

# AOC 2025 Focuses on Leadership, Future Challenges in EMSO

The [2025 AOC International Symposium & Convention](#) brought together electromagnetic warfare and spectrum operations professionals December 9-11 at the Gaylord National Harbor, with a clear message emerging from three days of keynotes and presentations: The EW community needs better-informed leadership and stronger budget commitments to achieve spectrum dominance in the years to come.

This year's theme, Charting a Path to 2035: Navigating the Future of Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations, addressed how geopolitical shifts and technological advances are reshaping the strategic roadmap for achieving electromagnetic spectrum superiority. Attendees representing industry, academia, military, and government gathered to explore international investments, evolving focus areas, and the latest advancements needed to realize the 2035 vision.

## Keynotes Stress Leadership and Resources

The symposium's three keynote speakers, representing perspectives from government and military command, converged on common themes despite their different vantage points.

Laurie Moe Buckhout, former Assistant National Cyber Director for Policy at the White House, opened the symposium by identifying leadership education as the most persistent gap in her 40-plus years in EMSO. "If your leaders don't get it, nobody gets it," she told the audience. When leaders understand EMSO, she explained, they integrate EW into doctrine and national security strategy, turning it "from a set of point solutions into a strategic advantage."

The Honorable Don Bacon, the US Representative from Nebraska's 2nd District and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Cyber, IT, and Innovation on the House Armed Services Committee, delivered a blunt budget reality check. Despite organizational progress and new doctrine, EW budgets remain inadequate. "I hear a lot of talk, I see a lot of papers, but if you actually look at the budget, we're not that healthy in the EMSO space," said the former EW officer. He cited the EA-37B Compass Call program, where USINDOPACOM needs 21 aircraft, but the fleet stands at just 10 after funding was repurposed.

Lieutenant General Paul T. Stanton, Department of War Cyber Defense Command Commander and Director of DISA, reinforced the education theme on the event's final day by emphasizing that EW experts must translate technical knowledge into language warfighters understand. He also stressed the need for joint solutions, highlighting the Joint Electromagnetic Battle Management System being developed to accommodate sensor data across all military services.

## **Technology, Training, and Live Conversations**

The convention offered diverse educational programming throughout the three-day event. Spotlight Sessions provided deep dives into emerging technologies and operational challenges, while breakout sessions allowed for in-depth discussions among experts. Technical Briefings shared the latest research and development findings, and dedicated Program Manager Briefings from Army, Navy, and Air Force leaders gave attendees insight into service-specific acquisition priorities and timelines.

Many sessions examined the future of electromagnetic spectrum operations through the DOTMLPF-P framework – Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, Facilities and Policy – ensuring comprehensive coverage of the challenges and opportunities facing the EW community.

More than 160 exhibitors filled the Expo Hall, showcasing cutting-edge technology, products, and services. The show floor provided attendees with hands-on demonstrations and face-to-face discussions with vendors developing the next generation of EW capabilities.

AOC's [From the Crows' Nest](#) podcast recorded live throughout the convention, with host Ken Miller interviewing EMSO experts, military insiders, and industry leaders. One notable Main Stage discussion featured Eric Bamford, Col. Jeffery Fischer, USAF (Ret), and Lt. Gen. Kevin Kennedy, USAF (Ret.), debating whether the time is right to establish a dedicated EMSO Force to address cross-service challenges and needs.

## **Recognition and Reflection**

Throughout the three days of AOC 2025, award recipients were recognized on the Main Stage, honoring achievements across Prestige Awards, Community Awards, and Military Awards. The AOC Foundation also celebrated its STEM Student of the Year and From Service to Scholar scholarship winners and Future 5 recipients.

The awards presentations reflected on those who have made lasting impacts throughout their careers in electromagnetic warfare and spectrum operations. Prestige Awards, including the Gold Medal and Silver Medal honors, recognized senior leaders who have demonstrated outstanding contributions to the EW community over decades of service. The Technology Hall of Fame and Pioneer Award celebrated innovators whose technical achievements have enhanced force survivability and advanced the discipline.

Community Awards showcased current leaders making significant advances in EW technology, systems, and capabilities. These honors recognized individuals and project teams across industry, government, and academia who are driving innovation in the field today.

Military Service Awards and Unit Excellence Awards highlighted the tactical expertise and operational achievements of Air Force, Army, Navy, Space Force, and international military members and units. These awards demonstrated the real-world application of electromagnetic warfare capabilities in deployed environments and joint operations.

The recognition throughout the convention served as a reminder of the depth of talent across generations within the EW community, from pioneering veterans to emerging young professionals shaping the future of spectrum operations.

## **Building Community and Giving Back**

AOC 2025 introduced several initiatives focused on strengthening the EW community and supporting warfighters. The NextGen Crows event on Monday brought together early-career professionals for an afternoon of networking and mentorship. Young professionals connected with peers, explored AOC resources, and built relationships with experienced industry veterans in a relaxed setting before the convention officially kicked off.

Wednesday morning's inaugural Empowering Women in Electromagnetic Warfare breakfast sold out, bringing together female leaders from across the EW community for candid conversations about careers, challenges, and opportunities. The EW in EW initiative aims to promote excellence, collaboration, and professional growth through generational networking, support, and mentorship.

In a first-time partnership with [HeroBox](#), the AOC and AOC Foundation gave attendees an opportunity to directly support deployed military personnel. Over two days, conference participants assembled more than 400 care packages destined for actively deployed warfighters from the US Army, Navy, and National Guard stationed around the world. The packages included essential items and handwritten words of

encouragement from AOC members and supporters – meaningful gestures as the holiday season approaches.

The initiative connected the work discussed at the convention with the men and women who implement electromagnetic warfare and spectrum operations technologies in operational environments.

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## **SAVE THE DATE**

**What:** AOC 2026

**When:** December 8-10, 2026

**Where:** Gaylord Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD

**Learn More:** [aoc2026.org](http://aoc2026.org)