



Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

All right, let's get started to make the most of our 40 minutes. Good afternoon. I'm Major General Linda Urrutia-Varhall. If you know me or you knew of me, I go by UV and I'm very proud to moderate "Shattering Barriers to Success." We have three panel members, Ms. Malizia, Lieutenant Colonel Hart, otherwise known as Lion, and we have Major Thomas, otherwise known as KT. I'm going to jump...

Marianne P. Malizia:

I'm not feeling the love.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

I'm going to jump right into the questions and ask the panelists members to introduce themselves as they go. My first question is for Ms. Malizia. Ms. Malizia, why was a diversity and inclusion office established in the Department of the Air Force and what is your vision for the future?

Marianne P. Malizia:

Thank you, UV and AFA. Thank you so much for the opportunity to have this panel. Very excited and I'm glad to see all the faces out here. I'm Marianne Malizia, director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion for the Secretary of the Air Force, and I've got a bunch of my team and office here and I'm really excited about it. But why are we here? I'm going to say let's take this back to 2021. That's as far back as I'm going to go. There was executive order 14035 that stated that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility was of paramount importance to all of our services and across the Department of Defense.

And couple that with fiscal year 2020 ones NDAA, that said that secretaries of the services needed to appoint an advisor on diversity, equity, and inclusion. And so that prompted the standup of my office. We report directly into Secretary Kendall, which is a distinct honor and it really shows the level of importance that he places on diversity, equity, and inclusion. My office is aligned to everything that is directed by the Executive Branch Congress, Department of Defense Secretary Kendall, Chief Brown, Chief of Space Operations Saltzman. So we have a lot of people that are very interested and invested in the work that we do and we're here to serve. Yeah, so that's why we're here, the nuts and bolts of it.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Ma'am, let me follow that up with another question. So you always hear people talk about diversity and inclusion, equity, but sometimes it isn't related to mission and readiness. Can you talk about diversity, inclusion and equity and relate it back to mission readiness both for our Airmen and our Guardians?

Marianne P. Malizia:

Most definitely. That is my most favorite talking point to make when you think about any of the services across Department of Defense, but specifically today for Air Force and Space Force, what do we need to win? We need to have strong teams, right? It's the teams that do the work. It's the people that do the work, and we need to have leadership who knows how to lead those teams and how to manage the talent that is out there. And a good leader knows that diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, experience, education, brings quality thought to the process of solving any problem. People are able to solve more complex problems with better results. You can really forge a sense of team to move forward collectively to accomplish the mission. And it is about talent management as well. I say leadership, talent management, knowing who your people are, knowing what their capabilities are, knowing what



opportunities you need to provide them to be successful in their careers and to enable their success, whatever that looks like for them.

And so that if you can have that strong team, if you can have that inclusive culture, you are as a unit ready to execute the mission. People, it's a mission imperative and diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility, that's what we're calling it now. In my ideal world, you wouldn't need my office if we're doing this right and we're being very intentional about it and creating that culture of inclusion, it will be embedded into the very, very intricate tapestry that is the Department of the Air Force and we'll respect each other. We'll treat everyone with dignity and respect, and we're going to be ready to meet the pacing challenge, which as you heard this morning, China, China, China. So we need to know how to leverage our people to our best abilities. And one other thing I'm going to throw in there, we have all heard about how all of the services are having challenges recruiting.

Why wouldn't we want to ensure that we are widening the aperture of where we're looking for talent, not just people but talent and enable everybody the opportunity to learn about the Department of the Air Force and the opportunities that are out there. Let them learn about what's required to enter whether you're in uniform or in civilian clothes and have the opportunity to do so. We can't continue to fish in the same ponds we fished in over years, over years. We have to be innovative, we have to be intentional, and we have to ensure that our department is representative of the nation that we are serving, and you and I and us, we are the best recruiters out there for doing so. And so engaging with your communities, with your families, with your friends, letting them know that we are an employer of choice, we do have an inclusive culture, and that we welcome them to join will benefit you and me and our nation.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Great answer, Ms. Malizia and I agree. Over my 35 years, especially working in intelligence, diversity of thought was key. And it could be diversity of thought from culture, it could be from your background, it could be from your schooling, it could be from lots of things because if we had everybody in the Airmen and Guardians thinking alike, then we really wouldn't be able to defeat China. So that's a great point. I think Ms. Malizia has set the foundation now. I'd like to go to Lion now, Lyon, I heard there's a great program at ACC called Sword Athena program. Could you tell the audience and brag a little bit about it?

Lt. Col. Kareen Hart:

Yes, ma'am. So my name is Lieutenant Colonel Kareen Hart. I go by lion and I am a career intelligence officer by trade. However, I'm lucky enough to belong to the Sword Athena team at ACC. Sword Athena was stood up in 2019 at the behest of General Holmes and Colonel Lang, who's in the audience somewhere here, helped set up this program. And it was looking at what are the barriers that women and families face when they're looking to serve? How do we better get at some of the organizational training and equipping type processes and challenges to overcome those and allow women to serve to their highest potential? We recognize that women sometimes have different challenges As leaders, you're being torn in different directions because you feel like you're not serving enough or you want to be at a meeting, but you are also a nursing mother. And so you want to be able to actually still take care of your child.

And there's a lot of things that kind of come up with the psychological safety of the environment, the ability to serve some of the pressures that we internalize upon ourselves. And so ACC took a weapons and tactics model, which is known across our command where you take grassroots efforts from the tactical level, identify what your barriers are, and then raise them up to the MAJCOM staff so we can look at how we can address those for you.



The beautiful thing about Sword Athena is that our headquarter staff team, which again, all volunteers and I see lots of them in the audience here, are taking ideas from our wing Athenas, the wings are building from the squadron on up to say, "This is what I'm challenged with, this is what I'm facing, this is what I would like to see done." And they push those ideas up to the MAJCOM so that we can come together, research, develop courses of action, and then figure out how to present those courses of action to our decision makers to go out and change things for our Airmen at every level.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Let me follow that up real quickly. Can you give some examples of the successes that you've had with the Sword Athena?

Lt. Col. Kareen Hart:

Certainly, ma'am. So as we've looked at it over the course of the years, we've done a variety of things. Some of it is we look at how to better implement policies that the Witt and higher levels have developed into more practical solutions. So we've done things as simple as changing our CDCs to no hat, no salute zones, because that makes it easier just to be taking your children in and out every day. We've helped push some of the guidelines for the changes to the hair regulations, recognizing that hair was often impacting fit of how you were wearing chem masks. It was causing actual physiological harm to women because of some of the regulations of how tight it had to be. We were looking at some of the barriers there and trying to push them out. We've also done things like institute lactation rooms and make sure that they're available across the comp setting standards for what those should look like and making sure that our civilian partners are actually getting paid time off to go and pump something that they were not getting before.

We've also done things like pushing for... Pardon me. We've also pushed for things like Bluetooth enabled breast devices in the skiffs, which I know as a commander who had had a child while I was in command, I was still trying to do that. And the ability to actually take care of my child while still sitting in a staff meeting and knowing that I'm taking care of my Airmen was absolutely critical because it helped me feel like I could still lead, but I was also still taking care of my family. We've also looked at issues like Female Fitment and getting after. I know the Female Fitment booth is back in the back hallway there and looking at what are the devices which allow women to do things like actually use the restroom while they're flying in the aircraft.

Challenges that you would think are basic and yet are not. We're looking at Afrigen and saying, "How do we recognize the physiological differences that women are going to face while deployed, especially in a forward operating location? Are we properly supplying them with basic necessities like sanitary products?" Because you cannot run down to your local BX or PX0, just be able to get after that. So all of this falls into readiness. All of this follows into the idea of how are we better preparing our Airmen to serve and be at their highest potential?

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Boy, if only the program would've been around 35 years ago, but I will say thank you finally, after 35 years, I can actually put a hyphen in my name instead of running all 14 letters together. So I appreciate you guys start at least doing that part. All right, KT, time for you to really, really brag and talk up the Legacy Flight Academy program, another program that is really hitting diversity, inclusion and equity hard. Awesome.

Maj. Kenneth "KT" Thomas:



Well, first I want to say thank you for having me here and be able to represent Legacy Flight Academy. This is really big for us and I speak from being A1C Thomas at one point in my life. So being here to be able to tell you about the great program that we have is a big deal. So let you picture this. Sometime last year we had one of our events. We had a young lady who was terrified of getting in an airplane. For her it was death defying. She was petrified. And due to the staff that we had, the team members we had out there, the Airmen that were there motivating her, pushing her and helped her get to the point where she's like, "Okay, I'll get in the airplane, but I don't want to fly this thing. I have no desire to do this."

So she gets in the plane and she's still petrified and I'm flying with her. So we get up to the whole short line, getting ready to take off, and I tried to distract her a little bit. I said, "Okay, you get to make the radio call." I was like, "We're Legacy One, so let everybody know Legacy One's ready for takeoff." So she's like, "All right," push the button, "Legacy One ready for takeoff." You see her smile, get a little bit big because bought in now, she's part of this now. Then we get on the runway and before I told her, "Now you're not going to fly. Don't worry about it." I said, "All right, put your hands on the yolk, put you on the yolk, then put your hand on the throttle." She pushed the throttle up. You hear the engine rev up, the airplane starts moving down the runway.

We get to rotate speed. We pull back. As soon as we get off the ground, that petrified look turned into big smiles and uncontrollable laughter. At that instant, her entire life was changed.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Changed.

Maj. Kenneth "KT" Thomas:

Before that she never thought she would get in the airplane. After that moment she couldn't stop talking about "How do I get to do this for the rest of my life? How do I get to be part of the Air Force? How do I get to do these things? What do I need to do?" And at this point, we get done flying and she's asking all the other mentors and all the other Airmen around, "How do I do this?" She gets put into learning how to get into Civil Air Patrol, learning how to apply for Air Force ROTC scholarships, getting mentors. And that right there happens on a nearly continual basis with our program since 2012. Legacy Flight Academy is a nonprofit organization dedicated to introducing underrepresented youth to aviation, STEM, and aviation careers through mentorship, flight training and history Legacy Tuskegee Airmen.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

KT, you kind of alluded to this, but can you talk a little bit more about how it's impacting recruiting across the diversity spectrum and do you consider this program as a retention tool? One other piece I'm going to add to that too is how do they find out more about it? How do they get their kids? How can you get people involved in it? Is there a website or is there a telephone number or something that you like-

Maj. Kenneth "KT" Thomas:

Sure.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

... to tell them about?

Maj. Kenneth "KT" Thomas:



There's a lot of ways to find out about Legacy Flight Academy. You got 188-TUSKEGEE, you got [legacyflightacademy.org](http://legacyflightacademy.org). We're on Facebook, we're on Instagram. You can Google us, you can find us if you want to. Ask somebody and someone will direct you. You can look me up, KT Thomas and I will get you where you need to be. As far as a recruitment tool, we go to areas all across the United States, and we do virtual programs. So we provide an opportunity for students to learn about the opportunities we have in cases where they may not have ordinarily had access to or known how to take whatever steps. A lot of times people say, "Well, you can just Google how to do this." As a lot of us may know, Google in itself only gives you steps, but it doesn't give you the mentorship or guidance to get you to where you can become a pilot in the Air Force, get a technical job in the Air Force.

Because we know that's not as simple as it would seem. It's just like if someone gives you a recipe, you can look at the steps, but it doesn't mean you're going to bake a cake like your mother does or have the right seasons and everything. So for us, it really is that link between here's some information and here's us taking you through the process to actually get there.

As far as retention is concerned, legacy Flight Academy gives opportunity for our Airmen who believe that diversity inclusion in these careers are important. We empower our Airmen to be able to volunteer their time, to be able to have say in how we move the needle and really help them feel like, all right, I can actually have an impact on diversity and inclusion, whether it's in the Air Force or through Legacy Flight Academy. Because being that legacy Flight Academy is independent of the Air Force, there are a lot of things that we can do that you may not be able to do necessarily in the Air Force. And it's not a big ship that has to be moved. We can do things on a real quick pivot. If we want to do an event two weeks, we can go do that. If someone wants us to go do certain projects or anything, we can do that almost now. And most of the people who are on the LFA team are Airmen, so we know how to be expeditious and make things happen.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Perfect. Ms. Malizia, I know Secretary Austin stood up a defense advisory committee on diversity inclusion. I'm proud to be included on that. Can you let us know how some of the barriers that we have for the Air Force and the Space Force, how are those brought forward to that particular group so they're included when it gets briefed to Secretary Austin?

Marianne P. Malizia:

Most definitely, and thank you. Yeah, DACODAI was brought back into force I guess this past year with General Lyles leading as chairman of that, and DACODAI is the Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. And so our office is tasked with things that we are very fond of. RFIs request for Information by DACODAI.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

We have plenty.

Marianne P. Malizia:

Wanting to learn more about how does our current Air Force look, what are the programs and policies and procedures that we have in place to support a culture of inclusion to ensure that everyone has opportunities and identify are there barriers to success? And so we do provide that information up to DACODAI. It's also allowed us to provide most recently a demonstration of a tool that we're very proud of our workforce analytics dashboard, which lets you take a look in time, present time as to what our



department of the Air Force looks like across gender education, ethnicity, AFSCs, geographies, you name it, so that we can all have an idea as to who we are and what we look like.

Anybody has access to that. And so the demonstration that was given to leaders from DACODAI the other week was extremely well received. And I'm sure we'll be sharing this with other services as well. But on that, you mentioned barriers. I'm going to talk a little bit about my office and then a little about the volunteers that are doing great work in identifying barriers and not just identifying them, but making informed recommendations as to how to overcome them. So my office is focused on overall attracting, assessing, recruiting, retaining development, you name it, of our Airmen and Guardians, both civilian and military. And we do that through education training, through data analytics and analysis, through strategy policy and governance, through strategic outreach and strategic communications. And that's great. And it's a lot of work to do for almost 700,000 people when our office is less than 30 people.

So we're lucky enough, and I'm proud enough to call my colleagues, members of the department of the Air Force Barrier Analysis working group to have them supporting our mission. They're aligned, any of you perhaps who are civilians came from industry or corporate America, very similar to employee resource groups that they're aligned to different demographic groups, women, LGBTQ, Hispanic Latino, Disability, LGBTQ, Pacific, Asian American, you name it. We have seven of them. And they're doing amazing work at identifying barriers, doing really good in-depth research coming forward with data to support as why is this a barrier and why do we need to get rid of it? And then working with the different offices to identify those policies and procedures that can be implemented. My office's booth is right out the back door behind you if you want to learn more about what the office does, as well as there's a really cool takeaway card that has QR codes that you can scan for each of the barrier analysis working groups if you would like to get involved and make real change happen. So I'm talking a little bit too much.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Nope.

Marianne P. Malizia:

But I'm really proud of the work that the office does and our DAFBOG teams.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

You should be proud of what you and your office have done. And I'm glad that you touched on the point because when people talk about diversity and inclusion, unfortunately most people wrap it around just race and ethnicity. It is much more than that. It's AFSCs, let's be honest. It's enlisted, its officers, it's the whole scheme of it. So when we talk about diversity and inclusion, it's important to talk about the entire spectrum and not just relate it back to what everybody thinks is race and ethnicity because it's way beyond that.

Marianne P. Malizia:

I could not agree more, and I'm glad you mentioned the AFSCs. My SEL Chief Don Pedro had a conversation. He's got fans out there. He knows it, just about everybody.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

I'm a huge fan.





Marianne P. Malizia:

But he shared an event with me how he was talking to a senior leader, and the senior leader more or less said, "Hey, I don't have diversity. How am I supposed to bring diversity? These are the people that get assigned to my unit and this is who I work with." And Chief Pedro was like, "Well, sir or ma'am, it's not about just about race or ethnicity. What AFSCs do you have that are going to come at this problem with a different perspective. Invite them to the table, have them provide input. You'll be amazed at the different thinking and the different solutions you're going to be coming up with." And so I think it's really important. I just want to say one other thing and I'll give you back the microphone. Fine. I did make a comment in my earlier opening that in an ideal world, my office would not be here. It's not because I don't want to be here doing this work. It's-

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Come on. Who doesn't love the Pentagon? Come on.

Marianne P. Malizia:

... the work we're doing is really important, but until we get it right, we have to continue this and we have to continue doing this once again collectively and intentionally. Our office likes the work that we're doing, and we'd like to invite you along in the journey.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

All right. So I'm going to throw an audible to Lion and KT mentoring. When you're talking about shattering barriers to success, mentoring is so important, and I always like to say you mentor down, but you equally mentor up. Through my 35 years, I didn't have the answer to everything. And more importantly, you mentor sideways. So how does Sword Athena and both the Legacy Academy, how does that build mentors? And I'm sure that some of the staff or people that may be involved in the program can be mentors that other folks look up to, whether it be an African-American, whether it be LGBTQ, community, woman, just overall. Could you talk a little bit about that? I'll let KT go first, kind of leaving it lively up here.

Maj. Kenneth "KT" Thomas:

Okay. All right. What I'm going to do is I'm going to tell the story real quick that's going to answer your question. All right. So when it comes to mentoring at all levels inside organization and not just to youth, I'll give a story about a young man that went to A&T and was a comm officer and had not ever really seen any black pilots. He came to be a volunteer to mentor our youth in Tuskegee years ago. He came to the event, helped out with the event, mentored youth, and actually had opportunity to go fly plane with Legacy Flight Academy as a volunteer and sometimes we're able to take kids and take our volunteers up because we know sometimes they have not had that opportunity as well. So this young man went and flew in the Cessna that day and it changed his perspective on flying.

Never considered it ever. Not that he was incapable, but most of our students didn't know that it was something that was possible. After that, he completed his private pilot certificate and probably the fastest I've ever seen anybody complete a private pilot certificate, I think he flew every day, two to three times a day until he was done. I don't think he slept or eight moat much, but he got it done.

He got it done and applied to UPT with the mentorship from a lot of the folks in Legacy Flight Academy who gave him guidance on how do you get there. Because he was already at a point where when you're prior service, there's less opportunities for UPT, but there's a lot of people who help you get there. So this young man, he made it through UPT, became a C-17 pilot, became a C-17 aircraft commander. Now



is a KC-46 pilot and has done the same and given back and is mentoring those around them to still be able to get there. That's D'Andre Davis right there. You go ahead stand up, Greg. But that's an example of how we don't, we're not just mentoring down, but in our program, everybody who comes out always gains something. They're always being mentored by the people around us because we get a lot of people who have a lot of knowledge and experience that we all can share and all can benefit from. So that's how we do it.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Yeah, it's really important to pay it forward because unfortunately we're not there in the Air Force or Space Force that everybody can see themselves in a senior leader. So we need to continue to build that. We're going to get there eventually, but it is just really hard. So those of us who retired, or those of us who go out into the career fields like you did, you need to give back. It's important they have to see you. They have to see the success that you had. And I'm sure that you started from humble beginnings too. [inaudible 00:27:01]. "I don't know if I can do this." Maybe he's not a STEM graduate or whatever, and it just opens it up. But being able to see somebody in real life with a flight suit on getting ready to board the airplane or just hear about his great adventures, I mean, that makes the whole thing. I totally agree. What about you for Sword Athena?

Lt. Col. Kareen Hart:

Ma'am, for Sword Athena, I think we've taken mentorship to kind new heights in terms of being able to incorporate across the MAJCOM and being able to look from the groundswell efforts that are occurring to help build it up. And so for us, the mentorship comes naturally from down up because they're the ones who are saying, "I've identified a problem and at my level I just can't fix this. I don't know how, I don't know who to go to. I don't know how to make this change." And so by having them start at that level, we've helped empower them by giving them a venue for which they can highlight these concerns, but also then teaching.

All right, part of Sword Athena now is we have kind of a how to Athena type program that we're trying to build up and it's still nascent, we're still developing it, but it's kind of a how to pack of, "All right, you want to set up your own local chapter, you want to set up your own wing effort or squadron effort. These are the things you might want to consider. This is what you might want to bring to the table."

And a lot of it is not. We started as a readiness function for women and families. However, that doesn't mean that it doesn't cross against other career fields. It doesn't cross against other things. One of the big items for us is, for example, I'm an Intel officer and I'm lucky enough to have had many senior female mentors, but I work with a lot of AFSCs where they are the senior female in their AFSC or they don't know any leadership that are female. And so to approach them about things like, "Hey, how would I get access to menstruation products on the aircraft or something like that?" They don't want to necessarily approach their squadron commander about that. So having an organization where they can reach out and ask the hard questions, find the resources that they need, it's so important in helping diversify that. And what's great is that Sword Athena has now moved on from just an ACC program to develop kind of what we're calling a Parthenon of events. So the other MAJCOMs have started standing up their own women's initiative teams and Athena events.

And so the idea that we can help share ideas across the MAJCOMs, cooperate on things like the bladder relief programs for aircraft and fighters, that's going to be applicable to global strike command. So there's those areas where we naturally tie in and being able to share those lessons across has been absolutely helpful across all of us.





Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

I'm really proud of the Air Force and Space Force. Obviously when I came in and through my whole career, I was always a minority in the room, usually the only woman, always the only Latina. It's just something that I had to deal with. Thank God I grew up with three brothers, wasn't a problem. So it was hard for me. And I see, and Intel's one where I came from, we have really worked with a lot of women to put them in place like Leah Lauderback and such who have really put a good... They really care about diversity and they're really trying to make a difference once again through the mentoring piece. Ms. Malizia, another audible. So where do you see your office in five years or do you see a need for your office in five years?

Marianne P. Malizia:

Is that a trick question? Where do I see my office? I think it's going to take more than five years for us to get this right. We're a big organization. Both the Air Force and Space Force are younger than the Army or the Marines. And so we're not as entrenched in the way that we've always done things as they are, but we still are. And so I think my office will still be here and my office hopefully will be growing in size and we will be increasing the capabilities that we provide our Airmen and Guardians to be able to be successful, to be able to be inclusive leaders no matter what rank you are. I think we will also continue to be leveraging our DAF BOG teams in helping us as well as our chief diversity and inclusion officers that are out at our MAJCOMs and field comms.

It's important work to do, right? When you take it back to its mission essential, it allows us to be operationally ready for whatever is to come. And we heard this morning, whatever may be coming our way is something we've never seen before. So we need to have the innovation, we need to have the creativity. We need to be able to think critically to be able to react in the speed of light to what challenges come our way. And as we continue to work in a more global environment on a daily basis, having that cultural literacy and cultural competency to be able to engage with our partner nations or even engage with those that are not partner nations is going to be important too. So we're here.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Okay. I agree. The adversaries we have out there now, we have to absolutely think outside the box. And usually it comes from our younger folks who aren't as handcuffed as you get more senior. So it's really important that they know they have the freedom to think outside the box and really go back to what the Air Force was supposedly set up on to be anyway. That was a technological service, which I think sometimes we've taken a step backs because we've had to, but it's time to get back on the train. I agree. So we've heard about Sword Athena great program. Can you tell us a little bit about the Fitment effort? And I understand there's a booth outside.

Lt. Col. Karen Hart:

Yes, ma'am. So for Fitment, what are we talking about? We're talking about the actual fit of uniforms and equipment for females in particular. And so when we talk about Fitment, I know it's kind of a made up word, but it is the idea of I am not just a small male. I happen to be a very small female, but the way that I have uniforms that fit me is not the same. And that goes beyond the basics of just size and proportion. It goes to the fact of fitment is about survivability. When I look at body armor and I see women who are wearing sizes that are three sizes too big because that's how it will fit their chest, but then they have huge gaps along their sides, meaning that that is one of the least protected zones, which is of course right where your heart and your lungs are. That's going to be a problem.



If we're talking about putting our Airmen in harm's way, we need to be providing them with the equipment that's actually going to allow them to survive and do their job. It can be as little of things as the size of gloves for some of our maintainers, we've heard that from some of all of our training units of I don't need just an extra small size glove. I need one that fits my proportions of my hands because that allows me to be nimble. That allows me to handle the equipment I need to do and make quick turn changes on my aircraft in very cold conditions or very, very hot conditions.

It's being able to have the equipment you need to perform your duties that actually allows you to perform. So they've done some amazing things. I know the Fitment team that's out in the back hallway right now is from AFMC, LCMC, and they're developing not only things like the bladder relief for some of the pilots, they are also looking at some of the better maternity uniforms both for flyers as well as just for routine, how do we make this not a 1950s tent type effort.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

I hear you on that.

Lt. Col. Kareen Hart:

But they're doing a really great job of looking at how do we better design it so that it fits women and men because women make up 20% of our force and it's important that we start recognizes that sometimes their needs are just different.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Perfect. KT, what are some of the concrete barriers for entry into the STEM and the aviation career field, and then what organizations are out there like Legacy Flight Academy that really goes after the stems in the aviation career field?

Maj. Kenneth "KT" Thomas:

That's a really good question. That's a big question too, because when it comes to entry into the STEM and aviation career fields, when we look at our youth, the problems we have are the expectations, the educations and the exposure. Those are the three things if you kind of break it down. So the expectation comes from the different areas that we go to, making sure that the youth know that they should be good at math. It's okay to be good at math. It's okay to be part of organizations that help you with math. It's okay to learn computers, but sometimes we don't focus on that as a whole and we want to try to make sure that we're making sure they understand that's important. That's the expectation. Education. They have to have a reason to want to get educated in math and in science.

They'll go to class but if you don't give students or young people a reason to want to work harder on math, other than just showing up to class, take a robotics class, take the aviation class, take any of those types of things, it's going to be really hard for them to get the education they need to get high ASVAB scores to be able to get those technical jobs. Be able to pass the Air Force Office of Qualification test and be able to get a rated slot if that's what they want. And then exposure. And that's what our program and a lot of other programs are is exposure, because they're not going to know that those things are important if they don't see that one, that some of those jobs are available, possible and attainable. I know when I first joined the Air Force, I didn't know that a lot of the jobs in the Air Force even existed until I had someone expose them to me.

Luckily for me, I was good at math and I liked math, but everybody's not like that. And young people tend to not like math to the detriment. And there is a lot of organizations out there that help outside the Legacy Flight Academy. I'm a big fan of Civil Air Patrol because Civil Air Patrol has a lot of different



programs, whether it's flying, learning about using radios, technology and things like that, that really get students to learn how to do those things. We've done a lot of partnerships with Civil Air Patrol to kind of help that. But students in different STEM programs at their schools, the key is a lot of us out here are parents, so we need to make sure that we're pushing our kids and our kids' friends because our kids' friends sometimes don't get those things at home as well.

We talk to a lot of parents, not just the students when it comes to our program. We need them to know, "Hey, you got to go out there and push these kids to do more than what they're doing. Even if they have good grades, expose them to things that they may not have considered." Even to say, "Yeah, I don't want to fly a plane," we'll still go out and learn about aviation. There's a lot of things you can do outside of a flying airplane. As everybody in here knows, it's not just flying airplanes in the Air Force. That's what people think. So Civil Air Patrol's good. And like I said, Legacy Flight Academy, we have abundance of programs to help mentor and guide students in that direction.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Great answer. And I'm proud to say I was STEM. Before it was cool. I was 1984 Engineering. Lion, 30 second wrap up. I'm going to give you the floor final words.

Lt. Col. Kareen Hart:

I would just encourage everyone to be empowered at your level. We have an amazing groundswell of efforts that have been pushed up recently with Sword Athena and with some of the other Athena efforts, and I love seeing it. Absolutely love seeing it. We have had phenomenal senior mentors. The Commack was our biggest advocate for our program. We've got Wing Commander sponsorship, we've got senior sponsors on our headquarter staff, and I encourage you all to build your own teams, do what you can at your level and when you find those barriers, when you find a point where you can't make it any further, then push it up and we'll see what we can do. But thank you all for your engagement.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Exactly. It's not, no, it's how do we get to, yes. That's the answer. All right, KT, any final words of wisdom? I know you got them.

Maj. Kenneth "KT" Thomas:

Yeah. Continue to know, live and grow the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen. That's my words. Thank you.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):

Ms. Malizia. I'm going to let you close out the panel with some words of wisdom.

Marianne P. Malizia:

Thank you so much. I'm very proud of the work that the Department of the Air Force is doing to drive a culture of inclusion forward. I thank you for being here and partnering with us on this journey. I can tell you, being a graduate from the United States Military Academy with a second class that graduated women and looking out at this audience, we have come a long way. The work is not yet over. So let's go forward and get after this today and into the future. Thank you all everyone, and UV thank you.

Maj. Gen. Linda Urrutia-Varhall, USAF (Ret.):



So the panel members will be around if you'd like to talk to. Ms. Malizia has an engagement a couple minutes after we're done, but Chief Pedro will be there. We'll be right outside. And how about another round for this great panel.