Mininia Hawkins: My name is Mininia Hawkins, and I am with the Department of Defense Military Community Support Programs office, the host for this week’s symposium. Before we begin today’s session, we have a special guest to kick off this week’s event. Please welcome Mrs. Hollyanne Milley, spouse of General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Welcome, Mrs. Milley.

Hollyanne Milley: Good morning, everyone. Thank you. Thank You, Mininia and your great SECO team for hosting this virtual event focused on solutions to an issue that has always been close to my heart, and that is military spouse employment. I’m looking forward to great content and rich discussions that we’ll have over the next few days.

One thing that I love despite so many drastic changes to our everyday lives in the past couple months, this event is one of the few that is actually proceeding as originally planned because it’s always been virtual. If there’s a silver lining to our current situation, I think it’s that more employers are willing to see that remote and flexible work options like telework are actually a great way to do business. Given the military family lifestyle, this could open up additional opportunities for our military spouse employment in the future.

As I mentioned, military spouse employment is a topic that’s been close to my heart. I’ve been a military spouse for 35 years and a registered nurse for nearly as long. I can relate to the challenges that many of you face. I know firsthand that finding and sustaining a career as a military spouse can be very difficult. So far, our frequent moves have led me to 14 different jobs in nine different states. The military lifestyle can be very destabilizing, especially for a working spouse. Which is why events like today’s symposium are so helpful.

Having and maintaining a career of my own has always been important to me. I’ve transported my job each time we’ve moved, and looking back on my 33-year career, I can honestly say that regardless of the struggles and the challenges, it was worth it. In addition to the benefits of improving my nursing skills, building my resume and providing additional income for my family, my work experience has truly enriched my life. I look back at working night shifts in Salinas, California as a brand new nurse, or the standing-room ER, the standing-room only in the New York City ER, or watching Hawaiian families literally move into the ICU with portable coolers and
folding chairs to support their loved ones. And I realized that my career enabled me to truly become a part of every community we’ve lived in.

From my colleagues and patients, I learned about local foods, traditions and cultures and I was able to share with them my military story. But my stories of working spouse is not unique. Having and maintaining a career is so important for military spouses, and fortunately for them, their families and their employers, the number of working military spouses continues to grow.

SECO programs have played a significant part in this progress. Since the program began, SECO has posted more than 1 million job and career opportunities for military spouses. And their Military Spouse Employment Partnership has more than 430 large and small companies who have committed to hiring military spouses for the value they bring to their organizations.

While military spouse underemployment and unemployment rates remain a challenge, with resources like MSEP and their Career Advancement Account Scholarship, SECO is dedicated to military spouse support. When I started working, there were not many resources available for military spouses. I can remember when military spouse employment wasn’t even a part of the discussion. Fortunately that has changed, and it’s changed for the good. It is possible to support your service member and have a fulfilling career. Absolutely, there are challenges, but there are more employers and more employment resources available to families today than ever before. And it’s events like this that are instrumental in this progress.

So, I want to thank you all again for inviting me here to kick off the symposium. I’m actually signed up for a few courses today and tomorrow. Looking forward to those. And it’s never too late in your career to learn a thing or two.

And with that, Mininia, I want to turn it back to you and the wonderful folks at SECO. And thank you all very much. Stay healthy and stay safe.

Mininia: Thank you, Mrs. Milley. Thank you very much. So, we will now hear from Ms. Natalie J. Ellis, who’s a career coach for the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. Ms. Ellis is going to provide an overview of education resources that lead to growth and personal fulfillment through lifelong learning opportunities. Welcome, Ms. Ellis.

Natalie J. Ellis: Hello everyone, and welcome to the first day of the 2020 Virtual Military Spouse Symposium. I am Natalie J. Ellis, proud career coach with the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. And on behalf of the entire SECO program, I am beyond excited you have joined us today. We recognize the current state of affairs has everyone feeling a little out of sorts, but it is our goal for the next two days to bring a little sunshine into your living room by continuing our commitment to providing education and career guidance that is accessible to military spouses worldwide.
The last few weeks have probably given you more than enough time than usual to slow down and reflect upon various things you’d like to be doing. And because you’re here, one of them likely revolves around your education and career goals. And I’m glad you’re here, because the more you know, the more you’ll grow. It’s all about planting seeds of information, so as they are watered, you will grow into the knowledge of what’s available to you to take action toward your education and career development. It’s my hope that by the end of this webinar you are able to begin exploring your interests, your values, your skills to choose the right education and career path, to find training programs that match your career interest, also to identify sources of funding to help pay toward college expenses, and to tap into free education resources to advance education and career interest. If you have questions throughout the presentation, I have an absolutely amazing team supporting me today, so feel free to place your questions in the general chat pod. If time permits at the end, I hope to be able to answer a few questions. Also, thank you for answering the poll questions at the onset of the presentation because it helps me to know some of the reasons you all have joined today.

Before I begin sharing information about building that foundation, let me first provide a brief introduction to one of the most powerful resources for military spouses. The Department of Defense Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program, also known as SECO, offers comprehensive education and career services to military spouses around the globe. Now, if by chance you were under the impression the SECO program is limited to certain military spouses, let me clear that up right now. No matter where you are located geographically, your service member’s pay grade, your level of education or work experience, or even your age, the SECO services are available to all military spouses. Even up to 365 days post-transition of your service member, you remain eligible for SECO services.

So, if this is your first time coming in contact with the SECO program, I can assure you it likely will not be your last. And if you’ve had contact with the SECO program previously, welcome back. We do not take lightly your support of the SECO program. So, thank you for your participation and be sure to hang out until the very end of this webinar because you’re sure to hear a resource you can use now as you’re looking to build upon a foundation for your future.

Returning to school and pursuing your education are key components to getting there. This educational process may look different for everyone and it doesn’t always mean spending years in college to do so. Always keep in mind that the more you know, the more you’ll grow. So, as you’re choosing your education think about how your selection of a training program will allow you to experience growth in your current and future endeavors.

Now, I love audience participation so there’s a little tool that you can use to raise your hand. So, if you’re saying to yourself gosh I want to start school, but I have no idea what career I’m interested in or what type of training program to select, if that’s you go ahead and raise your hand for me. Let me know that that’s you out there.
Oh, I see quite a few hands going up. That is awesome. And let me be transparent for a moment, because when I first went off to college I chose the path that other people were traveling, and I kind of went along with the crowd and declared a major in business because that’s what my friends and most everyone else was doing. So, you know there was nothing wrong with business, but it just wasn’t what I felt passionate about.

However, if I had spent just a little time exploring my options, I know I would have made very different choices. And there is power in self-exploration and seeing what choices are out there that are all about you, not what your spouse or maybe your BFF or your family thinks you should do. Of course, their opinions are important, but discovering your interests and values and passions and what they look like can help you get on an intentional path for your future. And that’s what is important. And, just in case this is resonating with you I want to recommend an excellent tool that can bring your desire to begin your education to fruition and allow you to build an educational foundation that is intentional and meaningful and more than a one-size-fits-all way to jumpstart your future.

If you have an electronic device and about 90 seconds, that’s fantastic because I want to introduce you to my friend Traitify. Traitify is the go-to personality assessment at the SECO program. So, this assessment tool is for anyone. You can be an experienced professional who is interested in switching careers. You may be a stay-at-home parent and eager to return to work but you might be a little unsure as to what industry that may be. Or just getting started with choosing a career. All you need is to devote about 90 seconds to answering a few quick questions and what you’ll receive upon completion is information that will demonstrate how your personality relates to your career interest. It is so cool. But hold on a second. I have to stop right there because I don’t want to steal any thunder from my colleague, SECO Career Coach Kathia Kilburn. She’s going to be presenting immediately after this session, so she’ll give information about career changes and how Traitify can be instrumental in choosing a career. So, please be sure to stick and stay, because you will not want to miss her presentation.

So, let’s dive into pursuing your education. The Traitify results will provide an excellent starting point to determining what your focus should be in building a solid education foundation and finding a training program to match your future career goals. Next is actually choosing a training program. And so, where do you start with that? A good place to begin is by considering the school and learning environment that will be a right fit for you. Each of us is so very different and we all lead lifestyles that should be considered when returning to school. So, there are military spouses who work, others who may stay at home with the children. There are some who are hands-on workers who thrive in a team-oriented environment. And then there are others that most effectively work independently. And let’s not forget that a part of a military spouse’s lifestyle is the potential of interruptions to your educational pursuits due to PCS moves every few years. With such a variety, your career objective, unique learning style and lifestyle demands all factor into determining if...
maybe a traditional on-site campus setting or a more flexible online environment is most suitable for you.

Regardless of how you decide to attend classes, be it in a traditional classroom or at your dining room table, another factor to consider in building that solid foundation is by looking into a school’s accreditation. To help give a perspective to the concept of accreditation, think about going to the grocery store. We all do that, and at the commissary when you get say to the meat cabinet, you see ground beef that you’d like to purchase. Well before that ground beef arrived to the commissary, it likely went through a series of inspections to ensure it was acceptable for you to purchase. And in the end, it received a stamp of approval, which tells anybody interested in buying that ground beef that it is OK to show up as meatloaf on your dinner table tonight to serve to your family.

Well, accreditation is kind of the same thing with that, in that schools can go through an evaluation or inspection process to ensure they are meeting certain educational standards and in the end accreditation is granted and serves as public recognition awarded to colleges and universities and institutions and its programs indicating it has met acceptable levels of educational quality. So, for you as a potential student, it gives you the assurance of quality and that your credentials will be valued and respected by future employers and educational institutions that assess them.

Now, are schools required to be accredited? No. Is accreditation helpful? Absolutely. Schools can exercise the option to participate in the process of becoming accredited, because accreditation is completely voluntary. If a school is not accredited, your chances for receiving scholarship funds, or maybe transferring previously earned credits to another school, or even landing a job may be impacted. So, it’s certainly worth researching further and deciding how accreditation may impact your short- and long-term goals.

To do your own accreditation research, make the U.S. Department of Education website one of the first items on your checklist when selecting a school. They have an easy-to-use accreditation search finder tool to verify if a school is accredited and the type of accreditation that they have.

So, you’ve done the Traitify assessment, you figured out the best career fit for you, you’ve discovered the type of environment where you’ll thrive as a student, and have a pretty good grasp of the ins and outs of accreditation. Now it’s time to consider the type of training program. To get started, and one of the places I’d like to start, is with an associate degree. Before I do, I’d like to get your thoughts. So, if you were thinking about pursuing an associate degree, what would be your primary consideration for pursuing that degree? And if you could answer that polling question, it could be that the idea of completing the degree in two years sounds awesome, it may be pursuing a degree at a school with affordable tuition cost is very attractive to you – or the ability to increase your earning potential in the job will be better, or it may be that an associate degree can get you much closer toward your future goal of earning a bachelor’s degree. So, I see those results coming in. Wow.
OK, thank you so much for submitting that information. It looks like we have a variety of responses and reasons why people would pursue that degree. And that's great, because there are many reasons people choose an associate degree to build an education foundation toward their career goals.

And let's look at some of the reasons for that. As a military spouse pursuing an associate degree is attractive for every reason that was selected on that polling question. And think about it this way. The average length of time spent at a duty station can be as short as two years and as long as six years, which is just enough time to start and finish an associate degree program.

These programs usually can be completed in about two years of full-time study, which is ideal for military spouses who are unable to commit to a four-year bachelor's degree program, especially with such a mobile military lifestyle. In addition to finishing in two years, you can do so without going into debt in the process. Tuition rates for associate degree programs can often be more reasonable than rates for bachelor's degree programs, especially since you're paying for two years instead of four.

Many schools offer associate degree programs, and a good place to look is out your back door at your local community college. They offer quality education with an array of major fields of study to prepare you to be job-ready with the skills necessary that you’ll need to enter the workforce at an incredibly affordable price.

Another benefit of completing an associate degree program is that it can lead to an increase in salary and employment opportunities. Landing a high-paying career isn't reserved solely for bachelor's degree holders. Grossing a generous salary with an associate degree is possible, and choosing the right major can have a significant impact on your earning potential.

Options for careers that pay well with an associate degree run the gamut. And they include engineering careers, dental hygienist, diagnostic medical sonographer, funeral services manager, even air traffic controller. Annual salaries in these fields range from $64,000 a year to up to $100,000. Whoa. Did you even know that?

Lastly, earning an associate degree can be a stepping stone to eventually obtaining your bachelor's degree. Depending on the type of associate degree received, military spouses either receive general studies credits that they may transfer into a bachelor’s degree program, or a vocational technical preparation to enter a specific career field upon graduation.

So, once upon a time I wasn’t really aware of the many options for earning an associate degree. Before you get started, it’s helpful to determine first, the end-result of the degree, whether it’s the transfer to a bachelor's degree later on, or for immediate employment. And there are three options for degree seekers to consider. The first option is the Associate of Arts, the A.A. degree. And the second option is the Associate of Science, A.S. degree. Both generally require students to complete about 60 hours of coursework, which includes general education courses and courses
specific to your chosen major or concentration of study. The A.A. degrees are usually awarded in the liberal arts, whereas the bulk of the coursework for the A.S. degree will have an emphasis on science. For military spouses interested in further education both of these options are appealing because of the possibility of applying previously earned credits toward a bachelor’s degree. Associate of Applied Science degree is the third option. For students to pursue the A.A.S degree typically requires fewer hours of general education coursework, focus on a highly specialized area of study and prepare students to enter the workforce immediately following graduation from their program. Now keep in mind however that most courses from this type of degree are not recognized for transfer equivalency, nor will they fulfill general education requirements for a bachelor’s degree at a four-year school. So if you want to pursue a bachelor’s degree this is not the type of program you can expect to transfer credits.

So, we’ve just explored different kinds of associate’s degrees as a way to build an education foundation toward reaching your career goals. But that is not all I have to share. I’m sure there are military spouses who have joined today that may be saying OK, all right, the associate degree sounds good but what if I’m in a different place? I’ve earned my degree or I’m in a profession and I want training that is still relatively short, highly specialized and beneficial, and giving me a swift boost professionally. Well if this is you, please let me know. Remember I like audience participation, so there’s gonna be a chat box. It’s going to appear in just a moment and I’d like for you just to take a quick second and shout out the industry that you’ve been thinking about lately in which you’d like to get more specialized training. And go ahead and just type that in really quickly, what are you thinking about? And oh. Oh, wow – have some education folks, cyber security, psychology. Wow, look at you all, project management, HR. Wow. Career counseling, hey that’s me! Psychology, accounting. Oh, this is awesome, you all! Wow, there’s such a variety there. Thank you for sharing that and keep that coming. Keep that coming. That is awesome. So, that’s perfect.

The thing, is aside from earning a degree, another way to strengthen your foundation to work reaching your career goals is by pursuing a certificate program or an industry certification. And so you may be saying OK, aren’t they one and the same? Well, I have to let you in on a little secret, because once upon a time I thought the words certificate and certification meant the exact same thing. Certificate and certification are often used interchangeably and I want to let you know about a little subtle difference between the two that you may want to know and may be helpful to you as well.

So, starting with the certificate program. Certificate programs give you knowledge and career training in a relatively short period of time on a specific topic or area of study. So, once you come to the end of the training program and pass a final exam or it’s some other tool to assess your knowledge, you will earn a one-time certificate designated you mastered specific learning outcomes.
With the certification, it’s a credential issued by a non-governmental entity after showing proof of required knowledge and skill established by a specific industry. This credential is time limited, so in order to renew it you must demonstrate continued competence in your industry. So, with that distinction made between the two let me say certificate programs and certifications are ideal for all kinds of military spouses. So, if you completed your high school diploma or GED, you're a college graduate, you may be feeling that the passion has run out for your current career and you’re considering a career switch. You're a stay-at-home parent. No matter who you are, it is for you regardless of what stage you may find yourself in. You education or career certificate program is a great way for you to remain competitive in the job market with the most up-to-date 21st century skills. So, let’s take a moment to look at each individually starting with a certificate.

So, certificate programs have amazing educational benefits when you look at the path to advancing your career. It may mean more education, but going back to school for the next two or more years may not fit into your time or budget. Consider a career study certificate that focuses on a particular career area and can be earned in a short period of time. You may be looking for opportunities for professional development. A certificate can be issued in another way than attending a formal training program. So, there may be events you attend such as webinars or seminars, classes, presentations that are geared toward a topic of interest to you. These are excellent opportunities for professional development and to earn continuing education credit or CEUs. You are probably experienced in an event of this type by doing in-house training with your organization or by going to a drive-in or virtual conference where sessions are offered on diverse topics just like this symposium. At the end, you receive a certificate for attendance. Only getting the certificate is not tied to mastering any learning outcomes. It simply acknowledges your attendance or participation in an event. But it’s an awesome way to stay well-versed in what’s trending in your profession.

No matter what the industry, though, employers get excited when they see the efforts current and prospective staff do to remain relevant in their career, earning professional certificates almost guarantees that employers will attract the most competent, confident employees who are productive and energized to tackle routine tasks with a fresh perspective and higher level of efficiency.

As with certificate programs, certifications have a way of tagging you as competent, confident and an expert in your field. And you can make your career path portable through national certifications. There are industries that have precise requirements in order to work, and these often vary from state to state. For military spouses, meeting these expectations in the midst of frequent PCS moves can be challenging. When you move to a new state it may not be a new license you need for your new job, but a nationally recognized certification that can move with you no matter where you go. Once you’ve earned an industry certification, let their certification work for you. Leverage this as an accomplishment to advance your career. Tell your supervisor about it during your next performance evaluation. Highlight the
contributions you’ve made to the organization since earning that certification, and use this credential as a basis for salary increase or even promotion.

Now, certification signals to the professional community you’ve met educational requirements, you’ve worked hard in your field and taken advantage of as much knowledge as possible to qualify you as an expert in your field, which in itself can give you an edge over others and increase your earning potential. So make it work for you.

Now, just in case you’re curious about how to find certifications that match your industry, I have the resource for you. The MySECO portal houses a ton of resources and one of them is the Career OneStop Certification Finder. The Certification Finder allows you to search for certifications using different filters such as names, the certifying organization offering the credential, or occupation or industry.

Before I leave this topic of certifications there is an opportunity to earn industry-specific certifications in two career tracks. And they can be found also in the MySECO portal. And guess what? They are absolutely free. I mentioned earlier about knowing the environment where you learn best, and if you’re someone who is an online learner and that’s your preference, consider the Onward to Opportunity program where you could be a 100% online student through Syracuse University. After selecting either the information technology or business management career track, you can earn certifications like Cisco certification or CompTIA certifications in Server+ or Network+ or Security+. Even the PMP project management professional, Six Sigma Green Belt, human resources certifications – I saw some of those come up when you were listing your industry. And so much more, all free of charge.

All this talk about different training programs probably also had you thinking about how it will all be paid for, right? Well, some training programs can be done for free like the one I just mentioned with Onward to Opportunity. But let me transition now into a few ideas for paying for school. A very, very popular funding resource for military spouses is the MyCAA scholarship program, which provides up to $4,000 of tuition assistance to eligible military spouses. And with this scholarship, military spouses can pursue a license, a certificate or certification, or an associate degree for any occupation or career. Spouses may use their MyCAA scholarship fund at any academic institution approved for participation in the scholarship. And your options for schools and programs are endless.

So, who’s eligible for MyCAA? Thousands of active-duty service members in pay grades E-1 through E-5, 01 and 02, and W1 and W2 are eligible for MyCAA. This includes spouses whose military sponsor is National Guard or reservist and these pay grades as well. You, too have the ability to request MyCAA tuition assistance while your military sponsor is on Title 10 military orders. So, if you’re thinking about building a solid foundation towards your career goals, MyCAA can provide your path to advance in your career.
Before making a choice on using your MyCAA scholarship, military spouses are highly encouraged to work directly with a certified SECO career coach first. Because in doing so, you’ll receive expert guidance from a SECO coach who is committed to paving a path towards your excellence that will result in a meaningful future for you.

Now, I think I may have seen that somebody disconnected or dropped their phone and yelled, oh my goodness did I just miss the cutoff for MyCAA eligibility? Well, perhaps your service member is transitioning out of one of these pay grades that I mentioned previously. You may still be eligible to receive the MyCAA scholarship, so please give the SECO program a call to verify your eligibility. But in case you're not eligible for the MyCAA scholarship, it does not mean there’s not money available for you to pursue your training program. As a matter of fact let me begin with the SECO Scholarship Finder right there in the MySECO portal.

In the event you don’t qualify for MyCAA, the SECO Scholarship Finder gives you access to financial assistance resources to fund your career development endeavors. What’s really cool is you have a variety of filters to sort the specific results you’re seeking. So, you can filter by your state, your branch of service, the applicant type, whether you’re the spouse of an active-duty service member, or even if your children are looking for scholarship money, you can look for dependents as well. And, even degree type, associate, bachelor’s, master’s, certifications. You have the ability to choose those filters for scholarship and grant options.

In addition to the SECO Scholarship Finder, another scholarship option is through the National Military Family Association, and this is an organization committed to supporting the education endeavors of the military community. You could be a military spouse who may be trying to finish that last class to earn your bachelor’s degree, or you may have your sights set on career advancement and you already have the education and work experience but you just need a specific industry certification for promotion. The National Military Family Association has scholarships ranging from $500 all the way up to $2,500. That could be just enough to achieve your goal. Again it matters not what your sponsor’s pay grade is. This is for everyone.

Another excellent resource is your college or university that you’re attending. Most schools have financial aid administrators who are well-versed in financial resources such as private scholarships and government grants, and they can advise you on what funding is available, what you qualify for, how the funds are distributed, and any special aspects associated with that financial award. The financial aid administrator is an excellent resource for funds earmarked through the individual college or university.

Lastly, there exists a pot of gold that is out there when it comes to finding scholarship money, and this happens to be one that I personally used and the results made me see that there is something out there that may be a little bit better than sliced bread. The U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration powers the Career OneStop Scholarship Finder, which has an
extensive database of more than 8,000 scholarships, grants and other financial awards. Similar to how the SECO Scholarship Finder works, you can use different filters to see certain kinds of awards but the options are more diverse here. You may be interested in funding your education, say for a STEM career or a vocational program. You may represent a minority group, you may need help with your graduate degree. There are scholarships to help all kinds of students and I spent hours finding hidden treasures in this funding database. So, once you get started you all be prepared to hang out there for a while as you uncover money that could be applied to your ability to pay towards your education.

Now, I do often hear from military spouses who are working hard to strengthen their career aspirations through graduate education but who often feel a little bit bummed out because there seems to be limited funding for graduate programs. Now remember I mentioned the Career OneStop Scholarship Finder has funding options for certifications, graduate certificates, master’s and doctoral programs, but there are other options you can plug into as well that I’d like to mention.

So, for those of you who are aspiring graduate students, one of your options is to turn to your employer for financial assistance because companies often offer tuition reimbursement programs or partial, full payment toward the cost of tuition for their employees. Offering this incentive is a great way for companies to retain top talent and encourage skill development that can lead to promotion in the future. But another option is a graduate assistantship, and this option happens to be one of personal significance to me because it was how I was able to fund my entire master’s degree program as a full-time student and graduate completely debt-free.

So, what a graduate assistantship means is that while you’re a student in a master’s or doctoral program, you work for the university part time and earn money that goes directly toward tuition. This gives students the best of both worlds by earning money for school and gaining hands-on experience in your career field of interest. Graduate assistantships take on many forms such as a teaching assistant, it could be a graduate research assistant, or a general graduate student assistant that may have an assignment in areas like academic services or student affairs. It’s a wonderful way to put the theory you’re learning in the classroom and to practice through your graduate assistantship and have your tuition cost covered by your university.

Now, a final option is a fellowship which allows graduate students a chance to focus solely on their studies and attend school full time without having any teaching or research responsibilities. Your educational costs are covered and you can concentrate entirely on your education.

Now, I do have to slide this little nugget in for any military spouses who like working with numbers or have a career interest in the finance industry. Because there’s a fellowship program for a select group of military spouses that provides training to become an accredited financial counselor. So, if you have an interest in working maybe in the banking industry or corporate credit department, maybe with an insurance company or with family service agencies or community programs, or
maybe you want to be self-employed as a financial consultant, becoming an accredited financial counselor may be perfect for you.

Now, opportunities like fellowships and graduate assistantships are very, very competitive, so it’s strongly encouraged that you reach out to your desired schools’ graduate admissions office or academic department in which you intend to study and research funding options at least for one full year in advance of applying to graduate school.

Now, I have had such a good time this morning or whatever time it is for you hearing this information. And as I wind down today, I have one last resource that I want to pass along. Now, suppose someone told you about a free resource that could change the direction of reaching your career goals by offering free learning opportunities and training absolutely free. Would you be willing to take this? OK, well that someone is me. And I’m telling you that if you’re serious about building a foundation to position yourself for career growth, taking advantage of LinkedIn Premium and that upgrade is the way to go. Now, many of you have heard of LinkedIn, but just in case you haven’t, LinkedIn is a massive networking site that allows you to share your professional story as well as make professional connections with others. But LinkedIn Premium and having that account takes you to an entirely new level by not just increasing your ability to make professional connections, but by growing your skills and knowledge in a specific interest area.

To achieve this, the SECO program and LinkedIn developed this strategic partnership to offer eligible military spouses the opportunity to obtain a free 12-month subscription to LinkedIn Premium. You will be happy to know all military spouses including caregivers and Coast Guard spouses are eligible. Now, as I mentioned, LinkedIn is the place to make professional connections and this could be with someone at a dream company you’ve always wanted to work for, or by seeking out advice or mentorship relationships with people in your industry for guidance. And preparing for and getting the foot in the door for your career. Now those professional connections can manifest themselves in so many ways, but for the purposes of today’s topic I want to highlight a feature of LinkedIn Premium that is vital for your career growth and development. And that’s LinkedIn Learning.

LinkedIn Learning gives you access to a library of thousands upon thousands of business, technical and creative courses. And maybe you’re between jobs or possibly a stay-at-home parent looking to return to the workforce and you desire a way to address those gaps in your skill set. LinkedIn Learning is organized by individual courses or learning paths, so you have the opportunity to choose courses that will fill those gaps, demonstrate knowledge in specific areas, access information to your resume, and LinkedIn profile and then show employers that while you weren’t working necessarily in a paid job, you were still actively engaged in your professional development.

With those learning paths you can then explore specific learning opportunities, whether it’s for professional or personal development. So, say for instance
photography is your future and that’s something that you’re thinking about. And you’d like to learn more about the skill, possibly for an entrepreneur venture as a freelance photographer. So in LinkedIn Learning, they have the most up-to-date courses on things like photography foundations, Photoshop, Adobe, digital imaging and much, much more that will allow you to perfect your craft from the comfort of your home.

Now that much, much more also is this, because earlier in the webinar I talked about certifications as a way to advance your career. Well in order to earn the certification, you have to pass the exam, right? Well, the cool thing about LinkedIn Learning is that it supports you by providing free study materials and training sessions to help you prepare to pass certification exams like the CompTIA exam for the IT industry, and prep materials for the PMP project management professional certification. And even other tests for you or maybe your children, like the SAT, ACT the GRE, the GMAT. There are test-prep courses there as well.

Now, my strong advice to you is to make a list of the areas in which your skills could stand a boost then plug into LinkedIn Learning to enhance your skills and bridge skill gaps, because if you’re eligible ladies and gentlemen it is absolutely free to you.

So, our time has gone by so quickly. I cannot believe we are at the end of this and there is so much more that I would love to share, but I can’t tell it all. But I do know who can. If you want more details about these and other resources call the SECO program. You can do it right now to schedule a consultation with a friendly SECO career coach, and I can assure you, I assure you they will have the answers to the questions for you.

Also, I want to mention that you can also visit the download section at the top of your screen for links of all of the resources that I’ve mentioned today. But before we close out for the day, I would like to do a quick pulse check. A box is going to appear in just a moment and I’d like to get your participation just one last time. So, thinking back to the information that has been shared today, I’d like for you to take a moment and just type into the box at least one piece of information you’re taking away from this presentation that you were not aware of when we first started.

Ah, LinkedIn Premium. So, we’re gonna have a lot of people signing up soon. That’s awesome. Traitify, yes. The financial counselor program, yes. Scholarships, Woo-hoo! Oh my goodness, it looks like you all have got some awesome information today. LinkedIn and free certifications. Yes, it’s all there. And I encourage you to call the SECO program and set up an absolutely free consultation with a SECO career coach. Yes, I see it coming in, this is awesome, you all.

Well, we have talked about a lot today. Assessments to identify your career interests, Traitify, finding the right training program to meet your career goals, exploring the different funding resources to pay for your education, and finding out how to take advantage of a free 12-month LinkedIn Premium account to access LinkedIn Learning.
So, it has been amazing starting this symposium out with you all today. Thank you everybody who showed up. Please stay for the other sessions because they're gonna be awesome. And the seeds have been planted. I said I was going to plant some seeds today, and now it's time for you to water them and watch them blossom, because everybody, you know, it is time for you to grow. So, thank you so much for hanging out with me this morning.

**Mininia:** Thank you, Natalie for such an awesome presentation. Thank you so much. So, to download the available handouts from this session, including the presentation slides and our SECO program flyer that discusses the resources and services available to military spouses, as well as the SECO Career Coaching fact sheet to learn more about career coaches, how they can assist you, please highlight the document and click the Download Files button. The items will download to your computer in a compressed file. If you are connecting from a mobile device and are unable to download the file successfully, you may enter your email address into the Trouble with Downloads chat pod to receive the material after the event. If you have trouble, please let us know in the Need Technical Assistance chat pod.

In the Web Link pod, you will find two links. The first link is for the session survey. Please provide your feedback on your experience today. And the second link is where you can download your certificate of participation. This concludes our presentation. Please join us at 10 o’clock where you can learn about more information with SECO career coaches and everything has a season. Thank you so much for joining us today and see you at ten o’clock.