



Air Force Association Convention Speech

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Page 1 of 12

Thank you very much for that kind introduction. Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, what a distinct privilege to address this forum – to see so many longtime friends here today; and, truly, what a fantastic venue this is, appropriate for a brief respite from jam-packed work schedules that we all have, but also an appropriate setting for serious exchange. Welcome to all who have come from out of town for this annual Air Force Association convention. As George Will has often said, Washington may be the only town in America – an “enclave,” as he called it – “surrounded on all sides by reality.” So, for those of us who live and work in Washington, it is always healthy to get a dose of “ground truth” from you who reside outside of DC.

As a matter of fact, last year, I mentioned to Mike Dunn that he should consider taking this conference outside the Beltway. Mike, I see that you’ve taken my advice in its most literal sense.

But seriously, the AFA, as they do every year, has done a remarkable job, executing a world-class conference that keeps Airmen, key officials from the Air Force, the Department, and from across the federal government, as well as industry leaders, coming back year after year to discuss issues of importance to our Total Air Force.

This event could not have occurred at a more important moment – a time when the Air Force faces at least two simultaneous transitions. Airmen are, as Secretary Donley noted yesterday, emerging from a year of turmoil. A year ago, I spoke of a “back to basics” approach for the Air Force – a bit of triage in which we had to recalibrate in critical areas where we had lost focus. We concentrated on recapturing top-to-bottom excellence in the nuclear mission; on restoring the foundations of credibility in acquisition and other disciplines with OSD, Congress, and the American people; and on expanding the lessons from that period to reinvigorate a culture of compliance throughout our Air Force. We navigated through a challenging but ultimately healthy period of inspection and introspection, with a recommitment to our heritage of



excellence. Yet, we did it all while fighting a war that continues to depend on the unique and important contributions of our Air Force – a war simultaneously conducted hand-to-hand, and at global distances; a war characterized by face-to-face meetings with other cultures, yet also by electrons traveling through satellites 22,000 miles overhead.

I am grateful to Secretary Donley for his exceptional leadership throughout this period. With his sharp vision and steady hand, we have successfully navigated through some troubled waters, and now we are looking forward, and setting a long-term course for our Air Force. Under his direction, we have turned a corner; but, leadership at the top is only occasionally decisive. Airmen at all levels stepped forward and provided the extra measure of moral and physical courage, initiative, selflessness, attention to detail, and ingenuity, that brought us to where we are today. It was a thing of beauty to watch: Airmen being Airmen.

We stand here today because of the able leadership at all levels of our Total Force team. Over the last year, we've made tangible progress in so many areas. In the nuclear enterprise alone: we've invested 4.4 billion dollars in areas that frankly had been neglected, while standing up a fourth B-52 squadron, and consolidating the Nuclear Weapons Center responsibilities, establishing an Air Staff directorate, the Nuclear Oversight Board, and the Global Strike Command. All stand as visible, tangible symbols of a deeper, more enduring commitment to this cornerstone of U.S. national security. But, let me talk directly to those of you in the nuclear enterprise about the way ahead. Secretary Donley and I will not take the counsel of those who say the job is complete. Our commitment to follow through should not be underestimated, and we are counting on your commitment as well.

It took years for atrophy to set in, and we cannot afford to stand pat on the gains of the last year by being complacent now. As we reflect on the last 12 months, it is important that we measure our progress not based on tactical events, such as programmatic decisions, press clippings, or blog entries. We



must take a broader, strategic view, and consider what we have, at least in part, achieved.

We strengthened the trust amongst the leadership in OSD, in Congress, and of the American people, who rely on us, not only as stalwarts of our nation's nuclear arsenal, but as a fundamental provider of essential combat capabilities for the Joint team. We reinforced bonds and become better integrated with our Joint teammates, who depend on us for our unwavering commitment to today's fight. We did this by making tough, sometimes painful decisions internally – choices that set the course for our future; choices that restored a measure of institutional freedom of action that will allow us to embark on an even more assertive journey in the coming years.

We can take pride in these efforts, and in the many accomplishments that Secretary Donley mentioned yesterday. We were asked to put out some wildfires that had gotten out of control, and although we aren't off the fire line just yet, I'm here to report that the smoke and flames no longer obstruct our view of the future. While we remain resolute about the issues that remain, we can, and we must, raise our sights to focus on the longer-term vision – an Airman's vision of constant innovation in the control and exploitation of air, space, and cyberspace.

With the help of everyone in this room, and of others who share this vision with us, we can again be ambitious about charting a bold, visionary course for our Air Force, with a focus, ladies and gentlemen, on what we are for, and what we want to be, and less – much less – on what we're against.

As I look to the future, I envision an Air Force that effectively controls and exploits air and space, and eventually cyberspace, in ways that provide even greater margins of global stability and economic vitality. We anticipate significant challenges in gaining access to these commons, as our adversaries pursue asymmetric methods for thwarting our use of air, space, and cyberspace. The proliferation of precision means that state and non-state actors will continue to build sophisticated air defenses, long range missiles, and even short-range precision systems, that will threaten our bases and



deployed forces. Attacks through cyberspace and evolving electronic warfare technologies threaten to neutralize some of the advantages of our strike platforms, our command and control systems, and ISR networks.

To meet these challenges, our Air Force will need to work with the scientific community, our Allies, and industry partners, so that we have the capability to secure and protect the commons. In the tradition of Dr. Theodore von Karman, General Hap Arnold's chief scientist, our chief scientist, Dr. Werner Dahm, is conducting a "Technology Horizons" study, to identify the most promising technologies our Air Force can adopt to give us the flexibility to respond to the changes in all aspects of warfare – irregular, conventional, and nuclear.

We need an Air Force that continues to provide compelling conventional and nuclear capabilities that assure Allies, and dissuade and deter potential adversaries from attacking our Nation or its vital interests. In the future, this will include a next-generation long range strike and reconnaissance capability that enables penetration of contested airspace so that we may range and credibly engage any target in the world. Surely, there will be greatly increased demand for overhead and air-breathing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, so that our military forces and national leadership retain an unprecedented understanding of the global operating environment. The ability to perceive and anticipate an adversary's actions and intent offers a decisive advantage in warfare, and in maintaining the peace. Our Air Force maintains the world's most advanced systems for detecting, identifying, and targeting an adversary. We are currently the sole provider of the worldwide communications and precision navigation and timing capabilities that are increasingly required to conduct operations in all the domains. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will require that we increase our ability to monitor and detect technology transfer and weapons movements. We are pursuing the means to rapidly place our Nation's satellites into operational orbits – essentially on call – so that we can detect the threats and provide the



warning necessary to protect our Nation and our Allies from ballistic missile and rocket attacks, and from other hard to attribute threats in the commons.

Finally, in the future, an equally enduring, unique, and important contribution to the Nation's defense will be our ability to rapidly project and sustain Joint forces anywhere in the world. Failed nations, transnational terrorists, or even natural disasters will require our Nation to respond quickly, with force or assistance. Our ability to operate in air, space, and cyberspace gives our Nation a clear advantage in speed, range, and flexibility; and, our air mobility forces are necessary for building the extensive lines of communication, needed to send military or economic assistance – quickly, and for as long a period as is needed.

These capabilities that I've described are what make the United States Air Force vital to our national security. No other institution on earth provides the range of capabilities in air and space, or the global command and control to integrate their use. This is our unique and enduring contribution to the Joint team. Yes, it is our calling, and teamwork demands total commitment to doing our part – whatever is necessary to help the Joint team win today's fight, and letting the results speak for themselves – as we should neither seek to outdo, nor to take credit; for in the end, the thrill of victory is amplified, and the distress of setbacks is lessened, when we operate as a Joint team, together and unified in effort. Sometimes the nature of the conflict will place us in the lead, and others will support our efforts, as in recent decades; but, the nature of today's counterinsurgency fight emphasizes the capabilities that our ground force teammates provide, and we will, without hesitation, ensure their success.

In the future, we likely will find ourselves once again in an operation that emphasizes Air Force contributions, but in the meantime, we will devote ourselves fully to providing the Joint force commanders whatever capabilities they need to prevail, because in the end, there is no Air Force victory in war, or Air Force loss in war. Only the United States of America stumbles or succeeds; and while we are unsure of precisely what lies ahead, we can be sure that currently, there is a growing demand for the capabilities that we provide – air



mobility, unmanned aircraft orbits, satellite bandwidth, close air support, “beyond the wire” combat Airmen, and so much more. And, America can always count on the U.S. Air Force to deliver.

More accurately, it is our Airmen who will deliver. Today, some 40,000 Airmen are deployed in support of combatant commanders around the world, with more than 32,000 deployed to the CENTCOM AOR; and, the vast majority have served on multiple deployments, with no doubt more in their future. For a moment, let me tell you the story of just one of them.

Senior Airman Danny Williams is an explosive ordnance disposal specialist, assigned to Travis Air Force Base, California, who, while serving with the 755th Air Expeditionary Group in Afghanistan, performed with exceptional valor under extremely difficult circumstances. On the fourth of April, 2009, Airman Williams witnessed an IED explosion that claimed the life of his friend and team leader, Technical Sergeant Phil Myers, while they worked together to clear a road that was used as a major casualty evacuation route. Shaken, but driven by his firm determination and mission focus, Airman Williams took charge, and stopped those rushing toward the still-live IED, who were attempting to aid Sergeant Myers; thus, preventing more casualties. Danny understood that he had to find a way to quickly disarm the device. With the lives of fellow Airmen and teammates hanging in the balance, Danny quickly evaluated the options, and concluded that he would have to remove Sergeant Myers from the lethal radius of the IED. Without regard for his personal safety, Airman Williams picked up his friend, and carried him from the danger zone, and then “rendered safe” the IED. His actions saved lives, and reopened the evacuation route that was blocked by the explosives. These accounts of heroism are as exceptional as the impeccable character that underwrites uncommon valor. We honor our heroes, and yes we seek to emulate them, for they inspire us with their rare brand of sacrifice – willful, faithful, and sometimes, ultimate. We are reminded that humble service to our country shall continue to call for “the last full measure of devotion,” from the bravest and most – the most – generous amongst us.



Danny, I know that you understand this all too well; and, I know that you travel that high and truly admired road of humility, accompanied only by the most distinguished of our teammates. But I ask you to please stand, for just for a moment please, and accept our heartfelt appreciation for your tremendous and admirable service, and for the many heroes you represent.

As an explosive ordnance disposal technician, Airman Danny Williams also represents the many Airmen in critically important career fields who have moved out of the shadows and into prominence in today's fight. This unexpected demand for Airmen with special qualifications has resulted in a deployment tempo, the likes of which we have never seen before. Today, I'd like to recognize the many Airmen who – only by virtue of their chosen career field – have lived their lives with a one-to-one dwell time, for several years. These Airmen include: contracting, airfield operations, intelligence, Office of Special Investigations, security forces, Tactical Air Control Parties, civil engineers, combat camera, and, of course, our chaplains. We recognize them as “first among equals,” in the degree of commitment and dedication, and we especially honor your families' service and sacrifice as well.

As Suzie and I travel across the Air Force and meet with Airmen, it's clear to us, the impact of nearly 20 years of continuous deployments, and the impact that has had on our families. Foremost in our minds is our commitment to preserving Air Force installations as close-knit and caring communities, where every Airman, civilian, spouse, child, and retiree feels a special bond within a larger Air Force family. The evidence is overwhelming that this sense of community, and the culture of mutual support, is why families stay in our Air Force, despite the hardships, and despite the sacrifice. But I am mindful that our Air Force community, while sturdy, is not unbreakable, and that we have tested its resilience over the years, largely as a result of efforts to downsize and economize the way we operate our installations. Through successive rounds of base closures, we've closed many single-wing, smaller bases – where everyone knew your name – and consolidated them into “mega-bases,” and in the process diminished an aspect of small-town community life that the “one-wing,



one-base” concept fostered. We’ve consolidated and closed clubs, downsized dormitories, and encouraged single Airmen to live off-base; and we’ve closed dining facilities, which for decades have served as the “evening dinner table” for so many single Airmen in our Air Force family.

Secretary Donley, Chief Roy, and many others here today have spent a great deal of time discussing these issues, considering the second and third order effects of business decisions on our Air Force culture, because if we lose the sense of community that makes Air Force service special and unique, we will lose many of the Airmen and families that make us the world’s greatest Air Force.

In order to focus the collective attention of our entire Air Force leadership on this issue, Secretary Donley and I have designated this year, as you heard yesterday, as the Year of the Air Force Family. During the next 10 months, we will highlight the importance of, and commitment to, the entire Air Force family: all Airmen – married and single; spouses; children; Air Force civilians; extended families; and retirees. We will devote this year to identifying what we are doing right, and what we need to do better, to support the entire Air Force family, and to rekindle the sense of community that has been our tradition for so many generations.

Our Year of the Family program rests on four pillars, which are the foundations of Air Force family life:

- health and wellness of every member of our family;
- support to Airmen and families across the range of needs, and especially support to families of deployed and those with special needs family members;
- education, development, and employment; and finally,
- Airman and family housing.

While our commitment to these pillars of community life and support has been longstanding, this year, we’ll initiate a series of programs and assessments in each area, to improve the lives of our Air Force family – a commitment worthy of those who serve our Nation so admirably in time of war.



We place a tremendous premium on this culture of family and community, as much as on our core values of *Integrity, Service and Excellence* – values that are instilled in our Airmen from the very moment that they arrive at basic training, and which have guided the actions for a generation of Airmen. I am encouraged to see, especially among our NCOs and senior enlisted leadership, an emerging and deep-seated culture of excellence, where achieving the highest levels of job performance is not just an individual value – or, a choice made by some to guide their personal conduct – but supremely valued and expected from everyone, and demanded of subordinates by supervisors at all levels.

I am extremely pleased to see this culture of excellence blossom, and I encourage all here today to take measure of their own personal commitment, and settle for nothing but the best from themselves and their fellow Airmen – including this Airman – and to instill in all, that successful mission accomplishment must be the driving source of our collective job satisfaction. I see examples of this commitment every day – men and women of impeccable character, with the capacity to endure sacrifice and hardship.

No Airman better exemplifies this spirit – no one better – than Technical Sergeant Matthew Slaydon, who survived an IED explosion at a range of about two feet, while performing his duties as an EOD technician in Iraq in 2007. Matt survived, but sustained critical injuries that changed the course of his life forever. Suzie and I attended Matt and Annette's retirement just a couple of weeks ago. For those of you who have the privilege of knowing this remarkable warrior, husband, and Airman, you have seen this firsthand, the power and resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity, as well as what one can achieve by looking forward, and focusing on the opportunities that life offers, whatever your circumstance.

Matt Slaydon and Danny Williams are men of few words, but it is not their words for which we know and honor them. They are quiet men of resounding action – living examples of the fact that words mean very little, as it is our actions that will determine our value and lasting contribution. And, we all could benefit by promising a little less – and delivering a little more – because



in the end, only results matter. This lesson applies to individuals, and to organizations, inside and outside of government. All of us here today, starting with me – and everyone in uniform, as well as those representing the many institutions that support and do business with the Air Force – will be judged by our ability to meet our obligations and commitments to our Joint teammates, especially those engaged in combat, to our combatant commanders, to our leadership in the Administration and in Congress, and to the American people, who watch our actions closely.

As public servants all, and especially as members of the Armed Forces, Americans rightly judge us by the highest ethical standards, and in this regard, our reputation means everything. In no area is this truer than in how we conduct ourselves with respect to major acquisition programs, where we are entrusted with billions of taxpayer treasure, and are expected to deliver best value for the American people – our only real constituency. We have learned time and again that there is only one path to success in how we manage major acquisition programs, and that is the straight path, strictly in accordance with law, and the many regulations that prevent even the perception of undue influence by any stakeholder.

We've also learned that our reputation is fragile, and that even a single lapse reverberates for years, and invites the justifiable and deserved scrutiny of those who provide oversight of our activities on behalf of the American taxpayer. For those of us here today, old enough to have lived through the years of past acquisition challenges, it is our obligation to instill this lesson in the next generation of acquisition professionals and all others in our Air Force: that our reputation is everything to us; and that it is easily tarnished, and it takes years to restore. And, teaching that lesson begins by setting the highest personal example. Let's do this together in our family, having made each day an example for the one that follows.

This morning I have looked mostly forward, as we face a challenging counterinsurgency in Afghanistan that will again test our stamina and our commitment to winning today's fight, but I'd like to end with a brief look back,



and to remember how far we've come. Through a spirit of innovation, Americans broke us free from the ground over one hundred years ago, fulfilling one of mankind's earliest dreams. Our grandparents marveled at the Wright flyer of Kittyhawk, Eddie Rickenbacker's Spad Thirteen, and, of course, Doolittle's B-25. Our parents listened in awe to radio reports of Joseph McConnell in his F-86, as he downed 16 MIGs in Korea, or honored the bravery of Rudolf Anderson in his U-2, who gave his life to help prevent the Soviets from establishing a nuclear presence in the Western Hemisphere. All of us watched the Mercury Seven astronauts open up space for all humanity. It was these aviators that inspired the dreams of many in this room to become Airmen. That spectacular scene of America's first steps on the moon, viewed while I stood at attention during Doolie summer at the Air Force Academy in 1969, has never left me; and, even as my generation entered the Air Force Academy, it was the heroics of DeBellevue and Ritchie, to which we all aspired.

Common to our heritage is the relationship between the aviator and the machine, alone together in the vastness of sky or space. The relationship is etched into our very psyche. It is so powerful an idea, that it has attracted the best and the brightest that the world has to offer to our Nation's service. It is these people who made us the service of technological innovation; but today, the evolution of the machine is beginning to outpace the capability of the people we put in them. We now must reconsider the relationship of man and woman, machine, and air. We must question, and ultimately answer, manned or unmanned in combat and support aircraft. We must continue to evolve and embrace the culture of technological innovation which has been our hallmark. We have always, and will continue to use this technological innovation to provide for the security of our nation. Technology will allow us to better execute defense, when in the past only offense was viable.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's think now of the possibilities. Let's drive ourselves with a sense of purpose toward these extraordinary possibilities. As my dear friend Jim Callard would routinely remind: *carpe diem* – seize the day!



And, as Matt Slaydon so eloquently instructed all of us at the untimely conclusion of his active-duty career just weeks ago: “hold the line...hold the line.” We can do this, and we will. It’s been a pleasure to speak to you today. Thank you very much.