



AI didn't write this

By Mark Hille '97, CEO, U.S. Air Force Academy Association & Foundation

In response to one of my recent letters, a fellow graduate remarked, “Your AI is a terrible writer.”

I responded that the words they had read — good, bad or indifferent — were in fact my own. The exchange led to a conversation about the importance of authenticity and a perception some hold that our efforts to engage at times feel thin, impersonal or insincere.

These critiques sting a bit, but they push us to be a better Association. And if I'm honest, the individual had a point. As an alumni association serving more than 56,000 living graduates across seven decades — along with parents, family members and others who care about our Academy — our work boils down to real, personal connection. Yes, scale and efficiency matter. And technology has a role in an AI world. But no matter how tech-savvy we become, building connections and developing authentic linkages across the Long Blue Line remain our primary tasks.

I was reminded of this recently during a trip to Washington, D.C. There, I had the pleasure of visiting with numerous Academy graduates, including those serving in uniform and as senior civilians in the Pentagon, along with elected officials, professional staff and senior administration appointees.

The late U.S. Sen. Alan Simpson famously quipped, “Those who travel the high road of humility in Washington, D.C., are not bothered by heavy traffic.”

It can be sporting to poke fun at life in our nation's capital, a place where noble pursuits and good character too often have short lifespans.

But what I encountered in D.C. was a community of graduates, in and out of uniform, each of whom cares deeply and sincerely about our institution's future.

Alongside and in support of our Academy leadership, these graduates shared their willingness to do their part in making our Academy its best.

I observed the same commitment at the annual Air & Space Forces Association Warfare Symposium near Denver, where I spent time with graduates in uniform and those in the defense and aerospace industries — all focused on meeting the pressing challenges facing our airmen and guardians. The shared commitment to preparing leaders of character to serve our Air Force and Space Force should make us all proud.

Across multiple sectors, increasing numbers of graduates are serving in positions of influence and responsibility, putting our core values into action as they shape policy, fight for resources, execute on their key authorities and make critical decisions. AI and technological advancements spin ahead at an astounding pace, but as Air Force Undersecretary Matthew Lohmeier '06 reminded the Warfare Symposium audience, it is the character and spirit of airmen and guardians that will distinguish us from our adversaries. I saw and felt this in D.C. and at the symposium.

Because we're in the relationship business, I want to close by sharing some highlights from a year of growth and renewed focus on our “vital dedication” to the Long Blue Line.

- In 2025, we hosted more graduates, parents and friends in our facilities and on the road than ever. From the successful use of the new Hotel Polaris for reunions to the expansion of our Legacy Class efforts, the dynamic connections between graduates and the Cadet Wing are increasingly powerful. In 2026, we are making a significant investment in our

partnership with chapters around the world to extend these gains.

- The NextGen Advisory Council took flight and is already powering engagement, accelerating our outreach to young(er) generations of graduates. Check out the story about the NextGen Advisory Council in this issue of *Checkpoints* [p. 54].
- We completed several capital improvements, dedicating the Madera Cyber Innovation Center and Wecker Hall, and made progress on the expansion of the Heritage Trail and a future renovation of Doolittle Hall.
- Our support for graduates and their families expanded with the launch of an annual publication, *Here's A Toast* (see p. 52 for more information), and expanded memorial and funeral assistance.
- Closer to home, we are working with the class officers of the Classes of 2026 through 2029, supporting their personal commitments to serve their classmates while at USAFA and in the decades to come.

Together, we are establishing personal and lasting bonds that I hope will be illuminated, rather than diminished, in the age of AI. I thank each of you for your enduring commitment to our Academy, our mission and the Long Blue Line.

Let me conclude with an invitation for connection. My email is mark.hille@usafa.org, and I respond quickly (sans AI). It would be a pleasure to hear from you. 📧

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mark".

Mark Hille '97