

1 LOUISIANA MILITARY ADVISORY COUNCIL
2 BOARD MEETING HELD ON
3 NOVEMBER 16, 2023
4 AT THE LEESVILLE CITY HALL
5 508 S. 5TH STREET,
6 LEESVILLE, LOUISIANA

7 REPORTED BY: NICOLE M. CRABB, CCR

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20 APPEARANCES:	
21 ROBERT M. "ROBBY" ABBOUD, JR., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR	
22 LMAC	
23 MAYOR RICK ALLEN	
24 MAYOR CLARENCE E. BEEBE	
25 GENERAL ROBERT J "BOB" ELDER	

1 MR. CHRIS GOODE, THE ROOSEVELT GROUP
2 MR. JEREMY HILTON, SOUTH CENTRAL REGIONAL LIAISON
3 OFFICE
4 MR. BRUCE KELLER, BELLE CHASSE NAVAL AIR STATION
5 JOINT RESERVE BASE
6 SECRETARY DONALD M. PIERSON, JR. (CHAIRMAN)
7 MS. DEBORAH B. RANDOLPH
8 SENATOR MIKE REESE
9 SECRETARY/LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOEY STRICKLAND (VICE
10 CHAIRMAN)
11 MR. MURRAY W. VISER
12 MRS. PAT VISER
13 BRIGADE GENERAL D. KEITH WADDELL
14 PROCEEDINGS
15 MR. ABOUD:
16 All right. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being
17 here on 16 November LMAC meeting. I'm showing 10 after 1:00, so
18 I'd like to go ahead and call this meeting to order.
19 I know we have a number of important topics and activities to
20 report out on, so I'd like to quickly do the roll call. And so,
21 again, as we move through the roll call, please feel free to
22 correct me on any mispronunciations.
23 Mayor Clarence Beebe?
24 MAYOR BEEBE:
25 Here.

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1 MR. ABOUD:
2 Representative Raymond Crews?
3 (No response.)
4 MR. ABOUD:
5 General Robert Elder?
6 GENERAL ELDER:
7 Here.
8 MR. ABOUD:
9 Mr. Robert Gatti?
10 (No response.)
11 MR. ABOUD:
12 Mr. Brian Jakes?
13 (No response.)
14 MR. ABOUD:
15 Mr. John Manion?
16 (No response.)
17 MR. ABOUD:
18 Secretary Don Pierson?
19 SECRETARY PIERSON:
20 Present.
21 MR. ABOUD:
22 Ms. Deborah Randolph?
23 MS. RANDOLPH:
24 Present.
25 MR. ABOUD:

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1 Mayor Rick Allen?
2 MAYOR ALLEN:
3 Present.
4 MR. ABOUD:
5 Major General Ronald Richard?
6 (No response.)
7 MR. ABOUD:
8 Mr. Gary Silbert?
9 (No response.)
10 MR. ABOUD:
11 Mr. Ronnie Slone?
12 (No response.)
13 MR. ABOUD:
14 Senator Mike Reese?
15 SENATOR REESE:
16 Here.
17 MR. ABOUD:
18 Secretary Joey Strickland?
19 SECRETARY STRICKLAND:
20 Here.
21 MR. ABOUD:
22 Mr. Murray Viser?
23 MR. MURRAY VISER:
24 Here.
25 MR. ABOUD:

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1 Major General Keith Waddell?
2 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
3 Here.
4 MR. ABOUD:
5 Rear Admiral Joel Whitehead?
6 (No response.)
7 MR. ABOUD:
8 Okay. Thank you very much everyone.
9 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
10 You have nine, so you have a quorum.
11 MR. ABOUD:
12 We do have a quorum, yes, sir.
13 And now I'd like to ask that everyone please rise and join me
14 in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.
15 [PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE BY ALL]
16 MR. ABOUD:
17 Thank you. You may be seated.
18 So I'd like to just thank everyone for your time and joining
19 us and participating in today's meeting. I know many of you have
20 traveled from various parts of the state to join us, so we
21 certainly appreciate having you here today.
22 With that said, I'd like to say we're grateful to have the
23 opportunity for the Governor to address us this afternoon. I'm
24 not sure that he'll be able to stay for the entirety of the
25 meeting, but we certainly welcome his presence.

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1 So at this time I would like to call on Governor John Bel
2 Edwards for his remarks.
3 GOVERNOR EDWARDS:
4 Thank you, Robby.
5 Good afternoon, everybody.
6 ALL:
7 Good afternoon.
8 GOVERNOR EDWARDS:
9 It's good to be here with you. I didn't know that I was
10 walking into a church sanctuary, and then I was told, "No, you're
11 at a funeral home." But, no, this is a great venue for City Hall
12 and so forth.
13 But I appreciate everybody being here today. And I said
14 earlier at Leesville High School, it's great to be in this part
15 of the country when we're not checking on a fire or a tornado or
16 something like that. And, in fact, the rain we've had in the
17 last three days across the state has been a real blessing for us.
18 The purpose of my visit is to express my gratitude to
19 everyone on the Military Advisory Commission. I thank you for
20 your service, and your work is so important and in so many ways.
21 I really don't think that -- and there's a lot of different
22 ways to measure it. And truthfully, it's probably more
23 subjective than anything else. But one of the things that has
24 always inspired me about our state is just the level of
25 patriotism that we have.

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1 And one of the ways that it's manifested is the support for
2 the military, and the number of -- the percentage of our
3 residents who choose to serve. So the active duty components,
4 the Reserves, the National Guard, the veterans who are here, but
5 also the support that the military gets all across Louisiana;
6 very important to National Security, and obviously hugely
7 important to our economy.
8 And everybody in this room gets it. And I know you get it,
9 and you work hard on it every day, and I want to thank you.
10 Don, I appreciate your leadership.
11 Robby, thank you for yours as well.
12 You know, we had a great event at Leesville High School to
13 talk about five STEAM centers that are being built here in Vernon
14 Parish. In fact, they're all just about finished really soon.
15 And how there are about 2,000 families who have children --
16 military families who have children in the school system, and
17 they're going to benefit from these centers. But not just their
18 children, every child in these schools. And it's going to build
19 for stronger families, better communities and so forth.
20 And I know the Vernon Parish School System worked really hard
21 with LED, and LED put up a non-federal match and competed and won
22 that grant. And so that's -- that really is -- I think speaks
23 volumes for how we work together to pursue these opportunities to
24 strengthen communities around these military installations, and
25 really to make the necessary investments in the central

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1 infrastructure, but also education and so forth.
2 And I know this is something that's on people's minds right
3 now. But whenever the Department of Defense, or in this case the
4 Army, looks at where they might need to downsize, that it won't
5 be here. And we can point to the fact that this is the only
6 military installation in the continental United States that's
7 actually growing, because the people around here support it.
8 We can talk about the infrastructure that's going to improve
9 the state expense on the highways and now these STEAM centers.
10 We can point -- the Barksdale Air Force Base; that had been for a
11 couple of decades the number one request of Barksdale to the
12 State of Louisiana, was to create a connection from the
13 interstate right into the base, but it just had not happened ever
14 before.
15 Well, we actually made it happen faster than they thought
16 because now we have a beautiful interchange that stops at the
17 woodline of the Air Force Base. And so they -- but they have
18 appropriated the money now. It is in the plan, and that is going
19 to happen. And I think that that's incredibly important as well.
20 But then you've got the Weapons Generation Facility at Barksdale
21 Air Force Base as well.
22 And then here, even as there is some things that we have to
23 make sure that don't happen. There are some really positive
24 things happening at Fort Johnson as well, to include the new
25 Joint Operation Center.

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1 And I'm going to make a comment, because I know some of you
2 weren't at the previous event, but I really believe this. When
3 you look at what -- for a community the size of Leesville and
4 Vernon Parish, when you look at the contribution to our National
5 Security, I suspect there's not another community in the country
6 that comes close, relative to the size of this community.
7 And it starts by educating so many people who are going to
8 themselves serve in the military, to include officers. And there
9 are Wampus Cats all over the United States Army today at the very
10 highest ranks, and that's something to be proud of.
11 And then the unit training that happens at JRTC is the most
12 realistic. It is the most arduous. It is the best training
13 available anywhere in the world in the United States Army, and it
14 happens right here. And all of these units come in from all over
15 to take advantage of what's only available in Louisiana.
16 And I know I'm talking a lot about the Army because that's --
17 I'm an Army veteran. All the Navy stuff is wonderful too. The
18 Air Force is great and so forth, but I just have so much more
19 experience here.
20 I had a brother who commanded a company in a mechanized
21 division years ago. And while I was at West Point, he was in
22 command here. And so I spent a lot of time here as a cadet
23 trying to learn, you know, from him and so forth, but I learned
24 enough to know I didn't want to be in --
25 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:

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1 The Motorpool.
 2 GOVERNOR EDWARDS:
 3 That's right. I went light Infantry, because I followed him
 4 around enough to know I didn't want to spend time in the
 5 Motorpool. And that led to me going to the 82nd Airborne
 6 Division.
 7 But that and the four JRTC rotations that I did, three of
 8 which were here at Fort Polk, really gave me a lot, I think, of
 9 insight into how critically important this community is.
 10 But having said that, the -- it's a \$1.4 billion dollar
 11 economic factor, in terms of our state here, but over \$9 billion
 12 dollars overall across the State of Louisiana. And that's why
 13 the Military Advisory Commission is so important to keep us on
 14 track. To make sure that we're doing what's necessary here to
 15 support all of that and to make sure that everybody in
 16 Washington, all the decision makers know how important the
 17 military is to Louisiana and that we are going to support them.
 18 And then I know that many of the members of the Commission,
 19 if not all, are veterans themselves, and there are a people here
 20 who are not on the Commission who are veterans. And come a week
 21 after Veteran's Day, I just want to thank you.
 22 Quite often veterans forget to thank veterans. I mean, and
 23 so I try to do that. I realized on Veteran's Day -- I've got my
 24 oldest brother, the one who commanded a company here. I don't
 25 think I had ever called him on Veteran's Day to thank him for his

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1 service. I did it. It surprised him tremendously. And, of
 2 course, he had the opportunity to turn around and say that to me.
 3 But just from this veteran to you all, thank you so much for
 4 your service. And I'm going to be a proud supporter of our
 5 military, of all branches, of our retirees, you name it, the
 6 Reserve, the National Guard.
 7 Y'all, we have the best National Guard in the country. They
 8 are excellent in their war-fighting mission. Most people have no
 9 idea how many deployments they make. And they do all of their
 10 share of the deployments around the world. We have people in
 11 Poland right now.
 12 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
 13 Yes, sir.
 14 GOVERNOR EDWARDS:
 15 People don't realize that. To make sure that Putin doesn't
 16 think about going into Poland. But we see them engaged all the
 17 time. We had an engineer unit here out near Peason Ridge
 18 fighting the forest fire, with every tornado, every hurricane,
 19 every flood, every --you name it. They are just the best.
 20 And General Waddell has a connection with this area too,
 21 because he taught and coached at Anacoco. And so -- and he has
 22 just been a superb leader of the National Guard.
 23 Now, I -- Robby indicated that I may not be able to stay. I
 24 really can't. I've got some things that I have to get back to
 25 Baton Rouge to do. But I did want to close with this.

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1 A couple of weeks ago, to just about everybody's surprise,
 2 Army was able to beat Air Force. That means when we beat Navy we
 3 will gain the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy. It will be returned
 4 to its rightful home.
 5 And so, I'm just going to finish with: Go Army; beat Navy.
 6 MR. ABBODD:
 7 Thank you, sir.
 8 So we'll go ahead and move back into the agenda. So we sent
 9 the previous meetings minutes, should have been circulated via
 10 email, to the members of the Board, but at this time I would like
 11 to see if any members do have any comments, revisions or notes
 12 related to the previous meetings minutes, which was in July.
 13 SENATOR REESE:
 14 I move we adopt the minutes.
 15 MR. ABBODD:
 16 Okay. Any second?
 17 MAYOR ALLEN:
 18 I second that.
 19 MR. ABBODD:
 20 Okay. All in favor please say "aye."
 21 ALL:
 22 Aye.
 23 MR. ABBODD:
 24 Okay. And so with that, I'd like to turn the meeting over
 25 now to our LMAC Chairman, LED Secretary Don Pierson, for his

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1 remarks.
 2 SECRETARY PIERSON:
 3 Thank you, Robby. I'll be brief.
 4 What the Governor didn't say is that he and I have about 53
 5 days left in service to the state, and so I just wanted to thank
 6 this group.
 7 I'm very proud of your service and the body of work that we've
 8 been able to establish over the last eight years. Certainly
 9 there is so much more to be done.
 10 I also feel some pride in leaving you in very good hands with
 11 Robby Abboud. That's a part of the leader's responsibility, is
 12 to leave the unit in good hands when he departs.
 13 But we've had a tremendous set of accomplishments at
 14 Louisiana Economic Development in all parts of our state. We
 15 have had a great working relationship with the Legislature and
 16 with the Governor, of course. And it has been my honor to serve
 17 as a leader, and I look forward to many great accomplishments to
 18 come.
 19 Thank you.
 20 MR. ABBODD:
 21 Mr. Secretary, we'll have you stand just for an additional
 22 moment, sir.
 23 SECRETARY PIERSON:
 24 All right.
 25 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:

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1 Well, good afternoon, everyone. We want to try to change it
 2 up a little bit today. Most of the meetings that I go to, we try
 3 to always start on a good note, and we did that with the Governor
 4 and the Secretary's comments. But I want to one up them right
 5 here a little bit.

6 So this afternoon we want to recognize Secretary Pierson for
 7 his outstanding leadership and service to the State of Louisiana,
 8 LED and as the Chair of the LMAC. So I want to award him this
 9 afternoon the Louisiana Distinguished Civilian Service Medal.

10 And it reads, "For exceptionally distinguished meritorious
 11 civilian service from 15 January 2016 to 15 December 2023 as the
 12 Secretary of Louisiana Economic Development. Mr. Don Pierson's
 13 responsiveness and coordination with multiple state and local
 14 agencies on all economic issues produced outstanding results for
 15 Louisiana. Mr. Pierson's professionalism and tenacity set a
 16 sterling example for all and reflect great credit upon himself,
 17 the office of LED, the Louisiana National Guard and the State of
 18 Louisiana," given under my hand in the City of New Orleans this
 19 27th day of October, and I signed it.

20 But, Secretary Pierson, I just want to tell you all the
 21 things that you've done for the Louisiana National Guard, Water
 22 Campus, Camp Minden. I can go on for plenty more time doing
 23 that, but it's been an honor and a privilege working alongside
 24 you. And again, on behalf of all, thank you for your impact and
 25 what you've done for the State of Louisiana.

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1 You're the best, and we appreciate you.

2 SECRETARY PIERSON:

3 It's easy to do a great job when you've got a great team.

4 Thank you, sir.

5 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:

6 Thank you, Mr. Don.

7 Thank you, Robby.

8 MR. ABBOD:

9 All right. So at this time we can go ahead and move into our
 10 reports and overview and discussion. So at this time I would
 11 like to call on Colonel Strickland to provide his remarks on
 12 Veterans Affairs.

13 SECRETARY STRICKLAND:

14 Thank you, Robert.

15 MR. ABBOD:

16 Thank you, sir.

17 SECRETARY STRICKLAND:

18 It's really good to be back here in Leesville with you,
 19 Mayor. And I was telling the the Mayor earlier this morning that
 20 Leesville -- I pulled two tours of duty -- two combat tours of
 21 duty here in Leesville over the years. It felt like combat at
 22 the time. But I love Leesville and especially Fort Polk.

23 I married a beautiful girl right there at Main Post Chapel.
 24 And many of you know my mother-in-law, a little German lady named
 25 Brigitte that used to run the restaurant at the Holiday Inn. And

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1 she's with us in Baton Rouge now.

2 So I love coming up here. But good afternoon, and thank you
 3 for the opportunity to brief today. It's been a great honor for
 4 me to serve alongside Don over the past eight years. I've served
 5 with Economic Development since Mike Foster was Governor. I
 6 served eight years under Foster, four years under Governor
 7 Blanco, and then I went away to another state and worked in
 8 government and came back. And I've been leading our Department
 9 of Veteran Affairs for the last eight years.

10 And, Don, it's just been a joy to work with you on veteran's
 11 issues and economic development. And I know everything that
 12 General Waddell just stated. You are a wonderful person, a great
 13 leader and a great American.

14 Thank you.

15 SECRETARY PIERSON:

16 Thank you, sir.

17 SECRETARY STRICKLAND:

18 It's also been a great honor to serve as your Secretary of
 19 Veteran Affairs for the past eight years. And I am proud of the
 20 work that we've done under Governor Edwards' leadership, and I
 21 want to tell you that the Department of Veterans Affairs is
 22 strong as we go through the transition of our Governor-elect
 23 Landry's Administration.

24 I want to take some time this morning to talk about what
 25 we've done in the past year and our major accomplishments of the

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1 past eight years.

2 First, our five veterans' homes are doing very, very well.
 3 They've all been renovated. We focused on that over the past
 4 eight years. We've replaced roofs. We've replaced -- we've put
 5 new dining facilities in the homes. We've repaired chapels.
 6 There's some minor things that need to be done, but overall the
 7 -- all five homes are in perfect shape.

8 Our staff continues their hard work to build census. We got
 9 hit hard during the pandemic. We lost about 88 elderly veterans,
 10 unfortunately. Our census went from about 730 veterans living in
 11 our homes to about 300-and-something. We've been able to start
 12 building the census back up over the years and now we're -- as of
 13 today, we are at 612, and every day new people come into our
 14 homes. I fully expect that we'll be back to over 700 by this
 15 time next year. And I'm really happy to see that.

16 We are currently giving our veterans -- providing our
 17 veterans with the highest level of care and comfort. We are also
 18 working hard to recruit and retaining nursing staff in light of
 19 the nationwide nursing challenge during the act of the pandemic.

20 Whenever you are competing for nurses and medical people with
 21 the civilian sector, it's really tough. But we've -- I'm proud
 22 to report that we've gone to the state's Civil Service multiple
 23 times to secure additional pay for our nursing staff, and we have
 24 been successful in all of these endeavors.

25 So we're in good shape. Never perfect, but we're in good

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1 shape. The key thing: that we have to provide at least
 2 two-and-a-half hours of care every day to our veterans. And we
 3 are well over that. Actually, we are providing about three hours
 4 of care. So we are way above what the Federal VA requires.
 5 At our five state-run cemeteries we have incurred more than
 6 11,000 veterans, veteran spouses and veteran dependents since we
 7 opened our first state veteran cemetery at Keithville. We
 8 continue to make improvements and additions at our cemeteries
 9 with four construction projects totaling more than \$12.9 million
 10 dollars in Rayville, Keithville, Slidell, as well as here in
 11 Leesville.
 12 We just spent an hour with the Governor at the cemetery this
 13 morning in Leesville and we were -- if you haven't visited the
 14 cemetery in a while, and I know many of you have, it's beautiful.
 15 It's peaceful. We've put a new ditch in the columbarium walls.
 16 And that cemetery, in my opinion, is just perfect. And it's a
 17 cemetery where I would like to be buried one day when my time
 18 upon Earth is done.
 19 These projects include expansion of in-ground burial spaces
 20 at all of our cemeteries. Cemeteries with columbarium mix or
 21 cremain burials and other improvements. All of which are
 22 necessary to ensure that we are able to offer a final resting
 23 place of honor for veterans, their spouses and dependents for
 24 many years to come.
 25 I want to commend James Armes, our Cemetery Director here in
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1 Leesville, and his staff for their dedication to our veterans.
 2 We were just visiting with James over in the hospital. He has
 3 been very sick, but I think he is going to be fine. But we spent
 4 an hour visiting with him after we left the cemetery.
 5 And speaking of our Leesville Cemetery, I would be remiss if
 6 I did not mention the great support that we have received from
 7 the command group here at JRTC. I know that General Gardner and
 8 others have been keynote speakers at the cemetery on multiple
 9 occasions.
 10 We also appreciate the support from Senator Reese, a
 11 long-time friend of mine, and Representative and Colonel Owen --
 12 I think he's over there -- as well. I knew Colonel Owen's
 13 father, Creighton, very well many years ago, so that tells you
 14 how old I am. I don't look it, but I am.
 15 Louisiana is home to 267,000 veterans and their families, and
 16 it is our goal to connect them with every benefit they have
 17 earned.
 18 Eight years ago when I came back to Veterans Affairs I walked
 19 into a department that was in terrible shape. We were under IG
 20 investigation. We were under a state audit investigation. The
 21 young secretary had been fired by Governor Jindal, and I was told
 22 by Governor Edwards to fix it. Thank God I was a former Army IG
 23 and I knew what to do.
 24 And so I started fixing it. It took me about five months to
 25 get us out from under all kinds of investigations. And now --
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1 and bringing in top leaders and putting them in charge of major
 2 programs and let them do their job, and now we're one of the top
 3 departments in state Government.
 4 As a matter of fact the Louisiana Department of Veterans
 5 Affairs is highly respected. It is so highly respected that I
 6 was elected by two different Secretaries, Federal Secretary Lokey
 7 and McDonough, to Chair two national cemeteries for the VA in
 8 Washington, which I just finished the Memorial Cemetery.
 9 So this past fiscal year -- getting back to benefits -- we
 10 filed more than 132,000 claims for our Louisiana veterans with
 11 the Federal VA. The latest VA report shows LDVA counselors
 12 bringing in to the State of Louisiana more than \$1.9 billion
 13 dollars in compensation and pension benefits. This is money that
 14 goes directly into the pockets of our veterans, which in turn is
 15 spent in our Louisiana communities contributing to our state's
 16 economy.
 17 Our appeals office has, so far, returned more than \$2.2
 18 billion dollars in back pay that was originally denied to our
 19 veterans by the Federal VA, because we were successful in helping
 20 them appeal VA decisions on their claims. We have an appeals
 21 office co-located with the feds in New Orleans.
 22 One of the most practical ways that we help Louisiana
 23 veterans is through a program that we are very proud of. It's
 24 called the Military Family Assistance Fund. And that fund offers
 25 financial assistance to eligible veterans and their families.
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1 Since 2015 the MFA Funds Board -- and it's governed by a
 2 Board appointed by the Governor. There is a retired Air Force
 3 General Officer on the Board. There's a Senator on the Board, a
 4 State Representative and others. But anyway, this Board awarded
 5 more than \$1.1 million dollars to veterans, helping to stop
 6 evictions, save homes, pay past due utility bills or rent, and
 7 help with medical or moving expenses.
 8 We encourage veterans who are in financial distress to go to
 9 our department's website and apply. We can award any eligible
 10 veteran's family up to \$10,000.00 a year to get out of financial
 11 trouble, and they don't have to pay it back. And the most
 12 important thing: we use donated money to run that program. It's
 13 not tax money.
 14 One group of LDVA staff members who educate veterans about
 15 MFA and all programs is called the LaVetCorps. The LaVetCorps is
 16 a program that we started five years ago. We wrote a grant to
 17 the AmeriCorps Foundation for \$300,000.00 a year, and we've
 18 gotten that money every year since then.
 19 And working with the Board of Regents and the Governor's
 20 office we created 32 student veteran centers, starting with LSU,
 21 on all college and community college campuses throughout the
 22 State of Louisiana. We're only the third state in the nation
 23 that has that program.
 24 And the reason that we did that is because we have a lot of
 25 Iraq/Afghanistan veterans going to college -- over 10,000 -- and
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1 we wanted to know how they're doing. We wanted to be able to
 2 help them if they have trouble with their GI bill payments. And
 3 so what we did, we hired student leaders called navigators and we
 4 put them through an orientation course of about a week to help us
 5 if a veteran has a problem, to let us know.
 6 So we're very proud to host those 10,000 student veterans
 7 because we want them to stay in college, we want them to
 8 graduate, and we want them to stay in Louisiana and contribute to
 9 our society.
 10 Another big project that I'm very proud of, I was the -- I
 11 was serving as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in Arizona for
 12 Governor Napolitano and Governor Brewer. And I had -- I'm part
 13 Native American. Some of you know that. And I wanted to go out
 14 there and work with the native tribes and others. 700,000
 15 veterans in Arizona; they needed help. They only had one home
 16 when I got there. We built a number of homes and cemeteries.
 17 But I noticed that when you walk out of the Arizona
 18 Legislature and you walk across the street, you immediately walk
 19 into a beautiful Veterans Park with the Navajo Code Talker
 20 statues, Korean War Veterans, Vietnam Veteran Statues. And I
 21 thought, "Why doesn't Louisiana have that?"
 22 And so one day I was up at the Capitol and I happened to be
 23 walking to the Capitol and I noticed the Old Arsenal Park. It
 24 was run down, it was ugly, the pine trees were brown.
 25 And so I went to the Governor and I said, "Governor" -- I said,
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1 "We need a Veterans Memorial Park in the State of Louisiana."
 2 And I said, "And my recommendation is the Old Arsenal Park. Why
 3 don't we get with the State Capitol, get with the Legislature,
 4 and see if we can't get that approved."
 5 And we did. We got with people like Senator Reese,
 6 Representative Owen, other great Americans that are serving in
 7 the Legislature. And they said, "You know what, Colonel, that's
 8 a good idea."
 9 So we renamed the Old Arsenal Park the Louisiana Veterans
 10 Memorial Park. We tidied it up. It's beautiful. The first
 11 memorial that we put in there was in honor of Gold Star families.
 12 The second memorial was in honor of our Great National Guard;
 13 beautiful statue. And then just this past July we created a
 14 Purple Heart Trail through there. We put a Purple Heart plaque
 15 on George Washington's statue because he created the Purple
 16 Heart.
 17 And then in July we unveiled a statue in honor of African
 18 American Veterans. The first three regiments of African
 19 Americans who served in the Civil War was started in Baton Rouge
 20 and fought at Port Hudson.
 21 So we now have a beautiful park that we can use to host
 22 ceremonies and events, and I am very proud that our Veterans Park
 23 sits next to our State Capitol.
 24 So in closing, I thank you for your support of the Louisiana
 25 Department of Veterans Affairs. I am -- and I'm not bragging,
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1 but it's a fact. I am the longest serving State Secretary of
 2 Veterans Affairs in the nation, and I'm going home in about 73
 3 days.
 4 Thank you.
 5 MR. ABOUD:
 6 Thank you so much, Colonel.
 7 SECRETARY STRICKLAND:
 8 Thank you.
 9 MR. ABOUD:
 10 Next, I'd like to call on General Waddell to provide his
 11 remarks for the Louisiana National Guard.
 12 I will add that we will have the slides up here on the
 13 monitor, but we also have printed copies here. So if anyone
 14 needs a printed copy, you can come up and grab one.
 15 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
 16 Good afternoon, again, everyone, Secretary Pierson, elected
 17 officials, fellow Council members, friends. Keith Waddell with a
 18 brief of the Louisiana National Guard.
 19 We are excited to report the Louisiana National Guard is
 20 doing very well in our quest for excellence every single day.
 21 And as we go through the slides, I think you'll have a first-hand
 22 look at some of the exciting and great things the Louisiana
 23 National Guard is currently doing.
 24 So let's go ahead and go to the next slide, Robby.
 25 As he brings that up, obviously nothing has changed for us in
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1 terms of readiness. We focus on readiness every single day and
 2 we try and appeal readiness across the Army and the Air National
 3 Guard here in Louisiana. You'll see some of the successes are --
 4 if you can't, I'll just call out for you this.
 5 On the recruiting side, which you hear a lot about the
 6 challenges recruiters have had in all branches of service. Well,
 7 in Louisiana National Guard for the third year in a row, we have
 8 the top production recruiter in the entire country, and that's
 9 Staff Sergeant Andrea Rayburn. Christian Knoll had got it the
 10 two years prior to her, but she had 47 accessions last year. She
 11 worked the LSU area here in Baton Rouge. And her partner, Joseph
 12 Reagan, Sergeant First Class, he actually put 33 in. So we got
 13 80 accessions right out of the LSU community there. And she led
 14 the entire nation, so she'll be recognized at a ceremony later
 15 this year.
 16 But at the regional meeting a couple of weeks ago, we
 17 actually had the area supervisor, Master Sergeant Watson, was
 18 classified as the Expert Seven, so doing a phenomenal job. And
 19 Sergeant First Class Burns actually took the All-Nation award for
 20 the region. So they'll compete nationally.
 21 But again, Sergeant Rayburn, it's in the books. She's the
 22 best, and she'll claim the title when they hand out the belt
 23 later this year.
 24 On the personnel readiness side, the strategy is still in
 25 play. We are still well over 100 percent on the Army National
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1 Guard side and the Air National Guard side. We are sitting at
2 105 on the Army side and 103 on the Air side. Which in terms of
3 force structure, whenever competition comes up -- when it comes
4 up -- we'll be at the table bidding on whatever it is. Right
5 now, force structure is not being dealt out a whole lot because
6 of the division realignment that is happening on the Army side
7 and then the invest/divest on the Air side.
8 But again, we're trying to sustain and build upon those
9 strength numbers to put ourselves in a position to be first in
10 line. So when they say, "This is it and we want it, it's going
11 to help Louisiana," we go after it. So again, personnel
12 readiness is looking really good.
13 On the equipment side, the National Guard Bureau goal is 90
14 percent. We're over that at 91 percent Operational Readiness
15 Rate. Doing good on the equipment side.
16 And on training readiness, we had a great summer as far as
17 annual training with all our Army and Air units. We were spread
18 out over Camp Shelby, throughout Louisiana. And we actually sent
19 an element to Camp Dodge, Iowa, which is where the Sustainment
20 Training Center is. It is equivalent to the Joint Readiness
21 Training Center for maneuver folks. At Camp Dodge, it's for
22 sustainers. So we try to rotate our units through the
23 Sustainment Training Center to get them at the top of their game,
24 so when we deploy or we go on any type of big exercise or it's a
25 state emergency we're at our peak. So lots of great things

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1 happenings there with our sustainers.
2 Again, proud of everybody for the job they did at this annual
3 training. And I'm thankful to all the employers out there who
4 supported their citizen soldiers coming to that two weeks to be
5 able to train to protect our country and protect our state.
6 On the next slide, so we'll talk a little bit more about the
7 personnel readiness. So on these line graphs, I guess what I
8 will point out to you, when you look at where we were in '22 in
9 terms of recruiting and retention kind of on that post-COVID era,
10 we see numbers like 769 for where we were with accessions last
11 year. We were plus 287 this year, so a huge growth.
12 I really feel like right now we are about 17 recruiters down,
13 and they've cut our budget on the recruiting side pretty
14 significantly in terms of taking away some of our GSA fleet. But
15 in spite of those numbers we've been able to almost go 300
16 members on the accession side. I really feel like this next year
17 hopefully we're back to the pre-COVID accession numbers in the
18 1,300 or 1,400 category.
19 So again, I think it's just going to come down to getting
20 those recruiters more resources to continue to push them out, and
21 our relationships with the schools are -- in all 64 parishes are
22 really, really good.
23 On the Air side, we actually jumped to 133. That's actually
24 the highest amount of accessions we've had in eight years on the
25 Air National Guard side.

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1 We opened up a storefront in Baton Rouge right off Airline
2 Highway. We've been able to get a lot of folks to come in that
3 way. And our goal is to try to get our field rate to 90 percent.
4 So we're about 1.9 percent away from it right now, but we're
5 working every single day to try to get that number to 90 percent.
6 On the retention side and the eight -- we've averaged --
7 we've been better than 81.2 percent retaining our soldiers over
8 the course of the last four years. In the recorded history of
9 the Louisiana National Guard, retention has never been that good
10 for a four-year period, period. I think the best they've ever
11 done is maybe two years being in the low 80s, but we have
12 sustained over 81.2 percent for four consecutive years. And
13 we're off to a really good start again this year, so I'm
14 optimistic that we'll continue to be over 80 percent.
15 On the Air side at the 159th Fighter Wing, we saw a good
16 uptick there, about 3 percent. So I had an opportunity to be out
17 there a couple of weeks ago for General Schneider and Chief
18 Randolph's retirement, and I had a chance to go work -- or visit
19 the supply area, and the feedback that I got from our airmen and
20 women there just made me want to be assigned to the wing, quite
21 frankly, that and munitions. And I enjoyed visiting the munition
22 folks as well.
23 On the officer side, five years ago on Lieutenants, we were
24 down 130 Lieutenants in Louisiana National Guard. Today we're
25 around 50. So we have improved and grown 70 more officers. And

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1 as turnover happens, over 70 more, you know, for our organization
2 to the positive. So I think that's another good story. It's not
3 on our OCS program when we've been getting them.
4 We've got great partnerships with ROTC programs at all the
5 different universities. We've had some direct commissions.
6 We've had some folks transition from active duty into the Guard.
7 So all that has been positive for us in terms of officer growth.
8 Next slide. On our Federal Missions -- and I know the
9 Governor touched upon it real quick. So right now we have six
10 units -- well, five units and some individual mob augmentees are
11 out there.
12 My Sergeant Major -- Sergeant Major Ockman and I actually had
13 an opportunity to go visit these deployed units. We went to
14 Poznan, Poland, Powidz. And I might be mispronouncing them there,
15 but I'm doing by best. And we went to Camp Buehring and Ali Al
16 Salem in Kuwait and visited our soldiers there. Nothing but
17 positive feedback.
18 Some of you will remember General Frank. Pat Frank is the
19 Arcent Commander now, three-star. So Lieutenant General Frank
20 gave me a lot of positive feedback about the units that we had
21 that were working currently, and he could -- he just went on and
22 on about the great things the Louisiana National Guard men and
23 women were doing for his particular area. So I walked away from
24 that visit very proud, you know, to be in this organization and
25 thank each and every one of them for the great work that they're

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1 doing.
2 The ones that are in the chute, currently we have -- first,
3 the 244th Aviation. They will actually be going to Kosovo to
4 Camp Bondsteel. They will leave in December, next month, so
5 we'll do a farewell ceremony for them at the first part of
6 December.
7 And then at the 159th Fighter Wing, we have 288 pax that are
8 going to Kadena in Japan. So we will do their ceremony in
9 December as well, and they will actually take off in January to
10 go there.
11 We have a lot more -- a lot of other units that are slated to
12 go. Typically in Louisiana National Guard, it's about 1,000 men
13 and women that are deployed each and every year on a federal
14 deployment to support our country.
15 So next slide. So wildfires were talked about, I think at
16 the event prior to this one and I heard it again today, but I
17 will give you a vantage point. You know, when I left active duty
18 and got in the National Guard, I think the first state emergency
19 that I was ever involved in was a forest fire in Oakdale,
20 Louisiana and that was in 1996. And we had nothing to do with
21 fires since '96 until this year.
22 So in August and September when we had to deal with the
23 wildfires, we had had units and individuals that had gone to
24 California to support wildfires there as well as in the central
25 part of the United States. And we actually used a lot of the

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1 expertise in dealing with this issue that we had this past year.
2 I met with local officials at Tiger Island; 113 Lions Camp,
3 right down the road; Evans, right down the road. And I know
4 Representative Schamehorn, because he and I talked a lot of about
5 this up in Sabine Parish as well, and I know he's got a great
6 story, and I got the video to show it too around Pirate's Cove,
7 what actually happened there.
8 So I think it just speaks to local elected officials and
9 state officials all working together to solve a pretty complex
10 problem.
11 Oh, and by the way, the federal. The feds were involved as
12 well, the red team, blue team and all the teams that follow them
13 up down there in Beauregard Parish as we continue to deal with
14 the fires.
15 But, you know, we had 10 Blackhawks that were deployed at Ft.
16 Belvoir. We still have 10 that are here. All 10 of those
17 actually got into the wildfire fight.
18 And then we also asked -- I reached out to some active
19 Generals from other states -- Arkansas, Alabama, New Jersey,
20 Oklahoma and Tennessee -- and they actually sent down Blackhawks
21 as well as Chinooks to help us tackle this problem.
22 So with the Bambi buckets, a lot of you saw Bambi buckets
23 that were dipping in the surface water. 1.2 million gallons of
24 surface water actually dropped on the fires throughout West
25 Central Louisiana. And then we had about 30-plus D-7 dozers that

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1 were working firebreak in all of these different areas. So over
2 -- close to 300 miles of firebreak that they actually improved or
3 put in, in conjunction with the folks that we were working with.
4 So, I think collectively, when you think about what was
5 accomplished with that wildfire fight, kind of never having to do
6 it before, this was an atypical state emergency for us that
7 everybody just kind of shifted gears and problem solved when we
8 got there. So, extremely proud of all of the partnerships and
9 the collective efforts that everybody had tackling those
10 significant challenges that we had with the wildfires this past
11 year.
12 Okay. On the next slide, another atypical mission that we
13 had was saltwater intrusion. I know it got a lot of media
14 attention, I guess maybe the last six or seven weeks, but we were
15 actually dealing with this in June. So we were actually moving
16 water from our warehouses down to Boothville-Venice and Buras in
17 Plaquemines Parish starting in June. And every week we would
18 bring water down there to those communities so they could
19 actually pass that water out.
20 Now, as the intrusion started coming up the Mississippi River
21 a lot further in some of those communities that were going to be
22 threatened, obviously the scale of that problem got a lot bigger
23 than just bringing bottled water down there or maybe activating
24 some of the systems that we have; the tactical water purification
25 systems, or the ROWPU that many of you know about. Those are

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1 small solutions to smaller problems. But I know the Corps of
2 Engineers got involved. A lot of contractors got involved, in
3 terms to support Jefferson Parish and Orleans Parish.
4 Really our piece, we actually sent some field grade planners
5 to Orleans Parish and Jefferson Parish and worked with those OEPs
6 in terms of coming up with courses of actions or solutions to
7 some of the challenges that they might face.
8 We also made that same offer to St. Benard Parish and
9 Plaquemines Parish, but they didn't need us. But I felt like the
10 planners that we sent for them helped them figure out local
11 solutions to the problems that they could've potentially faced.
12 But we did -- the 243,000 liters of water really began back
13 in June for us with the Louisiana National Guard.
14 On the next slide we'll talk about military construction.
15 Again, just to give you an update. I know we touch upon this
16 each and every time, but at the top where it says "Current
17 Military Construction and Modernization," we actually put
18 projects here that are kind of in design.
19 So, for example, the Camp Minden Unaccompanied Quarters,
20 Speaker Johnson helped us with that particular project. So it's
21 in design right now. And then as you look at all of them, the
22 Pineville Readiness Center and the LMI housing, both of those
23 projects are complete. So we'll be doing ribbon cuttings for the
24 LMI, low to medium income housing project, that we have in
25 Pineville. We'll do that on the 29th of this month.

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1 And in December we'll do the Pineville Readiness Center on
 2 Training Center-Pineville grounds. And then on December 20th
 3 we'll be down in Belle Chase to do the Alert Complex and the
 4 Apron that they finished for the 159th Fighter Wing. All the
 5 other projects on there are going well, pleased to report,
 6 looking forward to those completing and doing the ribbon cuttings
 7 there also.

8 And on future projects, kind of the biggest one there -- or
 9 the two biggest ones that are the first two, and one of them is
 10 the 256 Armory for Lafayette. We'll actually -- construction
 11 will occur on UL Campus. And then we also have the Abbeville
 12 Armory or Readiness Center, which will be on the airport grounds.
 13 That one is in '27, and the one on UL should be ground broke in
 14 2025.

15 On the next slide, on our Innovative Readiness Training
 16 Projects, this is where we save communities lots of money and in
 17 return we get a lot of training out of it. So typically this is
 18 vertical and horizontal construction that we actually have an
 19 opportunity to do. We finished all our projects during annual
 20 training this past summer.

21 And then for this year, we're looking at five projects.
 22 Grant Parish Police Range is a branch -- you can see we'll be on
 23 Phase III there -- in Dry Prong. And then we may add a project
 24 in Chalmette. It's going to be another ballpark. So I think
 25 we're going to end up with six, but a lot of times it really

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1 depends on the customer's ability to fill out the paperwork or
 2 the checklist.

3 I know at one time, Mayor Beebe, we were looking at Hornbeck
 4 in terms of the baseball field, and I think Ms. Hooks found
 5 another solution for it before we could get to it. But I know we
 6 were dealing with Hornbeck High School at one time, and that one
 7 actually fell off. But we stand ready. I know the Anacoco
 8 baseball field was built by the Louisiana National Guard so --
 9 that was before I was in this position, but we were thankful to
 10 have that ballpark.

11 All right. On the next slide, on our State Partnership
 12 Program, the update here is in September I had a chance to go
 13 down for the Belizean Independence Day activities. They finally
 14 got an Ambassador there, Michelle Kwan. Ambassador Kwan, as most
 15 of you know, the figure skater. She is the Ambassador there, and
 16 we got to spend the day with her and actually brought her up to
 17 speed on the partnership and what's involved there.

18 There's some issues that she is looking at that we are going
 19 to try to work collectively together with SOUTHCOM, ourselves and
 20 her office, in getting some of those things done. We have had
 21 exchanges dealing with what they call WPS, which is the women's
 22 initiative that they have for SOUTHCOM right now. That's going
 23 real well and some resiliency work.

24 So we've been supporting Belize. They're dealing with
 25 suicides and things like that, so we're trying to provide some of

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1 those services that we have and kind of show them these are the
 2 things that we're doing as best practices in hopes that maybe
 3 they can implement that or some version of that for the force --
 4 the Belizean Defense Force and the Belizean Coast Guard.

5 In Haiti, you know, it's still unrest. We are unable to
 6 travel down there, but we have had our opportunities to meet with
 7 the Defense Attache Commander Grabins. We did that at SOUTHCOM a
 8 couple of weeks ago, and that was very positive. So we're hoping
 9 as the future -- as we move forward in the future we get an
 10 opportunity to get back there and work with the Haitian National
 11 Police as well as their emergency managers in the country of
 12 Belize.

13 Next slide. On our Service Member and Family Support, you
 14 know, we are fixing to shift into the holidays, so we just had a
 15 big coat drive that we had at eight different locations
 16 throughout the state. We were able to get coats to needy
 17 children, needy families that are out there.

18 And with Thanksgiving coming up next week and then looking
 19 forward to Christmas, we have needy families. So, you know,
 20 we'll support them in terms of turkeys and invites out to share
 21 Thanksgiving with some of our families. And we do Christmas
 22 Angels with our families that are having extreme hardships right
 23 now, to make sure those young people don't go without getting a
 24 gift or multiple gifts for Christmas.

25 So that's kind of been a standard practice for us every

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1 single year. We'll do that. We'll have free Christmas trees for
 2 a lot of our service members or some of our state employees that
 3 are disadvantaged and need the support there.

4 So again, I'm very proud of our SMFP program. We have a lot
 5 of service members and contract employees that go the extra mile
 6 each and every day. They don't work those typical work hours.
 7 They work a lot of times after hours supporting families as well
 8 as our leadership teams. Our Command teams do the same things in
 9 terms of supporting our soldiers and airmen.

10 On the next slide, just to solve joint diversity executive
 11 council here. I know this was a question I had gotten in our
 12 meeting in June, and I actually shared that information with one
 13 of our members, but I wanted to make sure collectively everybody
 14 saw what the diversity statistics are in the Louisiana National
 15 Guard.

16 I won't go through every single number, but if you would like
 17 a copy of it, it's in the front for your reading pleasure. But
 18 we had a meeting with the Council yesterday. We do our quarterly
 19 meetings. One of the big success stories for us was we actually
 20 got to do four Lens training at our Command and Staff Conference.

21 If you are unfamiliar with it, it's a personality instrument
 22 where everybody kind of self-assesses on where they are, and it
 23 kind of talks through getting along with people in different
 24 settings, whether it's a unit, a classroom, it just tries to help
 25 leaders better perform and understand the men and women that

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1 they're actually leading.
2 So we got a lot of knowledge out of that with 133 of our
3 Battalion Commanders/Command Sergeant Majors/Group Commanders and
4 Chief Master Sergeants. So a very, very positive experience
5 there.
6 While I visited the Wing, I talked to a Tech Sergeant Gaines,
7 and she's actually leading a lady's roundtable for us within the
8 Wing, which I told her I would like to expand that into the Army
9 side too, because they are doing so many great things as a
10 woman's group. So real pleased with the efforts there.
11 And then we're going to do a women's symposium probably in a
12 couple of months. General Haygood is kind of my lead on that,
13 Cindy Haygood. So she's taking the lead on that, and we're
14 hoping to do that symposium for our whole community across the
15 Louisiana National Guard.
16 So as I look on the Army side, in terms of our Command Teams
17 at the -- within the nine BRUs right now we are actually 50
18 percent Caucasian, 50 percent minority, whether that's African
19 American, Black, Hispanic, Asian American, whatever the case
20 might be. So I think we're doing a really good job there.
21 Next slide, on our youth programs, we actually -- on our,
22 YCP, we recently had a graduation with the Gillis W. Long Center
23 down in Prairieville. We had Mayor Sharon Weston Broome was the
24 keynote speaker, and we had Coach Mainieri there too.
25 Paul Mainieri came and supported us. He's been a great

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1 advocate. I've been able to get Coach Mainieri to go on lots of
2 different things with us. He's helped us with retention. I
3 bring him out to project sites with me. And, you know,
4 everybody don't worry about General Waddell. They're worried
5 about Coach Mainieri. They want to talk LSU baseball so -- but
6 he's been a huge advocate for us, and we're trying to capitalize
7 on some of the experiences that he's actually had.
8 So Karl Malone is my next person I'm trying to go after to
9 help us with the Camp Minden bunch and maybe spend a little time
10 talking to them, and Warren Morris around Central Louisiana. So,
11 more to follow if I'm able to capitalize on that.
12 Our Job ChalleNGe Program. Again, another great success
13 story here. We'll have another cohort that will graduate on
14 December 21st with a group of folks that are going to be getting
15 those credentials and everything to move on to the next phase of
16 their life.
17 So again, Ed Programs, huge -- I'll give them an A plus right
18 now for all the great work that they are doing.
19 And on the last slide, just on a few other updates that I'd
20 like to provide. So, October, General George came down. Chief
21 of Staff of the Army -- new Chief of Staff of the Army. He came
22 down and spent some time.
23 The day I met him was in Belle Chasse and he had just
24 finished a meeting with a lot of centers of influence,
25 specifically superintendents in that particular region. And he

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1 was talking to them about recruiting and what they could do.
2 And then whenever I had a chance to link up with him, I told
3 him -- I said, "Sir, right now we're at 105 percent strength."
4 And he kind of sat back a little bit, and he said, "Really?" And
5 I was like, "Yes, sir." I said, "Patriotism is alive and well in
6 Louisiana. People love serving and these are the things that we
7 can do for them."
8 We talked about state tuition exemption. We talked about the
9 initiative that -- Senator Reese, Representative Owen and
10 Representative Schamehorn stepped away -- but the entire
11 Legislature and support that we got with the Patriot Scholarship
12 for free fees. So once I kind of laid that out for him and said,
13 you know, the other big thing for us that's positive is our
14 recruiters don't PCS every three years. They're here to stay.
15 So they are part of the fabric of the community.
16 And he's like, "You know, General Waddell, it's funny you say
17 that. That's one of the things that we're looking at in the
18 Army, is maybe keeping recruiters in communities longer than we
19 currently do."
20 But that has worked really well for the National Guard. So
21 we kind of shared those best practices with him. But again, he
22 was impressed that we were sitting there with 103 percent on the
23 Army side -- 105, excuse me -- and 103 on the Air side. So,
24 again, just speaks to the effort of team and all the great work
25 that the team is doing.

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1 We did complete the re-designation from Camp Beauregard to
2 the Louisiana National Guard Training Center Pineville. We did
3 that in October. Governor Edwards came out, gave comments. I
4 gave my comments.
5 The next time you're in Pineville and you drive through,
6 you'll see at the front gate, we've changed the signage there.
7 You'll see the road signage has changed also. Our water tower no
8 longer has the Minute Man with Camp Beauregard underneath it.
9 It's got that logo that you see in the top left corner. That's
10 what you will see on our water tower when you go to Pineville
11 now. So the feedback has been very positive about the
12 re-designation.
13 I understand, just like here, you can still talk to some
14 folks that were there for a long time and they're still going to
15 call it Fort Polk. I see some of the older folks there; they
16 still call it Camp Beauregard. But as generations go by, I think
17 it will change and the new naming reconvention will stick.
18 The Patriot Scholarship, so the update in terms of numbers
19 here, and I guess specific to the Senator and Representative for
20 y'all to take and talk to your peers about, is right now -- last
21 year we had around 600 people that were using state tuition
22 exemption. When we were able to bring the Patriot Scholarship
23 online on August 1st, right now, we're still waiting on 10
24 universities to give us the information, but right now we know of
25 1,028 individuals that are using STEP and the Patriot

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1 Scholarship.
2 So that is changing lives. And the feedback from the field,
3 visiting soldiers and airmen is: thank you. Thank you for doing
4 that with the Patriot Scholarship. It's making a huge
5 difference. Our folks are going to get that education that they
6 so richly deserve so they can go out and be very productive in
7 their quality of life and all the things are going to improve for
8 them.
9 On NGREA, I know General Elder, you asked me about this last
10 time, so here's the update I will give you. So for 2023 the Army
11 and the Air National Guard ask was \$1.3 billion dollars. That
12 was the list that was submitted from all 54 states and
13 territories to General Hokanson.
14 So when General Hokanson and the two Directors, General
15 Jensen and General Loh, racked them all, where we landed was \$633
16 million was actually funded, so about \$300-plus million for both
17 services. So obviously everybody didn't get what they were
18 looking for. And there was a deficit there, obviously about
19 \$700-plus million dollars for '23. So looking forward to '24.
20 What is passed in the House currently is they have passed
21 \$617 million, is what they've passed. And on the Senate side,
22 they haven't voted on it yet, but they're looking at \$533
23 million, is what they are thinking. So we're still not in the
24 ballpark of what we're asking for in terms of the 54, but that's
25 kind of where we landed in terms of NGREA and where we currently

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1 stand.
2 Now, Louisiana did benefit in '23. We got a loader, a scoop
3 loader, a HYEX, and a water tanker, which we needed those things.
4 And our ask for '24 is a lot greater than that. A lot of convoy
5 equipment, communications equipment and some different systems
6 that are out there. But I don't know that we'll achieve it based
7 upon the numbers that I'm reporting to you this afternoon, sir.
8 GENERAL ELDER:
9 Thanks. It's unfortunate.
10 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
11 Last week we were at the World War II Museum. This was a
12 community relations project for us, The Congressional Medal of
13 Honor Society at the World War II Museum. Phenomenal event. And
14 what we tried to do is rotate as many soldiers and airmen that we
15 could through there.
16 There were 41 Medal of Honor recipients that were there.
17 And I actually got to go to the event on Friday and meet one
18 of my heroes, Colonel Bruce Crandall. So if you're familiar with
19 the Vietnam War, Ia Drang, you know the helicopter pilot that was
20 flying in to pick up the wounded shoulders with Hal Moore in that
21 valley, that's the guy that was flying them out. So I made it a
22 point to go see him. I got to talk to about 20 Medal of Honor
23 recipients, but he was one of my personal heroes that I got a
24 chance to talk to.
25 But as I visited with our soldiers and airmen that worked

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1 that event, they were blown away. They just -- you know, the awe
2 and the things that those folks have achieved were just
3 unbelievable. And I know they're stored in history, but if you
4 ever have an opportunity to go to one of the events, I highly
5 recommend it. You won't be disappointed.
6 Tom Hanks was there. They presented him an award. He's
7 donated a bunch of money to the World War II Museum. Robin
8 Roberts, Good Morning America, she was there. So a lot of folks
9 recognizing some real heroes.
10 And then finally, I talked about the Command visits a little
11 bit. Certainly as we look forward in the future, you know, we
12 will continue to do Command visits as we can. But the visits
13 that I got to do this past year were really, really good, and I
14 was thankful.
15 As I told each one of those soldiers and airmen I talked to,
16 I'm always thankful to be your teammate and I'm proud to serve
17 with you every single day. And like I tell them, I mean that
18 from the bottom of my heart. It's not hollow when I say that,
19 because I don't take it for granted. Not one day.
20 So that completes my report for the Louisiana National Guard,
21 subject to questions or comments.
22 REPRESENTATIVE OWEN:
23 I have a comment.
24 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
25 Yes, sir.

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1 REPRESENTATIVE OWEN:
2 I just want to tell everybody listening, for four years this
3 officer picked up the phone every time I called him in a lot of
4 crises, and his people saved our lives. Those of us around here
5 know that. They know in the moments and days after Hurricane
6 Laura when everything was out, those green trucks started running
7 through town bringing them water and food.
8 And I said this on the floor of the Capitol, but I can't say
9 it enough how valuable the Louisiana National Guard is to this
10 state. And all organizations start at the front office.
11 If there was something wrong he did, he'd be getting blamed. But
12 it went well, and I just want to publicly thank you, General.
13 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
14 Thank you, Representative Owen. I appreciate that.
15 MR. ABBOD:
16 Thank you so much, General.
17 I'd like to next call on Chris Goode with the Roosevelt Group
18 for his report which will include activities at Southeast
19 Military Alliance, Barksdale Forward and Louisiana Armed Forces
20 Alliance.
21 MR. GOODE:
22 Good afternoon. I just have a few slides, so I'll move
23 through these fairly quickly.
24 First, congratulations to Secretary Pierson and Strickland,
25 great service here in Louisiana. It's been a pleasure working

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1 with you. A lot of successes.
2 I do want to start with just a quick update on what's going
3 on up on Capitol Hill in D.C., and then dig a little bit deeper
4 into some current issues we are dealing with across the military
5 installations.
6 In the meantime, General Waddell is obviously tracking this
7 tag prospective. You know, obviously, the good news is the
8 government is not going to close at midnight on Friday night.
9 You know, the Continuing Resolution Bill passed, as you know, by
10 the House, and the Senate passed it last night. The House vote
11 was 336 in favor, 95 against and 3 did not vote.
12 So what does that mean? You've probably heard it's a
13 two-tier Congressional continuing resolution. Essentially, you
14 know, the four agencies will be covered through January 19th.
15 That includes the bills under MILCON, for example, and the
16 remaining funding which will include DoD will be funded through
17 February 2nd.
18 That sounds good. That's great. But unfortunately in the
19 former Speaker's Deficit Reduction Act, it was some of the
20 provisions in the opposing bill in there that included a one
21 percent across-the-board cut should appropriations not be enacted
22 by January 1st the calendar year. Those cuts go into effect on
23 April 30th. In terms of DoD, we're estimating that cut can be up
24 to 36 billion. I'm a little dubious that that is going to play
25 out. I think we may see Congress withdraw that sequestration cut

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1 in whatever vehicle they choose to.
2 The appropriations meanwhile have been very slow. You know,
3 credit the new Speaker, Mike Johnson, for getting the CR done.
4 But when you can't pass a rule to proceed on, Congress adjusts
5 the state funding or HHS funding right after you vote for the CR.
6 It's not good. So we'll see how far we go with '24
7 appropriations.
8 Essentially, not a lot has been passed, right? You know,
9 MILCON was passed by the House. DoD was passed by the House
10 finally after a real struggle. General strike -- the Senate
11 hasn't even got that to the floor yet. That actually could be
12 good for us in a way, considering some of the challenges we are
13 now facing here in this community.
14 In terms of the Authorization Act, that's the big policy Act
15 that pays for servicemen that have -- you know, that's about
16 1,000 different authorities baked into it. That work is pretty
17 much completed. It should potentially go back at any point now.
18 However, there's a big conference between the Senate and the
19 House now that should -- that's a work in progress.
20 There's a lot of talk about supplemental. You know, the
21 supplemental is really nowhere to be found at this point. We'll
22 see. Nothing is -- there was no supplemental funding in the CRs
23 -- in the CR. So we'll see what happens to Israel, Ukraine, and
24 Taiwan funding as we move forward.
25 You know, the '24 budget was \$842 billion dollars for

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1 Defense, right? It sounds like a lot of money, but DoD is
2 struggling right now. They are struggling in terms of resourcing
3 itself, paying for new capabilities, finding people to serve.
4 There is not a BRAC ground authorized, but this is the
5 closest of the BRAC that I've seen in a long time. And the
6 services are doing everything they can to get around BRAC to make
7 trades and save money. And it's apparent to me -- it's apparent
8 just based on what we're seeing down here in Louisiana.
9 Next slide. So despite the challenges, I've briefed this
10 slide before. You know, the MILCON kind of stuff is always fun
11 to put up there because it's high impact dollars. You know, it's
12 important.
13 And '24 is another big year for Louisiana. You know, we
14 finally got some progress in terms of getting some P&D money that
15 was not requested in the President's budget and to start looking
16 at things like the Child Development Center finally. At
17 Barksdale, the new dorm, which is part of really the Weapons
18 Generation Facility, got a good chunk of P&D money.
19 The Weapons Generation Facility is going into its third year,
20 \$112 million. That was part of the budget, so we really didn't
21 have to do anything. You know, that was just, you got to finish
22 the project. That's going to be a \$277-million-dollar project.
23 You know, my hunch is that project will probably cost over a
24 billion dollars by the time it's finished. There is no way it's
25 going to be finished with \$277 million. But it's a generational

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1 project. It's going to keep Barksdale in good shape for a long
2 time.
3 There was some additional action that the Senate took, to
4 include funding off the unfunded priority list for a big
5 multi-purpose field for Fort Johnson. That's good news, and
6 you've got some costs to complete, as you know, in terms of the
7 distribution piece.
8 And then added on top of that, the \$5 million dollars we won
9 for the third time to extend the Leesville runway via DCIP
10 funding. You know, that -- again, that's not even a begging
11 shamelessly for money. That's actually competing for it, putting
12 grants together and winning. And we have won in Louisiana,
13 basically every time we have tried. So that was a great thing.
14 So next slide. And, you know, again, I showed this slide to
15 some groups, but it bears repeating. If you can't see it, I
16 apologize. But, you know, this shows you who's doing the work.
17 You know, at least on the Senate side. The House is supportive
18 as well.
19 But, you know, both Kennedy and Cassidy are very aggressive.
20 And, you know, when we asks, they do listen. And this is money
21 that was not requested that they put in. And when we look at
22 this list, you know, Kennedy has appropriated great, and I hope
23 and I think he may soon be a defense appropriator. Cassidy is on
24 four great committees, but he's not on defense committees.
25 But when you look at this list, they're in great company.

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1 You know, people like Dick Durbin, you know, who's the
2 Appropriations Defense, Senate Appropriations; Moran -- Jerry
3 Moran on Defense Appropriations; Susan Collins ranking on Senate
4 Appropriations; Van Hollen, another appropriator; Gary Peters on
5 Senate Armed Services Committee. These are all very heavy,
6 powerful defense Senators and your delegation. Like I said, they
7 weighed into this and listened to us and the community to get
8 some things done, which is great.

9 Next slide. So let me switch to Fort Johnson. You know, we
10 have briefed this issue over the last few months. And the
11 rhetorical headline from the Army is we are reorganizing to a
12 divisional level versus the brigade level, which you see down
13 here with the 310, you know, to better fight against a peer
14 competitor, meaning China, right?

15 Again, undoubtedly you've heard some rumors probably that
16 that can impact us in force structure, and it can. And, you
17 know, the numbers have not been published. We have heard things
18 that are not good numbers for us and we are taking action. I
19 can't really get into the details, except I can tell you that
20 every member and Senator of Louisiana knows exactly what's going
21 on. The staff are briefed. We do have a plan. I think it's a
22 good one. And this delegation will do what it takes to protect
23 this community.

24 There are a lot of issues with this plan. We have never -- I
25 don't think this state has ever or would ever do anything opposed

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1 to national security. But when these things happen, they can
2 often be done quickly and clumsily, and we're not buying this
3 proposal for a second.

4 There are a lot of issues cutting force structure down here,
5 given what this community has done. This is a self-inflicted
6 issue by the Army. They don't know how to recruit, and taking
7 from one community disproportionately to sort of fix their own
8 internal issues is not the way to do it. When you start cutting
9 like they propose to cut without going through Congress and, you
10 know, getting the proper oversight, there's going to be push
11 back. And there will be push back.

12 So, there are some other things, you know, when you really
13 get into the details and you look at the military housing. Fort
14 Johnson has a very unique, compact privatized housing. That
15 essentially means when you take a lot of people out of Fort
16 Johnson, the Army is going to pay. The Army may own that
17 housing, but they really want to do what they intend to do.

18 So I think we have a plan. You know, we've been through this
19 two other times in 10 years and we pulled it off. And I think we
20 will have a good outcome at the end.

21 Next slide. So just so you can see it, two years ago the
22 Army was authorized at 485,000. Congress knows this. It is now
23 authorized at 452. It is authorized now at 452. In the next
24 blank column, if you said what is the FY25, I think it will be
25 433. The Army's projections appear to be going way low, way

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1 fast. You know, down to about 425,000.

2 So this is a co-dependency really. A co-dependency of
3 dysfunction, I would say, based on both Congress and the Army.
4 The Army can't recruit, so then Congress says, "Okay, fine. If
5 you can't recruit, we're going to reduce your authorization."
6 And Congress says that's not that bad because we had to increase
7 authorizations in the Air Force and the Navy to fight China.

8 So everybody's a little bit at fault. But we are getting to
9 a point where we have to decide as a nation, you know, do we want
10 a standing, functional Army or not. If we want to reduce it to
11 250,000, that's Congress' choice. But if we really want to be
12 able to satisfy war plans that are on the books and defeat China,
13 that's just not going to fly.

14 So back to our situation, you know, the plan is to slow this
15 thing down and click the proper Congressional oversight. We need
16 to increase authorizations and give the Army more guidance, they
17 will.

18 I don't know. General, you probably know better than I do.
19 I cannot get a straight answer from anybody. And I have more
20 retired Army Generals than I can shake a stick at, and I don't
21 get good answers. I don't know what's happening.

22 And I do know that a brief from the Hill that said recruiting
23 is a problem. They've acknowledged that. They think retention's
24 pretty good. And, you know, from what we're hearing, retention's
25 getting bad too. And not to say Congressional holds on GOs and

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1 senior officers is helping. I get that. It's a tough situation.

2 GENERAL ELDER:

3 Chris, this may be more of a question for Keith. But since
4 the JRTC and the area was really designed with the support of
5 what was the counterinsurgency, and you've got this belief that,
6 well, it's China, China, China, because that's all we've cared
7 about. Is -- and, of course, we've learned recently that maybe
8 we still need to protect and, you know, maintain its capability.

9 Is any of that driving in the Army, the cuts here? It's just
10 a question.

11 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:

12 I mean, I think it's just the recruiting. The recruiting
13 element of the whole equation. You know, going back to the large
14 scale combat operations. I mean, I think about when I was a
15 Lieutenant, that's what we were doing 30 years ago, and now we're
16 back there.

17 But I think the market, and then, you know, on the retention
18 side, like on bonuses. Bonuses are not going to be as healthy as
19 they have been for the last several years, so that's going to be
20 something else that's kind of working against the strength fight.

21 But, like I said, you know, just sharing those best practices
22 that we have.

23 You know, I think when you look at all the Gulf Coast states,
24 we all did pretty good on recruiting on the Gulf Coast states.

25 As you move further up, you know, Minnesota does well. New York

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1 does well. But other than that, everybody is having strength
2 challenges.
3 And I know they talk about redoing the ASVAB and all that
4 stuff, use calculators, maybe changing some of the questions. I
5 think they're trying to do some creative things to get there.
6 But the recruiting is what's driving a lot of those decisions and
7 inability, to get them.
8 So does that help, sir?
9 GENERAL ELDER:
10 It does.
11 MR. GOODE:
12 There's -- and just a side note, you know, we'll keep going,
13 but, you know, there have been some conversations about DHA, the
14 Defense Health Agency, and how, you know, if you had childhood
15 eczema, that shouldn't prevent you from joining the Army and
16 maybe doing something that is less arduous than a kid who says,
17 I'm going to be Delta Force. Space Force, you know, do we really
18 need -- should Space Force folks be in uniform? Do we have to
19 treat them like we treat the Air Force?
20 So there -- I think there are a lot of good ideas out there,
21 you know, but it's paying for them and, you know, embracing them.
22 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
23 So MEPS has been a challenge too. I mean, going to MEPS now,
24 when everything went to Genesis, the system of record that
25 they're using right now, and they go back and look at someone's
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1 health history. Maybe they were taking ADHD medicine when they
2 were in the ninth grade --
3 MR. GOODE:
4 Yeah.
5 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
6 -- and now they're trying to get in, they are having to wait
7 longer. Or they broke their arm when they were 8 years old.
8 Having to get all those records is something that used to take
9 maybe a week or less. Now it takes 30, 45 days. And a lot of
10 them are losing that loving feeling, you know, the longer you
11 wait.
12 MR. GOODE:
13 Yeah, they're gone.
14 MAJOR GENERAL WADDELL:
15 So, I mean, that's another angst that's kind of out there.
16 MR. GOODE:
17 Yeah.
18 So next slide. We'll finish up here, but, you know, not that
19 you don't need reminding of this. But when you look at the DoD
20 spending, the impact here, I think you see very quickly --
21 anything in that last column over 3 percent is considered
22 significant. Anything over about 3 percent, from an honest
23 standpoint. We're at 17 percent here. I mean, it's just
24 unbelievable the impact the DoD has to switch.
25 And then, let me just finish. You'll have to -- again, this
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1 just goes to the irony, right? But for all the sacrifices this
2 community has made in terms of the land purchase program, taking
3 land out of the tax base, and maxing out your bonding authority
4 to put schools to accommodate the brigade. The Army was right
5 there alongside you for a while. It was called the life
6 initiative. All of those little boxes are worth millions of
7 dollars, and a lot of that stuff has been funded and is now in
8 jeopardy.
9 So next slide and the next slide. So that's where we're at.
10 And again, it's hard to talk details when the Army themselves
11 have not put these figures out in public. The Speaker was
12 briefed, I believe, yesterday on the numbers. Senator Kennedy
13 was briefed the day before. Cassidy, I don't believe has been
14 briefed, so it's still sort of a fast-moving train here.
15 But, again, all I can tell you is there are Congressional
16 legislative vehicles out there to deal with this. It is not like
17 it was, you know, during the first two big rounds. It was based
18 on an environmental process that allowed everybody in this room
19 to go up to D.C. and collect petitions and be very vocal.
20 This is a different game. This game, it's internal. The
21 Army was very secretive about it. Everybody involved signed
22 non-disclosure agreements and it was done really through the
23 front office, inside the Secretary of the Army's office. So it's
24 a different type off fight, this fight.
25 Any questions on it? I just have, I think, three more
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1 slides.
2 Again, good news at Barksdale. Listen, we talked about the
3 WGF; that's going great. We're tracking the Child Development
4 Center and the dorm. You know, we're right now in the process --
5 we're in November. We want to strategize and sort of solidify
6 our FY25 requests going forward.
7 We've been really successful here in terms of DCIP grants. I
8 think we are getting closer to a potential DCIP grant request for
9 Bossier and Shreveport, and we'll work that as well as an FY25
10 appropriations package.
11 But the big news, I guess, it's been sort of intriguing to
12 folks, is this -- well, it's a major command reorganization. The
13 Air Force calls it an optimization exercise. And, you know, it's
14 based on a couple of memos from the Chief and from the Secretary
15 of the Air Force.
16 And thankfully we have some folks, like Bob Elder, who have
17 been tracking this pretty closely; Mobile Holmes on my staff.
18 Mobile is the Commander of the Air Combat Command. He's very
19 much tracking it as well. I spoke to Senator Cassidy's Chief of
20 Staff yesterday to give him an update.
21 Bottom line, you know -- and I'll let Bob tell you this. He
22 knows better than I do. But the Air Force is relooking at how
23 they assemble requirements and execute requirements versus how
24 the Major Commands actually prosecute more and do their
25 operational duties.
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1 And the thought is that the requirements need to be sort of
2 broken out in some cases. You know, maybe stand up a new
3 headquarters focusing on requirements. The Air Force did that a
4 long time ago. And get to about five, what they call OTE --
5 organize, train and equip -- Major Command Centers. And there
6 are five.
7 And again, this is a fast-moving train, but based on Bob's
8 entail, the nuclear enterprise will likely be one of those five,
9 which is great. Mobile suggested the same thing.
10 And on the ground level in the community, obviously the
11 question is: Okay, we worked really hard to, A, get Air Force
12 Global Strike Command to Barksdale; B, make sure it was resourced
13 at the right level from leadership perspective, that being
14 four-star and three-star; and C, getting it resourced and --
15 personnel-wise. And we were good at one and two and never really
16 good at three. So, you know, it's great that you have a MAJCOM.
17 It's great there's a four-star. But the personnel staffing has
18 always been a challenge.
19 So this current exercise it appears the four-star is going to
20 be in good shape. And it appears to so few people, like Air
21 Force Global Strike Command, has already given up people.
22 And that's my take on it. If you have anything to add, Bob?
23 GENERAL ELDER:
24 One thing for the group to know is that the initial look at
25 this thing. Basically, the Secretary put this letter out to

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1 everyone in the Air Force -- so if anybody can get a copy of it
2 -- and it says, hey, it's a new era of competition. We've been
3 optimized for something different than what we probably need.
4 So he basically told the staff to go look at some ways that
5 we can better prepare ourselves, optimize ourselves for purposes
6 of having to deal with peer competitors like, China and Russia.
7 So that all makes pretty good sense, right?
8 The problem is when you turn stuff over like this to a staff,
9 they immediately think that that means reorganization. And so
10 that was kind of the approach that they took, and that's largely
11 the variety.
12 But there's really two big pieces that -- Chris talked about
13 the one, which they're really concerned. The Secretary was
14 concerned for a long time that they don't look at any, what they
15 call trades across the major commands.
16 So they don't look to say, "Well, you're doing something in
17 this command. And if you do that, and I do that, then we
18 wouldn't have to buy this." There is no mechanism in the Air
19 Force to really do that. They've tried several things. So
20 that's one of the things they're trying to fix.
21 The other big thing that they're trying to address, which
22 doesn't really effect Louisiana that much is, they have a lot of
23 -- in the old days, credit for Vietnam, called hollow
24 organizations, hollow units, where you have the organization but
25 there's hardly anybody in it. There's a number of organizations

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1 in the Air Force.
2 That's not true for Air Force Strike Command. Certainly not
3 Barksdale, where they have a squadron, for example. And they
4 have squadron commanders and staff. And they actually even have
5 planes, but they don't have any people. And so they're thinking
6 this doesn't make any sense to be tying up this many people doing
7 that. So that's another piece of this.
8 When they look at the bids where the money goes, they look at
9 the -- depending on what they look at, they can kind of somewhat
10 track what they are doing with the command. They look at the
11 people, which is the biggest costs in any service, is the
12 manpower. Then they look at the logistics, and they look at
13 sustainment, and then there's readiness. And those are the
14 areas.
15 So, I mean, they are looking at things like -- they kind of
16 want to organize the commands along some kind of an arrangement.
17 Something like that.
18 The other big thing that's hurting them is the cost of
19 installations, which, you know, we don't think that's going to
20 affect us. But they're trying to figure out ways -- how can we
21 cut down all these installation costs, and they're looking at
22 some innovative ways to do that.
23 The only thing, I think, is a concern for -- the good news is
24 that one of the reasons that they're -- so General Bussiere, who
25 is the Commander of Air Force Global Strike Command. He is a

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1 fighter pilot originally, so he is able to talk that lingo very
2 well and he gets along very well with the Secretary.
3 The problem we have within the Air Force is that only a very
4 small part of the Air Force is involved in doing the nuclear
5 stuff, and the rest of them don't have a single clue about what
6 they do. All right. So that's one of the reasons why you need
7 to have a dedicated Major Command to do that.
8 On the other hand, the problem with that is that when people
9 are doing things like this kind of a process, they -- in fact,
10 the initial thing that came up and got a lot of -- all stirred
11 up, and is the stupidest thing ever. Turns out that General
12 Bussiere apparently talked to the Secretary and said, "This is
13 really stupid." And the Secretary said, "I agree with you." So
14 they've already made some immediately changes. That's the good
15 news about this.
16 I think it is really important for the State of Louisiana,
17 general -- our congressional delegation to have some kind of
18 understanding that we've done a good job in educating our
19 congressional delegations. Very few people outside of
20 congressional delegations that are associated with an Air Force
21 Global Strike Command Unit know how different a nuclear command
22 base is compared to a regular one.
23 And so they look at what looks like some optimization thing.
24 It looks like a great idea until you peel, like, even one layer
25 back, and it's a problem. So for us, I think we need to worry

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1 about educating other people to help. That's to help our own
 2 Legislatures help when they look at this.
 3 The only other thing -- and you kind of mentioned it there,
 4 Chris. When you do a major reorganization like this, if it's big
 5 enough, and even though it really doesn't affect, let's say, the
 6 four-star yet -- Global Strike Command. There is some big trades
 7 they're doing across it in terms of how they realign stuff in
 8 that.
 9 Which both reopens this whole thing about: so how did Air
 10 Force Global Strike Command end up being at Barksdale and not at
 11 let's say, Omaha at the Offutt Air Force Base, which is where the
 12 Command headquarters is or at the place that everybody thinks of
 13 as kind of the center place of nuclear things in the Air Force,
 14 which is the current Air Force base where all the national labs
 15 are that do nuclear things. I don't think anything like that
 16 would happen, but it's a threat. And if we wait until the
 17 problem occurs then it would be harder to push back and to set
 18 the stage to where it makes it really difficult for someone to
 19 argue against it now.
 20 So that's some of the things I think we can do, certainly
 21 within the state with our delegation. And any chance you have to
 22 really talk about it, I think one of the things we've been trying
 23 to do is make sure that people understand just how different Air
 24 Force Global Strike Command is than other units in the Air Force.
 25 MR. GOODE:

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1 over, and they've been over since 2000. So the mission they have
 2 is a good one, and it's getting the resources.
 3 The one thing they do really need -- and the good news is the
 4 base itself is screaming for them -- is they have the oldest
 5 C-130s in the fleet, C-130 Tangos. They're old. They need to be
 6 replaced. The delegation this year got one added to the Unfunded
 7 Priority List. We'll see if we can keep that one. I think we
 8 will. But we need three more, and we're going to ask for them.
 9 And the delegation, I hear, is going to be a good spot to ask for
 10 them next year. If we get the C-130s modernized, the F-5 is
 11 modernized; we're in a pretty good place. Not to mentioned the
 12 new F-15s that will come into the system as well, which is
 13 dynamite.
 14 Link 16, a communication note, that's another thing that the
 15 base is suggesting will be a good add, so we're looking at that
 16 as well. So, you know, I think we're in a good place with Belle
 17 Chasse.
 18 I think that's it, unless there's any questions.
 19 Okay. All right. Thanks a lot.
 20 MR. ABOUD:
 21 Thank you so much, Chris.
 22 I know we are approaching -- very rapidly approaching a hard
 23 stop here. So I wanted to just quickly provide an update.
 24 You know, at LED we have a suite of services for small
 25 businesses, and we have a program called the Veterans First

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1 Thanks, Bob.
 2 And then I just have one more slide on SEMA. Gary wanted to
 3 be here today. But, you know, we've had some good -- we've had
 4 some great interaction with Belle Chasse. Sam and folks have
 5 been very helpful in terms of getting us in front of the right
 6 folks.
 7 Gary Silbert met with the CO not too long ago. You know,
 8 we're pretty close to looking and, again, formalizing our
 9 legislative priorities. We've briefed the delegation on this
 10 multiple times. You know, there's a lot of angst down there.
 11 You know, the F-18 is being taken out.
 12 And, you know, the bottom line, the Navy is committed to
 13 Belle Chasse. It wants that training mission. The Adversary
 14 Mission. I think some people, some of the local folks down there
 15 who've flown the F-18 felt the F-5 was a bad deal. The F-5, the
 16 conversion's completed. They are flying down there. They're
 17 being converted as well, or modernized, I should say. New
 18 radars, new ADIs, new ejection seats, and it's going to be a
 19 really -- it's going to be a good jet.
 20 Bottom line, at the end of the day the F-5 is going to phase
 21 out as well. You know, probably even looking at F-18s coming
 22 back down to Belle Chasse by nature. So, you know, the profile
 23 of that Wing, I think, is good. And the Navy supports them and,
 24 you know, it's a necessary service. But the notion they're going
 25 to fly to the boat and be a Reserve Air Wing -- those days are

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1 Business Initiative. It allows veteran-owned businesses to be
 2 certified and added to a database which then allows anyone
 3 looking to do business with a veteran-owned company to search and
 4 find those businesses.
 5 And so earlier this year we hit a significant benchmark in
 6 which we certified 1,000 veteran-owned businesses in Louisiana.
 7 And so I just wanted to provide an update that we are now at
 8 1,151 veteran-owned businesses that have been certified and are
 9 now in that database. So anyone looking to do business with a
 10 veteran-owned company can do so. And so we continue to drive
 11 that program forward and engage as many veteran-owned businesses
 12 as we can.
 13 So at this time I would like to move into our Other Business
 14 section of the agenda. I know we have two very brief comments
 15 that two gentlemen will provide here in short order. But first,
 16 I would like to call Mr. Jeremy Hilton with the South Central
 17 Regional Liaison office as part of the OG's military community
 18 and family policy.
 19 MR. HILTON:
 20 Thanks, Robby.
 21 I will make this brief. I know everybody wants to get out of
 22 here. Jeremy Hilton, as Robby mentioned, South Central Regional
 23 Liaison. I work in our different states. Mine are Texas,
 24 Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Missouri.
 25 I am also a Navy veteran, Air Force spouse and an Air Force

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1 Academy grad, so. And just so you know, the last time I was
 2 here I had the chance to talk to Secretary Pierson. If you --
 3 the mascot for the falcon -- of the Air Force is the falcon. And
 4 Secretary Pierson sent me a recipe for barbequed falcon, so I
 5 knew I was going to be in Louisiana.

6 It's been an honor, sir, to work with you and your team. We
 7 work with our state legislatures and executive branch agencies on
 8 military family quality of life. It's a pleasure being here this
 9 morning and seeing the things that are happening in this parish
 10 and across the state.

11 Louisiana has done so many things for our families already.
 12 The members of the Council have our list of top 10 things going
 13 into the Fiscal Year '24. I'm happy to work with Senator Reese
 14 and Representative Owen on getting those impacted.

15 Obviously, we're transitioning into a new administration.
 16 That might look a little bit different, but I have every
 17 expectation that the State of Louisiana will be just as steadfast
 18 in support of our military families as it has always been.

19 So thank you all very much. And it was a pleasure, sir.

20 MR. ABBOD:

21 Thank you again, Jeremy.

22 And I'll add that we do have a printed copy of a few notes
 23 that Jeremy did bring, so please be sure to grab a copy.

24 Consecutively, I'd like to call on Bruce Keller with Belle
 25 Chasse Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base for a few comments.

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1 MR. KELLER:

2 Good afternoon. Briefly, the Commanding Officer of the Naval
 3 Air Station Joint Reserve Base in New Orleans sent me here just
 4 to cover a couple of bullet points about -- following with the
 5 General's comments about saltwater intrusion.

6 The continued mitigations for possible saltwater intrusion
 7 situations, they remain important to us on an ongoing basis. The
 8 base does not make its own water. The base gets its water from
 9 Plaquemines Parish. That worked out well this time, but knock on
 10 wood, it will continue without needing to do so in the future as
 11 an item.

12 We're a customer -- the base is a customer for water with the
 13 parish, with Plaquemines Parish. We do have a 500-gallon water
 14 tower. At its capacity it will provide about five days worth of
 15 water, so there's a small window of time if we were not able to
 16 have a solution for water.

17 We're very thankful for the efforts of both the Parish and
 18 the Army Corp of Engineers for what they -- the work that they
 19 did to actually haul things -- the saltwater wedge before it
 20 reached Belle Chasse, at least at our level. The lower part of
 21 the Parish, not so lucky. But, so we are very thankful for that.

22 I just wanted to provide a couple of the impacts. Some of
 23 them will be obvious. Some of them are less so that would happen
 24 if we had no solution. We would be unable to provide potable
 25 water to more than 2,200 base residents and about 1,000 grade K

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1 through eight students and the staff of Belle Chasse Academy as
 2 well as to the thousands of airmen and civilians and service men,
 3 Army folks that work on the base.

4 The saltwater intrusions, as we know at this point in time,
 5 would eventually get to our appliances and slowly degrade their
 6 capability of their normal life expectancy. There's actually --
 7 there would be impacts to fire fighter capabilities. You don't
 8 think about these things until you -- unless you've dealt with
 9 saltwater your entire life, you don't really know that saltwater
 10 is terribly corrosive.

11 And that's where it gets to what we do at the base. We fly,
 12 and the aircrafts get washed down frequently. I'm not sure how
 13 often they do at LANG, but, you know, it's at least once a month,
 14 I think, for that. So eventually a long time without fresh water
 15 has an impact. Planes need to be lasting for 30 or 40 years, and
 16 the one way they get to do that is they get washed down so the,
 17 you know, the salt that's on them or whatever can be eliminated.

18 And we also have a medical clinic on the base. And so the
 19 last time you went to the dentist and they swished water in your
 20 mouth to get clearer, that actually needs to be freshwater.

21 So a couple of things that are not obvious on people's minds
 22 until you start looking at them, and this was a good exercise for
 23 us to do that.

24 Thank you.

25 MR. ABBOD:

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1 Thank you very much, Bruce.

2 Any other items or new business to come before the Council
 3 today?

4 Okay. I'm hearing none. So I'd now like to move forward
 5 with questions and comments from the public.

6 Okay. Hearing none as well, so I believe that covers
 7 everything for today.

8 Again, just to thank you for everyone taking the time to join
 9 us today, and we look forward to continuing to work with you all
 10 as we move forward.

11 So are there any motions to adjourn?

12 SENATOR REESE:

13 So moved.

14 MR. ABBOD:

15 Okay. Any second?

16 MAYOR ALLEN:

17 Second.

18 MR. ABBOD:

19 All in favor, please say "aye".

20 ALL:

21 Aye.

22 MEETING ADJOURNED AT 2:50 P.M.

23 REPORTER'S PAGE

24 I, Nicole M. Crabb, Certified Court Reporter in and for the
 25 State of Louisiana, the officer, as defined in Rule 28 of the

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1 Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and/or the Article 1434(B) of
2 the Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure, before whom this
3 proceeding was taken, do hereby state on the Record:
4 That due to the spontaneous nature of the interaction and
5 discourse of the proceeding, double-dashes (--) have been used to
6 indicate pauses, changes of thought and/or talkovers; that such
7 is the universally accepted method for a court reporter's
8 transcription of a proceeding; that double-dashes (--) do not
9 indicate that words or phrases have been left out of the
10 transcript;
11 And that the spelling of any words and/or names which could
12 not be verified through reference resources have been denoted
13 with the parenthetical phrase "(spelled phonetically)."

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Nicole M. Crabb
Certified Court Reporter

9 CERTIFICATE

This certification is valid only for a transcript
10 accompanied by my original signature and original required seal
11 or my certified digital signature on this certificate.
12 I, Nicole M. Crabb, Certified Court Reporter in and for the
13 State of Louisiana, as the officer before whom this meeting was
14 taken, do hereby certify that the foregoing 93 pages; that this
15 testimony was reported by me in the voice reporting method, was
16 prepared and transcribed by me or under my personal direction and
17 supervision, and is true and correct to the best of my ability
18 and understanding; that the transcript has been prepared in
19 compliance with the transcript format guidelines required by
20 statute and rules of the board; that I am informed about the
21 complete arrangement, financial or otherwise, with the person or
22 entity making arrangements for deposition services; that I have
23 acted in compliance with the prohibition on contractual
24 relationships, as defined by Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure
25 Article 1434 and rules of the board; that I have no actual
knowledge of any prohibited employment or contractual
relationship, direct or indirect, between a court reporting firm
and any party litigant in this matter, nor is there any such
relationship between myself and a party litigant in this matter;
that I am not related to counsel or to any of the parties hereto,
I am in no manner associated with counsel for any of the
interested parties to this litigation, and I am in no way
concerned with the outcome thereof.

22 This 4th day of December, 2023, Simpson, Louisiana.

23
24
25
Nicole M. Crabb
Certified Court Reporter
Certificate No. 2019015

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[unit - warehouses]

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Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure

Article 1445 and 1446

Art. 1445. Submission to Witness; Changes; Signing

When the testimony is fully transcribed the deposition shall be submitted to the witness for examination and shall be read to or by him, unless such examination and reading are waived by the witness and by the parties. Any changes in form or substance which the witness desires to make shall be entered upon the deposition by the officer with a statement of the reasons given by the witness for making them. The deposition shall then be signed by the witness unless the parties by stipulation waive the signing or the witness is ill or is absent from the parish where the deposition was taken or cannot be found or refuses to sign. If the deposition is not signed by the witness within thirty days of its submission to him, the officer shall sign it and state on the record the fact of the waiver or of the illness or absence of the witness or the fact of the refusal to sign together with the reason, if any, given therefor; and the deposition may then be used as fully as though signed unless on a motion to suppress under Article 1456 the court holds that

the reasons given for the refusal to sign require rejection of the deposition in whole or in part. A video deposition does not have to comply with the requirements of reading and signing by the deponents.

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