Survivor Symposium, June 2026

Video transcript

Brian Behlke:

All right, well, I'm showing noon East Coast time, so I will kick it off. Welcome to the sixth Department of War Survivor Symposium, navigating survivor benefits and resources together, hosted by the Department of War, Office of Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors. I'm Brian Behlke, and I'm from the Office of Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors.

And I'll moderate the symposium today. But first, let me cover the Survivor Symposium event disclaimer. Next slide, please. The presence of links or information in this presentation during the Department of War Survivor Symposium does not constitute endorsement by the Department of War. The opinions expressed in this presentation on the following slides are solely those of the presenter. Next slide, please.

As part of the War Department's commitment to survivors of active-duty deaths, the Department of War's hosting the Survivor Symposium. The symposium will provide a platform for survivors and service providers to learn and gain information on a variety of important tools. And it is now my pleasure to introduce Denise Kelly-

Panelist:

Can you hear that?

Brian Behlke:

Principal director —

Panelist:

Can you hear that?

Panelist:

I can hear that.

Brian Behlke:

Mercedes, can you check? We're getting feedback from somebody's mic. But it's now my pleasure to introduce Ms. Lee Kelley, who's principal director of Military

Community and Family Policy, and she will be providing opening remarks. And thank you for joining us, Ms. Kelley, the floor is yours.

Lee Kelley:

Brian, thank you. Can you hear me OK, Brian?

Brian Behlke:

Got you loud and clear.

Lee Kelley:

All right. Welcome, everyone. As Brian said, welcome to our June Survivor Symposium. In addition to being principal director for Military Community and Family Policy, I'm also an enlisted Army veteran and social worker, and I'm really honored to have a chance to be here with you today.

Today actually marks a really meaningful milestone for us. And so I asked one of my teammates, our teammates, Lisa Valentine, to give a little bit of background on the milestone that we have here today with our June symposium, Lisa?

Lisa Valentine:

Yes, ma'am. So thank you, everyone. We're so glad to have you here. This all started based on an outreach event that we were at, Brian and I were at, it was Snowball Express with the Gary Sinise Foundation, and one of our surviving spouses who is also an SOS coordinator, she came along with a couple of surviving spouses that she takes care of with the milestone management and so forth. And they said, “You know what? We would really love something where we can have more education and go into detail about different topics that affect us. And so we thought it would be a really great idea.

And they also told us, they said, “But you know what? We work, so we'd really like it to be like on a Friday or Saturday.” Well, Saturday gets a little complicated because of overtime. And we said, “Well, we'll see what we can do.” And so out of that, evolved the Survivor Symposium, and so a big shout out to you all in Europe that brought this to our attention, and we look forward to continued ideas. Our topics don't just come from our office. We really want to know what you want to hear, what you need to know, what are the gaps, what are things that we can improve upon? And we really take that seriously from the very top of the Department of War. So thank you, ma'am. Passing it back to Ms. Kelly.

Lee Kelley:

Thanks, Lisa. As Lisa said, in two years, we've hosted six symposiums, and Lisa hit the nail on the head. Each symposium's a little different and it's really shaped by your participation. That engagement really matters. These events, they're not just information sharing, they're about bringing together service providers, subject matter experts and our survivor communities that we can listen, learn and continue improving in this space. And that's why your ongoing participation and insights are really essential to this work. Your voices guide the work that we do every day and also inform how we shape future events.

You're gonna hear updates today from Military Community and Family Policy, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and the Department of Veterans Affairs, organizations that play a critical role in delivering benefits and services to survivors.

We're also gonna cover tax planning considerations to help make informed financial decisions. We're gonna highlight the College Success Roadmap series for the 2026 to 2027 academic year, unbelievably almost here, including financial aid, scholarship and benefit resources that can help with your family's educational goals. We know that navigating survivor benefits and planning for the future can be complex, and our goal is to make those resources easier to understand, easier to access and more useful to you and your family.

After this symposium, I encourage you to explore MilitaryOneSource.mil where you can review all of our resources at your own pace. Most importantly today, and I'll say it again, it's an opportunity for participation and continued dialogue. Your feedback helps us understand what's working and what we can really do better. We encourage you to stay engaged throughout the session. And if you can, complete a brief survey that will be emailed to you after, to help us know where we can vector follow-on symposiums.

We wanna hear from you so that we can improve. Thanks for being here again today. Your loved one's service and sacrifice will never be forgotten, and it's our privilege to serve you today and always. It's my pleasure to turn it back over to Brian Behlke to continue today's program, Brian.

Brian Behlke:

Oh, thank you, ma'am. Some more of the disclaimers. This meeting is being recorded. During the symposium, you should not be able to use your microphone or video. The chat function should be disabled and also the raise hand. We want you to submit any question from the Q&A. You can't really see it on the presenter screen, but if you go to the bottom of your screen and hover, you'll get participants, chat, there's three buttons that say “More.”

If you click on that, Q&A is in that list, and you can actually drag it over onto your menu bar so that it's available. If you submit the questions through Q&A, we'll either answer them on screen or chat back to you on there. So please submit any questions through the Q&A box. The panelists will respond to select questions at the end of each topic as time allows. Responses to additional questions will be answered at the end of the briefing, but hopefully before the conclusion, and a recording of the symposium will be posted to Military OneSource. We'll talk to that in a slide or two.

So, next slide. Ms. Kelley mentioned some of this. Today, we'll be discussing updates from the Department of War, Defense Finance and Accounting Service and the Department of Veterans Affairs. We're discussing some tax planning considerations for military survivors. And then we'll go on to details about the College Roadmap, or College Success Roadmap Series, including financial, scholarship and benefits resources. Next slide. We've already got the date picked for our next symposium and the topic.

So our next symposium will be October 30, and we will have the updates again from Department of War, Defense Finance and Accounting Service and the VA. And we'll also be talking about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, for the '27-'28 year and the updates. Next slide.

We encourage you to stay connected by signing up for our Survivor Connection eNewsletter, if you haven't, and receive symposium updates. And you also may review past Survivor Symposium recordings on OneSource. So this is the sixth symposium we've hosted. So if you're interested in watching past symposiums, you can visit the Survivor Symposium series article on Military OneSource, the second link shown there, which includes recordings and transcripts of each event.

And you may also find these by searching on Military OneSource for Survivor Symposium. And, Erica, do you have that link open at all for these past symposiums? So this is where that link will take you. If you scroll down, it lists all our past symposiums and we wanted to point out some things. So yeah, just open the January 2026 one, and see if it'll at least open for you. Now, this is, if you're actually YouTube savvy, you may already know this, but we pointed out last time, when you actually play the video, YouTube will automatically select a resolution for you based on your bandwidth.

So the recording is actually high quality. When you're playing it, there is a little cogwheel in the lower right corner, which is options. You can actually try to force it in a higher bandwidth. So normally, when I try to stream things from work, it forces 'em into the lowest bandwidth, which is 144, and the picture's as grainy as what it's showing right there.

But if you go to the options, you can increase the resolution. If you get it to about a 360 resolution, it's usually good enough to view, it's not HD, but it makes it much better. And you can also mess with playback speed if for some reason it's a different speed. So if you weren't YouTube savvy, wanted to point that out. Now, also from this article, if you scroll down a little more, Erica, if we get down, we have links further down for ... We've got the Q&A within those. Yeah, right there, stop there.

There's a link to the Survivor Inquiry Form, which that is a form you can use at any time and submit a question you may have. That comes right to myself and Lisa, and we will get you an answer or get you connected with the help you need. So that is always available through our Military OneSource website. Anytime you run into an issue or even if you have a suggestion, as Lisa already mentioned, most of our topics come from questions from you, the survivors. So if you're not seeing us at an event, please drop us an idea through the Survivor Inquiry Form. And also if you want to contact your long term ... I think scroll down a little more. There is, it's from the Survivor Inquiry Form.

There is a link there to the long-term offices of each of the services that will get you to your Army SOS, your Navy Gold Star. So plenty of ways for you to be able to reach out and contact us. And let's see, so we have the past symposiums, and when this symposium ends, so you can go back to the slides, you'll receive a brief survey. Please take a few minutes to fill it out. We wanna know what you feel, what you think, and the feedback helps shape what comes next. So today, we come together with a shared purpose, to support survivors of active-duty deaths and the dedicated professionals who work to assist them. Our goal is to provide you meaningful resources and updates.

Throughout the symposium, we'll explore the support systems available to you and work to educate you on your benefits and entitlements. We truly hope the symposium provides clarity, comfort and valuable insight. Your feedback is invaluable in helping us inform future symposiums. And please take a moment to share your thoughts when you receive the feedback after this event. So, next slide. And now to start us off, our first speaker is Miss ... Oh, you can click through Opening Remarks. Yeah, thank you. Or did we have these? Lisa, you want-

Lisa Valentine:

All right, so —

Brian Behlke:

Yeah, so click back then.

Lisa Valentine:

Yes, so —

Brian Behlke:

Yeah, this was not a thing.

Lisa Valentine:

Yeah, so anyways, next slide, please. So we wanted to make a DOD update. This is something that we just learned about this week, and we wanted to get this out to you all as soon as possible. So you guys are probably familiar with the term SECO, and it's now changed, so that it is now called the SpouseWorks. So if you go onto Military OneSource and you're looking for the SECO program, it is now SpouseWorks.

You still have the same benefits and so forth. But to learn more about it, if you go to the new link, which is written on the slide, you can see more information about this change. And what we're going to do is at our next symposium, we will invite our colleagues from SpouseWorks to provide you all an update on this new rebranded program. So, next slide. And so SpouseWorks provides free resources and tools that can help military spouses but also our surviving spouses to pursue their career and education goals.

So there's career coaching, there's Military Spouse Employment Partnership, free FlexJobs membership. You can get a free year-long membership to this FlexJobs career platform. So that's really awesome. And they're specialized in vetted, flexible and remote job opportunities. And so that is something to look at. And then we also, you have free access to the Udemy on-demand skill development. There's more than 27,000 courses, and this is a really cool program. It can be very expensive on the outside, but for our active duty, the surviving spouses of active-duty service members, this is a free benefit to you. We also have the Spouse Ambassador Network.

So to learn more, check out that link. And like I said, we will have an expert to come and talk to you all about this new exciting, well, I guess expanded program. So, next slide. Back to you, Brian.

Brian Behlke:

All right, now, our first speaker is Ms. Jennifer Harlow, who is the project manager for the Online Survivor Benefits Report, or OSBR. And she'll give us an update, an overview on OSBR. So floor is yours, Jen.

Jen Harlow:

Thank you very much, Brian. Yes, I am with the, as Brian was saying, with the Online Survivor Benefits Report program. And we have some exciting updates and information for you. Next slide. So the overview of the program is for active-duty survivors, including reservists and National Guard on orders. A benefits report is provided to the survivors and is able to provide the income of benefits now in today's dollars as well as future lifetime milestone changes. So, for example, when a child turns a certain age, a surviving spouse works or doesn't work, and we also have an interactive report.

Once the benefits start coming in, it allows the survivors to be able to access your benefits anytime, 24/7, with a login. And the information is an estimate, and the government agencies provide the exact amount. And this benefit was brought about just like many things, with showing that survivors needed access to all of their information in one place. In addition to that, for all of you who are looking for assistance or need help with the report, or access support team, and our contact information will be on another slide, and we also are able to access the casualty officers to assist. Next slide.

And we're going to go over an example of a report. I'm not gonna get into the details, but this is just a sample report, going to demonstrate. In the past, I've talked about the report, but this really demonstrates why it's so important for survivors to check this and get the report from the CACO officer and then check it themselves down the line using the interactive feature.

Because, as you can see, there are current benefits. And then each line represents a change in the benefit. And so this, it shows that the benefits change from $80,000 in this example, for a service member, an E-6 service member who died with two children in the home with a spouse and a child outside the home, and showing the benefits changed drastically between 2026 and 2039. And then once again, when the survivor turns 16 and is first eligible for education, excuse me, social security benefits.

So this is just a little snapshot to say this is why you need to check it, because not only do these milestones occur, in addition to that, every year you have a cost-of-living change. And over the past six, seven years, we have had many law changes that are incorporated into the system. Next slide. So hot off presses, we have upgraded our systems to comply with DMDC. And what that means is that DMDC, who for those who aren't quite familiar, they take care of the ID cards as well as logon, is now in the process of being replaced by the new better secured method of myAuth. And so now, survivors will convert all of their DS Logons into myAuth accounts.

So in order, just specifically for the OSBR, if you have a DS Logon account, you can convert your account to myAuth, and you may have already gotten a proactive notice if you've used DS Logon. It does alert you in some cases to convert to myAuth and you create a new ID and information. It does have multifactor authentication which does add to a security level, which is sometimes an inconvenience but also very good because it just means that there's one step further to protect your information.

So to connect to your interactive OSBR, survivors can go log in, get your myAuth information, and then you follow up with the Family Assistance Support Team, FAST, and provide us with your myAuth DOD ID number. If you are not a survivor with an ID card, the other name for it is called the EDPI, EDI-PI. And you just provide that information to the FAST team to link your account. Once your account is linked, you have access 365, 24/7, to look at your benefit reports and do what-if changes, look and see. You can go in and say, “If I decide to go back to work, what does that look like?”

And it doesn't permanently change anything on your report, it just gives you information. If I were to remarry, if a child goes to a federally-funded academy, what do those benefit changes look like? The DMDC office has set up a very helpful website, which I've included here, that has help questions. And so those of you who do not already have a DS Logon, you just go to DMDC and sign up for your myAuth account.

And there's also the toll-free number for DMDC, and then you contact FAST, and then we link your account to access your interactive report. Next slide. And what we want you to know is that the FAST team is here for all service branches. We have an email directly to our team and a phone number, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. Eastern time to 5:00 PM, and we can answer benefit questions. We work very closely with the casualty offices for all service branches, as well as the long-term care folks for all the service branches, such as Survivor Outreach Services, Air Force Families Forever, Marine Corps LTAP, Navy Gold Star, and the Coast Guard Gold Star representative. So we are there to assist you and answer any questions.

And with this new rollout of the myAuth, you keep this as one of your to-do items to get in touch with the FAST team and notify us of your ID number and we can link your account and walk you through getting a new report.

Also, I'd like to say, before I conclude, if technology is a barrier, and you need to get an updated report, please call our Family Assistance Support Team and we are glad to be able to get you a report, send it to you securely, and answer those questions for you. Or if you've never received one at all, absolutely call us. Again, it's for active-duty survivors, including National Guard and Reserve on orders. And thank you.

Brian Behlke:

Thank you, Jen. We have some time for any questions. I don't see any in Q&A, but for the audience, if you go to the Q&A button, you could submit a question. We'll give it one moment here if anybody has any questions for Jen. If not, we'll answer 'em at the end. But please drop any questions you may have in the Q&A.

Mercedes:

We have two questions. The first is: When sharing benefits for surviving spouses, could you include whether remarried spouses are eligible as well?

Jen Harlow:

Yes, remarried spouses are eligible, and thank you for that because I have my notes here, and I was so excited to talk to everybody. I missed over a couple of my notes, to say remarried surviving spouses and guardians of minor children who are in the care of the benefits for the children can get a myAuth account and access the report. And there is a form that needs to be completed for guardians and remarried spouses to get that information.

As well as Mark Dunlop, who's gonna be speaking later, actually sent me some questions from the community and talking about the myAuth, it also is helpful to link to other websites. And one of the questions Mark Dunlop had for his team was, "Will the myAuth work for TRICARE?" And yes, they're also converting to myAuth. In addition, adult children can have access to their interactive or initial OSBR. So that would be a child 18 and older.

They can get their own myAuth account. And when we're at events, we encourage the young adults to access their own benefit information so they can see their education benefits and have the FAST information for questions. And the one follow back I have is that right now the myAuth is set up to go up to age 31 as a maximum for children who are eligible for education benefits because of some of the law changes that show that there is no delineation time limit date for some education benefits. I will follow back and find out if the access to the myAuth would continue after the maximum of age 31 or 33, and I will get back to the group with that answer. And so yes, guardians, former spouses, remarried, and guardians of minor children.

Mercedes:

Thank you, and our second question is: Is it correct that OSBR is only available to spouses, children/guardians of dependent children, and not parents?

Jen Harlow:

Correct, the OSBR is essentially a tool for those that are getting monthly benefits from government agencies such as Social Security, Defense Finance and Accounting Service, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. For surviving parents that may be eligible for dependent benefits, the OSBR product doesn't exactly align and wouldn't be quite useful because, for dependent parents, the benefit is, for example for VA, is income tested every year. And so we do not provide information in a report form. However, dependent parents absolutely can call our help desk, and if they have benefit questions, eligibility questions, we're happy to answer that.

Mercedes:

Thank you.

Brian Behlke:

All right, we got any other questions, Mercedes?

Mercedes:

No, sir.

Brian Behlke:

All right, thank you, Jen. So if we go next slide -

Jen Harlow:

Thank you!

Brian Behlke:

All right, it's now my pleasure to introduce our next presenter who is from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, Retired and Annuitant Pay Division. Mr. Nathan Lynix is a financial system specialist, and he'll be presenting on taxes and the Survivor Benefit Plan. So Nathan, the floor is yours.

Nathan Lynix:

Good morning or good afternoon, wherever you are in the world. Just one silly correction. I was actually promoted earlier. I'm now the director of customer experience and training here. But coming to these events is definitely one of the highlights of my job. And I really like the opportunity to present and to talk to the survivors and retirees when I get the chance to talk to them as well. So let's go to the next slide.

So I want to talk to you today about the taxability of the Survivor Benefit Plan. Many people may not realize this, but the Survivor Benefit Plan is a taxable form of income. We do report to the IRS all the income that you receive through the Survivor Benefit Plan on an IRS Form 1099-R. This is similar to a W-2, just that this is the form that the IRS told us is best for this situation. It's what we use for retirees as well. So if you need to make changes to your tax status, there's a couple of different ways to do that. This slide is just an overview. I'm gonna go through it a little bit more in more detail in the coming slides.

But the IRS Form W-4P is the way to make that change if you're gonna do that change in writing. But a much easier way is to log in to myPay and make the change there. And like I said, I'll go through that as well. It's also very important that you keep your mailing address up to date with us here at DFAS Retired Pay, because we do mail a copy of the 1099 every year in January to you. And we send other things to you through the mail as well, as they come up.

So to update your address, you can go into myPay, you can call our Customer Care Center, or you can actually do that on AskDFAS, or you can just send us a letter to that address right there saying to what your new address is and that you wanna make that update. If you're not using a form, there are forms out there to change your address.

If you're just writing a letter, just make sure that you identify yourself clearly and that you put the member's Social Security number on that letter, and your name and social security. You can put your old address and then put what you want your new mailing address to be. And you can submit that to us. Let's go to the next slide, I'll talk to you a little bit about some of the ways to submit it to us. Go to the next slide. All right, so speaking of forms, I also wanted to bring to your attention that we recently updated our forms page on our website. You can see the link down there at the bottom of the screen. It's dfas.mil/RA. That stands for Retired Pay, or Retired and Annuitant forms.

Or in the upper left-hand corner of the page, there'll be a link that'll take you right to our forms page. The old way, I don't have it shown 'cause it was actually just a big long list of government forms, you know. It was just a bunch of initials and letters, and it was kind of hard to find the form that was best for you. So we reorganized it based on the intended audience for that form. And then it's broken down by use. It's a really much more user-friendly way. And this, this wasn't part of my original script on this, but we are also working on wizards to help with forms. There's several forms out there that are intended for annuitants to use.

And that wizard is just a tool to use that helps you complete the form in the most accurate way. It'll ask you a series of questions similar to something like a TurboTax, if you've ever used TurboTax. And then it completes the form automatically for you. If it's a form that requires an actual signature, you can print it out as a PDF. If not, there are a couple of forms that you can sign electronically, and it'll give you that option as well. But all of our forms are in this forms library. You just go out there, look for the survivor box, and it'll take you right to all the forms that you would need to manage your Survivor Benefit Plan.

Let's go to the next slide. So once you have that form complete, the best way to submit it to us is through AskDFAS. As you can see up there, there's a red circle and an arrow pointing to the link. This is either our dfas.mil website, that's the landing page that you would go to for everything Survivor Benefit Plan related from DFAS. And you'll see up there that, click on that AskDFAS link and then scroll down a couple, I think we're the third one down, is Retired and Annuitant Pay.

Click on that, and it'll take you right to AskDFAS. And like I was saying, some of the forms you would have to actually print out and sign and then you can scan them in and submit them directly to us through AskDFAS. And the best part about using AskDFAS is that it creates another way for us to communicate with each other without you actually having to call us.

So when you submit a form to us through AskDFAS, you have to enter an email address as well, and we will send you status updates on the process of that form that you sent us. So if you filled out a W-4P and sent it in to us, we will send you a link, not a link, an update saying that we received that W-4P.

It'll actually just say we received your form, it doesn't say exactly what the form was. And then when a technician acquires the form for processing, you'll get another update saying that a technician has it, and it's being processed. And then once it's complete, you will also get a third and final update saying that that action is complete.

And it will either say that it is complete or it will say something to the effect of that we need further information. Now, what we're working on, I'm just gonna give you a little preview into what we're working on right now, is the ability to send you a message back directly through AskDFAS. Right now, we would have to mail you something, but we're working on the ability to tell you what may have been wrong or what we need, and send that right back to you through AskDFAS. So be on the lookout for that. We're hoping to get that up and running in the next year or so.

You can also, while we're talking about AskDFAS, you can also ask certain questions, and you can make an update to your mailing address right through AskDFAS as well. It's much easier than faxing, you know, and those status notifications give you a peace of mind that we actually received it, rather than just putting the form in the mail and hoping that it gets here. Let's go on to the next slide. So if you're even more computer savvy, myPay is the very best way to make updates to your tax status and other changes on your retired, your annuitant pay account as well. You just log right in to myPay, there's a section in there for taxes.

You can go in and select your tax status and number of allowances that you want to make that change to, and it's made right away. It'll affect your next paycheck. There's no awaiting, there's no forms to sign. You don't have to worry about anything being filled out correctly or incorrectly. You don't have to worry about anything else. You're in control of making that change there on myPay. So myPay, I definitely recommend getting a myPay account if you don't have one already and using that. You can also get copies of your 1099 right on myPay. We're still mailing them to all annuitants regardless of whether you're in myPay or not.

But if you don't wanna wait for it, or if you lose it, if you need another copy of your 1099 for whatever reason, you can go right out to myPay and pull that off there. We also have previous copies of your 1099s too from previous tax years saved out in myPay for you. So you can make those changes to your taxes. You can update your mailing address out there as well. If you change banks and need to update your direct deposit, you can make that change on myPay. And it's made right away, there's no waiting, you know it's done, and it'll affect your next payment. Let's go onto the next slide.

OK, I think that might be it. Yep, and that's all that I have for you today. Like I said, you know, it's really an honor for me to be able to come and to present at these events. Thank you to Brian for inviting me. I look forward to these all year. I'm gonna check and see if there are any questions. But if not, thanks again.

Brian Behlke:

Thank you, Nathan, and I think we have, looks like two questions that did pop in. So either you, or maybe the first one, Jen. I think I know the answer, but I'll leave it for you. Does SBP payments end if the surviving spouse remarries before 55, correct?

Nathan Lynix:

Correct.

Jen Harlow:

Yes, yeah, mm-hmm! Sorry, go ahead.

Nathan Lynix:

No, no, yeah, right. Yes, if you remarry before age 55, they're suspended. If that marriage ends, you can come back and reapply for survivor benefits after that. But if you remain married, they do end there.

Brian Behlke:

All right, and then we had -

Nathan Lynix:

Did you have anything, Jen?

Brian Behlke:

Yep, go ahead, Jen.

Jen Harlow:

Nope, you covered it, and yeah, just if that remarriage ends. And then just speaking of remarriage, some new benefit changes that have come about where remarried spouses can retain their commissary and MWR activity and education benefits. So those are some new things to look out for, separate from DFAS.

Brian Behlke:

And thank you. And yeah, I got one more question. Are there any plans to be able to get your temporary password reset via AskDFAS, or will it remain via the once-a-month USPS mailing?

Nathan Lynix:

I'm not sure about the AskDFAS part, but myPay does have two-factor authentication now. You can call into the call center, and they should be able to get you a one-time password through the Customer Care Center, and that would avoid the, you know, waiting for the new pin through the mail.

Brian Behlke:

All right, looks like that's all we got at this time, and again, you can ask questions throughout. Thank you so much. So thank you, Nathan.

Nathan Lynix:

All right, thank again.

Brian Behlke:

You can go to the next slide. It's now my pleasure to introduce Ms. Kelly Hruska, who is the executive director of the Office of Survivors Assistance at the Department of Veterans Affairs. And she has some updates for you. So Ms. Hruska, the floor is yours.

Kelly Hruska:

Good morning everyone, or good afternoon I should say. Thank you all. Appreciate the Department of War hosting the symposium today. Just a few reminders. I wanted to remind everybody that the Office of Survivors Assistance has stood up a new monthly survivor series, and this series is held the last Wednesday of every month from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Eastern time.

The July 24 program features the Survivor Assistance Memorial Support program, or SAMS. It was formerly called Decedent Affairs. The SAMS offices are found in our VA hospitals, and they are expanding and will be expanding over the next few years. So we're really excited that SAMS is gonna be joining us to talk about the upcoming changes. If you can't attend the program on the 24th or if you've missed some past programs, you can find the links to the video and slides on our website, which is va.gov/survivors/survivor-series, and I'll send that to Mercedes and we can post that.

I also wanna remind you that our 2026 Survivor Benefits and Services booklet has been updated, and it is available electronically on our website. Hard copies are not currently available, but they will be available in the fall. There are some changes to our website.

We've now started a calendar of events, not just OSA events, but other events hosted at VA, Department of War and other affiliate organizations. And so I would recommend that you reach out to check out the new changes to the website. But that's all we have. There are a few things that are in the works, and we're gonna be looking forward to the fall to walking you through the new changes. But that's it, any questions?

Brian Behlke:

Thank you, Ms. Hruska. And yeah, a chance for anybody in the Q&A if you have any questions for Ms. Hruska? Let's see, it looks like one, nope, we got the link posted. Hopefully you're seeing it, and doesn't look like we have any questions. Thank you.

Kelly Hruska:

OK, thanks.

Brian Behlke:

So next slide, and we move on to the meat of our presentation. So our final presenter for the rest of the time we have is Mr. Mark Dunlop, who is a financial counselor for the U.S. Army, and our own Ms. Lisa Valentine, who is the program manager in Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors, who will assist Mark as a moderator.

He has a few topics for us, and we'll get through as many as the time allows, and anything we don't get to, we'll hold for the next time. This is actually part four of the presentations Mark has done. Again, if you wanna see what we've covered in the past, they're posted on Military OneSource. You can see all the great information Mark has had for us. But with that, I'll hand the floor over to Mark.

Mark Dunlop:

Thank you, and like let's move on. As I always do, is share a disclaimer. This presentation is to help identify resources, milestone topics to share with clients, on how to make appropriate referrals. I also want to add that a special thanks go to Christine Murphy, one of my peers who helped in coming up with assembling these questions that the two of us, along with Ms. Lisa Valentine and Brian, we collected from you, the survivors, and you, the coordinators, had about military topics. You'll see that most of the presentation are questions and answers, and the questions actually are coming from you. So a big thank you for that.

But the information that follows is intended to serve as a basis of discussion of financial, legal, tax and accounting advisors. It's not a substitute for competent advice from professional advisors in their fields. I am not an attorney, I'm an accredited estate planner. I don't do investments, although I'm a CFP, ChFC, and that.

But the actual application of some of the concepts is the practice of law and the proper responsibility of an attorney, and for an investment of a registered investment advisor. The application of other concepts may require the guidance of a tax or accounting advisor. While the sources are deemed reliable, the links were good as of last night. The information that follows should not be relied on for preparing tax returns or for making investment decisions. Next! Moving on.

Lisa Valentine:

So Mark, as we're waiting for the next slide to pop up, I'm very interested in our little review from our past symposium. So what are some key tools to look at cash flow?

Mark Dunlop:

Thank you, and I know this is an overwhelming slide that, when you do PowerPoints, you shouldn't do that. Well, I did it deliberately because what we found is, these decks that we put together also become reference tools, not only for coordinators but also for participants like many of you. So in the past symposiums, we looked at some key tools.

For example, we looked at Military OneSource tools that are available for you, the online survivor benefit reports that we talked about. We can do the what-if scenarios which are so useful. We talked about some of the practical things that now guardians can request a report from the FAST team. In fact, if they have, as was mentioned earlier, the DD 3005 on file, they probably will have a ... so they can actually do the interactive benefit report. So that's kind of, we covered that in the past things.

If you go to the last call that we did January 30, ironically at the 45-minute mark, we talked about some of these things. Now, for the recordings and handouts, as we mentioned earlier in this call, simply go to Military OneSource. Ironically, part one of the series was on tax issues, how to prepare. This one's focusing on how to plan, a little different there.

So that's neat, and on our next call, we're gonna talk about milestones in a more escalated manner. Now, one thing that I encourage people to do, many people say, “Oh, I have a Social Security account, I set it up 20 years ago.” I said, “Oh, I'm glad you did, very proud of you.” But if you created it before September 18, 2012, you probably need to go in again and they'll probably have you use login.gov or ID.me account, similar to how the VA has you log in, to keep access to see your Social

Security statements, reports, very useful, especially if you're refinancing a home, you know, show it's something tangible.

So it's a very useful thing. So yes, it's nice to log in to Social Security, but I'm gonna tell you, in general, be sure that you have login.gov or ID.me, so you can get into that system similar to the VA system. Social Security phased out its login system. They've enhanced it. This dual authorization, there's the security of all the entities we talked about the Department of Defense agencies with DFAS in particular. You know, dual security is really in, so login.gov or ID.me is wonderful to have for these purposes, and I encourage you to log in to your Social Security account, can be very useful.

Lisa Valentine:

All right, so next slide. And so, Mark, what are some other key databases that one should have a login for?

Mark Dunlop:

The login.gov, the ID.me key gets you in the VA as well as Social Security, as we mentioned. But actually, having the DS Login/myAuth allows you eventually to get into the TRICARE medical, you know, properly the dental, DEERS, and actually, as we talked earlier today with Jen Harlow, the OSBR reports. So I encourage you to set up a DS Login and then go to the next level and have it be a myAuth account, which gives you full access of that situation. In addition, I know there's so many logins, a login again even to Military OneSource.

What I encourage people to do is be sure if they're getting Survivor Benefit Plan, to have an active myPay account. It helps you track your benefits, and I tell survivors, you know, I'd like you to be able to log in to your VA account, your myPay account, to see your SBP if you're getting SBP, be able to log in to Social Security if you're getting Social Security. And I'd like you, if you have a benefits voluntary vision plan, to be able to log in to that.

And of course, a login to get into Military OneSource. So those are some of the things that you see there. I gave you the links, they are tangible links. So a lot of verbiage, but when you download a presentation you see the links and then you can cut and paste and put it in a browser. And again, as Brian mentioned, past symposiums are available for you to look at and we appreciate your participation.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, so next slide. So Mark, another question. We talked a little bit about TRICARE For Life, or actually talked a lot a bit, you know, in our previous symposium. But what are some of the key milestones that we should be reminded about?

Mark Dunlop:

That presentation we did on the 30th of January brought to light something that many survivors were surprised about. They were not aware that although they have access to a TRICARE program for life, the TRICARE For Life, in essence, is a Medicare supplement program. So at age 65, you will need to pay for Part B in most situations.

That's directly with Social Security, Medicare, because TRICARE is a supplement plan, better known as, you know what, what Medicare doesn't cover, on an issue that Medicare covers, TRICARE comes in and helps. So that's kind of an important thing. So a couple of survivors were very candid.

They didn't realize that they have to purchase Part B when they turned 65. I did not say 67, which is normal retirement date for many individuals, at 65, unless they're working. And there's a lot of exceptions to that. But in general, count on paying in today's dollars over $200 a month for Medicare Part B. Here are the links given for you. Not the best news for some people, but the reality is you will now have robust coverage between the two programs.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, Mark, that's very good information. Next slide, please. And so what are some of the key milestones relating to the timing of when to collect Social Security monthly benefits that we should keep in mind?

Mark Dunlop:

You know, on the last call we spent about 40 minutes on this concept because there's no one single answer. It all depends on everyone's situation. And that's the beauty of using the OSBR report. You can do what-if scenarios. You can also work with Social Security. For example, if you are not working as a spouse, but you had a good track record in terms of earning income in your career, one strategy is start drawing on your spouse's social security benefit at age 60, actually can do it 50 if you're disabled, but age 60, and let that ride and then begin again on your record at age 70.

Now you might say, “Oh, I don't know if I want to draw at 60 'cause I get seven years of a penalty because normal retirement date would've been 67, and in some cases it's 65, 66 for most, and 67. So I don't know if I wanna start drawing at 60. Well if you're not working, you get the money in, that's a choice. But at 70, you can actually do it earlier. But if you wait to 70 instead of 67 for yourself, you get bonus points, like a 24% increase in benefits. So there's a strategy of perhaps do it on your spouse and flip to yours.

Now, that's the extreme. It may make sense in some cases. Now you can do it as early as 60 as a survivor, to do it later, and it may make sense never to flip, or you might wanna wait to normal retirement date to start collecting the benefits, what-ifs. So key milestones, it all depends on one's situation, that's the bottom line.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, Mark, next slide. So then, what are some of the milestone timelines that we cover or that we will be covering in the future symposium series segments?

Mark Dunlop:

Yeah, and this is just a preview for October 30 that we're putting together. So you know, the key thing is, in the early days, of course, you wanna be able to get an ID card. And if you are, and I noticed the list of people that are logging in, some are not necessarily active-duty survivors, they are M-Day National Guard dates on a nondrill weekend, TPU survivors.

Same thing for the reserves. The children, for sure, you want to, if they are being raised by a guardian or the spouse, we want them to get ID cards as soon as the death certificate is available or the 1300's available, that, you know, see if DEERS will give it. But yes, at some point early on you wanna get an ID card. Do you know why? We wanna be sure as a survivor they're in the medical plan and the dental plan, because that's such a key thing.

Now, for the TPU survivors and the M-Day, there usually is a premium for three years, and then if it is service connected, often people will flip to CHAMPVA. If it's an active-duty death, it will be at no premium cost for three years for the spouse, no, but then they can pay a little something, and they're not gonna lose TRICARE, and the child, through age 21, 23 if they stay in school. But it's important to get that ID card early on. W

ithin the first year, we encourage people to put money that they get from the lump sum, the SGLI and the death gratuity, in a tax-free account also known as a Roth IRA. On the Roth IRA, normally the limits are 7,500 if you are under 50. If you're 50+, it's 8,600. You can actually add to it all the death gratuity and the SGLI. The sooner it's done, the more tax-free growth period occurred. I have some people that wait till the last minute to do it, their choice, it's a tax decision, but then for the year of interest that they were earning, it's taxable.

So there, there's no legal rush, you have one year to do it. But from a tax perspective, the earlier the better to get tax-free growth. And don't worry, when you put money in a Roth IRA, there's no tax penalty to pull it out. It's your money, you can just pull it back out. So the bottom line is, the bottom line is, that's an important thing to consider: earlier the better, for tax-free growth. But there's no pressure. It's a tax decision, not an investment decision, because you can put it in just a safe account at your bank.

When you want to talk investment strategy, you can do that anytime. It's just, “Do you wanna pay taxes on the growth of the money of your Roth IRA, yes or no?” In essence, do you want to pay taxes on the growth of your money that's from an SGLI or death gratuity, yes or no? It's simply a tax decision, earlier the better. Now, for the spouse, we remind people to look at their benefits now, but you see some documentation on third-party sources, not the VA source saying the spouse has de-elimination dates on using the Fry. No, not anymore. So look at the VA website to get the latest intel. But I tell spouses, if a death of your loved one is service connected in the line of duty, you got the Fry Scholarship, and use it when you want, and you save it for grad school.

And then for a spouse, you can continue also getting the DIC benefit. So a spouse, again, I remind spouses, the HEART Act. We do bring up the final-move deadline. You do get some ways to extend that, and that's important. And again, a little reminder on the TRICARE extension. So that's a very powerful concept that there is continuation coverage.

But there are some milestones, not to steal the thunder for the October conference call, but do wanna remind the children. The children, many people say, “Hey, if I turn 16, do I lose social security?” No, but your caregiver, if you're the youngest child in the household, will lose getting that little kicker for caregiving once you turn 16. The child actually can continue the benefits in Social Security too. High school graduation, gosh, you can be 19 in two months and still get Social Security.

But the child has to, every year, let Social Security know that they are not a dropout post age 18, 'cause the benefits can go to age 19 if they're still in high school, 19 in two months. So that's a key thing. Age 21 is a very key thing. Age 21, I tell the children, you had TRICARE to 21, medical and dental, but if your ID card expires at 21, it's gone. Oh sure, you pay for it, TRICARE, you're a young adult, but you gotta watch that ID card. Did it expire at 21?

Because many times the student is in school but the card expired, why? Because they did not inform DEERS that they are still a full-time student by providing adequate documentation. So I noticed on the list, we actually had some teenagers on the line that I've worked with, and I think that's great. Thank you very much for being there. But please, look at your ID card, see when it expires, and if it's 21, just know prior to 21 it'd be very nice, get a note from the school, work with DEERS, get an ID card. Gosh, it can go all the way to age 23, so that works well. Now, 23, you say, “Can I extend it past 23? I'm in grad school.” Well, good news, you can, but there's a premium and it's actually not extending, it's a separate policy. It's basically, or a certificate if you wanna use that word.

In essence, you have TRICARE For life. There are two versions, TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Select. You look at the benefits, you look at the cost and make a decision. If you wish to continue TRICARE, yes, there's an outlay. But in most cases, if you try to shop the market in the world, you'd say, “This is very fairly priced compared to what's offered.” I have also some 23-year-olds, they're getting jobs but they don't even offer health insurance. It's small little entities that are trying to get on their feet.

Don't worry, you can have TRICARE through age 26, actually longer if you're disabled. But let's say to age 26, yes there's an outlay, 23 to 26, the TRICARE Young Adult outlay, but very thankful many survivors are that that is as accessible. Now, age 26, historically, everyone said the Chapter 35 ended. Go to the website of the VA and look at the appropriate de-elimination date based on the death, of what occurred and how old you are when the death occurred.

Because there are some exceptions, many exceptions, to the old rules, to the tune is, I don't even call it exception anymore, it's the way it is. And so look at the new dates that are out there. Same thing with the Fry. Many people say, “Hey, age 33, I don't have Fry anymore.” Not true in many cases for the deaths. If you were not 18 yet and on, you know, 1-1-2013, and the death occurred after that date, the odds are you don't have to worry about the rush to get the Fry used at age 33. And that becomes very useful, and we'll talk about that today because many people save the Fry for grad school.

They apply for the Fry, but they use other benefits and they save that for grad school. It's your choice when you use the Fry, but in many cases, there's no de-elimination date. There's no urgency to use that. So wetting your whistle for the 30th of October.

Lisa Valentine:

So thank you so much for that, Mark. And so our next slide, this is very exciting, and very near and dear to myself, but also to, I think, many of our family members that are on the line. And so, Mark, share this program with us.

Mark Dunlop:

Thank you, every five years, starting 2011, so 2016, 2021, and yes, 2026, flags are put in Art Hill in Forest Park, and it's sort of like Central Park, New York. What you're looking at is actually several acres. A flag is put in, and the flag was put on a pole. Those poles, almost all of them are now assembled with the flag on it, with a picture of the service member who died post 9/11 overseas, and a special dog tag that was made. They're put on metal poles, quite a few tons of metal poles, they're there.

They're gonna be put in and installed at Art Hill right next to the art museum on 9/5/2026. And they will be there for about 1 1/2 weeks, including during 9/11. I tell you, it has been amazing. When you take the dog tags and the wind goes there, you hear them clinking and you're just reminded. And it brings back memories of so many of ours that have given their life. We have families that come in from Maine, California, Seattle, and of course, nearby in Missouri that come for a time of reflection in this amazing tribute.

Putting the flags in the ground on the fifth will be done by over 1,200 volunteers. And many of them have volunteered their time to put this flag with the dog tag and the picture together, a way of showing respect. And that's what this was all about. So it'll be a wonderful program, and if you need more information on it, please just, you know, let the team know, and we'll make sure that you get the information on that. What a way to honor those that gave their life overseas. But this year, they're doing something else.

They're gonna have a special large flag, a tribute flag, to also acknowledge those that died of PTSD, and a special acknowledgement for those that died 9/11 exactly on that day in various locations like the Pentagon. So that means a lot, thanks for letting me share.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, Mark.

Mark Dunlop:

Look at that ... Look at that website by the way.

Lisa Valentine:

Yeah, so we'll make sure that Mercedes puts that also in the chat so that you guys can easily access that. And so if you're in the St. Louis, Missouri time frame during that area, you may want to go in and check that out. That's very beautiful, next slide.

All right, so now we're gonna move into the proactive tax planning considerations. I think this will be very interesting, and I think it could probably even affect, or, you know, this is gonna be like great information just for people who may not be surviving family members. So, next slide.

Mark Dunlop:

Thanks. Yeah.

Lisa Valentine:

So, Mark, tell us about these proactive financial considerations that we should consider.

Mark Dunlop:

Great, and I thank you for sharing that question. So often, we focus on preparing the taxes, but being proactive about the future, and planning to minimize taxes in the future has become so important. I often say there's a difference between a savings decision, an investment decision, and a tax decision. Save the money, and encourage people, especially early on in the relationship. Save it, don't make any rash decisions, especially when you just get it.

I've a few times had the honor to work with a survivor, but it already was two months after the casualty, 2/3 of the savings of the SGLI and death gratuity were either given away, went into unique investments.

And, you know, instead of helping them manage a decision of 600,000, we're doing it on 200,000. So I say early on, just make a savings decision. If that is to put in the bank and let it sit there for a while, great, I applaud that. There is no rush to make an investment strategy though. I'm saying just, do you wanna save some of the money or not? You wanna make an investment decision. There's no rush, there's no rush. Once you wanna move into more of an investment strategy, there is no timeline to do that, whenever you wanna do it.

But a key thing, and I mentioned earlier, the key thing is the tax decision. Do you wanna pay tax on the growth of the money, yes or no? Now, the law says you have a year to make that decision. Why they give a year, that decision, do you wanna pay taxes, yes or no, is almost not a difficult one. So I encourage people, as they get the money, the death gratuity, make a tax decision. I don't wanna pay taxes on the growth of the money, and you make the appropriate transaction. You are not making an investment decision, you are making a tax decision. Same thing with the SGLI, make a tax decision.

I don't wanna pay taxes on the growth of money. And by the way, that'll help you even when you fill out FAFSAs. So that's a key thing, they overlap. The investment is the one, take your time, nothing to rush into. But make a mental decision not to throw the money away, give it away, or just do impulsive retail therapy early on, and do please make a tax decision, I don't wanna pay taxes on the growth of the money. Preserving the legacy.

I often tell people, what is your objective to do with that 600,000, if you're getting 600,000? And most people say it's to preserve the legacy. Maybe we pulled a little bit out or the interest a year tax effectively. But I want the legacy of my loved one to be remembered for future generations, for nieces, nephews, children. Because if it is, first example, a spouse who's getting eventually Social Security, VA benefits, the educational benefits included, the monthly flow, the Survivor Benefit Plan. In reality, this money might not really be needed right now, but if you have it grow tax-free, it can be a legacy, wonderful thing. I often tell people, “What are your goals?

What's your short-term goals and what's your long-term planning?” Many people don't have an opportunity to really sit down and figure that out, and that's OK. But you'd say, before you start writing checks and spending the money and paying $40,000 on a new vehicle, what are your ultimate goals? I also tell people, look at the Social Security milestones.

I had a spouse literally this morning said, “Should I go back to work? I don't wanna jeopardize getting the care,” I call it the caregiver benefit. I don't wanna jeopardize that. And I said, “Well, why don't you go part time, you know, keep the earnings somewhat under 25,000, that's a round number, and work this way. You'll have the satisfaction of working for a while, you enjoy that. No one's saying go totally back. You don't have to, and it won't jeopardize your Social Security benefit in terms of what you receive. There's some tax issues, but wonderful thing, don't feel pressed to do that, there's no rush. So analyze Social Security milestones. Now, other milestones to look at.

You know, first of all, I tell people, make sure the child, when he turns 18, as we mentioned earlier, let Social Security know that they're still in high school if they're still in high school. If someone turns disabled prior to that time or you know, while they're in high school, let Social Security know that. And as someone comes up to 60, start doing the math. Should you start drawing the spousal Social Security benefit or maybe wait to 62 and draw in yours? I also bring up the age 65 issue because age 65 is Medicare.

So notice how it's all coming together. I say in scholarship strategy, you know the phrase, “Saving the Fry,” apply for the Fry when you're eligible for the Fry. But you might want to use it right away, especially 'cause there's so many nonprofit 501 groups that want to support and help the family, especially with the new FAFSA considerations that we're gonna address in a little bit, that you might just want to save the Fry. You apply, keep it in your hip pocket ready to go. Now, if you go to a super expensive school, when you wanna use the yellow ribbon provisions, yeah, you might want to use the Fry for undergraduate. But for community college I will say it's available, but if your goal is to then go to a four-year school, get a master's, maybe a Ph.D., watch, you only have 36 months of Fry.

And when I say only, that's a lot, that's four years. But it doesn't mean you have to use it as undergraduate. So that's called scholarship strategy. We'll spend time on this. I also say look at the life insurance and liquidity considerations. Well, remember many spouses had 100,000 FSGLI at the time of the casualty. Many spouses don't convert it. They're welcome to do that within the period of time, they don't. And I also say, do you have enough liquid cash in the event something happens to you? I hope it doesn't, do you have adequate life insurance? If not, you might wanna address that situation 'cause you had 100,000 before the casualty.

And life insurance is great. It helps address liquidity considerations upon a death. I also tell people, look at the estate considerations. Many of our survivors, when everything occurred, did not take the time, and this is just in love I share it, to update or create a will. And many had children, so I encourage to make and find the time. Jack can assist you on it, FinancialPoint can assist you on it. There are many resources that can assist you on it.

Your own private attorney can help on it. There might be a fee for that. But look at your situation. Do you have an active will, especially after the casualty? I also say double check who are the beneficiaries of any assets you have. Remember, in most states, when you leave money to a minor, minor might not be able to touch it until they're 18, unless a conservator was named in advance or a conservatorship was set up in advance or a trust was set up in advance. So again, talking with an estate planner is very helpful to do, especially if the ultimate goal is to help children that are still minors. So that's a powerful thing. I also tell people to address the health and dental.

Now, if you are a guardian, and I notice on the list of those on this call, we have several guardians. If you are guardian for a child, yes, it's important for you to have DEERS recognize you with DD 3005 on file, and also see that the child has the ID card. That's good. But it's also important to have the HIPAA forms in essence on file with your health vendor, which probably is TriWest or Tri East Humana, with your dental vendor, which is TDP, which, if you are not in the TRICARE, if you're in CHAMPVA, similar type of consideration, that they know who you are. And of course with the vision plan, which is BENEFEDS, B-E-N-E-F-E-D-S, that's the vision eyeglass plan.

Make sure they know who you are, especially if you're a guardian. So that's important to be able ... you can log into the accounts as appropriate with the health and dental especially. Yes, spouses can do that, but I want to be sure that the guardians can do that too.

And then I say, please address tax issues due to the retro pay. Many people for a while had SBP not paid and then they get a lump sum. Remember, lump sum or monthly statement, as mentioned earlier on the call, Survivor Benefit Plan is taxable. Unpaid allowances is also taxable. Unpaid allowances is also taxable. I brace people for that. Many people get the unpaid allowances maybe two months after the casualty, and then come January, there's a 1099 that goes to the address that was on file.

Might not be the address where the survivor is who got the unpaid allowances, but the IRS got a copy of that too. So I tell people proactively, be sure you're tracking what was the unpaid allowances. Finally on this topic, interest of funds from the time of the casualty to the time you put the money in a Roth IRA, any growth is taxable.

So if it was sitting at Prudential for a little bit of time, that amount technically is interest. If you decided to take a while to make a decision if you want to have tax-free growth of the money or not, hopefully this growth, or not, that's taxable until you placed it in that Roth IRA. Cash outs from a non-Roth thrift savings account or from a non-Roth individual retirement account is taxable. Now, here's an interesting thing. I have some people that fund a Roth and then they pull money out of the Roth maybe to buy a house. OK, I get it.

If you make a withdrawal from a Roth IRA, please tell the IRS when you fill out the forms that next year on your taxes for the prior year, that you made a withdrawal up to your cost basis, C-O-S-T, out of your cost basis. Then when you fill in the form with the IRS that it's a return on the cost basis. Your withdrawal from the Roth IRA is not taxable. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

Wow, that's a lot, Mark. And I know we've got more, but you know what, I wanna do a quick plug-in for our surviving family members and just for anybody that's, you know, listening to this symposium. August is the National Make-a-Will Month. And I will tell you that at the Department of War, we do have tools to help you. Because I tell you, it's like a big elephant. I mean, looking at all these just proactive financial considerations, it's a big elephant.

So it's like, how do you break it down in, you know, into bite sizes? So what we have is on Military OneSource. We have a updated, we've changed it into a workbook, we had an asset worksheet. And we now have an estate planning workbook. And so it does just that. It takes that elephant and it breaks it down and can kind of guide you. But you really wanna go to your lawyer.

And if you're a surviving spouse of an active-duty service member who died, or you are of a retiree, you are eligible to receive assistance from the local judge advocate general. So you can go on base, you can make an appointment. They even have little worksheets that you can fill out if you go online. So I recommend checking that out. We also have an e-learning course, and with our e-learning course, it's like watching a video. It gives you information, and what's so cool about it is it's free.

You can watch it at your own pace. If you need to take a break, you take a break, you can come back to it later, you can watch it as many times as you want. And if you run into, you know, questions and so forth, if you're a surviving spouse of an active duty, you can contact Military OneSource and they can get you help. And then of course, you can also contact your long-term case manager. And if they're not sure, Mark always has an open door, and he will help out those long-term case managers. So just know that's out there for you. So, Mark, I know we talked a lot, but what are some other proactive financial considerations?

Mark Dunlop:

Well, I often say do a strategic financial framework. Look at the pillars, make sure you understand savings, which does give liquidity, investment, which could give enhanced growth or loss, and there's no rush, there's no rush, and tax efficiency. The earlier the better, if you need 364 days to do it, hey, I'm not pushing you, but remember that 363 days before you do it is taxable growth. And realize that they interact. Look at the planning horizons, look at your immediate liquidity needs. Now, I've had some people that did not get the life insurance and did not get the death gratuity, and say, “Did you apply for Social Security, get that kick started?” OK, look at that.

Did you apply, at least for the VA, and hopefully we get service connected in a timely manner. Did you apply for the SBP, if it's appropriate? I encourage people, not pushing, now we need line-of-duty in the later. But remember, the relief societies, if money is tight, are there for you to consider, and in many cases, yes. Historically, they've done loans, but for many of our survivors, they'll do grants if need be. So look at the short-term needs that you may have, liquidity needs included on that. And we can actually help you put a plan together for a strategy early on. Now, that's planning horizons. One thing that I found is so popular, and working with Christine Murphy, ChFC, AFC, at Fort Lee, is the legacy situation.

We have seen that preserving the legacy is a very important concept with many of the spouses. Preserving the legacy, limited risk, opportunity for growth, opportunity that their children's children will know that there was money set aside by a loved one, the service member, on their behalf.

So preserving the legacy for intergenerational wealth transfer has become a very common trend, and we can guide you on helping that goal and objective. That it is the objective, and apparently it is, for many individuals can be fulfilled. Now, there's some survivor specific tax and income considerations. The retro payments on unpaid allowances and any retro SBP, especially if line-of-duty took a few months to come into place, is taxable. And often on the lump sum tax check, in some cases taxes wasn't withheld. So we gotta consider that.

We gotta just realize it's out there. Prerollover interest, mention it, very important. If for some reason you needed 364 days to put the money in a Roth, that interest that accumulated during that period of time is taxable. Retirement accounts, you gotta be careful. If you cashed out assets like the TSP and didn't just, for a spouse, put it in their own name or roll it over to an IRA or an inherited IRA or a Roth IRA or an inherited Roth IRA.

If you just cashed it out, unless it was Roth, taxable event, gotta be reported. If you forget to report it, guess what? The IRS is getting the 1099, so they know. So we wanna be sensitive to that and just remind people you'd wanna track. You might have to pick up the phone call if you didn't get the 1099 'cause the IRS did. So you have some of those things.

And then Social Security. Now, technically Social Security is reportable and technically, it's taxable. Now, it could be income so low that there's no tax due, but it is reportable and it could be taxable. So that's not like the VA benefit, tax-free. We'll talk more about that in a few minutes, and what's taxable, what's not. Now, part of proactive financial considerations are estate considerations. I encourage people to look at the estate plan.

Now for me, yes I have a will, and designated my lovely wife as the beneficiary, but I have contingent beneficiaries and that's important. When there were minors, I had someone to care for them if something happened, and I can change that often, I can change the beneficiaries. But that's only half of estate planning.

The other half of estate planning, and I'll tell you for me it was a pain, I had to go to all my assets that I owned and put a beneficiary and a contingent beneficiary. My retirement accounts, my TSP accounts, my bank accounts, my checking accounts, my brokerage accounts, I wanted to be sure everything had a beneficiary and a contingent beneficiary, so when I die, it passes on. Now, in some states, and actually in many areas, you may also wanna have a contingent beneficiary on who owns the trust if the trust owns the house, if you went that direction. Who are your contingent beneficiaries?

And that's a very interesting consideration because assets with contingent beneficiaries are not subject to probate. So I ask people to just spend some time perhaps seeing an estate planning attorney, perhaps just have a dialogue with JAG for direction to talk about some estate plan considerations. After the casualty, I realized there was so much going on. But at some point, you may wanna look at that, 'cause that becomes a very vital portion of legacy planning. The education strategy. Hey, when do I use the Fry? If you plan on grad school, do you save it? When do I use the nonprofit organizations?

Remember, many of our nonprofit organizations start giving benefits for education as early as kindergarten, Folds of Honor and Folded Flag. Ironically, I'm drinking my coffee on a Folds of Honor mug, and that just reminded me of them. So it's kind of like, wow, there are groups out there that wanna help you, take advantage. Now, Folds of Honor and Folded Flag, yes they do college, they do all the way to Ph.D. I kind of say K to PhD, depending if you qualify for their grants and scholarships, and their window opens in February for Folds of Honor, and for Folded Flag opens in April. So that's an interesting thing.

Education strategy, kind of how this all ties in. More on education later. Liquidity insurance, mentioned it before, I mentioned it again, very important concept. If death occurs, how liquid is cash to pay the mortgage payments, if it's there, the heat bills, the lawn service, if applicable? Is there enough liquid cash until the dust settles? So that's why having some life insurance for a survivor might be applicable. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

So sorry about that. So anyways, let's go on to the next slide. This is very good information. And so what are some examples of taxable versus nontaxable benefits?

Mark Dunlop:

Taxable, Survivor Benefit Plan. Now, check with your state if it's taxable. But federally, yeah, it's taxable, it's reportable and taxable. So SGLI, that in and of itself is not taxable, but the interest that it comes from it is taxable. That's why the urgency of addressing the Roth IRA is there. And again, someone says, “I don't know if I wanna make a tax decision, yes or no?”

I said that's your prerogative, but you probably do want to not pay taxes on the growth. And remember, nothing scary of putting in a Roth IRA because you can always pull out the cost basis at any time with no tax penalty. Unpaid allowances, taxable. Basic housing allowance, I wanna make a distinction, is tax-exempt, the BAH, that one-year BAH that many spouses get or children, that is not taxable. So that's a little clarification there. Social Security could be taxable. The thrift savings plan, if withdrawn and it was a non-Roth, taxable.

So I have that all in one slide summarizing what we spent the last 10 minutes on. Now, non-taxable, the death gratuity, the one-time payment of $100,000, not taxable. And whenever it's paid out, there's no interest on it, you get that lump sum, so you don't have to worry about, “Oh, what was the interest?”

So it's paid there. And again, if you put it in a Roth IRA, you don't pay taxes on the growth. SGLI, the principal, not taxable. DIC, it's a VA benefit, not taxable. The Social Security lump sum death benefit is a one-time benefit of $255, not taxable. Anytime you withdraw from your Roth IRA or Roth TSP, or your Roth IRA that was set up under the Heroes Act of 2008, if reported properly, that it's return to cost basis, especially if it was a Roth withdrawal, not taxable. Any VA benefit, not taxable, and that includes the VA educational benefits, housing stipend. The Fry benefit, the DEA, not taxable. The $1,200 potential Montgomery GI Bill Refund, not taxable. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

Wow, so next slide. So we talked about taxable versus nontaxable, but then what if I wanna learn more about, you know, IRS rules? So what are some helpful IRS links?

Mark Dunlop:

Well, a common one I get from parents that are trying to fill out a tax return on behalf of their loved one, and we can help them, Military OneSource is available to help them, and we have other resources that are there. In fact, we covered a lot of that in our first of this series, when we did financial milestones. If you need help, we can get that for you. But Form 1310, it's like a cover sheet. So when you fill out a tax return on behalf of deceased, you simply fill it in, why you're filling it in.

You say, “Hey, I am the mother. I'm the appropriate person to fill in the tax return. There was no spouse,” and that's why you're gonna make a tax return for me. I kind of call it like a fax cover sheet. It tells the IRS why you're filling out the tax return on behalf of a service member who passed away, and then you mail it in the normal way. Now, if it was a theater death, it's a special P.O. Box that it goes to in Kansas City.

But, in general, you treat it just like a regular tax return. You just have a cover sheet, Form 1310. Now, I gave a list of other resources that are out there for you. IRS.gov has some great contact numbers. When they say let us help you, they really mean it. Their website has been enhanced and it's very efficient.

There's also the Taxpayer Assistance Center office locator that is available, self-service tools, if there was a small business involved that you need help on, they have that available for self-employed, the earned income tax credit, that becomes an issue. How to fix a tax return. This is becoming more and more popular, especially with some of our theater deaths because of the abatement. They in many cases get past years' taxes that were paid.

If it was like the second deployment, for example, to a combat zone, they can get the tax return amended and get that as a refund. So you have that available. So there are many tax preparation options. Check on the refund status, there's a resource for that. And I tell people, don't forget Section 529 plans. If you're not aware of it, you have a link. There's some unique benefits on the Section 529 plans that are available. Great, Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

So, Mark, I think we have some questions out there that may tie in, so I don't wanna jump too far. So, Erica, could you, or Brian, go through the questions? Or I can see one, it says, “Are parents of deceased service members responsible for paying any owed taxes on their adult child's behalf?”

Mark Dunlop:

Usually there's a refund because the person worked a partial year. And the IRS doesn't care. Let's say there are two parents, and they're separated. IRS doesn't care who does the return, first one in the gate filing the 1310. So that's the more common question, who's getting the refund? So that's the more common one. Now, if you feel that there are taxes that were due, in my years, I've not seen that, I've usually seen the refund. But if there's something that's due, my bigger question is who closed out the estate and were there any creditors that were owed? What were the assets of the estate versus the liabilities of the estate?

Now a parent, if let's say the parents get in the SGLI, they don't have to use their personal assets to pay off the liabilities of the deceased in most situations. So now this becomes an estate planning question. So my follow-up question is, who closed the estate? Who notified all the other creditors?

You know, in fact, a pretty good practice is sending a credit report to the three agencies, Equifax, TransUnion, Experian, to make sure no one else opens credit on them, and look at all the negative flows, then look at all the positive flows and see if there even is an estate. So every case is different. I or any of the financial counselors can kind of look at the broad thing, if need be. We can coordinate with JAG to see what the unique things.

But when I get that question, and if I got it once in the last 17 years, because usually there was a refund, it turned out that we didn't even notify the creditors of the death. And so every case is gonna be unique. So let's look at that on a one-on-one basis.

Lisa Valentine:

That sounds good, thank you so much. And then, Mark, so what are some common questions on tax financial planning?

Mark Dunlop:

Proactive tax planning, basically putting as much money in a Roth as you can. We'll talk about more of that later. You know, I encourage people, knowing that you can always pull money out of the Roth IRA at any time, just report to the IRS when you fill out taxes in the next year that it's not gonna be a taxable event. Max out your Roth every year any way you can, at work, your Roth, your personal Roths, proactive tax planning.

Roth is a wonderful way to be proactive on tax planning. Then we also look at the investments that they have. Are you in high growth assets? And that with your financial planner you can kind of see, OK, what are you generating? Are you generating growth assets or assets that spin off big dividends, and what works best for your situation? Now tax withholding considerations is another question that I'm often asked. I said double check with SBP.

I'm glad that we talked about that earlier. Often, people are not having enough taxes come out of their Survivor Benefit Plan, especially with all the increases we've been getting over the years. So I tell people, reevaluate. If you owe taxes, change your tax withholding. And early on this call, we talked about how to change the tax withholding, ideally do it online, change your tax withholding. How do I import tax information when doing applications such as FAFSA? That has become a simple process.

You know, when you do your FAFSA, it can download, this is relatively new, your tax information. So manually doing that process is minimized because there's now a link to just download and put it in. How does Social Security and survivor benefits income tax impact tax planning? Well, you know, if you are earning, in essence, over certain amounts, one, you're gonna be in a higher tax bracket, and two, the Social

Security could be taxable. If you need the tables, I can get a few. But the bottom line is, remember SBP is taxable.

Most likely, a good chunk of the Social Security is gonna be taxable, especially if it is a benefit that you're getting in addition to other benefits. How does the Roth and non-Roth TSP, 401 , IRA impact tax planning? If you withdraw at any time non-Roth assets, put in your pocketbook, there not only can be penalties on the interest that grew, but also on the principal if it was non-Roth, and if it's prior to 59 and a half, depending on certain situations, that could be generating some additional tax situations.

Politely, it could be even a penalty. Non-Roth, when you pull it out, it's yours in general, but you just gotta report it. Non-Roth, to withdraw your non-Roth IRA, your non-Roth IRA, when you pull it out and tell the IRS that you pulled it out, it is not a taxable event. Most people don't realize that, as a result, are scared to put money in the Roth 'cause they think pulling the money out, it could be, ah, I don't wanna have that potential issue. It's not an issue. What are potential Roth opportunities going forward? Again, I say, if you can maximize as much as you can, go in, if you miss the one-year deadline to put money in a Roth IRA, fine, just maximize your Roth going forward.

And we'll talk more about that in a little bit. How to report Roth distributions? There's an IRS form, your software, if you use Military OneSource on it, it pops up, just report it. Legacy planning considerations. Remember, if you have assets that grow and then you pass away, in most cases, the step-up in basis is not taxable. Now your heirs inherited your property with that step-up in basis with no tax consequences, and that's part of the legacy planning as a financial counselor that we remind people of. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

So let's go to the next slide.

Brian Behlke:

And hey. Lisa, we did have another question if you think it's a good point.

Lisa Valentine:

Sure, yes.

Brian Behlke:

Here's the question, was, “Why would a survivor and child using a Fry Scholarship at a VA-vetted and verified collegiate program at a local public community college that is accredited, be denied their continued use of their mil ID after 21 if they're enrolled full time?” And actually reading that, that may be more a VA question.

Mark Dunlop:

Well the mil ID, if they're not getting SBP, if they're not getting the Survivor Benefit Plan, they wouldn't begin it. But they're entitled to an ID card all the way to age 23 at the DEERS office with proof that they're in school, and on the VA, they should be able to log in with login.gov or with the other website to log in. So I'm not sure, anyone else wanna chime in?

Panelist:

I concur with you, Mark, that the child would be eligible for an ID card while in school and up to age 23 because of the full-time college status. So this is actually for the ID card specifically, it would be a question for DMDC, the ID card office. But is the only thing, I wasn't sure is, is this ID card prohibiting the child from getting benefits? If the child's getting benefits and it's just specifically an ID card issue, then the DEERS DMDC office is the best place to start.

Mark Dunlop:

I'm glad we have these questions. Thank you for that.

Brian Behlke:

And that looks like it for right now. So we'll turn it back to you.

Lisa Valentine:

All righty, so let's go to the next slide, which is, you know, we talked about the Roth IRA, Mark, and so I think this can benefit everybody. So how can we make the most of our Roth IRA?

Mark Dunlop:

And I wanna make a distinction on this question that came in, Roth IRA, you're doing outside of the work environment. We always talk about Roth TSP or Roth 401 , I'm saying Roth or a Roth plan at your public school system. We're talking about Roth IRA. Roth IRA, it is powerful, it's an investment growth opportunity if the investment you selected grows.

So I encourage people if they physically can to put the max into their Roth each and every year. I'm over 50, I can put in $8,600 into my Roth IRA, and come January 2, that's exactly what I did. I didn't do it through work, I did it through a private thing and I put in my 8,600. I also asked my daughter, actually all four of my children, to fund their Roth IRAs with 7,500, the max they could do if they had earnings, or if their spouse, if they were stay-at-home parent and their spouse had enough earnings to justify it, put in the 7,500, the max. And if they needed money, like to get a transmission of a car, they can always pull that out. Just don't forget to fill out the right form.

So I encourage people to max out their Roth each and every year. Now, as a parent, there was a few years when not all my children could fund the Roth. Part of my legacy planning was, now, I had some cash, I gave them 7,500. They had earnings that they could fund the Roth and they put it in a Roth IRA. So Roth growth tax-free, very powerful concept. Under 50, 7,500, you just have to have earned income, or if you're married, gotta have enough income just between the couple, 8,600 for 50 plus.

There's actually some provisions you can put a little extra in in the early 60s. But bottom line is max out your Roth IRA, do it when you want. If you do installments, you can. I did in the beginning of the year hoping for growth. Everyone's different. Yes it makes it tough now on cash flow, but I'm so glad I have money growing tax-free, and if I really need the money, I can pull it out. Now, the Heroes Act of 2008 says, in addition to those limits I give, you can put all the SGLI and all the DG in. It's liquid, you can pull it out at any time.

So that's called a qualified rollover contribution. You have up to one year to do, but why wait? It's not an investment decision. It's, you know, you're doing savings, great, I'm proud of you, it's a tax decision. If you want to delay, do the taxes to the tail end. As I mentioned earlier, you do not have to, you will have to pay taxes on the growth. So the earlier the better. So how to make the most of the Roth, I mean, the extreme is do it on January 2. Now, Roth is interesting. If you wanna wait until April 15th of the following year and do it retro for the prior year, you can with a Roth IRA. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

So let's go to the next slide. So what are some proactive tax planning that we should do related to the TSPs, the 401 s, the 403 s, for our working survivors?

Mark Dunlop:

Yeah, and I have a lot of parents in this boat, some spouses in this boat, it's key. Let's talk about spouses for a second. First of all, if there was a TSP and you're now getting your spouse's TSP accessible to you, you can actually just keep it there, but just put in your Social number and you can pick an investment strategy that meets what you feel is appropriate asset allocation for you. The inherited IRA is an option. Roll it over to an inherited IRA, roll it over to an inherited Roth IRA, roll it into, keep it with the beneficiary account. So that is a lot of options. Roll it over to your IRA, there is your Roth IRA.

So you have a lot of flexibility on what to do with the funds, but the bottom line is, growth in a program gives tax efficiency. If it's in Roth, you don't have to worry about taxes when you pull out the money. The Roth TSP and Roth 401 gives a powerful tax-free growth. For 2026, if you are working and you can afford it, I'd tell people try to put the max you can if you can afford it. In general, in general, $24,500, set it aside.

Now, you might say, “How am I gonna put milk on the table?” Well, if you have other cash somewhere else or you missed the deadline to put some money into the Roth IRA under the HEART Act, you wait, you're fine, you can now stuff it in. Or if you're working into a Roth program, sorry, you can now stuff it in, yes, into a Roth program at work. And if you're over 50, you even have some catch up provisions that are out there. So you have some of that flexibility. So in theory, you have a lot of opportunity.

I had one couple, a parent couple, that for some reason was missed under their radar, didn't even know that they could put the money in the Roth IRA, and they missed the one-year deadline. Just totally didn't know. So I said, you know what, are you both working? They both were, they were over 50. I said fine, hey, it's not the solution of, I mean, you didn't have the chance to put 600,000 in a Roth IRA in a lump sum, but you know what, I got something that you can do. Why don't you max out your Roths at work and your personal Roths, each of you. So between the two of them, they were able to put 82,200 in a Roth this year, they'll be able to put 82,000 plus cost of living in next year, the following year, following, you're fine.

They got the money put into the Roth. So it's not as wonderful as it is to do it in a lump sum. Turned out they were only planning to put $100,000 into the Roth anyhow because they were doing home improvements on their home. So bottom line is, we took care of the problem, we just did it a little different way. It is a Roth, so they're maxing out the Roth at work, living off of some of the money that is in their bank account, and they're maxing out their Roth as an IRA. So that's a wonderful proactive solution.

Now, there's a side note. Remember I said if you're in the young 60s to mid 60s, 60 to 63, there's a super catch up provision for 2026. It's an enhanced limit. So instead of that catch up that I mentioned, it is $11,250. So in essence, if you're 60 to 63, you can get an additional through work 3,250 in a tax-advantaged account. But when you turn 64, it goes back to the catch up normal limits. Bottom line is you can put money in Roth.

So if you miss the one-year deadline for some reason, and I don't run into that too often anymore, but if you miss that one-year deadline, you know what, just fund your Roth to the max if you're eligible for it. And for the few cases where people miss the deadline, it usually were parents that somehow it just didn't occur, a dialogue to talk about the HEART Act, fine, max out your Roth, and we can help you understand the strategy to do that. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much, Mark. Let's go to the next slide. So, Mark, can you provide us an overview of our TSP options?

Mark Dunlop:

Again, there are three that I focus on, and it's outlined in the Thrift Savings Plan death benefit guide that is available at the link below. We have the beneficiary participant account, when the surviving spouse maintains the funds with the TSP, very popular, continued investment access, they can change the investment strategy, very popular. We have the spousal rollover, when they transfer it to a spouse IRA.

But if they need the monies at certain points, there are different rules that fall into play of when they pull out the money and what is the taxable things and some forced distribution things if it is a traditional IRA, minimum distribution rules in the 70s. Bottom line, it is very viable option. We also have the inherited IRA. We have the inherited IRA, when you basically put an inherited account acknowledging the death of the loved one, there are some distribution requirements that are applicable as well.

Slight differentials on spousal IRA, inherited IRA. And again, we can go over the details on it, but there are three essential options, and it's summarized in the booklet that you see on the link.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much. That sounds like a wonderful book to read. So next slide. So the next question is, what are the employee contribution limits for 2026?

Mark Dunlop:

Yes, as I mentioned a little earlier, but I wanna crystallize and show the numbers. So 24-5 you can push into a Roth, and many people do, especially the parents saying, “Oh shoot,” and sometimes even if they maxed out their Roth IRA due to the Heroes Act of 2008, they say I can put more into Roth funds, yes, through work, 24-5. Catch up provisions, we talked about, being over 50, another 8,000, and between 60 and 63 the super catch up is available. So you have some of those things that are out there.

So you have that opportunity with those type of programs. Now, the 2026 traditional and Roth contributions, again I make the distinction. We have Roth 401 , 403 , TSP corporate, worth an employee contribution. But you also have the traditional Roth limits that you can also do, 7,500 if under 50 during the year, 50 plus, $8,600. Great opportunities to stuff. We talk about proactive tax planning, we just nailed it. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, Mark, next slide, please. So then, what are the main features of what they call SECURE 2.0 legislation?

Mark Dunlop:

I give the link, the TSP link that you see on the left side. It talks about some of the issues, especially if you wanna max out how much you can put into your programs at 60, 61, 62, 63 type of thing. You know, the catch-up provisions with it, it's well done and documented, you have that link about TSP. I encourage people to, if they are eligible for the TSP. Now, a surviving spouse not working for the military is not eligible.

You have to be working for an employer to do it. Not eligible for the TSP version. But the concept's the same no matter who you work for. So you could have a parent that's still working, you could have a spouse that's working. The concept is the same under SECURE 2.0 of how to push money into a Roth. And then some of the concepts we talked earlier, you also have the links about inherited Roth IRA and all the unique benefits that are out there.

Now, one thing on the Roth that many people are not aware of, there is a day of reckoning when the party's over in terms of tax-free growth of a Roth. If someone gets a Roth, they get tax-free growth for the rest of their life. Then when they die, it goes to the beneficiary or contingent beneficiary if there's no living beneficiary, cool. But that's not unlimited. In general, in general, it's 10 years. A few exceptions for minor children and in some other situations. But the bottom line is the tax-free growth only continues for about 10 years to the survivor. So if someone's 50, they live 40 years, they got tax-free growth for 40 years, whatever they leave in the account, then their heir, 10 years in general. Hope that helps, Lisa.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, next slide. So then what are some other proactive tax planning techniques that we should keep in mind?

Mark Dunlop:

This is a very interesting concept, and here you would really meet with your financial planner to discuss concepts, or your tax planner to discuss concepts. Like, I'll use myself as an example. When I was young, there was no Roth. So I maxed out as I could my 401 plans or my traditional IRAs. I maxed them out. It made sense. There was no Roth.

As that grows, someday there's a day of reckoning that I'm gonna pay taxes on that growth. That's an issue. Oh, and I'd rather kind of pay taxes now while I know my marginal tax bracket than later on when it could be higher, not because I'm earning more, just because tax brackets might go up. Also, I don't wanna have too much income, especially because my Medicare B premium is based on my income. So I don't wanna have too much of taxable income in the later years to trigger surcharges on my Medicare B premium.

When money is pushed out either by my choice or by forced distributions due to my age in the 70s. So strategy, this is an advanced strategy that your financial planner can guide you with, is perhaps converting some of your qualified funds to Roth. It's taxable. You'll pay taxes April 15 of the following year, but then all the growth for the Roth for the rest of your life will be tax-free. So it's, do you wanna bite the bullet now or later? But if you have some money that's in a 401 , this applies to all Americans. If you have money in a 401 or an IRA that is non-Roth. You can, under most circumstances, convert some of it. It is taxable.

Now, let's say you have some special accounts, there's other proactive strategies. For example, if you have a health savings account, or in some cases, you have a college savings account set up, there's some ways to get that into a Roth as well. That could be a strategy, I did not make a slide for that. But there's some strategies of, in essence, bringing funds into the Roth platform even beyond the limits that we discussed for the last five minutes.

So we have the health flexible savings account. You can put money in the health flexible savings account if you end up not wanting it for healthcare purposes in the later years, if you're eligible for a health savings account, there are ways of converting that. I encourage people to max out if they can in a health flexible savings account. I'm a government employee, I'll tell you, I maximize it every year.

So my out-of-pocket medical bills come from my health flexible savings account. And so that's kind of neat. If you had an HSA, which is a little different, a health savings account, there's the rollover. So there's a lot of rules that are out there. If it's a flexible spending account or an HSA, maximizing that with meeting your needs, we can look at that on an individual basis. If it's a pure HSA, which a lot of parents have, not necessarily spouses, but a lot of parents have, something to look at, are you maxing out for your health spending account, and in some cases, taking advantage of the fact that you don't need everything in the account, of the conversion opportunity potentials?

Dependent care flexible spending account, I'm really big on that. This year that limit went up from $5,000, which it was for countless years, to 7,500. I know I have grandchildren, I mean as they may go to daycare, if we're not sure of the situation, it's a moot point. The bottom line is if they do, we know that we can put money in a flexible spending account, dependent care flexible spending account. Have 'em use some of that money to pay the daycare costs, and it saves 'em some tax situations. I tell individuals, when you're looking at proactive strategies, talk to your tax planner, discuss the options.

Do you have an FSA at work? Do you have an HSA at work? Do you have a dependent care at work, if it's applicable? Are you taking advantage of the programs? How can you take advantage of it? And most employers, including federal government, host open enrollment meetings usually in November for the following year. Additionally, a qualifying life event, such as changing marital status or the birth of a child, provides special enrollment periods. Oh, another special enrollment period could be the casualty.

So a limited window to take advantage. But I tell people, these are proactive tax planning strategies. Take advantage of it. Bring up the topic with your financial planner and see if equitable in your situation. I find this very popular. I had a sibling that was getting some of the life insurance benefits.

Yes, did maximize the Roth in many aspects, where had a job and had children of her own, and said, are you maximizing dependent care plan and what do you have for your savings account for your healthcare costs potential? And we maximized those plans too. That's part of financial planning, thank you.

Brian Behlke:

And hey, Lisa and Mark, we did have a question, it probably was from the slide before this. But the question is: How does the higher Roth limit compare to around the $8,000 limit? How can we put more than that 24,000 limit? Is this special? What do I need to tell my financial planner, CPA?

Mark Dunlop:

Thank you, it's all based on the age. The rule of thumb, if you're under 50, does not apply. If you're over 50, it does apply. So then you can open a larger Roth. And then if you're in the young 60s, you get the bonus bonus. So it all depends on your age. So a very proactive thing is, “Hey, I can afford putting in the money that I'm putting in now.”

If I wanna put more in, you tell your planner and say how much you can do. And if you have that income and the ability to do it, more tax-free growth, hats off to you. So yes, a simple phone call. Often they're not gonna bring up the topic 'cause they didn't look at, oh, how old is this person? Say, hey, I'm over 50. Do I have any special things that I can do?

And it's interesting, when people do automatic deductions at their workplace, they don't change it on the year they become 50. And notice, I was careful on the word, almost to the point of almost getting tongue tied. It's under 50 is the lower limits, is if you turn 50 plus in a year, for the whole year, you have the higher limit. Excellent question, thank the person who asked it.

Brian Behlke:

All right, thank you, Mark. And yeah, that's all we have now. So, back to you.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much, so let's go to our next slide. And, Mark, you had mentioned this HEART Act. Can you provide us an overview?

Mark Dunlop:

Thank you. The HEART Act, the Heroes Act of 2008, allows recipients of the death gratuity and/or the SGLI ... I did not say TSGLI, did not say family life insurance, I said SGLI, to contribute all or part of the payments to a Roth IRA or a Coverdell, without the usual restrictions. In essence, it's in addition to what they're allowed to put into a Roth IRA, it's in addition to it.

There's no special form, there's no special thing, other than it would be nice just in case you're audited, to know the day you receive the death gratuity and the day you receive the SGLI. Bottom line, you can put it in. The tax forms are only when you pull it out. So that's the Heroes Act. Most people work out, when we say there's no rush to do it, but the more you wait, the more tax-free growth you're forfeiting. So people usually do it early on, and appreciate it knowing that it is liquid if they need the money. Now, there's an alternative. You can put it in a Coverdell Educational Account, CESA.

And since Roth came out in 2008, I've not worked with a single family that did the CESA. It's all going into a Roth IRA, you know, but they have a full year to put it in. Again, the earlier the benefit tax-free growth. It's not the day of death, it's the date the money was received. So if you receive the money on March 15, you have until March 14 of the next year to put it in on the death gratuity. If you received it on April 30 on the SGLI, you have until April 29 of the following year to put the money in and classify it as Roth IRA.

And in many cases, it's not putting it anywhere. Some people will use the exact same place where they have the money now and just make it Roth. So they're not changing saving strategy. Remember I'm not rushing an investment strategy. They're not changing anything. They're just classifying as, “I don't wanna pay taxes on the growth of money going forward.” It's that simple. So you have that out there, and it works very nicely. Now, if you're getting the SGLI in 36 months, which I don't see too often, but sometimes soldiers, service members, you know, people in all the branches, they might pick, I want the payments to be in 36 months to the recipient of the money, fine.

Then you in essence get 36 windows for that one-year period to put the money in a Roth IRA. In addition, if they got the death gratuity, I guess they got a 37th window for a one-year deadline. Just know when you got the money, you have one year to put it in. Most people I work with do it right away because they don't wanna pay taxes on the growth. Excellent! Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

So, next slide. So, Mark, you talked a little bit about the HEART Act, and you also talked about the Roth IRA contributions. So why are they both so popular?

Mark Dunlop:

Tax-free growth. Not long ago, we helped set up a conservatorship working with the appropriate attorneys, and I had a zero-year-old child who got a quarter million dollars. And it's been a while, and it's just growing and growing. And assuming 6% growth, it's in low-risk funds.

So let's say with 6% growth, you know, let's say they continue this growth, 'cause you're not gonna need the money when you turn 18, the child's not gonna need the money. They got all the VA educational benefits and all the nonprofit groups. But don't forget, we're gonna talk about that in today's call. But the good thing is it just grows. So that quarter million for the child, you know, half went to another person, half went to the child, conservatorship was set up, the judge is supervising it, and it's just growing and growing and growing.

So let's say now the child has, it grows for 30 years. The anticipated value of that account that can be withdrawn at any time tax-free is $1.4 million for that child. And if the child doesn't need it, and why would they, they got so many benefits still going for them, you know, grad school, BAH, ah, they can just keep it growing tax-free. Actually, they can keep it growing tax-free the rest of their life, plus 10 years after they die.

So it's powerful. When you look at this graphic, it gives you the perspective of the beauty of the tax-free growth of the Roth IRA. Even if you're not a recipient of the SGLI or death gratuity, consider maxing your Roth at work if you can, your spouse, if you have a spouse, Roth at work if you can, and maximizing your personal Roth IRA if you can.

That's my humble suggestion to you. And if you are getting any of the, or did get any of the SGLI or death gratuity, if you're within one year, push it in, and if not, live off of some of that money and stuff in as much Roth as you can going forward. I didn't talk about an investment strategy, I just said a saving strategy. If you wanna talk investments, there's no rush to make that decision. Just save it for tax-free growth. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

Wow, so that really takes a lot of pressure, when you don't have to worry so much about investment, but you're worried about doing the savings. So thank you for sharing that with our audience. I think that is key. And I sure wish I was younger and would've made some different choices within my own life. So I've learned from this. So next slide, please. So HEART Act, how does one set up an account and the eligibility?

Mark Dunlop:

I get that question every day. I tell the survivor, “I'm not gonna tell you where to go. Choose a financial institution.” You can have the institution call me if they think you're from Mars when you say “I wanna put 500,000 in a Roth IRA or 600,000 Roth IRA on top of my regular Roth contribution.” 'Cause if they don't understand the Heroes Act of 2008, you know, my role is to educate the financial institution and supply 'em with a code that says it's allowed.

If they've not done this before, they might say, “Huh, ask a question.” We wanna minimize that. So I will guide whoever you ask me to. I tell the survivor and educate them, whoever you decide to use. You gotta open a Roth IRA account. Minimum to open a Roth IRA account? It depends on the financial institution. The one that I worked with this yesterday afternoon said put in $10 of seed money and then we'll be ready to receive other monies later on. It's up to the financial institution. So choose an institution, open a Roth at the institution.

And many people when they start a Roth, they're very conservative. They just do it at a couple of banks. Three banks have FDIC limits they're concerned with. So they do two or three banks. There's no rush, we're not making an investment decision. They open an account, they put the funds in the account, let it sit there. When they want to talk investment, there's no rush. They talk investment, might wanna get a little asset allocation diversified. But many of the survivors had enough shock when the sudden death occurred. They're not ready to make an investment decision for two or three years.

And I don't push it, it's in already in a Roth, it's just sitting there, maybe it's earning 4% growth, fine. Tax-free growth, that's worth six in my book. And when the time's right, we can talk investment strategy based on their asset allocation desire, and they have a year to put it in.

Again, I reemphasize, not the day of death, it's when you got the money. So what do you tell a financial representative? These are the FAQs that I often say, I want to put the money in a Roth. If you don't understand it, don't worry. Call your, you know, they can call a financial counselor who's comfortable with this. Let 'em know it's a military death benefit account. They might, for their due diligence, but I'm not seeing this too often.

Ask what day did you get the death gratuity? What day did you get the SGLI? They're not required to do that. But if they feel they need to do that for due diligence, let 'em know. If there's multiple installments, yeah, let 'em know all 36 dates that you're getting the money or plan to get the money, so they can track it and help you, when you get the money, get it in. And some people say, I don't know the rule. Brian, if you or someone can put in the chat box the Section 109 on the HEART Act, the code, this link is very valuable. Just show the bank or the financial institution you use. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

So just kind of thinking outside the box, Mark, as I was sitting here listening to your briefing, would you advise service members then to maybe consider, when they're making their selection for the SGLI, to put it in the 36-months payment so that it gives their family members more time to think about what to do?

Mark Dunlop:

I get that question constantly, and I say no. Well, first of all, the interest rate on that account's about half of 1%. So no, you know, money that's sitting there is only getting about half of 1%. So I'd rather not. Also, how much time does someone need to say, “I wanna pay taxes on the growth, yes or no?” So, you know, people ask me, “Should I voluntarily elect and do the 36th installment when you're getting low interest rate?”

But the other thing is, we're not asking you to make an investment decision, just a savings one. So lump sum makes a whole lot of sense. And I realize you're not ready for an investment, fine. Are you ready to make a tax decision so you don't have to pay taxes on the growth? Yeah, fine. Take it a lump sum, put it in a Roth, talk about investment later on. Excellent question, superb question.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much, Mark. So let's go to the next slide. So how do we report withdrawals from a Roth IRA?

Mark Dunlop:

Form 8606. Now, when you run your return on Military OneSource MilTax, it'll walk you right through this, and you simply say, “Hey, over the years I put 600,000, or maybe with additional deposits I put 650,000 in a Roth IRA,” let's say they maxed out, put 650 in a Roth IRA, or put more, if they had more earnings they put in a Roth IRA. So you put that in, and then you say how much you previously pulled out of the Roth, which could be zero. And now you say I pulled out of the Roth, let's say 200,000, buy a home.

They don't even ask what you used it for necessarily. So what you're saying is, I am pulling out less than my cost basis, so it's not a taxable event. But you gotta tell the IRS if you pull money out of a Roth IRA, 'cause when they get the 1099 from the financial institution, they don't know what it's for. But if they say that it was from a

Roth distribution, they're not gonna be taxed on it. So you are gonna get a 1099 to the address on file from the financial institution. Don't worry about it 'cause they don't know exactly what your cost basis are with all your Roths. So they'll say, “Here's the money, we don't know where it came from, we just know it was taken out.”

They send it to the IRS. IRS is waiting for your explanation of what it was. You are explaining that it was a return of the cost basis on Form 8606. So you gotta fill that out April 15, or by April 15 of the year after you made a withdrawal from the Roth IRA. I've had survivors forget to do that, then they get a tax letter from the IRS. You owe X amount of taxes 'cause you pulled money out of a pension, 'cause they didn't know it was from a Roth IRA, or you pulled it out and they don't know if it was cost basis or not cost basis. You need to have that form. So when you get that letter, if you get a letter, I hope you don't, simply we amend the return, do an 8606, and we're fine. Excellent question, thanks, Lisa.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, Mark, so next slide. So can you gift money for the purposes of funding a Roth IRA or an account without any tax reporting, provided you stay within certain annual limits?

Mark Dunlop:

Yeah, you can. So if I wanted to give a gift to my son, I could say here's $19,000, and I don't have to report it. It doesn't affect my lifetime gifting limits or my estate limits, which are super high now, but they could change. I don't have to worry about that. I can give up to 19,000 to everyone I want. Don't even have to fill out a gift tax form. So to me that's an excellent gig, 19,000.

But he can only put into his Roth IRA up to his limit that we discussed, of 7,500. But now he has play money and he can use some of that money to fund his Roth at work. So maxing, part legacy planning, helping my children max out their Roths if they're not able to do it on their own accord just yet in their career path, is a phenomenal way for legacy planning. So if I have any extra money that I can help my children out, I can do it while I'm alive and just give it to 'em and let it grow in their Roth accounts, which is a great strategy, if I maxed out my own Roth accounts, to give them up to the gifting limits.

Don't even have to report it on the gift tax return. And even if I go over and I have to report it, it's not the end of the world in many situations. I just, I'll keep it at 19 though, and let them fund their Roths, and then now they're gonna have, this is all part of legacy planning. So it's a very powerful option for those that have cash in the bank that wanna do legacy planning for their children, or anybody that they wanna do legacy planning for, a niece and nephew, whatever, or you know, someone that's very dear to them.

So you have those game plans. Now, if you go over 19,000, you fill out a gift tax form, not necessarily do you have to pay taxes on it, but you do have to do an informational form, IRS Form 709, and it can impact your lifetime limit and your estate taxes later on when you die. But with the limits being unbelievably high right now, no one's overly concerned with it. But I remember when those limits were quite low. So who knows where the future holds. I play it safe and I just cap my gifts at 19 when I can.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much, Mark. Next slide, please. And so, Mark, you told us a lot about, you talked about a lot of different things, and a lot of this applies to surviving family members, but it also can apply to surviving parents that are not necessarily receiving those benefits, and just regular old people like me and you. So what are some key takeaways that you wanna leave our audience?

Mark Dunlop:

Thanks for asking. First of all, the whole ecosystem includes immediate and ongoing benefits, track 'em. I encourage people every year to run their OSBR reports. How wonderful that Jen was able to share how easy it is with your myAuth. Everyone that is a survivor, if it is one takeaway from this dialogue, please, one, see that you have a myAuth, and two, work with the FAST team so you can run your OSBR report with what-if scenarios if you so desire, or just do the static version, and do it at least once a year.

It's a great thing that you have available to you. A great tool that has been funded for you to have a resource too. Number two, if you've not done the Roth IRA on your personal income, look at that at your work site, also on a personal account. If you are within one year of receiving the money and didn't put the money in a Roth IRA, from a tax perspective, you might want to do it. If you wanna wait till the last day that you are eligible for the tax break, fine, but until you do it, you're paying taxes on the growth. Hopefully there's growth.

And remember, if you pull money out of a Roth IRA, it's not gonna be taxable if the IRS knows that you're pulling money of your cost basis out. How do they know that? Form 8606. Those are some key takeaways. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much, Mark. So let's go to the next slide. And so what are some tax holding ... I can't even talk right now. So what are some tax withholding considerations?

Mark Dunlop:

Bottom line, if you owe taxes April 15, that probably means you're under withholding. So you might wanna increase how much taxes come out of the money you're getting, be it at work, be it with your SBP. So W-4 is from an employer, W-4P from DFAS. If it's an SBP, W-4V with social security. One, do all three, or just one of them, just increase your withholding 'cause we don't need to have to write a check on April 15. So that's an important thing.

You have the myPay resources available if you want to do it with DFAS. Those are some things that are out there. That's an important concept. So we summarized a lot of things. Now, for some people that are getting windfall, that are working outside and they get some windfall money because of some entities that they're working for, 1099 income, or they're getting some outside investment income that's non-Roth that they gotta pay taxes on, you might wanna make sure you increase your withholding.

Some survivors I work with, helping them, I encourage 'em to at least do some quarterly estimated tax payments, it's IRS Form 1040 if they're running short, 'cause on April 15, if you owe too much you actually gotta pay some penalties for owing too much.

We wanna minimize that. So if we do quarterly tax return extra money or increase the withholding from work, DFAS, or Social Security, if you're getting Social Security, we have ways that you can have adequate withholding done in the tax year. So April 15 you don't get that surprise, and a surprise possibly with a penalty. Thanks for the question, Lisa.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, and then just as a reminder to our surviving spouses and certain surviving children, that we have MilTax during tax season that's available on Military OneSource for you. So we highly encourage you to access that. If you have any difficulties in accessing the MilTax program, we have the Survivor Inquiry Form.

Please, you know, fill it out and send it, and our office will get it and we will assist to make sure that you get to those tax experts. So thank you. Next slide. So how do we import our tax information when we're doing applications such as a FAFSA? That sounds real exciting.

Mark Dunlop:

Yeah, you know, if you did your taxes for 2025, when you now do the FAFSA, which I'm told is gonna be available on or before October 1 of this year, you'll hit a button. And in theory, if all the validation for security has been done, the Future Act Direct Data Exchange, FA-DDX, will upload the tax information. It's gonna make it real easy, and I encourage people to do the new FAFSA for 2027-'28 as early as possible.

So I have juniors doing it, why? Because for the summer, not the following summer, but the following, following summer that they'd be graduating after being a senior, they graduate in May.

They take a couple summer classes in June and July. We have it on file for the Pell Grants. So juniors, October ... And I know, I know some of the families in this call, junior year's coming up, put that on your calendar, October 1, do your FAFSA, and hopefully if there's income for the young child or from the parent, tax returns were done for 2025 already. Then for the 2027-28 we can upload it. Excellent question.

Lisa Valentine:

All right, so next slide, please. That's really good information. So how do you do federal withholding for SBP and Social Security taxes?

Mark Dunlop:

I wanted to expand on one of our prior slides and really get into the minutiae details. You have this as a downloadable opportunity, but the most important thing is, we talked about it, be sure you update things with mypay.dfas.mil. That's a key link, mypay.dfas.mil. There are also, I tell people, some great budgeting tools at FINRED's website, part of the USA learning library, money budgeting for certain times.

Great resources are available to you as well. Also, just remember, if you wanna do super withholding at your wage, you don't have to do all three. If you wanna do a little of the proper withholding with all three, that's appropriate. But remember, if you're getting Social Security, that's possibly taxable. So you gotta be sure that that income, somehow the tax on that income, is being reflected.

Same thing with SBP, if you're getting SBP, and same thing that you're getting from all your wages if you're working, and from many investment opportunities that you have that are causing growth that is not in a Roth IRA. So do your tax withholding. Push comes to shove, we can do the quarterly return as an estimated tax. Excellent question.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much, Mark. So let's go to the next slide. So how does Social Security and the Survivor Benefit Plan income impact your tax planning?

Mark Dunlop:

A lot of people just know they get Social Security every month. They didn't realize that they're like the SBP, and that it's gone up. Last year it was 2.8%, before that it was 2.5. Before that, you know, there's always been increases. So sometimes people just see the money coming in, they don't realize it's growing over the years.

So I ask people, with all the growth, are you having enough tax withholding coming out?

So I gave you some key links that are out there. And still to this day, we're finding some survivors that the SBP stopped 1-1-2023, forms were missing. Now they get their forms in, we're still within the six-year window, 'cause if you missed the six-year window, the Barring Act bars some payments, and now they're getting large checks since 1-1-2023.

If you're a surviving spouse and you're not getting the Survivor Benefit Plan but you are eligible for it, and for summary, call DFAS and see what's up. And are you entitled to it? Because if a retro check has to come, great, let's address that. But remember, in some cases, if it stopped on 1-1-2023 due to changes in the law, which were great for the surviving spouses, but if for some reason you didn't apply for it, you know the clock's ticking of when you can.

So something to look at. So check if you're getting a DFAS payment, call DFAS, double check if you're entitled to it as a surviving spouse, and then we can take it from there. Good, this has just been a great thing, Lisa. For all the people that gave these questions that we prepared for, a big thank you to the audience because it's an honor to answer questions that have come literally from the field.

Lisa Valentine:

Absolutely, they're very great questions. So thank you to all of those who submitted your questions. So let's go to the next slide. So what are some Social Security survivor benefits and income impact tax planning considerations?

Mark Dunlop:

First of all, unmarried surviving spouses may qualify for Social Security survivor benefits, if they are over retirement age themselves or caring for a deceased's child under age 16, or is disabled. So we have those benefits. Now, between 16 and 60, well, that got me scared, between age 16 and 60, that's a blackout period for the spouse. I just wanna brace people for that, and they'll see that on their OSBR report.

The amount of Social Security survivor benefits, depending on the age of the surviving spouse, their earnings, their marital status. But the bottom line is, if a spouse is earning more and they're under normal retirement age, which is 67 in most cases, if they're earning over 64,480, and that's the 2026 amount, they will have the benefit reduced 50 cents to the dollar, in general.

So I caution people to be prepared for it, but if there are many other children, what they're losing usually to some degree gets shared with the other of the children. So if it's several children there, it is not the end of the world. Children, fill out your verification that you're still in school because you're entitled to Social Security until you graduate high school, even at the age of 19 and two months. And also, if you are disabled, have your guardian, conservator, parent, fill out the form so it could possibly be continued thereafter. Now, is Social Security taxable? Possibly! Generally, Social Security benefits are not taxable if the individual's total income is under 25,000. If you're single, head of household, or qualifying widower, it's a bit higher.

For most people, it's the 25,000 thing. But the bottom line is, in many people, part of that Social Security is gonna be taxable. Some people have been forgetting to put it on their return. The IRS sends 'em a friendly reminder and then they gotta write a check after the fact.

So I'd like to be proactive and bring that up. Who's taxed? It's the person who has the legal right to receive the benefits. Thus a child receiving Social Security benefits may have to pay taxes on those benefits, especially if they're also receiving Survivor Benefit Plan and other income. So we have some situations when there is no spouse, SBP and full Social Security benefits going to the child, it may be that that child has a combined income over the $25,000 threshold.

And in some cases, we have other tax situations, alternative minimum tax, child in many cases pay taxes. And it's something that a lot of four-year-olds didn't know, “Oh, did I have to pay those taxes?” Yes, so work with Military OneSource, or wherever you use MilTax, or your tax professional, to see, in your situation, especially if the child's getting an SBP and Social Security, is a tax return needed? And the answer probably is yes. Thank you, Lisa.

Lisa Valentine:

Wow, yeah, how in the world would a four-year-old know they've gotta pay taxes? Next slide. So what are some tax tips that you have in regards to the Survivor Benefit Plan income?

Mark Dunlop:

Remember, you're gonna be getting cash, taxable, if the money is going to a child and possibly if they stay in school and they're full time in school 'cause there's no eligible spouse, this is happening to age 22. I encourage the children to make sure to tell DFAS there's not a dropout, just like through age 23 if they're not using the Fry benefit or an educational benefit. Make sure the VA every year knows that you're still in school full time. Likewise, make sure DFAS knows you're in school full time to age 22 for the Survivor Benefit Plan.

Now granted on the VA, the first topic I mentioned, if you're using the Fry or any educational benefit, it boxes out the DIC, granted. But if you're using the DIC, it can actually go, if you're a full-time student and documented as such, to 23, 22, on the Survivor Benefit Plan, let 'em know. And don't forget, as mentioned earlier, on your Social Security benefit, you can still get it in your name as a child all the way to high school graduation, even 19 and two months, so those things. Now, one key thing, just be sensitive to it, especially if you get an SBP as a child and you have a parent, you know, in an income bracket, possibly it could trigger what's known as the kiddie tax bracket.

Your financial counselor can do that. But remember, because SBP is considered earned income, when it exceeds some thresholds, the child's tax rate might be determined by the parent's marginal bracket. Now, MilTax catches this, and is aware of it. So I encourage people to use that software. But children, if you're getting the SBP, if you're 4 or 21, you might be triggering maybe a kiddie tax, depending on the household situation. You know, fill in the taxes, work with a professional.

If you ignore it, IRS is gonna find that out maybe in three years when they do retro audits, and it gets awkward. Clarification is, please do taxes. I also clarify, a child's disability status is separately determined by Social Security, VA, DFAS and DEERS. I bring that up because I had someone saying, “Oh, I'm disabled for DFAS. I'm still getting the SBP. I have no spouse. I'm gonna get that forever.”

And in that same conversation, I said, “Did you mention to DEERS that you're disabled? It's separate forms.” “Oh, did I have to?” Yeah, I bet your ID card expired, so DFAS knew but not DEERS. And then I brought up the topic, “Did you tell VA?” VA did not know, did not know. And did you tell Social Security? They didn't know. So there's four separate entities to let 'em know if you are disabled as a child. And they all have different criteria for defining what is disabled. Lisa!

Lisa Valentine:

Oh wow, so Mark, so you could be disabled or considered disabled then for one of those organizations, but not for another based on their criteria, correct?

Mark Dunlop:

That is correct.

Lisa Valentine:

Oh wow. OK, well, thank you for that. So let's go onto our next slide. So how can you use the interactive online benefits report, or the OSBR, for cash flow and tax planning?

Mark Dunlop:

I am so glad that you brought up that topic, and this was one of the questions from our audience. Jen Harlow did a wonderful job earlier today to go over it from the FAST team, the Family Assistance Support Center, and if they have your DS Logon myAuth username, you can run that report. Now, if it's Army, MyArmyBenefits. Marine, they have some resources that are out there.

But, you know, sometimes the calculators, if you want to use MyArmyBenefits, you can just use that. If you wanna go to MyMarineBenefits, you can see it. Some of the calculators, they're very similar, but it's out there. Space Force benefits come through, the Air Force benefits, MyCoastGuardBenefits, and the benefit calculators. So you have some links there to do it. I encourage you to take advantage of that. Now, Jen's presentation of course will be available online at some point, today's presentation. If you wanna see a slightly older version of it, that's already loaded. I gave you the link.

It's on the Military OneSource website right now, a webinar that talks about the robustness of the interactive online benefit report. Survivors got an initial one from the casualty center right off the, pretty quickly after the casualty, probably within three months. Sorry, three weeks. So basically, the webinar talks about how to do the interactive report, the what-ifs that I'm encouraging people to run at least once a year. If you run it the same year as you got the initial report, in theory it should be the same unless you do some interactive change of what-ifs.

Starting the next year, you'll see the cost of living increases that could come. And looks like this year, at the end of the year, there's gonna be another cost of living increase. Thank you, Lisa.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, so next slide. So why does the OSBR matter?

Mark Dunlop:

Budgeting, planning, what's cash flow? When are you gonna have the blackout period for a surviving spouse when you're not gonna get that money from Social Security? So those are key things. Well, what happens at 65? What happens at other ages, 60, if you decide to take the Social Security right away? And I find it's also very useful for understanding other benefits out there. How long can a Fry benefit be there?

Remember, although you can get remarried after 55 and not have your SBP taken away if you're a spouse, same thing with the VA DIC. Gotta wait to 60 for that with Social Security, and you do lose TRICARE when you get remarried. A lot of interaction questions that you may have can be seen on the OSBR report. This is why to me it's so valuable, thank you.

Lisa Valentine:

And so I just wanna do another plug in. So for the surviving children that are on the line, when you turn 18, you know, you could do it the day of your birthday, but we really want you to start accessing your own online survivor's benefit report so that you too can see what your benefits are. So once you turn 18, your guardian or your parent, they can't see that. So that's why it's very important, and we'll help you to get access to your report.

And, you know, you can access it online. But to get that started, we need you to contact the Family Assistance Support Team at the number below, which is 877-827-2471. And then also, as I'm talking to our survivors' children, don't forget, Mark did like the flip stop that you need to make sure that you inform DFAS and the VA what your status is. So if you're going to school, you need to make sure that you let them know every year so that your benefits don't stop. So those are real key and very important matters for you. So next slide.

Mark Dunlop:

Yeah, thank you!

Panelist:

And if I could jump in real quick before, thank you Lisa, for bringing that up about the adult children, and then also one thing that we've gotten a lot of questions on while we've been in-person events for the OSBR, is for children who turn 18 during their high school year, that the benefits can continue on the high school level for DIC, Social Security, and if applicable, SBP, while the child is still in high school but over 18. So if you ever have any questions with that, we can update the report to reflect what the benefits are and tell you how to apply for those benefits. Because once you're 18, you do have to notify the government agencies that you are over 18 but still in high school.

Lisa Valentine:

And so that's the key —

Panelist:

Thank you.

Lisa Valentine:

Yeah, absolutely, and that's the key, surviving children, is to make sure, you know, that you are linked in, you keep everybody informed and we get you the right OSBR. So this way you too, I mean you'll be young but you still need to manage your money that you're entitled ... that your parent who died serving our country left for you. That's their gift or their legacy to you. So, Mark, how does the Roth and the non-Roth TSP and the 401 and the IRA impact tax planning?

Mark Dunlop:

The more you have in a Roth, the tax-free growth, and you don't have to worry about it when the money's withdrawn. Just so long you report to the IRS that you're withdrawing what you put in. It's that simple. So I put a lot of verbiage here 'cause this is gonna become a reference tool for many of our survivors. People might wanna dialogue with their financial planner, Roth conversion options as need be.

And if they are taking the TSP, think twice before cashing it out 'cause that is a taxable event, might not be the appropriate thing to do right away. You have time to make a decision what you want to do with that. And this just summarizes everything we talked about. Thank you, Lisa.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, Mark. That's a real complicated thing to really focus on, and so I appreciate all the information that you provided. And then just as a reminder to our audience, this will be available on Military OneSource. So we'll have the recording, and you'll even be able to watch it as a YouTube video. So, next slide. So what are the potential Roth opportunities going forward?

Mark Dunlop:

A simple way of summarizing our Roth presentation, no taxes on growth. One can withdraw their cost basis at any time. But any withdrawals need to be reported to the IRS when one files a tax return, otherwise the IRS will not know it's return of cost basis if that's the case. That's the bottom line.

Lisa Valentine:

All right, next slide. So where, and how, do you report Roth distributions?

Mark Dunlop:

Remember you're gonna get that 1099, I showed it to you, and then you basically look at the directions on IRS Form 8606, and you basically say I'm pulling out my cost basis. I showed you the tax forms in a prior slide, now I just wanna let you know how to do it. Thank you.

Lisa Valentine:

Next slide, please. So what are some legacy planning considerations?

Mark Dunlop:

One may be gifting to help your loved ones' children, put money into a Roth if they can, for their own tax-free growth, we talked about that. So that's a concept. Other is, when the time's right, talk about what your wishes for legacy is and maybe do some self-evaluation. What is your goal for legacy planning, especially if you receive some of the funds? And if you have minor children, is there a trust set up for them if something happens to you? I, you know, I have adult children, they know what my goals for legacy planning are for the generations, for the grandkids, and we have open dialogue.

When the time was right, we had open dialogues, and also because of that, it's gonna minimize future conflict and the future that potentially could come up. It's a sensitive subject, it requires deliberate action. And also the best thing is with a financial planner, you also can have some self-evaluation of what your goals are, because a good financial planner will ask rhetorical questions, open-ended questions to help you see what you want.

That's the purpose of working with a financial professional. And communicating the goals that you can uncover, short-term, long-term goals, as we talked in this presentation, and integrating income tax planning and estate planning, you ensure that the legacy is both protected and purposeful.

Lisa Valentine:

So, Mark, if I walked into my financial planner and I said “Hey, I wanna talk about legacy planning,” they should know exactly what that means, correct?

Mark Dunlop:

I think the following question would be, if they don't, hopefully they ask an open-ended question, “What do you mean by legacy planning?” Open-ended question dialogues with the financial planner are so important, so that's very key. So yes, that is correct.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you. Next slide, please.

Brian Behlke:

And we actually do have two questions, if I can interject. So first one, “My son received the 22-5490, he is 16. The form states, once I make the selection, he will not receive DIC when he turns 18. What if we postpone making the selection until he needs it, grad school? Would he be able to continue receiving DIC, and is this an option, or must we submit this paperwork now?”

Mark Dunlop:

Kelly and your team, I'll defer to you on that question, but the bottom line is you don't lose your DIC if you keep saying you're a full-time student, unless you're actually receiving a VA educational benefit. Help me out here.

Kelly Hruska:

I think you're right, Mark. I would need to check the specific, but if you are, you can defer. But again, I would need, you know, if they want an official reading on that, email us at officeofsurvivorsassist@va.gov, and I'll run that past Ed Services so that they can look at their specific case and reach out.

Lisa Valentine:

And we'll put that link in the chat as well so that you've got it for the email for the Office of Survivors Assistance.

Mark Dunlop:

I have many survivors that keep the DIC going to 23 and then start using the Fry, especially if there was no spouse, you know, because they're getting so many other resources and educational resources, which we'll touch on today and really wrap up a good chunk of it in October. But the bottom line is, that is a strategy, especially as you save the Fry. So I'd fill it in, but Kelly will verify for you. This is wonderful.

Brian Behlke:

And then we have a second question, "For child survivors, the way I understand the kiddie tax is that there's an exception in the bill, Gold Star Tax Family Relief Act, S. 1370, where SBP is considered earned income. Is this correct?"

Mark Dunlop:

Yes and no. There are two types of kiddie taxes. The first kiddie tax is the basic kiddie tax, and one was the surcharge kiddie tax. So we can look at the situation. In fact Military OneSource software captures it. So there was, for about two years until it was fixed, there was that surcharge kiddie tax thing, and that, I bet, is what's causing a little bit confusion there. So that's some of the issues that we have related to it.

But if you're being hit with a surcharge kiddie tax, you know, let the folks at the Survivor Symposium, they'll forward to me, and I'll look at your particular case. We'll probably work with Military OneSource together and figure out if you're getting hit with the surcharge tax.

Brian Behlke:

All right, and that's the questions we have for now. So back to you.

Lisa Valentine:

All right, so Mark, any other strategic tax saving consideration?

Mark Dunlop:

Well, real estate, brokerage accounts, you know, I give an example, when I die, I'm not planning on it. Basically, any appreciated assets that I may have will go to my heirs with a step-up in cost basis. My home, for example, it appreciated over the years, and if I die, when I die, it'll go to my wife. But basically when she dies, the appreciation, until for half of the home up to my death, and then the appreciation of her situation.

And it all depends how we title things, but bottom line is when the kids get the home, they're gonna get a step-up in basis. So when they eventually sell the home, our homestead, whatever, their taxes are only gonna be on the escalated value of the home at the time of the death and the profit going forward. So this whole step-up in cost basis on real estate, brokerage accounts, to the fair market value at the value of a member's death, is an interesting thing to consider. So sometimes, rather than give away an increased value asset to a child, now I'll say, "Wait till daddy dies, and you'll get the increased cost basis tax-free when I die."

So giving money away, even though I talked a lot about that is, be careful on appreciated assets. 'cause if you cash out an appreciated asset, it's taxable. Sometimes it might make sense on some assets to wait until death to give it to an heir because of the step-up in cost basis. So there's a lot of considerations there.

Again, your financial counsel can go to that. Some differences with community property states, and I listed the ones that are out there for you. This step-up basis is a very interesting thing. Your financial counselor can help you guide, what are the questions to ask? Are you a tax professional, you know, just to say, hey, here's some quiz questions that you might wanna ask your tax professional on to go there.

There's some unique things related to home sales. I just wanna make that as a reference slide for you, and I encourage you, if you are using a brokerage firm, do ask them to make sure that if you inherited assets from the deceased, what was the value of the asset on the date that you took over the asset? Because that is the cost basis increase that when you give away that asset or when you die, that is a consideration to be looked at on many circumstances.

So the bottom line is, if you inherited investment assets, have your broker calculate what was the value when you became the heir of that invested asset. Many people forget to do that. And then later on in life when they sell it, we don't know what the cost basis was of the asset at the time of the death of when they got the asset. That's strategic tax saving considerations.

Lisa Valentine:

Very good, so next slide, please. So then, Mark, what are what they call tax abatements and similar credits?

Mark Dunlop:

Tax abatements. If you own a home, check in your county if you can get a tax abatement on your home property. I live in Missouri, we don't have that, but in many states, Virginia, Illinois, you have significant tax abatements that are available, and that is a property tax abatement.

Check with your tax assessor as a military survivor, and often they say it's not only for service-connected line-of-duty deaths. If it's service-connected, they qualify. The survivor spouse qualifies for a tax abatement. So that's an important thing to look at. Another way the tax abatement is used, if it's a theater death, there's a tax abatement that is available.

There's a tax abatement that is available for going retro and getting back taxes that were paid in prior years if it was a second deployment. Other tax credits, we have exemptions, reductions, forgiveness, credits, and you wanna look in your state if there are different credits.

Sometimes they're age-based that are out there, first home buyer credits that are out there. So take advantage, your financial counselor can help you with that. Every county is different. I used to say every state's different, but now even within a state, the interpretation in the abatements slightly may differ. So it's something to be sensitive to.

Lisa Valentine:

Very good, thank you so much. And then, Mark, would it be helpful to even, you know how each state has their own little VA office, is not necessarily related to the Department of VA, but is that another place that a survivor could go to learn about these tax abatements in their state?

Mark Dunlop:

I heavily encourage them to do that. In fact, you know, Kelly talked about how the new book for the VA has been published online for 2026. Most of the states have now put online their booklet as well. I encourage people to go to your state website to download it.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you so much, Mark. And next slide. So what are some popular resources in tax planning?

Mark Dunlop:

Again, this will be a downloadable slide that you can click, click, click, click at some point. When you get the downloadable slides, and you cut and paste and put it in, everything I talked about here, I want you to have the secret sauce: Where did I get the information for writing this presentation in conjunction with consulting with my good friend Christine Murphy?

Those are those resources that are out there. They're your tools as well. All my secrets are now shared, so they're out there. But I'm gonna give you a caution. Resources like .gov, .mil, they're tools that are vetted to use. If you use anything other than .gov, .mil, just be careful and cautious.

If you're looking for spending plan worksheets, I like some things, where on USAlearning.gov, that's what I personally use when I meet with people. And I also love the Thrift Savings Plan resources that we mentioned earlier. And some of these that are out there. They just make some sense, that are tools for you to use. So you've got the secrets.

Lisa Valentine:

And then to our survivor population, you know, when you look at Military OneSource, a lot of these guides, a lot of these resources that we have on Military OneSource, it's based on feedback that we received. And so we wanna make sure that we have the information out there that you need. If there's information that you see as you're reading this and you're going, “You know what, I really wish that Military OneSource would also have this, and I remember Mark talking about this, or I remember hearing this on the peripheral, but I want more information,” please submit your input through the Survivor Inquiry Form.

We're very interested. We wanna make sure that we have resources and tools that are available for you to make your grief journey go a lot easier. So we really want your feedback. So next slide. So what are some resources available from Military OneSource? Well, there you go. And, you know, we have a podcast series, so you can listen to some of the interviews that may be of interest to you.

We also have that “Financial Management for Surviving Spouses and Surviving Children.” And I'm so sorry, Mark, I just couldn't help myself, because as the program manager for Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors, my team and our contractor, Moody's team, we're the ones that make sure that information is out there. And then of course we wanna link to all of our many colleagues within the Military Community and Family Policy deputy. And so I'll give it back to you, Mark.

Mark Dunlop:

I appreciate that. And Bruce Moody's on this phone call. So I'm getting you a personal shout out because I get a lot of positive feedback of what you did with Christine and I on, I remember the day, it's posted December 2, 2024. We did a 38-minute presentation on the Heroes Act of 2008 and savings. So had to give you a shout out there? Appreciate doing that. Military —

Bruce Moody:

My pleasure, and it's still on the website, and it will remain.

Mark Dunlop:

Good, that's great, that's great to know.

Bruce Moody:

It's also, I'm not gonna take any more time -

Mark Dunlop:

No, no.

Bruce Moody:

But it's also on our YouTube page.

Mark Dunlop:

That's great, Bruce, thanks for sharing that. Again, the date of that was December 2, 2024. And I look at your podcast of many other topics, they're useful for so many people, on the Military OneSource. So thank you for moderating that and encouraging us to do that program with you. So that's a simple way to connect. I encourage people to take advantage of it, and to have Bruce on this phone call or this call as a ... Thank you, it's great, next.

Lisa Valentine:

And also, too, so I wanna do some other plugs for my other colleagues from the other directorates within the MC&FP, or Military Community Family Policy. I mean, there's MWR, there is, we talked about the tax, there's the electronic libraries, there's things that have to do, not just ... It's just like living life, regular life. You know, everything about our grief journeys, it's not just grief and bereavement, but it's also, you know, living life and raising children if you have children, and so forth.

And so also, too, we're including in the chat, our link to our MilLife Learning courses. So there's a variety of courses on there. You can click one for the survivor. You can also click the one that I was telling you about. It's called “Making Your Last Wishes Known.” And so that will tie into what we've been presenting here today. So we are about 2:48. We wanna make sure that we close, we don't leave you hanging, we wanna make sure that we answer any questions that you may have out there.

Brian Behlke:

And I'd say just go to the next slide, and the one after that is questions. And that'll be perfect. So the next slide is just references.

Lisa Valentine:

Yep.

Brian Behlke:

So did you have anything to add on that one, Mark?

Mark Dunlop:

No, a lot of references that are out there, and I'm gonna just do a quick update on scholarships. We don't even need to see slides for it. My presentation for the scholarship thing is a short three-minute one, but I wanted to make sure it was on the agenda 'cause we have important news. These are key references. We have questions. Let's first take those and then I'm gonna give you a quick overview of important things on the FAFSA.

Brian Behlke:

And I don't think we had any new questions. We had one from earlier, and I'll sort of let you answer it more, Mark, but somebody asked, “Do you charge a fee for your planning services?” And that's where I said, “Hey, you are an Army SOS employee, correct?” So I'll let you speak to it better.

Mark Dunlop:

Anyone who calls any of the SOS financial counselors or the financial readiness counselors in the system, military family counselors, using Military OneSource, it's a resource for the survivors. I'm simply a humble resource, and I'm glad to be that. But thank you for the question.

So let me give an overview of financial questions for survivors. The roadmap, it's simple, let's just stick with that one slide and then we can do all our regular wrap up. I just wanted to spend time because there was an urgent reason that I brought this up for 2026-'27. Children, please, spouses, please, do your FAFSA. Now, I'll let you in on another secret on the FAFSA. If you didn't do a FAFSA for 2025-'26, and this is an important thing, very simple presentation here, if you did not do a FAFSA for '25-'26 and you are a child, please do it now, retro to last August, I'll tell you why. Recent law, about two years ago, two, three years ago, was that if you are a child of an active-duty service member, first responder as well, you get the Max Pell Grant, $7,395.

I'm running into many families that did not file a FAFSA for 2025-'26. The deadline is the 30th of June. This is so important. Do your FAFSA. There's a question on it: Did you lose your loved one active duty, yes or no? Newsflash, for most situations on this call, the survivor child can answer yes, you get the Max Pell Grant. Now, the school will get a flag. They will wanna verify. So bring a copy of the DD 1300 to the school financial aid office. I didn't say VA office, to the financial aid office, and say, “You know what, I didn't do my FAFSA or my FAFSA was not the $7,395, it should have been, something's amuck here,” and give them that 1300 before the end of the year.

Make sure you do the FAFSA for '25-'26 before the end of the year. We wanted on this phone call to bring that up because I'm looking at the calendar, we don't have a lot of time to do, you know, 20 days are left. So I encourage you, not even to, if you were in school since 2025 August, anything through now through the summer term inclusive, make sure the FAFSA's on time and you're collecting it. And then there's a humble reminder for 2026-'27, you can do the FAFSA, you're saying, “I'm not gonna get benefits because my mom's income or my dad's income or my stepdad's income,”

I mean beyond it. Guess what? Because of that new question, you will get the Max Pell Grant. And if not, it could be that they don't have a copy of the 1300 on file at the school financial aid office. I wanted to take a moment to do that. We're gonna expand on scholarships for the '26-'27 school year in the next call, but I wanna bring those two concepts up, very important concepts.

Gosh, first part of the presentation, you know, we spent good time on in the detail. This one's short and simple but super important. Thank you for that opportunity.

Lisa Valentine:

And also, too, surviving family members, if you are not sure, you've misplaced that DD Form 1300, you're not sure even what that is. It's the report of casualty. Contact your long-term case manager. So we have all that information listed on our website as well. So please, reach out, we are here to help. If you're not sure, Survivor Inquiry

Form. We wanna make sure that you have the information that you need so that you can be successful.

Brian Behlke:

All right, thank you, Mark and Lisa, and I said that we've got about seven minutes left. I don't see any questions in the Q&A, so we'll give it a little time. But I will say again, once this is completed, and we've gotta review the recording, it will be posted to the Survivor Symposium page on Military OneSource, the full recording and transcript.

And you can go back and look at the last ones. As Mark mentioned earlier, you can see his earlier discussions, and you will be receiving a feedback email that we appreciate any of the feedback on what we could do better, or the big thing. What topics are you interested in? What could we add to this or address? And —

Lisa Valentine:

Oh, and one shout out to Brian, that I wanna tell our audience that they may not be aware that we have some of our e-learning courses. You know, you can go to the e-learning website, and you have to create account and do all that. But we have some of our e-learning courses that are on YouTube, so you don't have to go through all of that. So I encourage you, check it out.

If you're, you know, we've got Military OneSource is on Facebook, they also Twitter, it's everywhere, but there's lots of information out there, and so we encourage you.

Mark Dunlop:

And, Brian, one interesting thing, I'm looking at the people on this phone call, and boy, most everyone stayed on for the whole time. Thank you. We have someone on the call from Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation, which just merged with Tunnel to Towers.

One interesting thing for our survivors that I think would be very useful to know is that they are still taking applications for undergraduate school, and in fact, they're giving out grants for people that are 16 years old, that they can start funding some of the resources for them. They're still open for applications. Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation merged with Tunnel to Towers. You can see their link on their website, but they're helping with some unmet living expenses at schools, sometimes the tuition at schools, and for people saving the Fry, they kind of make up some of the money there.

So that's a very nice resource. I'm very grateful that a gold star themselves who happens to work for the organization, I just noticed was on the call, Children of Fallen Patriots still taking applications. So I appreciate.

Brian Behlke:

Thank you so much, Mark. And I don't see any other questions. Again, you think of something later, we always have the Survivor Inquiry Form, Military OneSource. If you put in Survivor Inquiry Form or you search for the Survivor Symposium, the link is on the page.

Lisa and I are the ones that get those questions. So you can reach out to us, and if there's something you want from Mark, we'll pass it on to him. And here, somebody, Erica posted the link for, yeah, Tunnel to Towers Scholarship, thank you. And yeah, last call for any questions. Otherwise, yeah, thank you for your attendance. Our next symposium will be on October 30, will be the same format. You'll get the information on Military OneSource, or if you've signed up for the newsletter, you'll get it in our newsletters.

There will be a survey coming out after this. It will be emailed to you. And again, we appreciate any feedback. That's how we build these. And let's see, something just popped into Q&A, let's look quick. Oh, it's the link for Tunnel to Towers. So with that, I guess, Lisa, you got anything last, or that will conclude the symposium?

Lisa Valentine:

Nope, and just have a very safe and lovely weekend.

Brian Behlke:

And thank you all. So that does conclude the symposium. You may exit the meeting now. And thank you for attending.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you!