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An Interview with Deputy Director for Operations James Pavitt (U)

> **"We have more spies stealing more significant secrets that have greater impact on policy decisions than at any time in our history."**

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Editor's Note: On 24 October 2000, Lloyd Salvetti, Director of the Center for the Study of Intelligence and Chairman of the Editorial Board of Studies in Intelligence, *accompanied by* Studies *Editorial Board members Dawn Eilenberger and Julie Savell, met with Deputy Director for Operations James Pavitt to obtain his views on some of the key issues confronting the Directorate of Operations (DO).* (U//FOUO)

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We're here to really basically tell our readership where the DO is today, and where it's going, particularly with a focus on the development of its officer corps. We'll start by asking you what are the three biggest challenges facing the DO, as well as the ones you face as the collector of HUMINT for the Intelligence Community (IC)? (U//FOUO)

I do not know that I would define it in terms of three biggest, but let me begin by saying something about what the DDO worries about on a daily basis. But I will first tell you what I do not worry about, which can help put the challenges in context. What I do not worry about is core mission. I do not worry about spotting, assessing, developing, and recruiting spies to steal secrets, because the DO has never in its 53-year history done that job better than it is doing it in the year 2000. We have more spies stealing more significant secrets that have greater impact on policy decisions than at any time in our history. That is a tribute to the men and women who are in the Directorate, and to the organizations throughout the IC with whom we work. It is a tribute to the relationships we have developed with the Directorates of Intelligence, Science and Technology, and Administration. America's espionage service is doing its job brilliantly. As the Deputy Director for Operations (DDO), I could be perceived as being prejudiced on this issue. But the results of out-of-house reviews indicate exactly the same thing. The value of HUMINT is making a huge difference. (S)

Now, what do I worry about? I worry about sustaining our successes. I worry about making absolutely certain that we have the resources essential to do the job we are being asked to do. I speak to a number of groups. I recently spoke, for example, to one of the classes for middle-level officers. And you get feedback. The vast majority said, "This is an engaged DDO who really cares about what's going on." But one person said, "Ah, there is the DO, doing what it always does. He is talking about the DDO, he is talking about dollars. They [the DO] have always mismanaged their dollars. They have no idea what they really do need, and, therefore, he is putting the burden of his success, once again, on dollars. If he has enough money, he'll get his job done." I believe the critique is wrong. We do need more funding, and we need it now. (S)

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My greatest challenges are sustaining this workforce and continuing to recruit the kind of men and women we are recruiting to do this job. Retaining that workforce once I bring them in. And I need to ensure that the people in this organization get better care than they have to date. Fifty-three years in this business and we do not treat our own people with the same sensitivity, care, and concern

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I believe that it is absolutely essential that we get away from the nonsense of saying that we have enough. We have not asked for a topline add in this organization for many years. It is time we do so. There is nothing about this business that is inexpensive. There is a great deal about it which is expensive. But, at the end of the day, my business, the human side of this business, does not cost much. I am not asking for huge dollars. But what I am asking for is enough to guarantee that I treat this workforce better than I do today and to meet operational challenges. (S)

An article in *The Washington Post* last week stated that NSA Director Lt. Gen. Michael Hayden is going to have a hard time turning around NSA without computer scientists, who are leaving in droves. Let me stop here and just substitute the words "case officer" or "operations officer" in that and put it in the context of the DO and CIA rather than NSA. The article also said that in NSA's halcyon days, computer scientist pay was in the computer industry's 75th percentile, and now it is in the 25th percentile, and that, to stop the exodus, Hayden is working on a dramatically revised compensation schedule by Fiscal Year 2003; in the meantime,

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I would also like to cite an unclassified Department of State telegram sent this month from the Director General [of the Foreign Service] to all employees at all US diplomatic and consular posts. It said that the Department is announcing a pilot program for the summer 2000 bidding cycle which would provide additional financial incentives to employees accepting a three-year assignment to one of a number of positions. I sent a note to senior leaders and to a number of others calling their attention to these two items because they are germane to the issues we face here at CIA. In the case of the State cable, I pointed out that the Department has a plan to pay service need differential to select employees at select posts, who would receive a 15-percent differential if they agree to stay at post for three years; if implemented, State officers at the posts cited would receive 15-percent more than our officers. I emphasized that we need to do more for our workforce, that we need to do it now, and that dealing with the issues of retention, quality of life, compensation, and workforce reward require immediate attention. (S)

Let me clarify something. This is not a campaign on my part because my officers are complaining. This is not because any DO officer is saying, "I need more." This is not because I have officers saying, "You're not paying me enough." It is because, as the leader of the organization, I believe it is essential that we finally face facts. In for example, I have officers walking around, carrying weapons, in grave danger. I have officers throughout the world who are doing remarkable work.

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Now, let's say you're an FBI Special Agent, or a Customs officer, or a Secret Service officer. If you are doing overseas what I would say a basic case officer does, or what many of my reports officers do, you get a 25-percent flat differential on base pay. What is the difference between my officers and those officers? I have a lot of people who push back all the time, and tell me, "Well, they carry weapons." Or, "It's because they're on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week." What do you think a case officer or a reports officer anywhere in the world does? It is high time that there be enough leadership in this institution to stand up to this issue and fight for it. So, for me, that is a priority issue, a priority concern. (S)

You all know that about three years ago we implemented a plan which is designed to recruit people for the DO workforc

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I want to take that plan, use it as a baseline, improve on it, and take it to its next phase. (S)

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And then I want to institute process-reduction programs in the DO to eliminate the nonsense that is driving my officers crazy. I want to eliminate or deal with the issue of mission creep. I want to worry about management training, because we have never done it well. We have always given it lip service. In the field of leadership training, we have some innovative programs— (b)(3)(c) —that are being run right now. I want to worry about promotion. The only way I can reward people right now is on the

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basis of promotion. We have got to change that. (S)

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I opposed pay for performance at the time it was linked to the Human Resources Oversight Council because I thought HROC was unwise. But I promote the concept of pay for performance or rewarding performance right now, but with this caveat—I do not support it if it is fundamentally a way of saving money for the institution. If pay for performance is instituted, I recommend that we include all the things you get now—steps, quality steps, you know, steps because of time in grade, and so forth—but add to the pot, make sure that it is a serious effort to reward the workforce. Then, in addition to promotions, we will have a way to reward people because they are the best and the brightest, doing the hardest work. I believe we are going to move in that direction. (S)

So promotion is something important, as is succession planning in the DO. A challenge I face is to make sure that I can identify for the DCI five or six people I believe can take my job when I leave. I do not believe we have done that very well, historically—if ever. (S)

And then support to mission. I have got some critical issues about what the DO does. "Spot, assess, develop, and recruit spies to steal secrets, run counterintelligence operations to support all of our activity and to protect this institution, and the United States Government, and run covert actions as directed by the President." That is our mission, plain and simple. My mission should not be to provide support to the core mission of this Directorate. That should be the mission of someone else. I do not want to be an accountant, a logistician, or a security officer. I want to make certain in the context of support that mission accomplishment and not efficiency is the driving force around this place. (S)

So, in the context of my offsite, I asked my line managers, my component chiefs, my Center chiefs, my staff chiefs, in consultation with their Stations, in consultations with those with whom they are working, to look at shortfalls in needed support. And what is the cost of

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not being able to get the support we need?

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Against the framework you have been describing, what are your priorities in the development of the officer corps with respect to training, skills, and assignments? What is it that you want your officer corps to be? (U//FOUO)

That's a good question. In many instances, I am going to ask the officer corps of this Directorate to go to difficult places and do difficult work. We have high standards for those we recruit, and we set high training standards for them. I have certain obligations to that corps. Once I have hired them, vetted them, and trained them, then I

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have to get them out to the field to do the business. We are hiring more young officers of quality than we ever have before.

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Most have an advanced degree. Many speak a foreign language at the 3 level. Most have good experience in the private sector. And we are continuing to look for those with military experience. The number varies, but somewhere between 20 and 40 percent of those we bring in do have previous military experience.

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What am I looking for in skills? I need people who are hungry to do this business, who come in because of concern about mission. I need people whose skills include a willingness to think out of the box, a willingness to challenge conventional wisdom. I need skills which will allow me to do my business in every far corner of this Earth, and that means foreign language skills. I need people of the highest integrity. I need initiative. I need people who understand both what a team is and understand what individual effort is. I do not believe the profile has changed a lot from the time I was hired. (U//FOUO)

Has the workforce changed? Of course it has. That is why I brought in people as outside speakers in the DDO speaker series to look at such things as "Generation X." What does it mean for us? That is just a smart way to look at a

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workforce which is different than the workforce that I joined here in 1973. We have to deal with the fact that retention is going to be more difficult. We have to deal with the fact that a lot of the young workforce has a perspective different than the one I had when I joined. That is not good or bad. I am not passing judgment on it. I simply have to deal with it. And if I am going to lose a part of that workforce after eight or 10 years, how do I maximize their efficiency? When some of them do go, how can I retain some benefit for the national security and for this organization. How might I use them in the future?

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I do not want to run from the retention issue, but we need to deal with it. (S)

Assignments. We are in the business of recruiting spies overseas

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I have been asked by many people, "Jim, you have a terrible problem in that you do not have enough people at Headquarters to do the job. So, shouldn't you be keeping some of your back here to be desk officers after they have finished their training?" Absolutely not.

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Now, how do I know about some of those things that I have just talked about? In my business, if I did all the talking and did not listen to what people were saying, I would not be successful. The way you find the vulnerability in a potential recruit is to listen to what that potential recruit has to say. I have found that listening to the workforce—listening to their concerns—gives me far greater insight into what the challenges are for me and the DO than from any other way. In terms of making this place run more effectively, I probably learn more by listening to my workforce than by listening to many of our seniors. My seniors do not have the same responsibilities that I have. I try to meet with people from the GS-9 level and up on a regular basis in whatever forum is available. I invite some of them up here to my office on a Friday afternoon about every other week to have a beer, a soda, or a glass of wine and to talk to me. There is no set agenda. By doing that, I have found that they are concerned about such things as how to make the DO's recordkeeping and search mechanism for name traces work to the benefit of the mission, rather than to the benefit of a machine. I have also learned of concerns about the reward system—not for the dollar reason, but so that we are competitive, so that our families can have a reasonable existence. I have learned a good deal. I have urged every one of my line managers to do the same thing, if they are not doing so already. (S)

The responsibilities we have to our officer corps, all our employees, is to train them well. I do not believe in training for training's sake or that we should train people so that they can be promoted. I believe in training people to mission.

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> **"Now I am also trying to provide incentives for training. I am trying to go beyond just saying it is important to demonstrating that it is important."**

First, you have to be serious about training. Second, you want it to be world class. Third, you have to reward people who do that kind of hard work for you. I have had panels come to me and say, "Here are Mary and John. They were on assignment as instructors (b)(1) Therefore, while they are doi(b)(3)(c) good work, they are not going to be promoted this time. Once they return to core mission or to line activity, they will move forward." Every time I have seen that, I have called the panel in question, or the individual who has written the comment in question, and said, "You have it all wrong." And, if there was an unfairness done, I promoted that officer on the spot. And I intend to continue to do that. Training is key to our capability. I want people who are training to be our best and our brightest—nothing else. We continue to strive to get that at

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(b)(3)(c) We owe our officer corps, the new corps, the young officer, the middle corps, or the more experienced corps, the best training we can give. Train to mission, not to promotion, or because it is the popular thing to do. Train to what we need to train to. (S)

Do your senior managers support this approach? Once it was a badge of honor in the DO to say, "I didn't take any training. I never took leadership, management, or skills training." Do you see that changing? You obviously have made a huge dollar resource investment in training. Do you see that getting imbedded in your senior leaders, that now training is an acceptable option? (S)

Absolutely. And we see people who want to go down and do it. Now I am also trying to provide incentives for training. I am trying to go beyond just saying it is important to demonstrating that it is important. For the past few years, we have always tried to send people who have been instructors (b)(1) (b)(3)(c) into the field in the right position as a way of rewarding them. But we have not always succeeded. We look very hard at that right now. I believe we have also reached the point where some of my best officers are seeking training assignments now. There is a phrase in German that translates to "the bureaucrats are eating the state." And there are plenty of bureaucrats around here. I do not like bureaucrats or bureaucracy. And I do not like things that get in the way of getting the job done.

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Can you comment on whether there is a formal role for mentoring in your planning? (U//FOUO)

One of the greatest, consistent failures of this institution, and not just in the DO, is our failure to hold firstline managers accountable for their management. Perhaps we have not trained them to manage very well. Perhaps we have not mentored them before they got to the point of becoming firstline managers. It is easy to find a way to put your arm around a junior officer, somebody who is trying to

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learn this business, and help them get there. It shouldn't be conscious. It is in the world that I live in, the world that I have grown up in, what we do in the Directorate. I make the parallel again to the way we develop an agent overseas. (b)(1) (b)(3)(n) We do not do that enough with our own officers. Now, we have mentoring programs, and they are beginning to work. I have instituted, for example, the "shadow" program for the DDO and the ADDO. I have shadows come up here who usually have come from the cadre, the cadre, or officers who are at the GS-13 or GS-14 level, who have never been in the DDO's office before, or who have never had an opportunity to understand what really happens up here. It is a sobering experience for all of them. We try to do it frequently. I have established some groundrules. Anything they hear in this office stays in this office. That rule has never been violated. And what I do is expose them to everything, from the most exciting operational development of the moment, to how I solve a tough personnel problem, or to what my views are regarding what the DCI did on this or that issue. I believe Hugh Turner [the ADDO] does the same thing. They walk away from here saying, "I'll be damned." I have tried to push this down to the rest of my management team. "Do the same thing. Take an officer, and let him or her see what you are doing." That is

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not quite mentoring, but in another way, it is. I have seen Cofer Black from CTC come up here with young officers. I have seen Africa Division come up here with officers to do that. In terms of mentoring, I have also tried to encourage my management not to come here by themselves. Every one of them has all the "face time" in the world they need with me. And it is not about "face time," I guess, but it is about learning. Bring along the officer responsible for the operation in question, and let him tell me about it. So I strongly believe in mentoring, but we do not do it very well. We have to try to do it better. (S)

In the past, a lot of decisions that were made in management positions in the DO—whether it be a Branch Chief, COS, Division Chief—the primary factor has always been how well do they recruit, how well do they run operations. How much more weight are you giving to things like resource management, people management, and leadership? (U//FOUO)

Our business is about recruiting spies, so we have to give a lot of weight to the basics (b)(1) (b)(3)(n) That is our bread and butter. We will always do it. We will always reward it, and we must reward it. But we also need to find a way to develop officers who can go beyond just the little world in which they live. I do not believe that every officer in the DO needs to have an "out of body" experience to be promoted to the Senior Intelligence Service. But I do believe that every officer who is going to manage a major program, anyone who is going to sit in the chair as the DDO, or any other senior position, has to understand more than the way we run operations overseas. It is a given that anybody who gets there is going to have that as a key skill, it seems to me. Or a key skill in the Collection Management Officer arena as a senior reports and requirements officer. But we need to give people the kind of experience of (b)(3)(c) who was the first CIA officer assigned to the FBI to become Deputy Chief of the Terrorist Unit at the Bureau, the kind of thing I did by going to the NSC, the kinds of things that any number of officers are doing outside the DO. (S)

Let's deal with a few of the shibboleths that are out there. One is that to get promoted in the DO, it is a

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numbers game. I know that is not true, but we need to address it. (S)

No, it has been an issue. (U//FOUO)

So what does a GS-11, -12, -13 case officer need to do to get promoted? (U//FOUO)

I expect them to spot, develop, assess, and recruit agents. I expect them to handle agents well. I expect them to produce intelligence which is cogent, focused, and responsive to requirements. I expect them, even at that level, to understand fully the concepts of teamwork and of mentoring. I do not, repeat not, want them to be afraid to challenge conventional wisdom, if, for example, that wisdom is, (b)(3)(n) If, in fact, that's the wrong instruction, I expect them to challenge that instruction. I do not expect them to be revolutionaries. But I expect them to be thoughtful people who know their business well. I expect them to understand why they are doing certain things. What is the priority of collecting against this target rather than that target. I expect them to demonstrate consistently the highest possible integrity. We lie a lot in this business in the context of manipulating people to engage in espionage. But we will not, and we must not, lie to one another, or manipulate each other. And I believe that they need to be watched and evaluated in that context. (S)

I go to every panel. I will be going to a panel later this afternoon. I tell them that, in terms of promotion criteria, I want all our managers and mentors to look at who is doing the hard job and doing it well. I have officers who serve in who do not do traditional work. I have officers who serve in (b)(1) who do much dif- (b)(3)(n) k than what you do in I expect people to be able to take a broad view, and also to understand that we are not in the business of running operations for operations sake. And we still do some of that. I want people to understand that if we are going to be risking an agent, a sacred risk, if we are going to be risking an operations officer, and more and more where we operate that often is the case, then we had better be doing it for a good reason. And once we do it, and once we succeed, that information has to be dealt with. (S)

I have just done something that is truly controversial in the DO. I have just challenged the concept of (b)(1) (b)(3)(c) . I said I had had it right up to here with the fact that (b)(3)(c) our intelligence production was coming in that way. Is that a crutch? Why are we doing that? I believe we need to worry about timeliness. We also need to worry about quality. (b)(1) (b)(3)(c) It is changing something we have done for a half-century. It does not mean we eliminate (b)(1) (b)(3)(c) It means we think. So I am going to reward somebody who thinks, and who tells me that that is also not working. (S)

I believe the greatest failing we have consistently had is the failure of leadership. The hardest thing in the world to do is to lead. The hardest thing in the world to do is to make a decision, the right decision, whether it is a popular or an unpopular decision. The hardest thing in the world to do is to consistently say your message over and over again, and not be taken off your message by whatever the exigencies of the day happen to be. If we can teach people to do that, and reward people for leading well and courageously, we will better serve the institution, and, more important, the mission. (U//FOUO)

Regarding area, language, and hard-target expertise, do you seek to give priority to that type of development? For example, do you plan to develop officers who will be skilled in the history, culture, and language of areas like Central Asia and the Middle East and who will spend their careers there—and who, when at Headquarters, will work in related branches and divisions? Would you expect such officers eventually to become Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs of Station? Or is it the old standard that a case officer is a case officer and can serve anywhere in the world? (S)

I want to have my cake and eat it, too. We need to be a flexible organization where we are willing for the needs of the mission, the priority of the moment, to put a Russian expert in Southeast Asia, because

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there is a surge into that area. On the other hand, *absolutely* I endorse expertise. *Absolutely* I endorse producing officers who ideally come in with some expertise in the first instance, and then nurturing it, and rewarding it. We do not do that very well. I do not believe that we do a good enough job in foreign language training. I am not going to accept, for whatever reasons, efficiency because it is voguish, because it is the Working Capital answer. I am not going to accept substandard language training. And if it is necessary for me to create my own language school to deal with the language problems I face, I will. I am going to try to get the best that I can for my officers. One officer, who worries about a part of the world in the Near East context that is very important, alerted me to some foreign language shortfalls. I have one set of statistics that says how many people I have who speak that language, and then I have the reality. And the reality is starkly different than the statistic. And it is for a variety of reasons. The instructors in this particular area are, for the most part, on contract. They are not always available. We do not pay them enough. They are willing to go elsewhere to make a little more. I cannot train my people in that hard language that way. So if I have to buy it myself, I will. It is absolutely critical that we have language expertise, and we do not have enough. (b)(1) (b)(3)(n)

That said, we do have a cadre of people who are gifted. I just came back from the Middle East. When I sit down and look at the Chiefs of Station that I met, and the officer corps that I met in those Stations, (b)(3)(n) I was impressed. I want experts on Russia. I want people to know Russia as it was before, and Russia as it is today. I want experts on China. I want people who know the culture, who have lived the culture, who have smelled the smells of the back streets of Beijing. So I believe in both. We have to be flexible, and you will fail if you are not. We have to reward people for the willingness to get the expertise. We need to get people into some institutions of higher learning in certain places. I just had a bunch of names come up for all the senior schools. I was not very impressed with what we were doing. Once again, we were not doing it on the basis of what was good for the person and for the mission of the institution; we were simply putting somebody in a school when we did not know what else to do with them. And we have to stop that. Not everybody, but a handful of people, my best and my brightest. If that is elitism, then it is elitism for the right reason. (b)(1) (b)(3)(n) If I do not do that, I am not going to be serving the institution and the mission well. (S)

> **“It is absolutely critical that we have language expertise, and we do not have enough.”**

You had mentioned assigning people to the FBI, the NSC, and other key outside assignments in collaborative environments. That is the environment we are in now in the Intelligence Community. How well are you working in that more collaborative environment, given the DO's culture of secrecy and its concern about sources and methods? (U//FOUO)

We have made tremendous strides, but there is always more to do. The relationship between the FBI and the CIA is based on those kinds of interchanges, where we break down barriers, and where we challenge each other's culture. That is a sign of progress on both sides. We demonstrate how much value is added by doing it smart, whether it is in the CI arena or in the CT arena. Even in the CT arena, having those exchanges with the Bureau just makes great sense. The DO is a secretive organization in the context of protecting sources and methods. How many times have we lost sources because we have not protected them? Today, more than ever, we see things flying out the door because policymakers do not have the discipline to deal with the harsh realities of our business. As hard as they may even try, they do not understand what we do. (b)(1) (b)(3)(n)

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One last question, and it is a leading one, but important. If there is a legacy that you leave to this Agency, the DO, and this country, what would you like it to be? (U//FOUO)

To do the job as brilliantly as I say we are doing it right now. We hold ourselves to high standards, and produce the best possible agents and intelligence. And I believe that the men and women who do this so superbly are treated with the dignity their performance deserves, that they are rewarded, not because they are demanding it, but because they deserve it. We all know what the mission is. That is why we are here. I want to make sure that those people who are carrying out the mission are cared for by those of us who are in a position to do the caring as well as we possibly can. If I can get my people a little bit more, if I can make certain that they are rewarded for what they are doing, not simply with the cute reward of "Well, since we do not have enough money to give them a bonus, we will give them a pen that says 'Directorate of Operations' on it." It is time that we start treating our workforce in the same way that workforces elsewhere in our society are being treated. To do something to give the people who do this work so brilliantly a little bit more—that is what I want my legacy to be. (S)

"I want to make sure that those people who are carrying out the mission are cared for by those of us who are in a position to do the caring as well as we possibly can."

Thank you. (U)

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