Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for being here today, and for that warm welcome. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your extraordinary leadership. Few know how much you care, how hard you work, and how well you represent the needs of our Air Force to our partners in the Nation's defense. Ms. Conaton, I also appreciate your being here today and your dedication to the Air Force mission and its remarkable people.

Ladies and gentlemen, it truly is my privilege to be here again, at this fantastic conference, to address this distinguished audience. Once again, Mike Dunn and the AFA team have outdone themselves in putting together this perennial favorite of air, space, and cyber practitioners, advocates, and enthusiasts. And as always, we express sincere thanks to the staff of the Gaylord, for providing this magnificent venue and for managing the incredible logistical requirements for this conference.

Proud Air Force Achievements

Since entering office more than three years ago, Secretary Donley and I have been focused on meeting five priorities that demanded immediate and continuing attention:

- reinvigorating the nuclear enterprise;
- partnering with the Joint and coalition team to win today's fight;
- developing and caring for our Airmen and their families;
- modernizing our air and space inventories, organization, and training; and
- recapturing acquisition excellence.

In the ensuing years, Airmen have performed magnificently, amassing many noteworthy accomplishments—both in supporting these five priorities and other mission areas, both on and off the battlefield. As a result, we have largely normalized areas of earlier critical concern, and we now can look to the future with

optimism and purpose in doing what we do best—and uniquely—and that is providing the Nation with air, space, and cyber effects that are ready and timely, tailored and precise, and globally-postured but regionally-relevant.

We can be proud of progress in the Air Force nuclear enterprise, for example, where we have restored the level of surety, safety, and reliability that the American people rightly expect and properly demand. But we must be absolutely clear: no matter how much trust and confidence that we earn and restore, our pursuit of perfection is never "done," and our stewardship of two of the Nation's three legs of nuclear deterrence must always remain ironclad. We have implemented significant organizational changes to strengthen direct oversight and accountability by the Air Force's most senior leaders, including Secretary Donley and me; invested heavily in our nuclear professionals; and institutionalized a rigorous and transparent inspection process. Without resting on our laurels, we can be proud of the result: a nuclear enterprise that is renewed and focused on its commitment to avoiding critical performance shortfalls. Our work in this critical mission area remains worthy, valued, and essential to our Nation's security and its deterrence posture, and we will always be locked on sustaining excellence and maintaining required discipline in mission execution.

Another area where we can capitalize on our progress—and where the mission also never concludes—is in acquisition and procurement. Certain aspects of the KC-46 tanker acquisition—achieved after a lengthy, if not-quite-perfect competition, but nonetheless through a transparent and fair process—will inform future acquisition efforts. Although we will always be accountable for responsibly expending hard-earned, precious taxpayer dollars, we can regard our acquisition processes and procedures as having achieved a notable restoration of effective control and oversight, with still more work to do as outlined in our Acquisition Improvement Plan.

Future Procurement Efforts—Curbing Our Ambition

So as we move forward on the KC-46A program, we must vigorously work to restrain requirements creep, keep down costs, and maintain production schedules. A similar mandate applies to the Joint Strike Fighter, which, as a program, has

already experienced both overruns and delays. But because the F-35 is the future of our tactical air combat capability, and especially as we are compelled to draw down existing force size while minimizing loss in capability elsewhere, both industry and the government must be scrupulously disciplined, and maintain current progress with the F-35A, which continues to be the lowest-cost, lowest-risk variant with stable requirements.

Amidst prolonged budgetary pressures, future development efforts will have to be less ambitious, because we cannot assume the kind of risk that past acquisition strategies have incorporated in their development plans. A recent Government Accountability Office assessment found that, of 62 selected major weapon programs across the DoD, most suffered cost increases and schedule delays because the programs ambitiously attempted to proceed through critical junctures on the strength of insufficient scientific knowledge and technical ability. The assessment also found that approximately 85 percent of the programs began development without having demonstrated sufficient maturity of all of the required technologies. Although historically, the Defense Department has had more trade space to advance the state of the art, we now must be more calibrated in pushing the technological envelope. We must also be ruthlessly honest and disciplined when operational requirements allow for more modest and less exquisite, higher-confidence production programs. And while we cannot be inflexibly dogmatic about technology readiness levels and triggers, we also cannot afford to advance unproven technologies from the science and technology realm prematurely into applied research and development—particularly, when no genuine operational requirements demand it. We must, in short, discern between what we truly require and what we merely desire.

Our overarching strategy should be for industry and government, together, to appraise and adhere to genuine operational requirements, and evaluate manufacturability earlier in the acquisition process so that we can deliver better, more rapid-response solutions, to keep pace in our highly dynamic security environment. We also must partner to compensate for manufacturing readiness shortfalls and to narrow gaps in manufacturing technology and know-how.

Collectively, our ability to be disciplined and minimally proprietary will determine our success in squeezing every bit of value from each taxpayer dollar, and every bit of low- to moderate-risk capability from our future weapon systems.

In any circumstance, we require straight talk from everyone. Government must ensure stable requirements and reliable funding streams, while industry must bid according to realistic estimates, and resist offering to sell more than what is operationally required. Because the success of industry and the military are now mutually related, perhaps more than they have ever been, and especially with the ongoing convergence of fiscal pressures and strategic uncertainty, there is no trade space, or time, or patience, to over-promise, only then to under-deliver. There can be no "blank checks," either for surplus capability for the government or for windfalls for industry.

Airmen and Families—the Lifeblood of Our Force

Discipline in our acquisition efforts not only fulfills our promise to be prudent and trustworthy stewards of American taxpayer dollars; it ensures that our brave fighting men and women—the lifeblood of our force—are properly equipped and ready to act. But uncertainty about the future strategic environment means that much will be asked of them. We therefore have an even greater responsibility to ensure that our Airmen are properly equipped, educated, trained, and exercised, so that they are at maximum readiness when they are called to perform and become battle-tested across a wide range of contingencies. We will intensify our efforts to develop our Airmen deliberately, arming them with intellectual and experiential strength that is on par with the advanced capabilities that our weapon systems provide.

And, while our Airmen are conducting Air Force operations on behalf of the Nation, we know that their families will ever faithfully provide support to their efforts, sacrificing in their own, often uncelebrated ways. As long as we remain engaged in prolonged conflict, Airman and family support will remain a key focus area, and we will always recognize and honor their accomplishments and sacrifice, just as AFA is doing this week with families, for the very first time at this conference.

Because many of the family support challenges revolve around deployments, Airmen and their families deserve a personnel system that is more consistent with, and more supportive of, the deployment process. Our experience with more than two decades of sustained overseas operations highlights several shortcomings with the process that we instituted when we transitioned from a garrison to an expeditionary force. Our experience has also emphasized the importance of presenting recognizable Air Force forces, both in-place and forward-deployed, to meet combatant commander requirements.

Therefore, at the next CORONA, we will examine how to form a better linkage between deployment and assignment cycles; to better synchronize their rhythms; to facilitate the deployment of Airmen, their immediate leadership, and their unit equipment together as teamed capabilities; and to standardize the presentation of Air Force forces based on existing, recognizable units. By moving from a unit-type-code model involving manufactured sub-unit or sub-organizational elements, to a model that is more unit-based, we can better ensure that experienced leadership and personnel remain assigned to the unit that is preparing to deploy to support global combatant commander requirements. We also will ensure that these teams are appropriately sized, across 28 specific air, space, and cyber capabilities. The ultimate goal with this proposal is to ensure predictability for more coherent aggregations of Air Force combat capability, less serendipity in the formation of expeditionary units once they are deployed, consistency with Global Force Management and Adaptive Planning Guidance, and accountability for proper support of combatant commander requirements.

Everyday Heroes

Certainly, our Joint, Interagency, and coalition teammates value, and will continue to rely on, the distinctive capabilities that Airmen provide every day. It is difficult not to be proud of our courageous Airmen—humble, everyday men and women who perform remarkable deeds and achieve extraordinary results. Technical Sergeant Ted Hofknecht is one such Airman. As a joint terminal attack controller attached to a special operations team in Afghanistan, then–Staff Sergeant Hofknecht was on a reconnaissance mission with 20 U.S., Afghan, and coalition teammates,

when they encountered a numerically-superior force of 70 Taliban fighters. During the engagement, Sergeant Hofknecht turned the tide of the fight by leveraging the combat airpower of eight fixed- and rotary-winged assets with deadly precision. An hour into the battle, the enemy launched a violent ambush, blasting with improvised explosive devices, heavy machine gunfire, and barrages of rocket-propelled grenades that separated his team. Despite extreme hazard, Sergeant Hofknecht organized a small team of Afghan fighters to recover his isolated teammates. While engaging the enemy with his personal firearms, he and his team evacuated the team members who were separated, even carrying one injured Afghan partner on their shoulders, to a helicopter landing zone approximately two kilometers away—one click on foot, and the final in a cargo truck. All the while, he administered life-saving first aid to critically-wounded survivors, and coordinated final actions for evacuation.

Sergeant Hofknecht, this Nation is fortunate to have you in her service, exemplifying commitment to duty, displaying valor under fire, and favoring humility over glory. Nonetheless, I ask that you please stand in front of your peers for well-deserved recognition. Sergeant Hofknecht, and many, many others who quietly perform the mission, such as those who are chronicled in this year's installment of *Portraits in Courage*, inspire us to believe in the broader consequence of individual successes. I urge you to pick up a copy of this year's volume of *Portraits in Courage*, being distributed at this convention, and see for yourself.

Keeping Faith with Airmen and Families

This notion of selflessness and sacrifice—the likes of which are exhibited each and every day by Airmen like Sergeant Hofknecht and so many others—is the bedrock of our all-volunteer force, which is exactly why we must keep faith, as Secretary Donley has said, with those who volunteer to serve. Such selflessness during a time of sustained operations all around the world is what makes me smile—makes me shout out that this Air Force of ours gives no quarter to any other air force on the planet or member of our Joint Team.

But the relentless escalation of personnel costs—approximately 65 percent since 1985, even though active duty end strength has *fallen* by 45 percent in the

same period—simply is not sustainable to maintain this unrivaled all-volunteer force. As we address this trend, we will be very deliberate, very carefully considering the profound implications of potential adjustments in compensation and benefits on recruiting and retention. An important dimension of rising personnel expenses is health care, which is projected to consume over 10 percent of our base defense budget by the year 2015. Here again, adjustments almost certainly must be made, but in a way that keeps faith with our Airmen and families—active, reserve and retired. While being prudent, we also must keep an open mind that adjustments have the potential, no matter how difficult the choices, to put our successors in a better place. The proposals that were advanced by the Defense Business Board earlier this year are not entirely without merit. However, I do have reservations: to the extent that the study presented a merely commercial view of what we do—without due consideration to recruiting, retention, and readiness—the recommendations are clearly incomplete and thus lack credibility.

So for example, although we realize that a purely vested retirement is almost certainly not sustainable in the longer term, the idea of a retained asset still requires more analysis that carefully takes into account the overall health of our force. Indeed, the idea of something contributory and more portable, which a member who separates before retirement can take with him or her, is not unattractive and perhaps deserves consideration. But we should proceed with such proposals only after thoroughly evaluating potential effects on recruiting, retention, readiness, and ultimately, our overall effectiveness.

Enduring Core Contributions of the U.S. Air Force—What We Must Protect

There is no denying that we continue to face ambiguity in the future security environment. Economic and political interdependence continue to increase to "hyper-connected" levels. State powers and centers of influence continue to emerge and rise. We must be ever more prepared to respond across the entire range of operating environments, from the higher end, against potential near-peer competitors; toward the lower end, against insurgent and terrorist elements.

Yet as we prepare to respond across the entire spectrum, and to meet numerous and varied contingencies, we must be ever more disciplined in our spending decisions, because based on the current fiscal state of play, we can expect that budgetary pressures will continue to intensify, and purchasing power will continue to decline. We know that airpower—with its inherent and unparalleled flexibility, adaptability, and ability to range vast distances with unequaled speed—will continue to play an influential role in this evolving and uncertain geostrategic environment. And by translating airpower's intrinsic characteristics into timely, tailored, and precise effects—both kinetic and non-kinetic—virtually anywhere on the globe, Airmen not only are able to make distinctive operational contributions; they also present an expanded menu of strategic options to our national leaders.

To ensure these airpower effects for the future, Secretary Donley and I are intensely focused on managing potential budget constraints in a way that reflects our priorities and avoids creating a future force that merely appears on paper to be effective, but in reality is reduced substantially in its depth and breadth. Amidst the uncertainty surrounding ongoing budget talks to bring our Nation's deficit spending and debt under control, we know one thing for certain: our budget will "tip over" as it has for other sectors of the government.

So when budget reductions do occur, we will have to make extremely difficult choices to restructure and posture the force deliberately, not to attempt a merely scaled-down version of "business as usual." Attempts to evenly distribute reductions and reallocations do not assure a robust and capable force. Rather, we must be vigilant in building a force according to operational risk, capability and capacity requirements, personnel and materiel needs, and prudent, if frugal, strategies for investment in modernization, recapitalization, and readiness. In this way, we can be better prepared to continue providing our unique capabilities that afford a wider range of options for rapid and flexible power projection—"unique" because our core contributions come with maximum speed and precision, minimum vulnerability, and a global perspective of air and space presence on which our Nation's civil, military, and commercial aviation activities rely.

Air Force Core Contributions

The analytical framework that we will use to determine our strategy and priorities for resolving our part of the debt crisis is built on an assessment of our unique contributions to national security and Joint requirements. In any budget scenario, we will be required to continue providing capabilities that offer to our Nation's leaders a wide range of strategic options for rapid and flexible power projection. Our core contributions enable America's global perspective, and result in appropriately-tailored effects at times and places of our choosing. These core contributions are nearly exclusively ours, and they reside in four main areas:

- control and exploitation of the air and space domains, as well as mission assurance in cyberspace;
- global strike;
- rapid global mobility; and
- worldwide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

These four core contributions are enabled and enhanced by our superior command and control networks. Without these contributions, the United States would have to fundamentally recast its expeditionary power projection capability, because as articulated by numerous venerable airpower thinkers—from Billy Mitchell himself, to Ron Fogleman, one of my esteemed predecessors—we depend on air and space power for our strategic interests. Over the latter half of the Twentieth Century—particularly during the 1990s—most commercial travel was by air, with the Federal Aviation Administration now citing 739 million people who flew on U.S. commercial carriers in 2005, and estimating this figure to reach 1 billion by 2015. More and more goods are being shipped by air as well, with our dependence on space for global positioning, communications, weather forecasts, and other critical utilities also increasing for the better part of two decades.

In short, the Nation that we serve is an air and space nation—at Kitty Hawk: the first to ascend into the air via powered flight; at the Sea of Tranquility: the first, and still the only, to descend from spaceflight onto the moon. Certainly, our global posture, underpinned by our expeditionary power projection capability, depends on our freedom of action in the air and space, and increasingly cyberspace, around the

world. Therefore, Air Force **control of the air and space** has strategic significance that is far beyond military utility; and maintaining freedom of action in those domains, with minimized threat of attack from above, will be an essential precondition to achieving a wide range of U.S. strategic interests, from global commerce and trade, to diplomatic and certainly military applications. Even where the adversary threat from above is negligible, friendly airpower constitutes an omnipresent threat to hostile forces.

But to the extent that our ability to exert control and project power from any single domain, like air or space, is becoming increasingly dependent on our ability to operate freely in the others, our mission-assurance efforts must also cross multiple domains. Therefore, as part of our mission to control the air, we must continue to secure essential spaceborne capabilities such as precision navigation and timing; protected communications; missile warning; weather; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. And we must maintain access to, and freedom of action in, cyberspace, on which our command and control architecture and situational awareness significantly rely.

We therefore must ensure that we modernize and replenish our aging satellite constellations, and also improve our space surveillance, system security and protection, and threat attribution in space. In cyberspace, we must continue our ongoing development of dynamic defenses for our vital networks so that they are protected. And to counter aggressors that are able to intrude and to root through our networks, we must increase our ability to find and disable any malware, to discern and interpret any forensic evidence, and to attribute threats and track them to their source. Our commitment to cyberspace will remain institutionally strong and operationally relevant in order to ensure freedom of action and enhance resiliency in this vital medium.

To my second point—**global strike**—the Air Force will ensure the Nation's continued ability to hold any target at risk, through its unique perspective and ability to leverage airpower globally. Airpower's ability to travel vast distances, into opposed environments if necessary, and to create both lethal and non-lethal effects, can assure that the Nation remains able to affect the behavior of others and shape

outcomes to our strategic advantage. Therefore, our priorities for global strike will be:

- to coalesce high-caliber systems—including a penetrating bomber—into a family of systems composed of integrated weapon, sensor, electronic warfare, and ISR elements;
- to ensure that our personnel are developed and specially-trained for optimal performance; and
- to plan and coordinate meticulously with our Joint teammates so that together, we meet our Nation's long-range strike needs.

We will need to achieve an appropriate balance between systems such as the future Long-Range Strike bomber, and those with shorter legs that compose our tactical air combat capability. Our fiscal environment and the pace of development have made it necessary to temper the procurement of Joint Strike Fighters. We will mitigate any delays by modernizing our fourth-generation fleet with structural enhancements, advanced sensors, radars, communications, and avionics. But the fact remains that these fourth-generation aircraft—however capable, but nonetheless averaging 22 years of age—still lack modern stealth technology and integrated avionics, and will become increasingly less capable and useful against burgeoning adversary anti-access and area-denial strategies and capabilities such as air defense systems, radars, missiles, and aircraft. As our Nation's only active fifth-generation fighter procurement program, there is no alternative to the F-35, so we are committed to this program—as are the Navy and Marine Corps, as are eight other partner air forces around the world that have expressed interest in modernizing their fleets with the Joint Strike Fighter. As current challenges are resolved, we must proceed toward efficient manufacture and a steady production rate as soon as possible.

The F-35 program must succeed also because, with our revitalized stewardship of two of the three legs of the U.S. nuclear triad, our modernized conventional strike forces—appropriately balanced between longer and shorter leg platforms—compose a significant portion of our Nation's strategic deterrence, crisis response, and escalation control capabilities, all of which help to enhance global stability and our ability to deal with precisely the threats that we are most likely to face.

To my third point—**rapid global mobility**: it is both an enabler and a strategic capability unto itself. Underpinning vital functions such as crisis and natural disaster response, Joint combat support, and global logistics, our rapid global mobility force provides our Nation with the in-flight refueling capability of KC-10, KC-135, and future KC-46 tankers, as well as the ability to haul massive amounts of cargo with unparalleled speed to distant locations—from wartime materiel to humanitarian relief supplies.

This is another manifestation of the inherent flexibility of airpower, with capabilities and assets—C-17s, C-130s, and others—that are distinctly and inherently Air Force in character. Employed to airdrop equipment to U.S. and coalition forces, they affect ongoing activities in wide-ranging battlespaces. Just as easily, they can simultaneously deliver life-saving medical and disaster-relief supplies—as in our most recent example, to our friends in Japan—achieving strategic-level objectives and bolstering international ties through genuine American expressions of compassion, generosity, and goodwill. This capability must be retained at a scale that is commensurate with the overall size of the U.S. Armed Forces and consistent with operational plans. The Mobility Capability Requirements Study has traditionally served as a baseline, and must be updated as we go forward with efforts to modernize and recapitalize our mobility forces accordingly.

Finally, to my fourth point—**globally-scaled intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability**—America is afforded with an unparalleled decision-making advantage. We will continue to provide safe and reliable operation of a mix of earth-orbiting and air-breathing assets, each affording unrivaled data collection capability. Particularly in the area of remotely-piloted aircraft and sensors, the U.S. military and our Air Force have made tremendous progress, with operating concepts and infrastructure that underwrite our global ISR capability, and training and equipping of our personnel who do this important work. Air Force capability to process and exploit this raw data toward the dissemination of timely and usable intelligence will continue to be in high demand for national-level decision-making and Joint operational planning and execution in theaters of operation. While the size and shape of future ISR capabilities must be constantly evaluated and

rationalized in relation to national and combatant commander requirements, we remain committed to continuing the institutionalization of ISR capabilities and expertise in our Air Force. And most assuredly, we will not return to pre-9/11 ISR force levels.

Again, underpinning and embedded in each of these unique contributions is an additional distinctive and enduring core function: the remarkable ability to command and control air, space, and cyber operations. This unmatched, high-volume C2 capability spans all levels of operations, in peace and war, and enables responsive tasking and execution of geographically and operationally diverse missions.

Readiness

These are the capabilities that we deem clearly essential for our Nation's strategic interests, economic prosperity, and military readiness to respond, such as this past year, when we were fully engaged in Japan, delivering life-saving and life-sustaining supplies and support, then responded halfway around the world and on the opposite end of the operational spectrum to help enforce U.N. Security Council mandate in Libya. By the end of March and beginning of April, U.S. Airmen were singlehandedly and concurrently responsible for evacuating 7,500 American citizens from hazardous zones and delivering 60 percent—close to five million pounds—of U.S. relief supplies in Japan, while in Libya, contributing more than 65 percent of all coalition sorties, including 99 percent of operational airlift, 79 percent of in-flight refueling, 50 percent of airborne reconnaissance, and 40 percent of strike missions. One would be hard-pressed to find a more impressive, more compelling instance of strategic flexibility and versatility in all of their dimensions, all at the same time.

So as we may have to carefully consider reduced capacities in some areas while maintaining—perhaps increasing investment in—others, such as the four that I just discussed, we must carefully consider and calibrate our acceptance of risk, manifested in a force that is smaller in size and scale. Most assuredly, we still will be an extremely capable and effective force, but the simple matter—one of physics—is that we will be able to be in fewer places and to achieve fewer effects in the rapid succession to which we have become accustomed. We could mitigate some risk

through enhancing collaboration with Joint teammates, such as with our Air-Sea Battle and Long-Range Strike initiatives. We can also continue bolstering our partnerships with global air forces that share with us common interests and interoperable platforms and systems. Through cooperation and collaboration with partner forces—both Joint and coalition—we can mutually expand broad-spectrum capabilities, and utilize the additive effects of our pooled capacity, to continue providing appropriately-scaled airpower for the Nation.

But in any scenario, structuring our future force must be done according to our strategy and priorities. If we seek to avoid a hollow force, we cannot merely execute across-the-board cuts. As Secretary Panetta has warned, these sorts of ill-conceived reductions in defense spending would inflict real damage to the well-being of our Airmen and their families, and ultimately undermine our ability to protect the Nation. Instead, we will have to commit to readiness as a priority, and hold the line against longer-term erosion in combat power availability and preparedness.

Conclusion: Retrospective and Outlook

One of the most favored measures of character—whether of individuals or of institutions—is how one rises to meet the most daunting, most intractable challenges that we face. Pundits and commentators intone an "age of uncertainty," leaving us, as one has put it, "grasping for some type of certainty in everything from threats to resources." These pronouncements effectively mark the time for us to decide whether to curse our luck or to celebrate our opportunities. Nobody can say with any confidence when we, as a Nation, might emerge from this prolonged period of uncertainty. But toward the long-awaited, budding springtime of increased confidence, we can all embrace—if we so choose—a positively focused attitude; we can staunchly believe in the enormity of what we can and will accomplish together; and we can maintain faith, strengthened by optimism, shared purpose, and common cause.

So for me, I recall:

- events like pinning-on three Silver Stars and five Bronze Stars at a single ceremony at McChord;

- like B-1s departing in the middle of the snowstorm, below minimums—certainly combat rules—to fly twenty-some hours to Libya, and help enforce U.N. Security Council mandate;
- events like all hands—Airmen and families—contributing to a massive Joint and combined humanitarian relief effort in Japan, after multiple concurrent disasters devastated the region; and
- like the culmination of nearly a decade's worth of effort—our Nation's triumph in eliminating the perpetrator of the 9/11 attacks, knowing that Airmen were an invaluable part of that national effort.

I can go on and on with recalling our team's achievements. It's easy because there are so many. How appropriate it is, then, that we acknowledge another example of noble service, by announcing today that Secretary Donley has approved the award of the Air Force Cross to Staff Sergeant Robert Gutierrez, for extraordinary valor in the face of a determined enemy. The lone joint terminal attack controller on an Army Special Forces team, Sergeant Gutierrez and his teammates were tasked with capturing, detaining, or dispatching a high-value target that coalition forces had been tracking for six years. Closing-in on the target—the last two-and-a-half miles on foot—Sergeant Gutierrez and his team came under intense enemy fire. Fighting through the pain of a bullet wound and ruptured ear drums, he directed A-10 air strikes at "danger close" range—20 feet or so—while engaging Taliban fighters with his M-4 weapon, interrupted only to have his collapsed lung re-inflated by the team's medic. His actions during the four hours of intense fighting helped to decimate the enemy, allowed his team to escape the kill zone without additional casualties, and dealt a crushing blow to the regional Taliban network.

It is entirely fitting that the official awarding will occur later when his very proud family might join in the celebration, for this is truly a family affair. In the meantime, it gives me special pleasure to ask Sergeant Gutierrez to please rise here with his Air Force family, and allow us the privilege of expressing, in person, our tremendous respect and sincere gratitude for a job spectacularly well done.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm not suggesting that the next few years will be easy, but you know—and I remain convinced—that Bin Laden thought that we were feeble, decadent, and irretrievably attached to our comforts. How wrong he was.

Notwithstanding the fiscal and operational challenges that are arrayed before us, the U.S. Air Force will be prepared for whatever our Nation requires of us. We will provide the many utilities of airpower, as only Airmen can provide it: vital in the national context, and indispensible in the proud pursuit of our Nation's interests. We will be there for our Joint teammates and our Nation. We will do it, or we'll die trying.

Indeed, we must choose to be firm in our conviction that the best days for our Air Force and our Nation still lie ahead—in air, space, and cyberspace. And, for that, we need *everyone* to be on board. Thank you for your time today; and more importantly, thank you for your service to our Air Force and the Nation's defense. Suzie and I are truly grateful for our Airmen and their families, those serving, and our alumni and partners in defense, for their role in preserving our liberty—made possible through the highest order of noble service. *Aim High…*