

111517 Air Force Association Breakfast Series with General Darren McDew, Commander, U.S. Transportation Command on "Transportation, Sustainment and Distribution to our Nation's Warfighters."

GEN. DARREN MCDEW: (In progress) -- stay in the same hotel here in Washington, D.C. We work out in the same gym in the morning. I walked over to Joe Votel to give him a little fist bump when he was on the treadmill and I get back to my old man weight routine. I get back there and Joe -- I don't like to bother people when they're running on the treadmill. So when he finishes he comes back and shakes hands.

An Army colonel approaches me after Joe Votel shakes my hand and has a conversation. He says, do you know who you had a chance to shake hands with? I go, well, who was it? He goes, that was General Joe Votel, Commander of U.S. Central Command.

I said, wow. He said, it's pretty rare that people get a chance to meet him and have a conversation with him like that. I just wanted to make sure you fully understood who you were having a conversation with. I said, well, I recognized him from a few meetings. Now he says, sir, who are you?

TRANSCOM, everybody thinks they know what we do because transportation sounds so simple. It's a little bit more complicated than that, but that's not why I'm here this morning.

I'm here to say thank you to all of you, really, because you're interested in our United States Air Force. You do things every day that make a difference, and it's a lot of work, particularly by AFA. It goes into supporting air and space advocacy, and I understand that.

I've been a lifetime member since 1982. I used to pull out my wallet, before I had somebody that carries my wallet, and I had a couple of cards that were mandatory to be in your wallet. One was a (club card ?) membership. One was a battalion membership, or you were banished from the rest of whatever you were doing on base, so I had a lifetime membership. And the other was AFA. Those were expectations that we had. We've lost those expectation along the way, but that's another story for another day.

I want to do something a little bit different for you this morning. I want to challenge all of us. Beyond the fact that my good friend Larry Spencer made the best decision to not be here to hear me speak, I am humbled to get a chance to talk to you. I don't get a chance to talk to a crowd like this all that often. Inside the beltway, where you're in here rubbing elbows with the folks that make a lot of big decisions, it's important that you hear some things from the cornfields of Illinois on some of the things that are happening out there around the world.

I'm not here to talk about the Air Force, although I probably should. With 35

years of experience, nearly 36 years, I could talk about the critical role the Air Force plays in everything around the world. I could talk about how the fact that sometimes in the news it looks like that B-2 bomber levitated itself from Missouri all the way to Libya. But there were a couple of tankers that made it happen. I could talk about the fact that people forget that GPS satellites make the world what the world is today, the fact that we have a nuclear deterrent force that underpins the power of this nation. You all know that, so I'm not going to do that.

I could also talk about C-17s that are everywhere from Puerto Rico to Texas to Florida to everywhere around the world. All of that is important, but not as important to our success as what this challenge I'm going to bring up is, not just for you but for me. It's a reminder to me how important what we do right now is to what we need to be doing going forward.

I want to explore a couple of concepts that require us to think and to dream, and ultimately to change. I want to ask some hard questions, and then let you -- I think we're going to have Q&A here and maybe you can return the favor and throw some back at me. The problem with throwing questions at me at my age is I may or may not answer them and I may give you an answer you're not willing to hear. I'm starting to lose my filter.

(Laughter).

But there are incredible joint warriors out there, and I'm a joint officer now, that are solving the wicked problems of our time in imaginative ways. Are we identifying and empowering those folks? Let me tell you why I think it's so important that we do.

My staff found this quote. I have a great staff. They found a quote that I want to share with you and begin with this. "This nation was built by those who took risks, pioneers who were not afraid of failure, scientists who were not afraid of the truth, makers who were not afraid of progress, but most importantly" -- I added that part -- "dreamers who were not afraid of action."

These are the attributes that will be required as we move forward as a nation into the future, and we have to remember we must empower them. Many of the great inventions throughout history had naysayer who didn't believe the impossible could ever be possible. You wouldn't believe some of those that said things couldn't or shouldn't be done. I'm going to share a couple of quotes with you and I want you to try and guess what they're talking about.

Here's one. "Unworthy of the attention of practical or scientific men." Any ideas? That was actually a British politician in 1878 who was talking about the light bulb.

"If I had thought about it, I wouldn't have done the experiment. The literature was full of examples that said you can't do this." That was the sticky note. Can you imagine a cubicle without a bunch of colored sticky notes all over the place?

Here's another one, one last one. "An interesting scientific toy but of no military value. You know this one, the airplane. That was a quote about the airplane, and these are just a few examples of the millions that are out there. These were experts in their field who spent more time debating why something wouldn't work, and trying to figure out how to kill it, or even better how it might actually change the world if it did.

Innovation is more than just coming up with a few new ideas, it's actually the willingness to implement them. People like Edison and the Wright brothers, they made the unimaginable a reality, and really despite all the people that were trying to hold them back. The naysayers throughout history were those that were afraid to take risks. They're afraid of failure, and I believe, ultimately, they had lost their ability to dream.

That's what I fear. And I've got a theory about this, because I'm old enough to have theories now. That theory explains why people are unable to dream. Bear with me as I go through this theory.

Sociologists -- and I'm an engineer, so I'm not sure what those are -- but sociologists claim that people are programmed between the ages of 11 and 12 years old. Value programming is a result of your foundation. It was built by your upbringing, your education, your experiences. That influences all of your behavior and the decisions you make every day thereafter: 11 to 12 years old.

I've added a corollary to that theory and that is that in adult life there's a similar value programming. As you grow in your career you're programmed by your training, your leaders, your successes, and more importantly, by your challenges. Your value program makes you think through a particular lens and you always think through that lens, whether it still applies or not, because it's your lens.

If you allow yourself, you'll actually become shackled by your preconceived notions and biases, and you won't even realize it, because it's your value program. It's your lens. It's how you view the world.

Let's take me, for an example. Believe it or not, I'm a Cold Warrior. Thirty-five years ago I was ready for the most complex world I could imagine. I sat on alert at Loring Air Force Base, Maine for the Strategic Air Command. I was waiting for the big one and I was ready. We spent every waking moment waiting to go toe-to-toe with the Soviets in the Fulda Gap. Our value programming influenced the way we built and the way we thought about war. We were a big lethal force and we were ready for anything, as long as it was another big lethal force.

Everything had to look the way we expected it to look, and we were ready to fight that fight. I couldn't imagine anything more complex than that world. That was my world view. I look back now at how simple, how simple, those days were.

In the next generation, I believe you have the Desert Shield and Stormers. The

senior leaders of that time grew up in Vietnam. In fact, the Powell Doctrine was the result of a young captain sitting in Vietnam fighting what he thought was a war with one arm tied behind his back. He never wanted to see his nation in a quagmire again. So we had the Powell Doctrine of overwhelming force and quick decisive victory that came from that value programming. A big win, but what was the result?

Finally you have the post-911 military where everything starts with (why?). It's not bad, it just is. In that time we thought in terms like COIN, security cooperation. We brought our equipment to theater and we kept it there for more than a decade. Strategic decisions would still be made in Washington, D.C., but the tactical decisions, with strategic implications, were being made on the ground. Our senior leaders had more access to more information than ever in our history, and they weren't afraid to use it.

There are some iconic pictures out there of that very thing, whether it was appropriate to use the information or not. Today we've got a mix of all of those generations in our joint force. My concern now is how current events are shaping today's senior leaders.

This morning, our United States Air Force will announce a new brigadier general's list. Who are they? Really, who are they going to be as leaders and where will they take force and how are we shaping their lens?

I believe the changing character of war and the way we face it today will define the challenges of our time. The most significant changes are the result of emerging technologies. We talked about some of that this morning, geopolitics and shifting demographics. These are not only changing societies and the way we fight, they're also changing why and where wars are fought. In fact, they're changing who is fighting those wars.

Conflict increasingly transcends geographic boundaries. I remind my GCC colleagues that we don't have geo-fences up around their AOR. Oh if it were that simple, that a fight can be contained in a geo-fence called CENTCOM, but we will not fight there.

We're going to fight one day a technologically advanced adversary, and possibly a numerically superior adversary. We'll have to transport and sustain forces over long contested lines of communication. You've heard of contested environments, and some of you feel as though you've fought through them your entire life. But let's be honest, it has been since World War II that we have enjoyed total domain dominance and air superiority -- World War II, 70-plus years.

But those tactics, techniques and procedures that made us successful will not do the trick going forward. And get this, contested does not mean kinetic. Before in my life I thought that I was okay until I met somebody (warning?) you're in a contested environment right now sitting right here. Consider this.

June 22, 2017, 20 American vessels operating in the Black Sea reported their GPS was malfunctioning. It was displaying a position 25 miles away from where they were that said they were on land at an airport, not the ideal spot for a container ship, for those of you that don't know container ships. Their system said they were safe within 100 meters. They had been spoofed.

What happens when the actions of an adversary shake our confidence in our digital tools? Can we trust our systems? Once you lose the veracity of your systems, how do you get it back? First, how do you know, and then how do you get it back?

An adversary today doesn't have to stop us, all they have to do is slow us down. We'll stop a sec for that because we'll check and double check our accuracy. Once you've lost it, that will put enough doubt in the system that it will slow us down. They have already won, without any bombs, without any bullets, essentially using ones and zeroes.

That is the reality of our time, and it doesn't matter if you have the most lethal military in the world if you can't get it to where it needs to go. That's the paid political announcement from U.S. Transportation Command.

(Laughter).

Recently I had a chance to sit down with the president and the SecDef and the CoComs. Each of us went around the room in one minute and explained to the president who we were and connect our name and face with our command and our biggest challenge. Being the fine disciplined civil engineer from a fine military school that I am, I had mine down to about 40 second. How do I know? Because I timed it.

The other guys are not as disciplined as me. Here's what I said to him. I said, Mr. President, my name is Darren McDew. I have headquarters in the corn fields of Illinois, U.S. Transportation Command. We do air, land and sea transportation and global (patient ?) movement for the Department of Defense, both in military and commercial means. What I give you every day is options no other nation in the world has, the option to put an immediate force anyplace on the planet tonight for a decisive force when we need it and where we want it. My biggest problem is defending those options. That's the world we live in.

Our adversaries and other illicit actors are going to use cyber as the biggest threat to our decisive logistics advantage, and it is decisive right now, even though we haven't treated it as one for a long time. We can't afford to assume that that dominance will go unchallenged, because it is in fact being challenged every day. That's why cyber defense will be integral to everything we do.

We've got to move forward in solidarity to address this existential threat. It has to be a society issue, and what we have to do is get past the lens of the naysayers. We value the generation of Americans with things like this, because we found it important: cover

your mouth when you cough, wash your hands. We thought that was important enough that we put that in society.

Now, did it stop everybody from getting sick? No, but it changed the way we thought about health and we did it as a society. My six year old daughter came to me one day -- she's 31 now -- at six I thought I had progressed because I had taken the soda can rings off a six pack and was going to recycle it. I was advanced.

She wanted me to cut it up. Why did she want me to cut it up? It might hurt the dolphins. Society had decided that health and environment was something important enough to put (in tools ?).

No one expects any of those evolutions to be perfect. We trained our children to understand those things because we thought they were important at the time for the challenges we were going to face going forward. But like public health, we've got to establish cyber norms and standards so they don't just protect the individual, they protect everybody. These social conversations have got to happen and we have to come up with those quickly. We've got to take this digital technology age more seriously.

My grandson, as I told you, who is brilliant, is a wizard with an iPad. He can click on anything and make it happen. He's very comfortable with it. He can (face time ?). He's very good at it.

He's so comfortable he can get to me anytime he wants. The problem is he can click on anything at any time and doesn't understand what (denied ?) means, in a negative sense. Everything he can click, for him, is positive.

The current generation brought that level of comfort with them into the work environment. That digital technology in the workplace is a positive. But ask yourself this, does comfort equate to understanding? Does comfort equate to knowing how to protect yourself or knowing how to protect each other? We can't click on everything.

I'll tell you, that's your biggest threat vector right now, it's the insider clicking on anything. Cyber hygiene, cyber security, must be part of who we are, and we need to classically condition another generation of people.

I recently visited Estonia. They teach coding in elementary school. Why do they teach coding in elementary school?

They have a large neighbor to their east who taught them a very valuable lesson one time. What is it going to take for us to be next? How do we typically learn lessons in America? It takes a massive failure. We don't wait for just a little failure, we wait for a big one.

The challenge of our time will not be solved by the templates of the past, even if we were comfortable to think it could. The Cold War, the Desert Shield and Stormers,

they did what they needed to do to thrive at the time, but that was their time, and this is our time. Is what we're doing today good enough for tomorrow?

Even U.S. TRANSCOM had its own doubters back in the day. What made it a reality is people like you had the courage to act, the audacity to fail, and the intellectual curiosity to discover (new things ?). How is your value programming holding you back? Are you empowering a joint force of a generation through the challenges of time in a different way?

So what keeps me going? What keeps me going through the things I just talked about? It's quite simple. I believe this, someone in our joint force today is going to be the pioneer who will push through the face of this challenge. Someone in our force is going to be the thinker who will resolve the greatest issues of our time. Most importantly, someone in our force is the dreamer who will make the unimaginable a reality.

Who are we investing our time in, the person who can imagine the light bulb, the person who says it will never work, or the person who is just satisfied with designing a better oil plant? Who are we investing our time in?

I still believe that our force has the greatest America has to offer. I believe our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and coast guardsmen can imagine that world 30 years from now, just like I did 35 years ago when I thought I had all the answers. I believe this because ultimately we end up doing the right thing, sometimes (too slow ?).

It took us 80 years to go from the Wright brothers to full implementation of airpower. We don't have 80 years in this domain. I don't want to leave on too much of a downer, but I thank you for being the people in the room who believe and are intellectually curious. Thank you for listening.

(Applause).

MS. : We're open for Q&A. Please stand up, one question per person, and let the general know where you're from.

MR. : Sir, how are you? I want to go a little far afield, but some of it gets to the core of what you were talking about and I want to get some thoughts. You talked about learning and how your values are shaped really early.

There's one place in America, and you know this place very well, that trains joint officers, it's King's Point, New York. It has some amazing Air Force officers coming out of there. In this world, there's a great need for that. I would hope you'd give some thought to working really closely with your buddy Mark Busby (ph) who is now over at Marriott who has got a lot of challenges but a lot of really good ideas about King's Point as perhaps a joint service academy, and at the same level as the other academies.

In the future, where the world is going, kids come out of King's Point and have a joint perspective right away. You have a perspective of commercial and military integration. It's the only school that really focuses --

GEN. MCDEW: And it's credentialed.

MR. : Exactly, and they have licenses. Could you talk a little bit about King's Point and perhaps what TRANSCOM might do to bolster it and help Mark push forward?

GEN. MCDEW: I can't speak a lot about King's Point because my son graduated from the Coast Guard Academy. King's Point is a great institution that doesn't get enough attention and accolades for what they're producing, the young men and women. We also don't seem to value as much those men and women as they come out.

We've got to look at them differently and how we employ them after they leave King's Point. I had the privilege of a lifetime last year speaking at the commencement at King's Point. I fully understand what you're saying and I think more Americans need to.

If we can find a way to elevate King's Point to a place where people understood it more, we'd get a better product -- not product, utility at that point. They don't actually go sailing. Many of those young men and women don't go sailing because they're so valuable elsewhere. They can get jobs anywhere.

MR. : (Off mic) -- Air Force Magazine. I was hoping to follow up on some comments last month from Secretary Mattis on Capitol Hill who said that because of the mass need for airlift and sealift to respond to hurricanes, there had been a slight delay in getting troops and cargo over to Afghanistan and other AORs. Can you give me sort of an update on where things stand in response to the storms, and if that delay will continue?

GEN. MCDEW: There are always priorities that need to be met. We have a finite force, when you're talking about logistics and transportation across the globe. One of the things that we've done of late is to realize that we are a global force. TRANSCOM has realized that for a long time. I've tried for a long time to actually get my term changed from functional combatant command to global combatant command. I think it's quite amazing and quite cute that PACOM and CENTCOM get to tout all the countries in their AOR, 196.

But to get to your real question, with that reality I'm on record as having said that we don't have the assets we need to do everything around the world at the rate that we would like to do it. That means there have to be priorities. And when Americans are suffering, as they did during those Category 4 storms back to back to back, we shifted priorities and shifted assets to be able to respond in a way that we needed to respond.

Based on what FEMA was doing as the lead federal agency, what NORTHCOM was doing as the lead for DOD, TRANSCOM responded to everything they were asked to do by FEMA through NORTHCOM. That meant that some assets were shifted away

from maybe some places around the world, but none of the things that were shifted away impacted the ability to fight. There were priorities. There were lower priorities than what we were doing, and the higher priorities still got met.

We were maybe a week and a half or so in delay. We were a few days in delay. In the global transportation business, the way we do it, that is not as big a deal as some would think. However, if you're on the receiving end of those delays, it's a big deal. So I take every one of them seriously.

But if I had a thousand air refueling tankers, if I had a thousand ships underway, if I had a thousand air lifters, it wouldn't be enough. We have 200 and some odd C-17s. We've got 400 and some odd KC-135s and KC-10s, far below what we might need to be perfect everywhere.

MR. : (Off mic) -- You're military sealift command. Admiral Huber (ph) down there --

GEN. MCDEW: I was just there yesterday.

MR. : -- said his crews are going to be sailing into contested waters because of the changing international situation.

GEN. MCDEW: They're doing it right now.

MR. : Most of his ships are built to commercial standards and are crewed by civilians. Are we going to have to do something to change those conditions to take them back to something like we had in World War II when we had armed naval coast guards for the cargo ships? What do we do if Sealift Command faces contested waters?

GEN. MCDEW: There's multiple pieces of that. First I'll go back to what I said earlier, and that is that the contested waters don't start when you get underway. They start before they even leave the port, so they're contested right now. And that's not contested with a kinetic force, that's contested in a cyber force. So that's the first realization, that contested is right now.

Second, in World War II we also had armed convoys. We haven't practiced those techniques for 70 years. Why? Because we haven't needed to. We need to start figuring out what armed escorts look like and what open lines of communication look like on the open seas.

In World War II those civilian mariners came at valiant rates to the defense of their country and the free world. They died at the highest rate of any portion of the force, civilian mariners. The highest rate of casualties were suffered by civilian mariners.

I was talking to Dean Newbourne (ph) yesterday, and the effect of the U-boat in early days of World War II -- it took us two to three years to figure out the U-boat. The

U-boat was not necessarily thought of as the way to fight wars. It was kind of sneaky. It was kind of underhanded.

We didn't realize that that was the way it was going to be fought and we didn't want to deal with it early on. Once we finally started dealing with it after massive casualties, we actually solved the problem. I would actually contend that today's cyber is that way of fighting today that we don't really want to deal with. We want to worry about attribution. We want to worry about a lot of things other than solving the challenge of that threat. So what are we going to have to do? Think differently.

We know for a fact that the lines of communication will be contested. We know for a fact that we don't have all the ships that we want to have. Here's a word that I introduced into the lexicon when it comes to logistics, attrition. We don't assume for the last 70s years that we'll actually lose anything in logistics. Everything will get there on time. I don't think the adversary (will allow that ?).

MR. : Most of your sealift ships are aging. The admiral is worried about whether he can maintain both sealift and pre-positioned ships into the future. Give our budget situation, any possibility of modernizing your sealift fleet?

GEN. MCDEW: We're working on a recapitalization plan with the Navy. Part of that plan is we've got a legislative proposal in that I think is in the NDAA right now that allows us to buy used vessels as a bridge to getting to building new ships. Right now on the open market there are ships that are becoming available that are half the age or sometimes a third of the age of the ships in our fleet, and they are available for pennies on the dollar.

We can refab them and get them underway for work for the U.S. shipyards -- so everybody wins -- and we get a younger ship. I've got ships that are 50 years old. If I can buy a 15 year old ship I'm a very happy man. I'm also about to be the largest owner of steam ships in the world. I don't want to be the largest owner of steam ships in the world.

(Laughter).

You don't want me to be the largest owner of steam ships in the world because also with that comes the fact that, who has to sail those ships? The mariners who are credentialed in steam ships will not have a reason to stay credentialed in steam ships after the fact that I'm the last one with them. If the international community doesn't have any, why would they just stick with me to (flag ?) those steam ships?

GEN. JOHNSON: General Johnson, I like your comments about innovation and thinking differently. You mentioned we're going to have the list of the new two-stars coming out. We deal with a lot of colonels looking to become promoted. Most of them are risk adverse. They're not rewarded for thinking differently and doing things.

So what is the Air Force doing, or what could they do, to help reward that? It seems not until they become a four-star do they all of a sudden have all these great ideas that they try to implement with like a year left.

GEN. MCDEW: That's the urban legend. You need to talk to Bruce Manscot (ph). You need to talk to a couple of guys around the room and ask them how much different I am today other than older and not as good looking as I was. I'm about the same guy I was, and most of us who get here really have been that guy the entire time.

The urban legend says you get killed off if you're that guy. The reality is, not so much. What I have learned throughout my career is, most of the people that are naysayers don't have the courage to stop you.

If you're willing to lead, you can still get it done. People talk about being empowered and wanting to be empowered, people don't seize it. Most of our problems are people self-limit.

I used to always say when I was a colonel, I never want to be that colonel who thought he had a chance at a one-star. I actually had someone call me up when I was a young colonel and say Darren, you're making waves again. You just need to be careful. If you can sit there on your hands for a year you're going to be a one-star. I said, if it means me sitting on my hands I don't want to be a one-star.

So all the youngsters out there who claim old people do that, and there's enough that do, they have to realize that they're doing it to themselves if they buy into it. They say, well, these guys are careerists so why aren't you changing it? Well, I'm worried about my career. When you get to the point -- and unfortunately for the world -- I learned that lesson as a young major. For two years of my life -- I was a brand new major when I started working at the White House. For two years I was never told no. Why? Because I would call up and say I'm so and so and I work for the president of the United States and we'd like to do this. Okay.

That can do a negative thing for you or a positive thing. The negative thing is you could start to believe it's about you. The positive is you realize there's always somebody that can say yes. And the person that says no, sometimes they're only in power to say no. Once you realize that, there's a whole lot that opens to you. If you lean into that, you can get a lot of things done.

I understand what you're saying. I buy what you're saying. So I don't miss an opportunity to talk to every one-star class. I say, if you haven't now, start now. I've been a general for 12 years. Some people would say, if I started as a one-star (that's when I made it ?). I think I started as a captain, with SecDef.

MS. COURTNEY ALBION (ph): Courtney Albion with Inside the Air Force. (Off mic) -- are there other areas where TRANSCOM might be looking to partner?

GEN. MCDEW: TRANSCOM partners with everybody. We do a lot of things. We can't operate without our partnership with the Guard and Reserve, with what I call my fourth component which is commercial industry. One of the things I'm trying to get folks around the world and particularly in the nation and our board of governors and the 435 member of Congress to understand is -- industry I call my fourth component. The reason I call them my fourth component is I'm as interested in their readiness and capacity as I am in my organic fleet of ships and airplanes, etcetera.

The partnership with DIUX is an extension of a lot of those other partnerships that we have. Why is it so important? Sometimes, going back to this question, we have people that can't think beyond today. The folks in DIUX have experience in thinking beyond today.

I had another opportunity when I was a young colonel to go live at a Fortune 500 company for a year as a vice president in the company. So if you ask me any question today about the Peloponnesians, I did not go the War College. I do not know Jack about it.

What I did do is I spent a year in Silicon Valley, working for a Fortune 500 company in Silicon Valley from 1999 to 2000. Remember, that was the height of the Internet bubble. So I understand what people like DIUX bring. It's the ability to dream and the ability to act on it. They can find things that are possible versus trying to find things that are impossible. That what we benefited from.

We have now applications in the cloud. We have things in the cloud that I was told could not happen. We will be finished, hopefully, by a year from now, and I was told it couldn't happen. That's what that partnership (means ?).

MS. ALBION: Are there other areas where you'll partner?

GEN. MCDEW: It's not just DIUX. We've got a lot of big bets out there. One of them is we need a transportation management system. We're going to try to implement -- we need big data.

The guy or woman who sits in my seat two to three years from now ought to be more concerned about the data they move than the stuff they move. So we're trying to build a data lake and understand that. What I'm having trouble with is getting credentialed people that understand big data.

The Air Force hiring system is ridiculously slow. It is not compatible with anything you want to do that changes. I just said Air Force, but I could say, you name the service.

Why do we still have service civilians that are hampered from moving from service to service by the parochial views of that service? Why aren't there government civilians that can freely flow about? When I look at my kids, who are the generation that

will take over the marketplace here and very soon, they don't want to be tied down to a particular service.

They want the freedom to go work where the good work is. If they move from Air Force to Army, do we really care as long as they stay with us? If they move from Commerce to Justice to Army, do we really care? Our system says we care more about keeping them in a particular place than keeping them with the government. All of those things we need to change.

MR. ERIC PIERCE (ph): General McDew, thank you so much. I'm Eric Pierce with Lockheed Martin. It's great to see you again.

I want to pull a similar thread to what General Simmons said. I know you're a general officer who has nurtured and mentored in your career. I know you sat through a lot of Coronas and talked about diversity and inclusion initiatives. I wonder at this point in your career, as you look at the Air Force but the Joint Force as well, how are the services doing for DII?

GEN. MCDEW: It's an issue we have as a nation. We have a hard time talking about it. We have a hard time understanding a view that's not our own. We have a hard time relating to each other in a professional way about our differences and embracing the fact that we can be different yet work together.

We tend to go at it numerically, and that's not the answer. Our problem is -- and let me use me as an example. One of the first times it hit me square in the face I as a young captain. I got pulled into my squadron commander's office and he obviously didn't look like me. In fact, none of my bosses have ever looked like me.

He pulled me in and he said, why does lieutenant colonel so-and-so hate you? I'm a captain. And then he paused and he said, do you think it's because you're black?

I said, I won't be the first to say that. I said, first of all, I know he's a squadron commander and he can crush me if he wants, but if he chooses to use my skin color to hate me, I think that's a coward's way out. What he doesn't like about me possibly could be the fact that I'm an abrasive, aggressive, knowledgeable captain. He doesn't like it. My skin color doesn't help.

When I got promoted to four-star it was so uncomfortable for the chief of staff of the Air Force and his staff that they didn't even mention that I was the first African American combatant commander in the United States Air Force. They wanted my ceremony to be a small ceremony because that's what the chief always did was a small ceremony. He didn't want a big ceremony. There were hundreds of people who wanted to attend the ceremony, and they didn't understand why.

I mentioned once at a Corona that we have some places and pockets in our military where there are barriers to people progressing, and I was violently opposed with

a no they're not, (not from the chief's perspective ?). That's why we're not doing (enough ?). So any environment that allows it to be okay to say that those things don't exist, means even less is being done. I'm worried about the climate we have right now.

MS. : One of our missions at AFA is to (promote ?) issues that are important to the Air Force. Right now we're trying to be the voice and to pull a group together to talk about and shed some light on the pilots and maintainers. I was wondering how that issue is affecting TRANSCOM?

GEN. MCDEW: That's a broader issue than pilots and maintainers. I know it's very important and pivotal for the United States Air Force, but if you step back, where are the young men and women who want to be truck drivers and sail ships? They're not there.

There is not a transportation industry that is not suffering a shortage right now. There are probably a lot of (shortages ?) across the country. I am focused on transportation and logistics, but there are jobs in all of those places.

We have somewhat of a false narrative that we've painted for most Americans, and that is you must leave high school and go to a four year college. I believe it is a false narrative. Most of those young men and women do not graduate. I think some 30 to 40 percent do.

So if that's the reality, where is our trade schools? This doesn't get to the pilot part yet, but where are those places that teach people a trade that contributes to society, that's a really good skill and a good career? We're missing a lot of those in this country.

The pilot shortage, I've said this to some of the people in the airline industry, we send people to these exquisite pilot training schools, some wonderful ones, and most of them don't go into our aviation industry. As you look at the rolls of many of those schools, there are people that are being paid for by a foreign airline to go back and fly for that airline. Where is the interest right now in this across our nation as a problem? It's not there yet. We haven't hit the crisis yet, and that's the problem.

MS. : (Off mic) -- mitigate the attrition of tankers and transport.

GEN. MCDEW: To mitigate the attrition of tankers and transport? Attrition has many lenses. The question you just asked, I believe you may be considering kinetic attrition. I would like to see the Air Force address maintenance attrition.

We have some things we can control and some things we can't control. Where we put tankers and transports in the threat ring -- we have a threat working group that decides and can make decisions on when we will employ and where we will employ those assets. I have the authority to swing assets around the globe and to make decisions about risk to the force and risk to the mission. But what I can't control right now is how much money is invested in maintaining parts for those assets.

Across the board, every service has taken risks over the last few years in logistics. And it's not because they're bad people, it's because we have had a Congress that hasn't done their job for over a decade and passed an actual budget on time. I know it's got to be a hard job. I applaud them for doing it the best they can.

But I don't know many places where you can go and not do the pivotal thing that you're supposed to do year after year and say in your job. That means, when you have to make hard choices, there are consequences. Right now, our maintenance and reliability for the tankers are at one of the lowest rate I've ever seen, and that's because the services had to make too hard a choice on the things they could get under continuing resolution after continuing resolution.

MR. : To follow up on two of the questions -- (off mic) -- Congress is looking for a number. We've watched our force go to a point where there isn't a service out there that's large enough to do what it needs to do. We've seen them getting over-tasked just providing for hurricane relief, when if we really have to do a North Korea scenario we know we don't have enough assets.

We've asked the question, Congress has asked repeatedly the question, what do we need, not what can we afford? Reagan said, you need to tell me what the threats are, what you need to meet the threats, how much it costs, and then we'll determine what we can afford. Is TRANSCOM, with the services, ready to sit there and say, I need X amount of C-17s?

We're going to have to build a new lift capacity of some sort. We need ships. We need vehicles. We haven't done a (reforger ?) since you and I were sitting in the Cold War, so there's an infrastructure that goes behind it. Are you ready or is DOD ready to come forward and say, here's what we need to meet the requirements. Here are the numbers and here's what we need, instead of getting into we're going to play whack-a-mole in a sense?

GEN. MCDEW: Yes and no. We provide best military advice. Best military advice, we are on record, many of us, as saying we don't have enough to meet the scenarios that we believe we're going to face. From the top down, the government needs to decide what does it want from its military? What does the defense of this nation look like and what are the priorities?

Until we know what we're going to be asked to do -- if you ask me the question, do we have enough? The answer is, maybe. What do you want me to do?

If you want me to fight one war at a time, maybe we have enough. If we believe that we're at peace right now and we need to be ready to fight one adversary, maybe we have about enough. We're not at peace right now, and there are too many scenarios that say we're going to have a fight against violent extremism, ongoing.

We've become numb to that layer of effort, every day, all around the globe. We command probably 600 and some odd sorties every day, every day, at peace, right, at peace. So we've become numb to that level of effort, and that's additive.

So then what's the high end? We're concerned, and we have been concerned for a number of administrations, the high end adversary and whether or not we're going to be ready to fight a high end adversary. The (F-35 ?) is one of them. We aren't close to having enough of them. Is that squishy enough for you?

I have some numbers based on the scenarios. I believe I can give them to you, but your broader question I really want to go after is, what is it the American public wants from its military? What do we defend against? And then we build numbers based on that. Every general will tell you he wants more, or she wants more.

As I wrap up, sometimes you can get wrapped around the fact that when some old guy stands up here and says I've got a bunch of doom and gloom stuff, there's a threat through there that I hope you heard. Ultimately it is I still believe that we get the best America has to offer. I still believe ultimately that our Congress and our American public will do the right thing. I just think we need to do it faster.

We need to think different. Those of us that are in leadership positions owe it to the people below us and with us to let them do some things that scare us. I actually challenge my team at TRANSCOM, I want them to periodically come to my office and scare the crap out of me, because I want them to stretch me beyond what I think reality says.

They do it every day. Maybe that's why we're in the cloud. That's why we're talking Big Data. That's why we're talking partnering in a broader way. That's why my cyber message is as deep and as strong as it is.

I'm a 35 year airman. I don't get any questions about airplanes when I testify, zero. Those are not the challenges of our times. The ones I illuminated are, and most of them are (in here and here ?). Thank you for listening.

(Applause).

MS. : General, thank you so much for being here today. Although you're in a joint position now, I know your still (believe in the Air Force ?) so we haven an Air Force (centenary award ?).

GEN. MCDEW: Thank you. I've been in half of the Air Force's life and have lived all but 50 years of it.

(Laughter).