

USAFA Family,

On behalf of the team of leaders, faculty, and staff entrusted with the care of our United States Air Force Academy, thank you for the support we have received through this unprecedented time. In nearly four decades in uniform, I can tell you that this week has been one of my most difficult, and I know that sentiment is shared across our team. In particular, the outpouring of positive support from our graduate community has been inspiring. I readily admit that I do not have all the solutions to the challenges we face, but the solution lies in the USAFA family. It is in times like these that feeling the full strength of the USAFA bonds – between our cadets, graduates, faculty, staff and our entire community – can make all the difference.

I am heartbroken to confirm that since Thursday we have mourned the loss of two of our First-Class cadets here on our campus, and our entire Academy community is understandably shaken. The next of kin have been notified, and out of respect for the privacy of these cadets' families – members of our own extended family – I will not be sharing their names or many details today. I will confirm, given the current circumstances, that their deaths were not related to the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time I ask that members of our community refrain from sharing speculation, as it can cause further damage to families as well as our cadets. We will share more information when the time is appropriate.

As an Academy community we are navigating uncharted territory, and I ask for your continued support as we grieve while continuing to face the challenges that lay ahead. While each cadet will require different, individualized care, and decisions we make will not be applied broadly across the cadet population, the health, safety and wellbeing of our cadets remains our top priority.

I am writing this on the heels of a nearly 3 hour conversation with our First-Class cadets, where we covered topics of their choice while my team recorded every suggestion they gave – and there were many. Yesterday our permanent professors, AOCs, AMTs and helping agencies gathered cadets by squadron for small group discussions and support. Earlier today our AOCs and AMTs met remotely with the dispersed members of their squadrons to continue these conversations. In addition, I have reached out through several video teleconferences to the rest of our Cadet Wing across the country to discuss the importance of looking out for each other wherever you are geographically, and to ensure they know about the resources, support and helping agencies we have available. Our leadership team and mental health professionals are available 24 hours a day.

We will continue to coordinate with our own mental health professionals, and have called in those along the Front Range and from the Pentagon for guidance and assistance. We continue to conduct regular deep cleaning of common areas, including Arnold Hall and our gyms, in order to balance social distancing with the needs for social contact and support. We are having discussions with our healthcare professionals about how to balance cadet safety during a pandemic with providing the same sense of family and teamwork cadets are used to. Based on those discussions, along with feedback from our Cadets, we are allowing two cadets in a room again if they so choose. The two person room is only one of the suggestions our Cadets made during our meeting today, and we are continually looking at ways to consider all of their suggestions. Our goal in weighing each option continues to be both mental and physical health, along with turning our nearly 1000 First-Class cadets into lieutenants in 59 days.

What our nation and the entire world is currently going through is understandably generating a lot of anxiety and unease for our families, friends and loved ones. As a parent myself, I understand the feelings

of concern our USAFA parents have for the cadets who have remained on our campus. Likewise, as a graduate I understand and share the concern felt by our close-knit and protective community of graduates. We made the decision to keep First-Class cadets here because our Air and Space Forces have deemed us essential to their missions and while they are here I can guarantee access to COVID testing and world class medical care with our 10th Medical Group. Across our Air Force Airmen are restricted to their rooms, and in less than 90 days we will expect the Class of 2020 to lead those Airmen. Basic Military Training (BMT) and Initial Flight Training (IFT) are continuing with restrictions similar to those on our campus.

In this situation, while we continue to share lessons learned with our sister service academies, those lessons are limited because the other service academies' cadets and midshipmen were on spring break when the spread of COVID-19 escalated across the country. Our cadets were still weeks out from Spring Break, so we had the opportunity to make the call on whether they should stay at USAFA in a more contained and safe environment with our leadership and healthcare professionals, or return home to varying situations that could preclude them from graduating in May. In all of our decision making we have consulted with our medical professionals, the leaders of our sister service academies, and our Air Force and Department of Defense leadership. We still intend for the Class of 2020 to graduate in May.

We are a family that cares deeply for its own, and this is one of the reasons I am so honored to lead our Academy. I understand that the feedback and messages of concern we are receiving come from a place of care, and I can assure you that these are concerns shared by every last member of our team. Solutions to our issues have come and continue to flow from our USAFA community based on the love we have for each other. I thank you for your support, and I ask for your continued trust as we come together to confront the challenges we face. Please continue to support our cadets by sharing our helping agencies with those in your communities: <https://www.usafa.edu/helping-agencies/>. Join us in keeping the families, friends and loved ones of the cadets we lost this week in your thoughts and prayers. The class of '20 is strong, the USAFA family is strong, but we grieve together, and we will get through this as a team, as a community.

Together, we are USAFA. Together, we are strong.

Jay Silveria