

**A Conversation With An
American Hero**

**The Honorable Sam Johnson
Congressman, 3rd District of Texas**

25 September 2007

Moderator: This workshop is a conversation with an American hero. It is my distinct privilege to introduce our next speaker, an Air Force legend. He flew 62 combat missions in Korea. Then flying his 25th combat mission over Vietnam was shot down and spent the next seven years as a POW. He retired a colonel, and now represents the 3rd District of Texas.

Following his presentation, time allowing, he will open up the session for questions. I will now turn the podium over to AFA's Doug Birkey from Government Relations who will moderate this event.

Mr. Birkey: Thanks. I want to thank all of you for coming. As the 60th Anniversary we were thinking about an historical feature and the array of speakers. One name really stood at the top of the list and that was Congressman Sam Johnson. His career, as we're going to hear about it, is truly phenomenal. Just to kind of kick it off, one of the things that surprised me the most when I was thinking about you is that you really didn't think about a career in the military when you were a younger individual.

Congressman Johnson: Well, I was in Air Force ROTC at SMU and the Korean War started while we were at summer camp, actually. We went back home because they canceled the camp, and they ended up calling the whole class up for active duty. I wasn't about to be a supply officer so I applied for flying school and got it. We graduated on May the 30th and I was in flying school by July the 7th, I think at Bartow Air Base in Florida. Later Brian and then Nellis. That was the beginning of what I consider a great Air Force run.

I was in school with a bunch of guys from West Point because at that time they put them in the Air Force, some of them. And Buzz Aldrin was one of them. He and I went through flying school together and became great friends and went to Korea together. Even today he comes in the office every now and then. The little girls are all atwitter.

But I think that, in fact Buzz and I were at the top of our class and had a choice of schools and I chose P-51s. They had one in and I flew it twice. But they closed the program down and I went to jets, which was really a plus for me. That's the place to be.

Mr. Birkey: As you indicated, Korea was going on when you were going through flight training and you immediately went over in theater. What was it like to adjust as a pretty new aviator, and flying with a number of World War II combat veterans, I take it?

Congressman Johnson: In those days, and you all are probably well aware of it. When the Russians got into the Korean War they brought 965 airplanes into the theater, MIGs, and brought their best pilots in there from World War II. They'd flown a lot of combat and they were really good.

The reason I know some of this is I'm on the U.S.-Russia Commission on POWs and MIAs and I've been to Russia about eight times and talked directly with the KGB guy that ran the Korean War. He told me a lot of stuff that we didn't even know in our own intelligence. Part of it was how many pilots they had and who it was flying the airplanes.

When we got there we were brand new. There were 20 of us that went to Suweon, K13, and we were the first replacements that they'd seen. These guys had been called up from Rochester, New York, I believe, flying P-47s and transitioned into F-86s. That's what they were flying there.

We had the benefit of our guys who had been good pilots in World War II and flown a lot of combat. They trained us to the point that when we came back from combat missions in F-86s, we'd hassle over the field until we got down to about 200 pounds, and then land. You wouldn't think of doing that today. I mean even if there was weather down there, because you could pop into GCA and land. But sometimes with four.

But that's how we got trained. I'm just thankful we had our guys that knew what the heck they were doing training us, because the Russians already knew what they were doing.

I remember this KGB guy asked me, how do you know who you're flying against? I said oh, that's easy. The Russian airplanes are silver, the Chinese are baby blue, and the North Koreans are olive drab. He said yeah, but what you didn't know was they didn't have enough pilots to fly and we put Russians in those airplanes.

You'd see an olive drab airplane and man, you'd lock right on it because you thought you had you an instant kill. No way. Sometimes you were very which way with up and you were lucky to get away with your life. That was Korea. It was interesting.

Mr. Birkey: Out of your 62 missions you got one kill, one probable, one damaged. Can you tell us about the kill?

Congressman Johnson: Well, yeah. We were upon the Yalu patrolling and getting ready to come home. I just saw this MIG down there and dove in on him. We were just south of Antung [ph] maybe 20 miles and got right up on him and hit him good and he ejected. As I turned away, the flack opened up heavier than I've ever seen it. So I S'd around, stayed down, and then climbed out, and the next thing I know I'm down on gas so I climbed to about 40,000 and shut it down with 50 pounds remaining and glided 100 miles back to K14 which was Suweon, I mean Seoul because I couldn't make it to Suweon. Got over the field, cranked it up, started it up, and landed and flamed out taxiing in.

The squadron commander chewed me out, but he said it was okay because I got a MIG. [Laughter].

Mr. Birkey: I don't think we want to use that today for our fuel efficiency standards or anything like that, alternative energy.

When you got back from Korea you were involved with writing the first tactical fighter pilot manual?

Congressman Johnson: Energy maneuverability. Y'all know what that is. John Boyd and I got together. We were both flying F-100s at the time. I was in tactical analysis and development and he was in the Fighter Weapons School in analysis and development - research, analysis and development they called it at the time. So we'd go up and hassle and practice some of the stuff we talked about and John actually came over to our house and built a dynamic display with wires and little airplanes. We took pictures of it and ended up with the first energy maneuverability manual, which some of that stuff you're still using I think.

You trade it for altitude. Don't turn like an Oldsmobile at 30,000 feet. It works.

Mr. Birkey: What were some of the lessons learned from Korea that helped you with that sort of work?

Congressman Johnson: I think that was one of them. I remember the guys used to push you to the hilt. I think that was. I remember I was in Lessay's squadron when I first got back. The first mission out of the blue we took out at Nellis and at about 1,000 feet he started hassling. Again, you don't do that stuff now, but that's how you learn how to fly an airplane.

Mr. Birkey: In '57 things changed up a little bit. You joined the Thunderbirds. You were flying solo?

Congressman Johnson: Yes. Robby Robinson, you all may remember him. He was selected as the new team leader over Jack

Broton. Broton was still flying when I was with them. So because of Robby I got on the team, I think. But Broton flew with both of us, MacIntosh and I, and told me I was going to be the solo and MacIntosh was going to be maintenance officer, which was great. But I learned a lot flying that solo. Y'all probably remember in those days that was the first supersonic team. We used to open the show with a sonic boom. In fact Don Rumsfeld has a place out in New Mexico, Taos, and we've got one up in Angel Fire, and one night the phone rings. My wife answers. He said is Sam there? Shirley said, "Who's calling, please?" He said oh, it's Don Rumsfeld. Oh, she says.

We went down to his house and we were talking. He said you know, the Thunderbirds used to open the show with a sonic boom all the time. Why did that stop?

I said well, because of me. We did open it with a sonic boom and in several cases had some problems with it. At one of the SAC bases, and I can't really remember where it was. Olathe, I think, but I'm not sure. The general running the base there said I've never seen an airplane fly supersonic. I want you to come by the field supersonic. Robby and I tried to keep him from really wanting that but he said I'm ordering you to come down here supersonic. So Robby said okay.

That old F-100 wasn't really that fast, but I had it at 1.08 or so at about six feet off the ground going by the -- [Laughter]. Bill Scott who was our narrator was sitting there, said he could hear the tinkling of glass along the flight line as it was coming down. [Laughter].

Well, it got to town, too. The next thing I know the General's saying he's getting all sorts of calls from downtown. Windows broken and stuff. He said, tell them not to worry about it, that's just the sound of freedom. [Laughter]. You know, they bought it.

We went downtown to a banquet that night, and so help me the people were, let's go. Unbelievable. That's what the Air Force needs to talk about. That's the sound of freedom, airplanes flying.

Anyway, that was an interesting thing, but I got off subject. I digressed, I'm sorry. The reason we stopped doing it, and Bob Hoover taught me how to do that sonic boom and how to fly solo, actually. We checked the weather for inversions, for wind, all that, and you'd try to throw the thing out - you can actually aim it out and then dive under it, come subsonic, and you come by the crowd and they just see an airplane without hearing any sonic boom, and then it boom. So you're dragging the side of the sonic wave over them.

I did all that at Charleston, South Carolina, and 15 minutes was all it was from takeoff to air show. And so help me, the weather changed, and I broke every window in the Charleston waterfront, and the Air Force, it cost the Air Force \$100,000 or so, and they said no more sonic booms, and that was the end of it.

Maybe you guys can change it back.

Mr. Birkey: So after a few broken windows you took over at Fighter Weapons School in '61. That's kind of a dynamic time in the Air Force. You had the Century Series fighters as kind of the top dogs, and then you were transitioning into things like the F-4 and all that. Can you talk about that time a little bit?

Congressman Johnson: I took over from Bill Creech, believe it or not. Creech and I were good friends.

The F-100 was phasing out and we were trying to get a new airplane and we got six F-4s from Luke, I guess. With four of their pilots who came up, and we transitioned them into the Fighter Weapons School and developed the curriculum.

The beauty of that was the whole syllabus was developed by us. Dropping bombs and firing missiles and all that, and the whole problem with the F-4, and you all know it, it didn't have a gun on it. McNamara messed that up pretty bad. It wasn't until I think the E that had a gun. I flew that back at Seymour when I got back here.

That was a good airplane, but not an Air Force airplane and we had to make it an Air Force airplane. The later models, the E with the gun and Tizzio and all that stuff was a good airplane.

You remember that airplane that was called the F-110, and they brought that into Nellis and I got to fly that when it was the F-110, with no stick in the back.

We've come a long way in this Air Force, and I think a lot of it has to do with the R&D from Nellis and other places, and innovative pilots that just make the airframe work in whatever situation we need it to work in.

Mr. Birkey: Fast forward a little bit. The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred and you were quite involved in that in a number of different facets.

Congressman Johnson: When that thing happened I was at Nellis, still in the Weapons School. We were ferrying F-100s down to Homestead. We'd take eight down there and bring four back so the Cubans never knew we were building up the resources down there. We ended up with 195 airplanes, I guess, fully

loaded. We had that many at three bases - Orlando, MacDill and Homestead - all on ten minute alert, ready to go.

That Cuban thing was a real thing. A lot of people don't know it, I don't know how many of you know it, they evacuated all the women and children out of Miami and out of Homestead, too. It was a missile deal. I think one of the funny stories is General Sweeney flew down. I initially was the Air Division Plans Officer down there, Provisional Air Division. He flew over the field, and these guys were dumb. They had them all parked out there in rows on the ramp. I'll never forget, I was standing in the command post at the time and Sweeney comes backing over the radio, "Disburse those airplanes, right now." [Laughter]. You've never seen such a mess on the airdrome because nobody knew where to put them. They had them parked all over the place and he was absolutely right. You know how we forget. You remember World War II pictures where they were staffing airplanes on the ramp. Gosh darn, a MIG could have come in there and just made one pass and ruined our effort in an instant. And they weren't that far away, as you know.

But that was just one thing that happened. As a result he also called down and selected 18 of us, I guess, to go through Army Jump School. That's how I got through Fort Bragg. We were going to jump in with the Army and run the Air Force from Cuba, which is another deal that a lot of people don't know about.

They told us to go up to the Marine base where they had all the Army vehicles parked and pick five vehicles - a jeep and four eight-bys. We did. We got them back to Homestead and I'll be darned if they put them in the motor pool and took them totally apart and put them back together and had us drive them around the base in four wheel drive over the rough terrain because they figured that we had to have those vehicles work for a minimum of a month without any parts or replacements and they wanted them perfect.

They were going to air drop them, though. The odds of five vehicles hitting the ground and being drivable are -- [Laughter]. We reminded them of that. The Army later said well, we probably should have air landed them instead of dropping them. But they had to get control of the airfield first, and they wanted us in there. That was an interesting time.

After that they kept us down there, actually we went up to Langley and wrote the first Ground Support Manual for the Army, for the Air Force. Some of that may still be in use too. It really was an interesting time.

Mr. Birkey: We all know Vietnam played a big part in your career. One thing that's surprising when I was reading about you

is that you actually, your first assignment there wasn't a flying billet. It was actually --

Congressman Johnson: No, I was working for General Westmoreland in MACV Headquarters. I tried to persuade him, we had nukes over there. I tried to persuade him to put nukes on the, three of them across the DMZ and one in each of the passes and I said make them groundburst and they won't be bothering us any more. He liked the idea, believe it or not. He couldn't get presidential approval, which was a problem.

I'll never forget, when the first real ground fight happened - this was in '65 - we had I think 173rd Airborne Brigade, I believe that was who it was. They had the first real fight in Vietnam. We lost contact with them. I was trying to get contact with them. I couldn't get it through the Army or the Navy. We even went to Hawaii and came back, trying to find out what was going on.

This red phone rings, and I picked it up. "This is the White House. What the hell's going on over there?" I said, "You want to talk to General Westmoreland. I will get him." "No, I want to talk to you. You tell me what's going on." I said, "Well, if you really want to know, we're fighting a war." Bam, the phone slammed down. [Laughter]. I couldn't believe it. That was the first hand-to-hand combat, and they committed the whole unit into it. You probably remember that, some of you. That was an interesting session.

Later, right after that we developed the first B-52 bombings over there which was a mess too, because they had to - and I hope we've learned that lesson. You cannot communicate back and forth with the President and make things work. It went from MACV, to the Philippines, to Hawaii, to SAC Headquarters, and then to Washington for approval. Every mission.

Tell me - And then of course approval had to come back the same way. By the time that happened they knew where we were going to bomb. They didn't have anybody there.

I think if we haven't learned anything else, you cannot have rules in a war, and you cannot have that kind of control over what the field commanders want to do. They have to make the decisions in the field and you've just got to support them, and I know you all do nowadays.

Mr. Birkey: When you returned to Vietnam, you were flying the F-4. Can you talk about some of the missions that you were flying? What type?

Congressman Johnson: I was flying mostly night. I was in a night squadron. I remember one, we went up to Dien Bien Phu and

we were like the 7th attack on Dien Bien Phu on a truck park, for crying out loud, and they'd been hit. You could see that. I told my wingman, we're just going to go down and drop one bomb on it so we can say we hit that target, and we did. There was no flack. We took the road from there back toward Hanoi and ran across a convoy and so I told him we're going to go get that convoy. We rolled in and we got about five or six trucks and then the flack got so heavy I pulled us out. We still had one bomb left each. I saw a bridge down there on the way home, so we took it out too.

We got back home - See, I can talk about this now. We got back home and they said you should have brought those bombs back, those targets weren't authorized. That's why you don't need rules in a war. I told them on the spot, I was squadron ops at the time. I said you put bombs on my plane, they're coming off. I'm not bringing them back. I never heard any more about it. [Laughter].

Mr. Birkey: How did a lot of the tactics that you'd developed at Fighter Weapons School and throughout your training apply within Vietnam? Was it possible to utilize a lot of that? Were there restrictions? The operational environment was such that a lot of that wasn't transferable?

Congressman Johnson: I think there were too many rules over there. I'm not sure we don't have too many today too. You've got too many lawyers over there in that operation around Iraq. I've told everybody that. I don't think you ought to have to go ask if it's legal or not before you go after somebody. You've got to do it on the spot. And a lot of that does happen, but not all of it. I think our guys are doing a super job, and that's thanks to those of you who are in charge. We just can't ask any more out of the military that we have, and if we keep increasing, improving the weapons and weaponry that we have I think we're going to, the Air Force shines over there now. There's a lot of stuff happening that can help the Army too. So I thank you all for that and salute you for doing a great job.

Mr. Birkey: The 25th mission, a shoot-down happened. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Congressman Johnson: Well, it was a road reccy and most of our missions were night and probably some of you remember we ran out of munitions over there in Vietnam. I was on the first sortie out of Uban at the time and we didn't have any weapons on the airplane. A C-130 landed and we offloaded the first thing they had on the back which was napalm, which you weren't even supposed to carry up there. They put eight cans of napalm on each of our airplanes and off we went.

Road reconnaissance, maybe napalm's useful, but we got to a point where they were ferrying trucks across a river. I told the wingman to go left and I'd go right and we'd try to hit them from two different directions. People say if you go a thousand miles an hour you can't be hit. That's baloney. I had that F-4 going as fast as it would go, and about six foot off the ground for a good napalm run, and we got hit by small arms because my gun didn't fire. It was that gun pod that McNamara put on the airplanes and about half the time those things would malfunction. I flipped the switches three or four times, nothing happened. So we took a hit in the [stabog] and I pulled up. I thought we were going to make the jungle, but about that time the stick went full forward and it was locked. The first time I've ever seen every light in the cockpit come on. Every darn one of them. The right engine fire warning light came on, I shut it down, but we didn't make it to the jungle. I told the back seater to get out, Larry Chesley, and he didn't. I told him again, he didn't. So I ejected. I guess, because of my jump school experience, that I was about 800 feet when I got out.

We were doing 650 indicated, so it was a pretty hard shoot opening shock. In fact my boots came off, my gloves came off, and my helmet came off. That's how hard it was. I thought man, I probably don't have any panels left in the chute, either. I looked up and they were all there. I'll tell you, that Martin Baker is great.

Then I looked down just in time to see my back seater get out. What had happened is he had pulled the handle between his legs and the seat hadn't fired. And he'd come up with a cord about that long. He was mesmerized. When I got out it brought him back and he was able to get to the other handle and get out. Just before the airplane hit. When I was watching, I think his chute opened and the airplane hit the ground and he hit the ground. Fortunately not in the wreckage.

We landed right in the middle of a whole division of North Vietnamese Army, so we were caught pretty quick.

Mr. Birkey: Can you describe your physical condition at that point?

Congressman Johnson: Well, I had a broken arm and broken back, and they weren't very helpful about that. I had called my wingman and told him exactly where those two big guns were that were shooting at us. I couldn't believe it, we were going back downhill with the Vietnamese, they were kind of half carrying me. The Navy came in and got those guns. I watched those guns go up in smoke. I laughed. They kicked me in a trench. But I thought oh boy, that's good.

They kept us there for about ten days, I guess.

Mr. Birkey: During that period weren't you exposed to a mock trial and all of that?

Congressman Johnson: Oh, yeah. I guess about the eighth day they came in and blindfolded me, took me out to a room that was set up like a court with a judge and jury, and they had me tied to a stool. And they were talking in Vietnamese through an interpreter. When they got through they told me you're guilty and we're going to kill you. They blindfolded me and took me out in the woods. When they took the blindfold off I was standing in front of a slit trench facing five guys with AK-47s and an officer standing there by them.

My mother made me go to church every Sunday but I didn't really know the Lord until that point. I prayed harder than I'd ever prayed and when the officer said fire, the guns went click, click, click, click, click.

[Pause]

Excuse me.

I don't know what made me do it, but I laughed at them. They did kick me in the trench then and left me there for a while, but from that point forward I never had any fear of them because I knew the Lord was with me.

Mr. Birkey: In your book you talk a lot about the other individuals you were with. Jeremiah Denton, Jim Stockdale, others. Can you talk about the camaraderie and how it got you through it and also the kind of tap system that you used to communicate?

Congressman Johnson: You guys all know the tap system. It's taught now. If it hadn't been for that I think we wouldn't have survived as easily, because we could talk to each other and they gave us tin cups that amplified sound when you put them on the wall. The walls were built out of bricks like this so they carried sound a block. You could talk a block away. Just not tapping any louder than that.

We even had, toward the end I was one of the communications officers, but we had a regular code and a secret code and a top secret code. And the top secret we changed every day. We had plans for escapes and all that kind of stuff. So there's a lot of that that's not written down anywhere. But we had a big escape plan when the war ended. It took about a year to communicate between the U.S. and us.

The Vietnamese knew we were doing something. My wife, when I got back, asked me why I never read the letters. I said I was

reading them for code and trying to commit them to memory. They'd give you about ten minutes to read it and that was all, and it was just a little letter. Six lines is all they gave you. The Vietnamese guard sitting right in front of you. They wouldn't let you keep the letters, so you had to put them to memory. Then we'd pass the information around.

You all remember the Son Te raid. That was a big event. We knew something was going on that night. Those guys had been there just a month before.

They had my wife send me a package and in it were mints and they chopped them up. Well, I ate what I could of them and I got something between my teeth and fiddled around with it, and the next thing I know it unreeled and I had about six feet of microfiche tape. The whole front page of the New York Times was on it with the Son Te raid. And of course I couldn't read it very well, so we had some of the younger guys read it at the time, and we committed it to memory and we tore it up and disposed of it and passed it all around the camp. It was a real morale booster. If you don't think that kind of stuff helps, it does. You can thank our intelligence service for working with us, too, because they do great work.

Mr. Birkey: What was it like when you were released and transitioned back to life in the United States?

Congressman Johnson: Well, it was one of the happiest times of my life. I went into Sheppard Air Force Base. I can't believe it, there was six inches of snow on the ground in Texas, for crying out loud, and that first night a tornado came through. I was in the hospital there. It lifted up, went over the hospital and down on the other side.

But I think one of the funniest things was I was in the hospital room and a Texas State Trooper came in and handed me a driver's license. My wife said you can't do that, he doesn't know how to drive. He hasn't driven in seven years. [Laughter]. He handed it to me anyway.

We had some good times, and I did remember how to drive. It's just like flying an airplane. You can get out of it and get back in one and you learn how to fly.

Mr. Birkey: Speaking of that, you went back to flying F-4s. How was that transition?

Congressman Johnson: A piece of cake. These fingers were stuck like that when I first got back, and I had three hand operations, the last one at Andrews. I told the Andrews guy, you've got to get this finger down. This one had two operations on it to make it come down. He said well, I can do another one.

I'd already had three, and I'm telling you, hand operations hurt like heck. I told him no, I think it will pull a trigger, and it would. So the Air Force sent me down to Homestead to fly with a flight surgeon pilot who signed me off. So my first flight back was in an F-4, and went on from there. Flying F-4s at Seymour Johnson and then down at Homestead and F-15s out at Holloman. Good, clean fun.

Mr. Birkey: Over your career you were exposed to a number of different individuals. You mentioned Buzz Aldrin, Boots Lassay. Are there any others that really stand out in your mind as people that were really good mentors and friends throughout your time in the service?

Congressman Johnson: Well, Pete Everest was a good friend, too. I probably shouldn't tell that story in here. I was running a detachment down at Wheelless when we were in Europe and Pete Everest brought his squadron in from Spain. We were at Lakenheath at the time. I knew Pete. The guys and I went over to the officer's club. I got over there and Pete was sitting there at the bar and I walked up to him and we started talking. The next thing I know, the guys from my unit had dumped a whole keg of beer on Speedy Pete. I thought oh, my. [Laughter]. That didn't phase him. He was okay, and right on. He was just a great guy.

Buzz Aldrin, too. Buzz took one of my bracelets to the moon and gave it to me when I landed. He's been trying to upgrade that space program forever and NASA's fighting him all the way. As you know, they're fighting a lot of people that want to try to do more in space. A lot of them think we need to get back to the moon. Buzz thinks we should set up a station on one of the moon's moons because there's a lot of hydrogen up there and we ought to run drones back and forth to get the hydrogen back here if we're going to run cars and other vehicles with it. Not a bad idea.

I don't know if there's any NASA people in here or not I hope not, NASA's been fighting us on civilian interference, they call it, in space operations. And civilians have good ideas sometimes. I think we ought to listen to them. Good input.

Mr. Birkey: On a lighter note, as we were chatting on the way in, you and Buzz Aldrin have a little bit of an interesting experience trying to start up a T-28. Would you mind telling us your technique on that?

Congressman Johnson: [Laughter]. We went through flying school together and we were at Brian Air Force Base and they had T-28s, P-80s and T-33s for training. And they assigned guys to go out, two students to fly together. Buzz and I were assigned an airplane. Well, we went out to it, he took one side, I took the

other for free flight. We got in the airplane, it wouldn't start. I was sitting in the front seat, I couldn't believe it. The crew chiefs were sitting on the ground just laughing away. The damn airplane didn't have a prop on it. [Laughter]. So we were in the wrong airplane. [Laughter].

You guys have never done that, have you? [Laughter].

Mr. Birkey: On that note, are there any questions from the audience at all?

Question: [Inaudible]?

Congressman Johnson: Most of the guys who were with us in Alcatraz, and that included Denton and Stockdale and Shoemaker and some of the names you know, got tired of listening to the BS on the loudspeaker 24 hours a day and the bad mouthing of our government and some of it by our government, and we decided that instead of bad mouthing it, get involved and do something about it. Nearly all of us ran for Congress or some job like that. I think that's what stimulated me. I got involved in the state house and then Congress and hopefully helping the Air Force get better stuff.

Question: [Inaudible]? Sir, you occupy an important position on House Ways and Means and on the [inaudible], but you've been [inaudible] on trying to save [inaudible] aircraft as well as [inaudible]. Have you ever had second thoughts, or did you ever consider following the track that [inaudible]? [Inaudible] that everybody has in your leadership in the House, did you ever give thought to moving in the direction of [inaudible]?

Congressman Johnson: No. I think Ways and Means is, about 60 percent of what goes on in the Congress goes through Ways and Means. Taxes, tariffs, welfare, social security, Medicare, trade, just to name a few. And frankly, I think Ways and Means has more ability to influence people on appropriations than any other place. And you don't get put in jail for being on Ways and Means.

I think you're right, we push hard in the military, and as you know I helped start the Air Force Caucus over there which is still strong, I think. Hopefully we've done some good work. If you guys need something, don't hesitate to call us because we can push from the side. Sometimes it squeezes out the middle.

I'd like to thank all of you for being here and thank you for your support of the United States Air Force. It's a great asset and there's none better on this earth. So I salute you all. Thank you.

Mr. Birkey: Thank you from the Air Force Association.
[Applause].

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