and dive into education a little bit. So that's a theme that's emerged this morning. Probably shouldn't be a surprise because it's in the title, But we heard a little bit about it with the intelligence community this morning about educating the workforce, foreign languages and different aspects of intelligence collection and analysis. It came up a little bit on the previous panel with recruiting with maybe one of the challenges being that the GI Bill, education incentives are what they were and are, you know, maybe being duplicated out in the private sector a little more than they have in the past and are losing their value a little bit as a recruitment incentive. Can you talk a little bit about your thoughts on how we use education going forward for retaining people in the national security enterprise? But then also, you know, building up that workforce to be even more capable and where maybe there's some ways we can kind of kill two birds with one stone and do both of those.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: Anybody else want to go first?

JEFF WILLIAMSON: I can jump in if you'd like. I think from a skill perspective, it ties to what we see as those three key things. People want career opportunities in their in their careers. They want to see flexibility and obviously they want a strong total rewards compensation model. At the heart of all of that is learning and teaching and skilling. And so in today's world, you know, forget I hate to say this, some of the four year bachelor's degrees were a requirement for a job. Some of the technology that people need to learn and deploy have been invented and retired, right. In less than four years. And so the application of upskilling in education in the cycle time is so critical now that we need to not only provide our employees avenues and pathways to take cyber certification, right, to use what the best the best practices from the industries are bringing to bear as a collective, but also incent individuals who might not think that they had the aptitude to move into these fields. We know that we have a shortage of technical talent to meet the demand that's out there. And so Booz Allen, we started to build programs. We built a technical excellence program, and we are putting individuals who have the aptitude right. We do assessments through these cyber type programs. And when they come out the other side of a 14 week program, it's based on the core cyber skills, intermediate cyber skills. 60% of this talent who had no cyber experience before are testing it expert level proficiencies. And so you can upskill, you have to identify with the programs and build that content and build that capability. But you also have to inspire talent to see that that's a path that might not be a traditional path that they came from. At large, we look at, we also provide our

employees with flexible education benefits because some of it really is how do I skill them for a particular role or a particular job. In other cases, they do want to further their education, so they want to go back to school. Right. And so we're providing, you know, tuition assistance and academic assistance for our employees to do both individual certifications, but also academic programs. We benefit. They benefit. It becomes sort of that it's not a balance anymore. It's a need for us to grow our business because we're creating pipeline. We're creating talent in those areas that are really, really hard to just assume that they're going to be in the market or competing for for talent with others. So if we can grow it inside the organization, again, it solves a retention problem and it also helps us lift the entire organization's capability.

HEIDI URBEN: I've taught lots of Booz Allen Young employees that that are using their tuition benefits to come to Georgetown, whether they're in the Intel community or DOD. And it's it's great because it it's a recruitment tool and it's a retention tool. And that goes back to that. On the education piece. These are intertwined, right? I think in institutions within the national security workforce are recognizing the imperative of partnering. With many educational institutions. And I think the reason why they're doing so is, is to solve some of the recruitment challenges. And so we see National Security Agency and Cyber Command partnering with HBCUs to bring in students who are on a track for cybersecurity and information technology, but who might not be considering a career in the national security workforce. And this just goes back to we have to be we can't overlook the fact that careers in national security to somebody on the outside tend to look pretty opaque. And people who are likely to join them are those who have some insights into what a life might look like in the first place. So in the military, it's this family business aspect where I know what the Army looks like because I grew up around it and so forth. These partnerships with educational institutions help students peer behind the curtain and see what opportunities might look like in working in national security. So that will have not just immediate recruitment benefits by recruiting a more diverse workforce and working on some of those propensity to serve challenges. But it has retention implications. And to your point about kind of these incentives and so forth, and to Meredith's earlier about how big does the military need to be in order to foster what we call broadening programs? I think we did a better job of it in the 1980s. Now, again, the military was pretty big back then, but we look at the number of officers at any given time, especially in the army that were in graduate school. It's a staggering number in civilian graduate school, and those opportunities in comparison are much fewer in nature. And so some of that is rooted in the post-9-11 wars, some of that is rooted in organizational culture, right. Where we can't afford you to go take a knee and spend a year or two in graduate school. But if we go back to focusing on talent and preparing to thrive and grow future strategic leaders, I can't imagine a better investment in than sending them to advanced civil schooling and civilian graduate school. It's one of the most important things I think each of the services can do, and each service sort of has their own baggage and how they approach it, right? So that can be an easy win, I think. And we've we did this to greater effect in the 1980s than we're doing today. And we can look at what are what are the desires of individuals right at at an early level in their career, you know, when they're just joining the workforce or in the military, if they're a young oh three or four, they typically want to go to grad school. And that can be, again, a great retention incentive that changes over time, right? When they're when they're more senior, it might be stability, it might be more family concerns. But I think education is inextricably linked to both recruitment and retention.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: So two things that are not super well connected, two points. One would be, you know, I teach college students, I'm at a public university. There's a number of students who feel crushed by the prospects of their current or future student debt to achieve their education. You know, if you're thinking about levers, policy levers, I think, you know, the GI Bill might be, you know, the idea that it's an enlistment tool for future, gaining education at a later time, thinking more seriously about how to relieve student debt that feels crippling to this generation who doesn't feel like they can buy a home because they're saddled with student debt. You know, that's something that that is pretty practical. And the other thing that wasn't mentioned here is, you know, the military has its own form of education, professional military education. It's not a broadening experience per se. It's a routine part of at least the officer expectation I am less informed about. But I believe that for civilians in the federal workforce, having similar kinds of opportunities for

regular professional education of any sort would be another, you know, pathway to ensure that you maintain your talent pool. One look at the University of Maryland. We would love to take your your tuition dollars and educate, you know, national security professionals. But I also think that thinking about how the current structures, the current PME system might better accommodate more defense and national security related civilians would also be a place to think about building greater opportunities.

BRAD MCNALLY: So if we established earlier here that we don't have an acute retention crisis right now, and if we could agree that we established on an earlier panel that we at least have a recruiting problem, whether or not it's a. Prices may be still up to date, but definitely a problem. Can you speculate a little bit and I underline speculate here how long you think it will be or not, that until this recruiting problem will catch up and create a retention problem?

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: So I was thinking about this this morning. Typically, if you have a recruiting problem that's based largely on the state of the economy, Right. The people who don't think this is a crisis, we're just waiting for the next recession for this to all go away. But the fact that we you know, the fact that we don't have a retention crisis says there's something that's decoupling those two things in terms of just economic economics. Right. How long before it goes away? I, I don't have the answer to why recruiting and retention are not both following the market in the same way. And as a result, I don't I think it's challenging to think about when, you know, crises, non crises, you know, have an inflection point because it's hard to understand why they're they're moving in a decoupled way for me.

HEIDI URBEN: I think at Tom on the previous panel talked about complacency on the recruitment challenge. But I think there can be complacency on the retention bit. And the fact that we've been okay inhibits us from digging deeper on to why people leave, to make to my earlier point and we can look at certain canaries in the mine or of of of what might be an area that we want to dig into deeper as we recruit a more diverse force because the American public is more diverse. Right. We look at inhibitors to retention can be I can't see myself serving as a senior leader in this organization or this institution. And so if if that gap does not close, if we continue have women and racial minorities underrepresented in senior leadership positions, that's probably going to speak to ongoing retention issues, if not exacerbating them and so forth. So again, I go back to we can we can learn a little bit, at least as we find out why people choose to leave and see if there are some systemic things in there that might be, again, under the radar screen, because we're doing an okay job of meeting aggregate numbers. But exploring the reasons for departure would be useful before we get to any type of crisis point.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: I think to me it's definition. I would challenge us. I do think we have a retention issue. We might not from a volume standpoint. You might look at a retention rate and say, you know, look, we're not spiking the way that we you know, we're challenged from a recruiting perspective. But I think each organization, each department needs to look at who is leaving. If your best talent, those who are performing, you know, at or at their peak now and those who have tremendous capability and potential, if that is the population that's making up the portion who's leaving, you have a retention problem. Right. And so I think to your point about understanding from a data really segmenting and learning what's happening with your workforce, you may very well have a retention. I had one when I was in the United States Postal Service. Our numbers didn't say so. We had an on average attrition rate of two and a half to 3% across a workforce of 600,000. You might say that's pretty good. But in the management ranks at certain levels, we were we were losing our best talent. And so we had a problem and we needed to deploy programs targeted at that talent in order to address that issue. So again, I were I think as an as an industry and as a sector, we need to really be more thoughtful about what are we trying to achieve. Because just because people aren't leaving also doesn't mean part of our attraction. Problem is we have a need for this new talent that our internal workforce isn't able to achieve. Right? And so sometimes you do need to be able to mobilize your internal workforce in a different way to be able to meet those needs. So I think it's definitional. Brad. I think we need to really understand what can we do to provide and create the most optimal workforce to meet today and tomorrow's needs.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: Can I add one quick thought? Referencing back to Ryan policies where on the Rocks article again also endorse everyone should read it. You know he he brings up the idea of kind of a looming retention problem that relates to the blended retirement system. And you know if that was implemented in 2018 and you have new officers that, you know, came of age might have entered under that system. We're coming up on, what, about five years, you know, in the next fire in, you know, 1 to 2, five years, you might be seeing people who otherwise would be thinking, well, I've stuck it out this long. I need to make it to 20, who now don't have to to be tied to the institution. So that's a near-term, you know, thing that somebody should be really looking. I'm not doing it, so I don't know what the data say. And we probably, you know, are just at the beginning of a potential iceberg if people are leaving because now they can walk with with some of their, you know, vested retirement funds with them.

BRAD MCNALLY: Okay. At this point, I think we'll open it up to some questions. So if you'd raise your hand, one of the Brookings staff will come around with a microphone. I'll call on you. If you could briefly emphasize briefly, please state your question and I'll ask the panel to respond and we'll try and get through as many as we can. And I also have some that were submitted online that we'll try and get to as well. So in the back corner, the blue shirt.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hey, good morning. My name is Jerry Norton and the military fellow, it's ISIS junior officer. Retention is often considered a bellwether for the health of the all volunteer force. And as end strength goes down and requirements at best remain stagnant, I think we may be on the precipice of an iceberg, especially when you look at the stress placed not on just our population but the populations that we have to retain. My question is, is is an aspect missing from this dialog pertaining to perhaps elevating the threshold for requirements altogether?

HEIDI URBEN: Can can you just help me understand that last bit, elevate the requirements on what specifically?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sure. Who are particularly since we've removed about 190,000 service members from the CENTCOM AOR over the last several years and strength has gone down, requirements have not gone down. It's not like there's a decrease in the demand signal. So that leads to the downstream effect that there will be more stress on. That same population with less industry. So add that to the BRS, the Boehner retirement system. What's the outcome?

HEIDI URBEN: It's a great it's a great question. I don't know if I have a really well-thought out answer for you other than yes, I agree. We do a great job of adding requirements and we do a horrible job of taking them away and organizing. Large organizations just have institutional memory of continuing to do what they've always done, and it can be harder to take those requirements off. I think that's a great civil military conversation, at least where that where the military's involved, because that has to be done in concert with civilian oversight and the tasks and responsibilities that are given. We could go on a whole tangent right on unfunded requirements and so forth that I think are related to this. Right. And it's rooted into organizational culture to where the military enjoys taking on tasks and wants to do it because they're well-organized in many regards. But shedding those can be really, really hard. And I think to the point that you make to if we are sort of heading down the road of things could get worse. On retention, it's even more important to kind of take that on now. On your earlier point about junior officer retention, we were talking a little bit about this before we came on for the panel. When we were junior officers, This was the conversation. Why are captains leaving the military and why guys, what's happening? And so there's part of this that I think there's this has been a standard thing for a while, and we haven't quite figured out why talent leaves, right? Because we may have some retention blips for a while and then they even out and we continue to meet numbers. And it inhibits us from asking and setting up institutional processes to figure out why talent leaves, because that's as important as retaining top talent as it is. Just retaining numbers, too, so.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: I'll put on a little bit of a researcher hat, having also lived through the captains crisis days in the late nineties. And I remember being somewhat frustrated by the conversation about why captains were leaving seemed to be dominated by captains who weren't leaving. Right. And so you are sampling on sort of the obverse of the deep, you know, the the zero of the dependent variable. And just to reiterate Heidi's point about being, you know, intellectually curious and empirically rigorous, when we try to do this, like, you know, don't ask the people who have stuck around why all those other dirtbags left, which felt like a part of the narrative and instead talk to the people who left, talk to the people who stay and come up with a good model, right. Of how decisions are being made.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: I do think it's a great point because that's what the reasons people leave evolve. And so to your point about not changing requirements, the reality is those who are left in any organization, whether it's the military, the private sector, when you're asked to do more with less, without new tools, without additional upskilling, without additional, you know, support or infrastructure that starts to create other retention challenges. Right. And so it becomes this downward spiral. And it is something that you need to to watch for and understand. And again, I made the great point at the very beginning, understanding what's happening is critically important. Don't assume we I've seen it for decades. Why are people leaving compensation? It's always compensation. People make the decision to finally accept another job, typically because the compensation hit the mark. That's not why they started looking right. And almost every case it was something else, some other trigger that planted the seed in their mind. The grass is greener somewhere else. That's what you have to be able to find. That's what we have to put programs in place and practices in place To go after that will change the attrition trend.

HEIDI URBEN: And just to go back to to tie into that to Jaren's question, there are there might be some existing tools we have to see when there's dissatisfaction in the workplace and when there's morale problems. Right. And that for the military, the docs command climate surveys sometimes are limited in their utility and need a little bit more response rates and so forth. But all these organizations, you know, in the federal government employ climate surveys and you can track over time that can show some indicators of just general dissatisfaction because of workload in. And I think that's important to dig into that data. We collect data. The federal government collects data every day and it goes unexploited. Right? And I think so smart people who have access to the data can can dig into this and a little bit of a of a meaningful way.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: I'll just add one one more piece. One more piece to that. I'll add one more piece to that. I use my use my army voice as a civilian. I do believe that the National Guard is having a retention problem. And so this is there's a whole whole force enterprise here and if people you know, leave active duty, go into the reserves and find that that's where they're being pushed too hard, you know, the retention may not be in that challenge. You know, that may be the leading indicator. And it suggests, you know, the data suggest that's exactly what's happening.

HEIDI URBEN: That's a great point.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: Yeah, gray jacket.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you so much. My name is Rudy Novak. I'm a major in the U.S. Air Force, as well as a student at Johns Hopkins sites across the street. So services recruit individuals for specific jobs, pilot, infantrymen, ship driver. I'm an Air Force guy, so the actual term surface warfare officer. But the vast majority of previous education training, their own personal time is they learn a valuable skill worth program and they get to greet computer silence and end up doing something else as a retention problem. As I have experience, a lot of folks leave because they feel that that skill is being underutilized. So do you guys know of any organizations that do it well or any recommendations to capitalize on that talent that we have within the force? So folks want to stay because they feel like the things that they are passionate about are actually they're using that the skills. Thanks.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: As a federal contractor, we see that one of the top reasons people leave Booz Allen is because their interests don't match the work that they're doing. And so earlier I talked about career mobility, creating opportunities for people. Part of that is because they want to move their career. Part of it is because we want them to find themselves in their work. We want them to feel that connection, right. And that the skills that they either bring or the skills that they just acquired, which is actually a little bit of a different segment, people today are less patient to find that job that allows them to use that newly earned skill right than they are to say, Hey, okay, if I stay on this path in six years, I can see how that's going to help me. And so we're using technology. We created an internal marketplace to make opportunities really, really visible to people so that they can go in, use technology. These are the skills I have, the certifications. I have same thing on the opportunities side, and it provides people matches other segments of the business that they might not have any visibility into, will show you can apply these skills to these roles that they had not even thought about. And so I think to get to that very thing, organizations need to use technology, right? We do it in our day to day lives. We go online and we type into a search engine. I want to buy an X and it returns a whole bunch of things you the same capabilities from a talent standpoint. These are the skills that I have, the skills that I want. It can return training. If you took these two training courses, you'll be ready to go or these are the opportunities already exist for you. And so we are constantly your point is run out. We are constantly trying to make sure we both stabilize because we can't have people move in every day. Right? So there's some part of that. But we also want people to be able to see there are absolutely opportunities to use your skills, newly acquired aspirational skills here at Booz Allen. Stay with us.

HEIDI URBEN: I'll offer one perhaps encouraging note here, and I think the data still remains to totally be seen on this. But the Army has started a marketplace for assignments for officers at least. Were you you sort of market your knowledge, skills, attributes, behaviors and you incorporate all sorts of things that aren't necessarily purely on your military record that can be seen. So it might include some skills and certifications that you've had, unique undergraduate experiences and so forth. I don't think we have enough data yet to see how well this is showing. Hey, we put this person here that we ordinarily wouldn't have because that wouldn't have been transparent, but there seems to be greater officer satisfaction in the process as they've had maybe two or three years under this model. It's one very narrow thing, but it ties into the technology bit because part of the system. Terms that have to enable this are ways to to meet a tag you that oh, I didn't know that you were a paramedic before you joined the Navy. I didn't know that you spoke Mandarin because we didn't capture that somewhere. The technology, I think, has to be there that when big, large, lumbering organizations need to find talent quickly, they have a mechanism to do so because the absence of that, with the absence of that, you have all the horror stories. And I think linguists probably have the most horror stories. Like I spoke Mandarin and I joined the Army and they sent me to learn Arabic. And I was in Iraq. And, you know, and so there's lots of examples of that. But I think the technology has to enable how can I quickly find people with these unique skills?

JEFF WILLIAMSON: It's also a diversity opportunity for us, right? Because it gets us away from our adjacency bias. Right? If all you see are the people that you're with every day and you have an opportunity, those are the individuals who are top of mind and they might be very well-suited to fill those roles. But in large organizations, there are so many talented individuals, and using technology to harness that and create visibility on both sides really does drive diversity and inclusion in organizations.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: My colleagues have said all the smart things.

BRAD MCNALLY: Okay. We're going to go to an online question. So here's the question. Prior to 2008, 50% of Army National Guard recruits came from active duty. That number is now 20%. That's a substantial reduction of those that already had a propensity to serve. That was an operational National Guard going to make up the 30% difference, given the fact that active duty soldiers no longer cascade to the National Guard because of its up, up tempo. And before I ask you to respond, so that's a very specific question about the National Guard. So if you feel qualified

to answer about the National Guard, please do so. But I'm going to borrow a page from some of my Brookings mentors here and take a little moderator privilege on this question. And what jumped out at me is this idea of cascading, you know, maybe into another element of the national security enterprise. So, for example, military member goes to the civil service, goes to private company, civil servant goes to a private company, vice versa, or any of the above move to academia or a think tank. And so I think if we take a step up and look holistically across the enterprise, it seems like there are a lot of opportunities to move laterally. And so if you don't feel qualified to speak about the National Guard, could you speak a little bit about, you know, how you think we're doing as an enterprise, retaining people and letting them move laterally into another element, maybe multiple times throughout their career? And do we need to do better at that? The lateral movement within the enterprise not so much stovepiped and just looking at, for example, military retention. I'll leave it there.

MEREDITH KLEYKAMP: Yeah, that's a great point. And I think my brand colleagues have done some work thinking about, you know, alternate models for for, you know, opening up these pathways to facilitate, you know, going from military to government, government to reserves that, you know, to facilitate that movement. One thing that I do think is a bit of a challenge is the the movement seems to start from military and cascade to other sectors as opposed to, let's say, starting as a Department of Defense, national security, civilian and cascading out to other places. Right. So there's sort of an assumption that the military institutional affiliation starts at the top and they they trickle down to the point where I think the civilian national security enterprise, you know, we've heard rumblings about the challenge of people like my students at the University of Maryland, probably at Georgetown, actually, who who invest for years of education, who want to enter the national security enterprise as a civilian and find it very difficult to get hired without military experience, given veteran preferences, given that, you know, 30% of veterans work in the federal workforce, I think 50% of the Department of Defense or something to that number are veterans. And so it's a great thing, right, and principle that we don't lose the investment we made in training folks who served in the military. And we can retain some of that investment if they move to the other components or they move into the civilian workforce. I worry that it comes at the expense of crowding out interested civilians who don't want to take the military path but still want to serve their country. And it's a that's a different recruiting question, but it's really important. So I can't speak to the 30% delta and where we come up with the National Guard. But I do think figuring out how to get more talented, getting all of the talented civilians into the workforce, we don't want to miss the propensity we have wherever it comes in the national security enterprise. And I feel like we miss out on some really talented people.

HEIDI URBEN: Yeah, great point. So just to amplify a couple of things there and then try to I don't feel qualified to comment on the National Guard question, but maybe I feel qualified to speculate and I'll come back to that one in a second. But great point about institutionally, the military does a great job of helping people transition to life in the civilian sector. In fact, in many cases they can do an internship and skilled bridge work for six months. They're working in another corporation and still being paid by their parent service. The opposite path does not exist. And again, barriers. This is more of a recruitment bit, but then than retention barriers to entry. One can be simply the long time it takes to get a security clearance. You're turning off prospective civilian talent all the time and simply because how long it takes for that to it to transpire. And the the veterans preference. We had a conference at Georgetown. We hosted a at the beginning of the month on the all volunteer force turning 50. And I think Peter Feaver was one of one of the panelists at our final panel who said that provision should be rescinded for positions within the office of the secretary of defense. You know, don't eliminate. Veterans preference. But if you're trying to recruit civilian talent into purely civilian positions, we should we should again recognize that the national security workforce is opaque and the barriers to entry are real. And to try to minimize those as much as we can for civilians to get into the enterprise. Your point earlier, Meredith, about not a lot of civilian opportunities to go to professional military education. Typically that doesn't occur until somebody is at a gs5 level about ready to look at this and they might get to go to one of the work colleges here in town. We don't do a great job of finding opportunities earlier in a civilian's career to expose them to that type of those education settings onto the National Guard. Right. Just my pure speculation,

Right. That the way we have used the National Guard in the past 10 to 20 years is going to impact propensity to serve in the National Guard. We we turn to the Guard for all sorts of things. Right. Administering COVID vaccines, driving school busses, being substitute teachers, humanitarian disaster relief. There's been an overuse of the guard, and I think that changes people's perception of the the organization and the idea that they can have a full civilian career and get to do that. So I think there's plenty of opportunities for for further research to test to see if that speculation holds up. But there are enough, I think, concerning indicators that that may be a real reason why we're seeing declining rates of lateral transfer from the active duty into the Guard.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: I certainly can't opine on the National Guard item, but what I will say to to my colleagues points the barriers even for a federal contractor, whether it's or labor categories requiring degrees, where candidly certifications that individuals have earned that make them experts in their field should really qualify the time periods, eight years of experience, ten years of experience when some of these technologies in in applications haven't even existed that long. These are barriers that inhibit our ability to really bring an entirely new workforce to the federal space, to the national security space. And so we do really need to work on some of those artificial barriers which should be really outcome driven and outcome focused and ensure we have the right talent with the right skills and expertise deployed to our nation's biggest, most challenging problems. And so these are barriers as a collective. I think we have to continue to work to to address.

BRAD MCNALLY: Okay. Well, with that, I think that pretty much brings us up to the end of our hour here. So please join me in thanking our third panel. We're going to talk about a 15 minute break here to reconfigure for the keynote lunch with General Robinson. For anybody that's remaining for the luncheon, we hope you're all sticking around with us for the last portion of the forum this morning. The box lunches will be available in the foyer outside the auditorium. If you'd please go grab those and use the restroom. I'll take a break, and then we'll come back in here so we can get started on time for General Robinson's keynote. Thank you very much.

JASON WOLFF: The moderator. And I would like to welcome General Robinson. Great to see you, ma'am.

LORI ROBINSON: Good to see you, too, Jason. Thank goodness.

JEFF WILLIAMSON: Well, we're glad you could join us virtually. We'd love to have you in person, but I get the honor to try to speed through an incredible, incredible career. So if you bear with me.

LORI ROBINSON: Before you do that, can I. May I say something?

JEFF WILLIAMSON: Absolutely, ma'am.

LORI ROBINSON: So, Jason, congratulations to you and all your fellow executive fellows. I mean, it's a true honor to go to Brookings. It's like one of the most amazing experiences I ever had and to be selected to do it and then to experience the things that you get to experience and see the things that you never thought you would see is just amazing. And is Michael out there?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, Lori. Yes, I am.

JASON WOLFF: Yes, ma'am. He's in the audience.

LORI ROBINSON: So Michael. Michael, as always, thank you for being you. You were you are a trooper, the power person. We don't always agree on everything. And we have to have one conversation on the side, which we'll do some other time. But you are incredible in your heart is huge. And so you take care of these folks. And I just wanted to say thank you to Michael, because he really is just an incredible human being. And I don't know sometimes what I would do about it.

So I just have to say that before you diatribe about me. But it's all about Brookings. It's about Michael. It's about what they make us think about. So I just had to say all that. I'm sorry, Jason.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did you tell her that I'm trying? Not like the army.

JASON WOLFF: Well, they told me I'm the moderator. I get to do my thing.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm just going to say that was way too kind, Lori. And I am trying to like the army slightly less than the Air Force. Slightly more. I'm working on it.

LORI ROBINSON: I give him a hard time about that all the time. Just, you know.

JASON WOLFF: That's good to hear. He's not the only one.

LORI ROBINSON: Well, sorry Jason, and I apologize. I just wanted to say thank you. I'm humbled, and I'm sorry I'm not there. But if you could see the colors on my ankle, you would be, like, mesmerized. So, anyway.

JASON WOLFF: All righty. Well, we hope you get better soon. And with that, I'm going to give a slightly brief introduction. But as you can already see, just an incredible person, human being and a leader. So General Robinson entered the Air Force to the RC t program at the University of New Hampshire. Go Wildcats. She also served in a variety positions as an air battle manager to include becoming an instructor and commander of the Command and Control Operations Division at the Air Force Fighter Weapons School. So those have seen Top Gun. You know what a weapon school it will Air Force.

LORI ROBINSON: No, no, no, no. Ours is better.

JASON WOLFF: Yep. And absolutely ours is better. She achieved the range of a senior air battle manager. She has over 900 flight hours in the E-3. And with that, she commanded an operations group, a training, an air control group, and deployed as the vice commander of the fourth or fifth Air Expeditionary Wing that led over 2000 airmen flying the B-1, the KC 135, and the E-3 in operations of injury and Iraqi freedom. Not only that, somehow she worked into her career becoming a fellow at Brookings, which we'll touch on a little bit more later, and then also went on to become the first female commander of a combatant commander, commander of Air Force Pack F, which is called the Pacific Air Forces and Air Component commander and U.S. Pacific Command. And then also, she followed up as the first female COCOM commander for the United States Northern Command and North American Air Space Defense Command. For those who don't know, U.S. NORTHCOM partners to connect homeland defense, civil support and security cooperation to defend and security, United States and its interests interact conducts the aerospace warning in the defense of North America. And she retired from that. She came back and did a couple other things we'll hit on in a little bit. But just so you guys know the caliber we're talking about, she did this what I think is an incredibly big deal and 2016 times put her as one of the most 100 influential people.

LORI ROBINSON: I can't hear you, Jason.

JASON WOLFF: Thanks. Back in 2016, chair and Time's top 100 people of interest. And then since that wasn't just enough, she decided to take over the cover of Time's My Words back in 2017, where they talked about some of the most influential people of making first along in that issue that was covered were some people that you might have heard of Oprah Winfrey and Melinda Gates, to just name it to the caliber of people that she was in with. So with that being said, I'd like to turn it the floor over to you, ma'am, and ask you what motivated you to join the military?

LORI ROBINSON: So, Jason, that's a great question. First of all, congratulations again to you. Secondly, what I would say is that I really didn't want to go in the military. My father was a 30 year officer. He was a41 pilot. He I'm the oldest of five children. And, you know, from the oldest to the

youngest is six years. And so he's looking at how am I going to pay these bills? And and so he looked at me as I was getting ready to be a junior in high school, and he said to me, or you want to think about going to the Air Force Academy? And I was like, Yeah, like, there's no way. I have no desire to go in the Air Force. I've been doing this for 18 years because no bad stuff, but it was just like I had no desire. So after we did some wrangling about where I would go to school, I went to university in New Hampshire because that was our state of residence and which is where grandparents were is my uncle were was all the family was there because my mom and dad and the rest of my siblings were getting ready to go overseas back to Germany. And and so, you know, I was going to be a French and German major. And then Friday nights got in, you know, part of all of that, i.e., too much partying. And then and then I decided I wanted to be a teacher. And so as I went through all of this, I was going to be an English major. I wanted to be a teacher. But what happened was they said, okay, that's fine if you want to do that, but you have to do a fifth year. And I'm like, I'm not going to do a fifth year, right? So I decided to join the ROTC, and I decided that I wanted to do something where I could come out the other side with the job. And that kind of really was what was in my brain. Now, the interesting part was that when I made that decision to join ROTC, the colonel in charge of ROTC, my father was the best man at his wedding. So, I mean, it's just ridiculous. And so I joined ROTC. And then when they gave me the job to be an air battle manager, the commander of the ROTC detachment said, well, you know, you've got to get yourself out of this job. And I'm like, Why? And he's like, Because it's there is no ending to it. You're you might make captain potentially major, but that's it. And he's like, you need to get your dad to get you out of it. And I'm like, well, first of all, I'm not going to ask my dad to do anything because I'm on my own now. And secondly, you know, so I'm going to go do this. So the incentive was really Jason, at the end of the day was to have a job, to be on my own. So my father didn't have to. My parents didn't have to worry about me. And and then I end up in this career field. That was kind of weird back then, you know, And we ate our own and all that. So, you know, that's kind of how all that happened. There was no really thoughtful process. It wasn't, you know, okay, I'm going to do this. So it was like, okay, I just want to try and get a job. One that sounds really horrible, but but it was really but it was it was mesmerizing to me. I have probably one of my favorite pictures is my dad swearing me in. And what I learned out of all of that was supporting and defending the Constitution.

JASON WOLFF: Wonderful. Just I love the passion. I love the realism of the story and the way you bring that to life. One of the things that to tug on a thread on that is we talk about our military. And as we're evolving in diversity and how the air battle manager career field in itself is dynamic. But can you discuss some of the challenges you faced and what you did to overcome them to make it to senior leader?

LORI ROBINSON: You know, so here's it's not what I did. It's the people that believed in me. So if you look at me, you know, and I obviously I'm a woman. Um, but, but, but the other side to that is that I was in the competitive forces and all of my mentors and all of the people that cared about me were fighter pilots, and they cared about me. Not because I was a woman. It was because I happened to be pretty good at what I did. And probably the biggest the biggest compliment I ever got was that if I go to war, I want glory on the radio. I mean, I can't I can't think of anything bigger than that. So so to me, diversity is hugely important and we'll talk about that here in a second. But to me, they didn't care so much that I was a woman. They cared so much that I was good at what I did. They cared so much that I was able to be a part of their team. I mean, early on, because when I was at the fighter weapons school, better than Top Gun, when I was at the fighter weapons school. I have to always throw that in several times. Can I do one other story before I get back to that? So when I took over command at Cattail Apple, what player was my component commander boss? And so obviously I have organize, train and equip General Welsh, Admiral Locklear. You know, my component commander, boss. And so when he spoke, he said, okay, so paycom it was just paycom at the time. Paycom owns 52% of the globe from an area of responsibility, and which is true. And he said, you know, the Navy owns 83% of that, but the Air Force owns 100% of there. So I just quote Admiral Locklear all the time and remind everybody, you know, about that. But I go back to, you know, my learnings of teamwork about being a part of something bigger than yourself. And I'm going to see that here in a second. But but the fact of the matter was what was important

was that we were a part of a team. I was a part of their team and that I understood my role and responsibility. So I I'll say one other story and then I'll get it back to you. I had this amazing wing commander. We all remember? Are we in commanders or one star generals and all that stuff? I had this amazing ring commander not to use name here in a second. We had a weak commander to call on a Friday afternoon and he said to us. You're part of something bigger than yourself. And I was like, What does he mean by that? And what I learned over time was that it actually wasn't about me. It was about the team. It was about making you better than me. I need you to be better than I ever was. Because if I make you better than me. And I make the institution better. And that at the end of the day is what we all really, really want. So who is this one? Starving commander. Oh, I don't know. This guy by the name of General John P Jumper. So I'll go back to. It wasn't I. I had the privilege to serve, but I had these mentors that cared about me. You know, that. That. Watched me in in and they were all about the team. And so I'll stop there and let you continue on. I apologize. Too many stories.

JASON WOLFF: That. That's exactly what we're here for, to share those.

LORI ROBINSON: I can't hear you.

JASON WOLFF: Sorry. That's exactly what we're here for. To share those experiences, to be able to learn from those firsthand. Because you kind of hit on it. You were talking a little bit about the team and how that is. How did that shape your leadership philosophy? And can you give us an example in a story?

LORI ROBINSON: Yeah, So. I just think about how to talk about this for a minute. So one of the things I learned as a commander, especially so you're going to get to be a commander. Is that it? If it's not illegal or more unethical. Then it's teachable. None of us were born with a big red tag on our big toe that says, Here's how you're a commander or Here's how you are X, Y, or Z. Right. So I, I had a couple of ring commanders when I was a group commander, and I'll leave it at that. I'll just leave it at that and. What I learned was. That, if I could. Teach them how to be better. That. That it. I didn't care how. I mean, it wasn't about me. It was about them. You know, Sue. So to me, the biggest story that I have out of all of that is how do you teach people and not worry about yourself? What? You don't want to do this for you about yourself. What you want to do is make it better for everybody else. And if you worry about yourself, then you're not worried about the institution. So, you know, So you're going to take this right now. So. What classes have you taken while you were at Brookings?

JASON WOLFF: So far, I've taken one of the seminar courses with Washington University and cybersecurity and risk management.

LORI ROBINSON: So do they still have Washington in Congress and Washington, D.C.?

JASON WOLFF: I believe that's available through their philosophy course on. That's why she does offer those courses, ma'am. Yes.

LORI ROBINSON: Perfect. You should do that. It was probably the biggest lesson that I learned there. You know, it was not just because of Michael, because Michael took care of all of us. Do they still do they still have the Friday lunches?

JASON WOLFF: We have a Pechman lunch that goes on and that Michael did a great job in the fall before it got too cold for on Wednesdays. We had a standing lunch invitation that we had an opportunity not only to interact with him, but some of the other staff. So it's not so much a workplace, it's more of a family of professionals. Is that more accurate?

LORI ROBINSON: Yeah. I mean, my favorite thing, it was our Friday lunches. And E.J. Dionne would come in, you know, talk about I mean, be the mentor for the whole thing. But it was such a learning environment about how things in Washington, D.C. work. And so when you and your

fellow fellows, you know, depart, it's the part where you can see things in a bit of a different lens, if that makes sense. And and you can take that and you can hold that a little bit now at the tactical level and you won't see it, but you will understand it, I will tell you why. Your Brookings was wonderful. That's why I wanted to know about yours. But I. I sit back and I go back to the whole point of teaching you. It's your job to teach now.

JASON WOLFF: Yes, ma'am. And speaking of your time here at Brookings, as you talked about the lunches, as we go and look at making the impacts on strategy, I also noticed that you did a legislative fellowship also and had some time up there on Capitol Hill. Could you share some of those experiences?

LORI ROBINSON: So I did two jobs there. One was as in charge of the colonel's office. So each of the services has a colonel that sits in the House office and sits in the Senate office, and then each of the services has a two star job. So I did both. I did the colonel's house, and then I did the two star job. Here's what I would tell you. One of the things with the biggest lesson I learned early on was that we when I was a colonel, me and the chief and the two star went to a member's house and we walked in and set our thing and walked out. And I turned and looked at the two star. And I said, he's like, all messed up. That member has no clue. And. The two star looked at me. And he said, Lori. Nobody's going to get the football. And run 100 yards by themselves. That we have to do this together. Everybody's not going to get what they want, but we have to do this together. And so when I became the two star in charge of legislative affairs for the Air Force. I realize that you've got to figure out how do you compromise? How do you how do you get to some middle conversation? How do we say, here's what we need in the Air Force? But understanding what members need in their districts and senators need in their states? How do we have this conversation so that we can kind of try to get to the middle? And I think that's the discourse that I really learned the most about, was how do we do that? It was it was probably the most intriguing thing, I think that I. So I will say this. Here's another story to laugh. My grandmother was one of the first women in the New Hampshire legislature, later legislature. And so I'm in college. And she calls me and she says, Lori Jean, hey, they're getting ready to put a bill out there that's going to change the drinking age from. 18 to 21. And I don't agree with it. And she said, So what I would like you to do, she said, because we can draft you at 18. You can drive at 18, but you can't do that. I violently disagree. So what I would like you to do is I would like you to come and protest. So I do, because that's my grandmother and I go and I sit upstairs in the New Hampshire state legislature and my picture ends up on the front page of the Manchester Union. My grandmother is so proud. I still have the original. She writes a note. She writes a note to my father. My parents are living in Germany at the time. She writes a note to my father and she's like, Look at what your daughter did. And my father calls me, you know, because he's in the Air Force still. And he's like, Lori, what are you doing? And I was like, But Grandma said, you know, so. So I come from this very political background. But what I would say is I learned in those two years is this those two different assignments is this relationship between the department, the services and the help and the ability to sit back and and speak to them. And they're going to do what they're going to do. But but how do you model your way through it and understand that nobody's really going to get 100% of what they want?

JASON WOLFF: No great, great lessons and great advice on that. At this time, I'm going to open it up to the floor for a few conversations and see who has a couple of questions. And then I have a couple from the audience that they sent in ahead.

LORI ROBINSON: Great. Except for Michael. He always ask the hard questions. I looked at my interview, Michael, with you the couple of years ago that we did, and I'm like, Oh my God, I hope he doesn't ask me those questions.

JASON WOLFF: Well at this time is I'm going to take it on from the audience that came back in earlier talking about the first. And your name, as you do a Google search, comes up with a lot of firsts, being the first in a historical career, being not only their battle manager, as we talked about in the 5/52 ACW at Tinker Air Force Base, first commander of Pack Air Forces, the first and

NORTHCOM, the first force our female general on Time magazine. And the list just goes on and on. So for the audience, this is my first time moderating. This is my first time at Brookings and this is my first hybrid that I'm in charge of. So I've got a few first, but nothing compares to you. What is your most memorable first for you?

LORI ROBINSON: So I'm humbled, Right? I'm absolutely humbled. I don't I don't think about it as first. I think about it as so when one of my good friends is a guy by the name of Simon Sinek, and Simon and I spent some time together, if anybody's read his book, what's your why? W.H. Why? And Simon and I spent a lot of time together talking about my wife mind and what we decided, or as we went through this whole conversation, my why was to create a path for others to follow. So the good news is the good news is we've got Laura Richardson, we've got Jackie Vanovost we've got we've got other people out there. I just happened to be the first. But I bet I was first. Not because just took me. But because of people that believed in me. Because people that. Thought that I could do the things I mean, I will never forget. You know, when General Welsh called me and said, Mary, I want you to be the vice that Iraq Combat Command. You know this. When was the last time there was not a fighter pilot being advised to do a combat command? Correct. Right. I'll never forget when, you know, my boss told me, Hey, Lori, I think you're going to go be the pack commander. And General Walsh called me to do that. So I am these people that believed in me. So I sit back and, you know, I can look at all that. But at the end of the day, for me, it was about producing, doing the right thing. Being truth to power. Not being afraid of telling people what I think. You know, when Secretary Carter called me and told me, you know, so we were on our way to India from back out to India. Well, Secretary Carter called me and he said, Maury, I'm going to nominate you to go to Colorado Springs. I said, Mr. Secretary, to me now, I've known him for a while. He and I didn't always agree on things. I had known him for a while. He's like, Yes, you're the perfect person. And. So what I learned out of all those years is telling the truth. And not being afraid. That some of this like yeah I don't like I don't like what she's saying and I'll give you one other story and then I'll be quiet. So when all the AWACS came back from overseas to tinker, one of the things we had to talk about to air Combat Command was how many airplanes or how many crews do we have that are mission ready? Not many. Because we've done a lot of circles in the Scott. And so I went to my wing commander and I said, Hey, boss, before I send this to your combat command, I want you to know I'm going to say this isn't pretty. It doesn't look good. Not too bad. And he's like, Just tell the truth, okay, boss. So I told I did that. And then about three weeks later, all the group commanders from Air Combat Command were together. In the. Three the two star it or come back to me and said, Hey, you know what? Lori Robinson's the only one that got it right because she said, which she can't do from a combat capability perspective. So. So my lesson has always been just tell the truth and move forward to move forward. And if you don't, you don't. But you can look yourself in the mirror.

JASON WOLFF: Outstanding. Really appreciate that personal perspective on that. I've got two more questions that came in already. I want to check with our audience to see if anybody else had a question before I go on to it. I do.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. Thanks very much, ma'am. My name is Melanie Sisson, and I'm here at Brookings. So I'm also, as you are, a big fan of Brookings. And Jason, in terms of your firsts, it's quite, quite a first outing. So congratulations on that. My question is really straightforward, which is, are you concerned about the state of the armed forces today? Do you have confidence in the direction that we're going? What is your impression of how the military is perceived in the general population? Any one of those questions would be of interest. Thanks.

LORI ROBINSON: You bet. So here's a couple of things I would say. You know, when you when you retire and it's been five years, you know, you're kind of an outsider. But here's what I would say. I, I trust Secretary Austin. I trust the leadership. I trust their ability. What I watch is this this relationship between that and Congress and all of that stuff. Here's the other part that I though I would say and, you know, come back to me, please, if I don't answer. The other part. I think that's really important because when I retired, you know, I retired in the community. So Lori and her husband, David, who's like he's like a hero in life as far as I'm concerned. He's like the most

amazing hero in my world. We bought this house in 1999 because Michael notices I was getting ready to go be General jumper's executive officer. And I said, Well, I'll probably get promoted to colonel because I've got it. Four star is going to sign my promotion recommendation, but after that, it's all done. So let's figure out where we're going to retire. So 1999, we bought this piece of property. We've never lived near McDill, never been at McDill. The thing is, so, you know, we're here now. The thing that I think that I watch a lot is how do we. Include the workers, you know, into the community. I think that's been the hardest thing for me is because I don't I don't know anybody here. My fault we lived here. But it's. How do you do that? But in the long haul, worrying about the military. The only thing I always. Think about is what's the demand signal and what are the resources? What's today's flight and what's the flight? Your flight. What do we think about how to commit things and how to think about the future? So those are as a as a organized train and equip person in the Pacific. I watched that as a combat commander. You know, I watched that. So don't worry about the military per say, because I think I think that they it I mean, they're the heart and soul of support. Defend the Constitution is amazing. But it's how do we how do you balance those two things? Does that come close to answering anything that you asked?

JASON WOLFF: Yes, ma'am. We're getting a huge thumbs up. So outstanding. Get another question up front.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good afternoon, ma'am. My name is Rudy Novak. I'm a Urbandale manager, formerly of the 502 S.W.. So thank you for what you do. So my question is about a little bit off topic from the why we're here today. But just based on your background, I would love to hear your thoughts. Innovation efforts specifically for domain awareness and homeland defense. Are we moving fast enough? There's been a sense of urgency today, whether from the Chiefs staff, the Air Force, General Brown, about it. And just moving faster. Are we doing enough for. Yeah, that's my question.

LORI ROBINSON: So so so the issue is you're exactly correct. I mean, you know, I've listened to General Van Kirk. He's been phenomenal as the commander out in Colorado. I mean, he's just been amazing. Think the issue, it comes down to budget. Right. Where do we want to spend our money? You know, where do we see the biggest threat? What is it? I mean, during my time, the big threat was Kim Jong un, you know, and then hurricanes. So so the question is, where do we see the biggest threat? Where do we want to spend our money? Who's going to get it and who's going to take care of it? So are we moving fast enough? I'm going to ask you to do something. Go look at a map. And when you look at the map. Don't look at the map from the United States point of view or from the European point of view. Look at the map from the North Pole. And look at how close. Russia is. From that and then contemplate add on to that what China's thinking about and how they're trying to, you know, include themselves in this Arctic space. Look at that map. And it always amazed me when I would show people that when I was the commander out in Colorado, what that map looked like, because it's a totally different map. Then what most people perceive. And so I guess are we doing it fast enough? I all I can tell you is I don't know. But we have competing interests. And one of the things that I talked about a lot in testimony was, you know, we keep trying to pick our feet out of the sand and dip it into the snow. But every time we try to dip it into the snow, the sand picks us back in. And so, you know, it's all these competing interests and it goes back to how do we want to use our military? Where do we want our military to be focused? And what is it that we want them to do? And then are we resourcing them appropriately? Did I answer his question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes, ma'am. I'm getting a big thumbs up. Okay. A question that came in that ties into the why. One of the things they talk about is why you continue to serve. And if you could think back to your time around, the ten year point is crucial for most military service. What? Why drove you to continue on with your service?

LORI ROBINSON: Because I loved what I did. I absolutely loved what I did. I loved being an air battle manager at the Fighter Weapons school. I loved being an instructor in my squadron. I loved. I won't. Taking people in, making them better than me. My heart and soul was in this. And I just

think that I just absolutely adored every single second. You know, sometimes people say, what would you change? I wouldn't change a thing. I had. The absolutely most amazing life. Because people believed in me and I put my heart and soul in it. My passion for what we do as airmen, you know, my passion for what we do. You know, as the Department of Defense. And I wouldn't change a thing. So at the ten year point, you know, David and I were we were married and they were going to send him to Japan, Korea and me to Japan. And, you know, I was like, well, you're the fighter pilot. You're the Thunderbird pilot. You're the guy that got promoted early. I'm just an air about a manager, so I'll get out. And he said to me, And what would you do if you got out? And I said, I don't know. But at the end of the day, he chose to go to the reserves and chose to fly for the airlines. And I just happened to have great mentors and great people that put me in places. But what I was passionate about. Was the mission. The airmen. And their families. And. There was nothing else that I cared more about than that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Nice. So I've got time for one last question, and then we'll turn it back over to you for closing comments. Ma'am. I saw a gentleman in the middle hand up.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hey ma'am. My name's Colonel Dwight Rabe. At work at the Pentagon for every university overseeing the fellows for all their and space Force. Thanks for speaking to us today. So my question was, stems from your last answer about families having a passion for families. Can you just tell us how do you approach leading and taking care of families to enable airmen to be their best?

LORI ROBINSON: No, that's great. So here's a couple of things that I would say. So David and I. So my husband's a retired two star general. So when when I was the Packer commander. You know, he he stopped flying for the airlines. He stopped being in the reserves and he became my spouse full time. Here's a two star fighter pilot, for God's sake. Right. And we would go to wing commander's calls and go to wing visits and, you know, or Robinson, who is an air battle manager, you know, is crawling around airplanes. My husband, who's pope pilot, is going to the child development center. Here's what I would tell you about taking care of families. I relied on him. To talk to me about what's happening with families. I relied on him at the at the end of every single day to say, here's what I saw. And when we would finish those visits. And this is what I squadron commanders and group commanders and we commanders have to be so honest. I remember the visits I would have when I was a wing commander or, you know, when my boss had his wing commander to sit and talk about what's happening on the installation, what's happening with the families, and how do you what are the things that we think we can do better for our families? And so I relied on him and I relied on the subordinate commanders to tell the truth into. To make sure that when I walked away, I could bring stuff back to the staff, David, to bring stuff back to the staff that said, here's the things that we need to work on and bring it up to higher headquarters. So. So. The other thing I would like to tell you is that we never talk about ourselves as being general and General Robinson. We were Team Robinson. This was a team. We were a team in this endeavor. And so I sit back and I go I go back to the point where it's so important that. You as leaders, you as leaders empower the people that are subordinate to you, to tell you the truth. That you create the environment where they're not worried about what they're going to say because they're going to tell the boss the good stuff. Nobody wants to talk about is the bad and the ugly stuff. And what the boss really needs to hear this the bad and the ugly stuff. But if you U.S. leaders. Don't create that environment, then they're not going to. They're not going to tell you. And so the family part is hard because, you know, we we like to talk about work life balance. I sucked. Okay. I'll just tell you that I stopped. But we need to we need to, you know, continue to talk about that and we need to continue to bring it forward and we need to continue to help those around us. To tell us what's going on in the mission support group for the Air Force. I'll just speak for the Air Force in the mission support group. You know, in what's happening about our kids at the CDA, at the Child Development Centers, in what's happening about, you know, what people are doing. So I, I would talk to families all the time, especially when people were getting ready to deploy. I'd bring the families in and would go, okay, here's what's going on. Here's what's happening. So I think it's a team effort. I think it's a commanders effort. I think it's an effort where, again, we have to be willing

to stand up and listen to what's going on and to bring it forward. I don't know if that's a good answer, but it's kind of the way I dealt with it.

JASON WOLFF: Well, ma'am, based on that, I've got some good news. It's just been an incredible conversation. The bad news? Our time is coming to an end, so I'll turn it over to you for some closing comments before I close out the conference.

LORI ROBINSON: Well, first of all, thank you. Thanks for doing a great job. And I'm. I'm proud of you. And I'm proud of all the other efforts. I mean, it's such a great experience. You all day to day, you kind of go, okay, this is great. But when you look back on it, you'll go, This is astonishing. And you're going to sit back and you're going to go, I got to see some amazing people, got to see some amazing things. I got to, you know, like whine down a little bit. Right. And and I got to I got to learn. And I didn't have to cram the learning in between the working. And so I just think all of you are blessed to be where you are. I'm humbled to be a part of this. I wish I was there in person, but it wasn't going to be. And so I just want to say thanks for the opportunity. And, Michael, thank you for thinking of me. I appreciate it an awful lot.

JASON WOLFF: Well, thank you very much, ma'am. General Robinson, it's been a pleasure and an honor to be able to work with you on this forum. I also want to say a huge Brookings thank you to all of our panelists. Thank you for coming out. Michael O'Hanlon, thanks for leading this up. Alejandra and the rest of the RAs, if it wasn't for the support team, this wouldn't have happened. And lastly, my fellow chefs, Brad, Marcos, Scott, you guys set the bar really hard and hopefully I made that high bar and touched it myself. So on that behalf, thank you for a wonderful day. And all of our viewers online have an incredible day. Thank you.