

TRANSCRIPT

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Senator James Inhofe
Republican, Oklahoma

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DWG: I guess this morning, he probably needs no introduction, but we'll give him one anyway. We're joined today by Senator James Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma. Sir, thank you as well for making the time to come and sit down with us here today.

Senator Inhofe is an Army veteran, a pilot with over 11,000 flying hours including some time upside down, a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Chairman of the Readiness Subcommittee, so plenty of qualifications and plenty to talk about today as well.

Sir, you wanted to kick things off with a few words about current legislation and some of your amendments.

Senator Inhofe: Yeah. First of all, I have to get this off my chest, too. The last time I did this was at the Capitol Hill [inaudible], it was a lot more convenient. Just thought I'd throw that out. We got here 30 minutes early.

What I thought I'd do, I thought I'd cover four things real quick. They'll be fast, but there's a reason for each one of the four.

The first one has to do with veterans. I know that's not generally the subject of this table. I have had the opportunity to be here before. But we had an experience in Oklahoma, USA Today in December, December 23rd, right before Christmas, 2015, they had a front-page story about how we're mistreating veterans in Oklahoma and that really upset me because I went through 20 years or so of being the only member of our delegation in Oklahoma who was a veteran. So we ended up getting [inaudible]. I was always proud of what we did, but I found out that they were right. We called in the Inspector General and said we want you to come in, but we want you to bring a third party. This is significant. Any bureaucracy needs to have someone looking over their shoulder. So they said no, we won't do that. I said fine, you haven't been confirmed yet, so I put a hold on it. And then after a couple of days he said all right, we'll do it.

So they brought in a third party to oversee, and it doesn't really matter what the third party is, but it worked. So we were able to get everything really corrected. In Oklahoma, we had Oklahoma City and Muskogee, the two areas where our veterans are, and we actually got it cleaned up. We had to fire both of the administrators and we got good ones in. We jumped up from a one star to a three star and we're now one of the best operations.

Now I say this because you guys should know that there's a way if there's a problem that you can correct it. And the legislation that came from this did two things. The legislation that I introduced. It's now passed and it's now part of the system.

One is that it will allow permanently for someone to have a third party come with an IG so that they can't cover things up. Someone looking over their shoulder. That's now permanent.

The other thing is, and that was also in the legislation. By giving them the ability to come in and immediately fire someone if they're not performing right. This is something that we did have a little bit of problem getting it passed with some of the government units, but nonetheless, that's part of it now.

Now it makes a big difference. If you go in there and you find that there's a problem and it takes you six months to get rid of somebody, it doesn't have the same effect as if you do it immediately. So now it can be done immediately. And those two things are a major step into that [fight].

I'd like just to kind of go around to some of the areas that I know you're interested in. One, North Korea. [Inaudible] greatest stressors. A division here I think even on the committee. I have no doubt in my mind that North Korea is the greatest threat. Some people think it's Iran. We've had many hearings, many meetings, you folks have sat in I'm sure on some of the hearings that we've had, and every time we have the top brass come in, they say that the big problem with North Korea is that you've got a guy who's mentally deranged who's running the show here. So he's totally unpredictable and there's no, you can't, and that's what is scary.

Along with that is the capability North Korea has now. We know that. On the 4th of July they actually had a successful ICBM and it was, so we all know that the capability is there. And even the Defense Intelligence says now it will be next year, by next year, they keep moving it up a year and a year and a year. Now it's going to be next year that they have a capability of targeting an American city and having the ability to arrange a big effect.

I think they could have it already, because they keep changing it in terms of the capabilities are, what the technology is they've been able to perfect over there. And so I think they already -- but it doesn't really matter. Even right now, they could do it.

They've got the range, we know that. It could hit part of the United States. They wouldn't have the accuracy because those people who don't want to believe that there is that big of a threat, the only thing they say is well, they don't have a reentry capability. They do. It's called gravity. You're going to come down. So I think that's a very serious thing and we are addressing that in the building.

[Inaudible] a good job in Afghanistan, [inaudible] on that.

In Ukraine, I was over there when they had the parliamentary elections and Poroshenko, this is the first time in 96 years that they don't have one communist on their parliament in Ukraine. So immediately Putin came in right after that parliament and started killing Ukrainians. We know that. We followed that. We heard about it. And yet we tried to send defensive weapons over, this is during the Obama administration, and we were unable to get defensive weapons over there.

So we now have, we had to [ram] it through, as you know, our authorization, our channels to help them do that. I'm particularly concerned about that. I've been there twice in the last six months, and I look at them and here's, here's Poroshenko at that time, for the first time in 96 years. It's because he loves the West, he loves us, and that's how we [inaudible] those [inaudible] at that time.

The Iran deal. Two weeks ago I was in Israel, and I've gotten to know Netanyahu pretty well. I don't have time to tell that story. I thought he did a great job when he spoke to the joint session. It was suggested he change his registration and run for President of the United States. But anyway, he was smiling. He doesn't smile a lot. You've probably noticed. He doesn't have a lot to smile about, I guess, with the problems they have, and he used to always say why is it the American people have forgotten 9/11? And yet here, in Israel, when you go into a, you get on a bus or go to a coffee shop, you don't really know what's going to be happening to you.

This time I happened to be there right after the President did not recertify, as you well know, this rotten deal that John Carey put together on Iran. It was something that really upset Netanyahu and the others, and it's set up so the President couldn't just do away with it, but it has to be recertified every 90 days. You all know this, but the general public doesn't. So he said he was not going to recertify it. I've never seen Netanyahu look so happy in my life.

In Syria, I really believe, I'd like to over-dramatize this because I think a lot of you probably don't like Trump. I do. I had a personal experience with him October the 10th, and if there's time, I'll tell you about it. But he, I think he reinstated America as a leader of the free world in responding to Syria, to the chemical weapons in the way that he did. This is something that they weren't used to after years of Obama.

And AFRICOM, I want to say one thing. That will be the last thing I'll say about going around the world here, but it's one, and I've been criticized for it but I've survived that. I

just came back from my 156th African country visit. I know Africa. When they complained about Niger, what was happening in Niger, and talking about what are we doing with 6,000 American troops in Africa? Well, you stop and think about that. Of the 6,000, 4,000 of those are Djibouti, and that doesn't really handle the, it handles a lot more than just Africa. Then 750 are the Marines that are attached to the various embassies. So we just sent 1300 people in an area the size of Africa.

I was the one, I think you probably know, I had quite a bit to do with, I won't say who did it, but the continent of Africa was always in three different commands. Pacific Command, European Command, and Central Command. And anyway, they should have had the command they did. But when they set up the AFRICOM, they didn't resource it. They don't have anything over there. They have to borrow troops mostly from either Central Command or, and so now I think after what has happened and people are more aware of it, I think we're going to be in a position to maybe get that done and we'll be working on that.

Now [inaudible] over the crisis was mentioned, I chaired a committee, the Readiness Committee, subcommittee. It's ironic, because when I came in the Senate 23 years ago, that's the committee I chaired at that time. So I'm back with my old committee now. As you know, and some of you don't know this, but I chaired the Environment and Public Works Committee for the maximum years that you're allowed to do it under our rules, so I was concentrating a lot on that. And I'm back at the Readiness.

Readiness is the [inaudible]. When [inaudible] was there, and one of the quotes I use all the time is we will lose our quantitative and qualitative competitive advantage, our bases.

I had a hearing in the readiness subcommittee where we had all the Vices come in, and they said that we, they all agreed that we have the hollow force of the '70s, that's the Carter administration. That's how serious it is.

The problem is, the public doesn't know. That's why it's important, that's why you see, those of you who go to the committee hearings, each time on questions that I have either for the uniforms, for the Secretaries or Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, is to let them know that we, praise them for finally coming out and telling the truth about the threats facing America. I challenge each one of them to do the same thing. They all said they are going to do it.

So people are aware of it. People who know what's happened over the years, our military. I often go back and look. Up through the '60s we spent over 50 percent of the revenue that we have generated in this country on defending America. It's now down to 15 percent. That has to tell you something. We just don't have the resources. And of course during the Obama administration, we had serious problems with our maintenance. Or course maintenance and modernization is the first thing that goes when you're on a starvation diet in the military.

Anyway, we do have that serious problem that we're trying to deal with, and I'm particularly trying to deal with it. If you look at the Air Force, we had the pilot shortage. You know that. You've been covering these stories for a long time. And I do have a background in aviation, so when I talk to the pilots, it's not just the bonuses. It costs about \$16 million to take someone off the street and train them to be the level of an F-22 pilot. And that's the cost. So yeah, we could afford bigger bonuses. I'm convinced that it won't be bonuses, increased bonuses are not going to help, it's because they're not getting the flying hours.

I calculated the other day that during the August recess I actually had more flying hours than my non-forward stationed pilots had. And they are there because they want to fly, and they don't get to fly. So that's a huge issue, and it's one that we are, understand now and we're going to try to correct.

Maintenance Problems. The Marines that use the F-18s, and you guys are probably aware of this. Sixty-two percent of our F-18s don't work. They can't fly. They're either cannibalized or they don't have the parts for them. So it is a crisis the public does not know about.

When you look at all the deadly mishaps that we've had. You can tie those to readiness. People don't like to do it, but you can't positively say in the case of the one, two, three, four naval mishaps that they had, that all of them were due to that. But in fact, logically they are. And we have 12 of them, the aviation mishaps, that I think can be identified with the fact that we're not maintaining properly our equipment, and the kids out there, and I'm talking about the Army, too. Not just aviation.

Anyway, you say how do we fix it? One of the things, I just mentioned. We need to have the public understand it, because, and particularly during the Obama administration, they kept talking about and repeating over and over again the greatest Army, the greatest military on the face of this earth. We have responsibilities beyond just defending America. We've assumed that in terms of being leaders in the free world. And so we had to show people and demonstrate clearly within this world there are, that we do have shortfalls, and we're going to have to try to correct them. The best way to do it is to try to get people to understand that there is a problem, and we can do that to the senior and uniformed personnel as well as some of the others, and then of course try to do something about the Continuing Resolution. I don't think you've attended one hearing that had the top people in it that didn't address, talk about that as being, the Continuing Resolution as being a disaster.

I'm going to kind of skip through now. Last night at 10 o'clock we finished up our Defense Authorization Bill, and that's why this guy's sitting next to me, because he was involved with doing all this stuff and you might ask a question I'm not sure I can answer. But I can just briefly run over what is in the bill because I know you folks are interested in that.

Our conference in the Senate, [inaudible], you all remember that. That was some time ago, and we had the figures, the authorization figures are different than they were before. It does have the 626 [inaudible], and then 65.8. So you're back up to the \$700 billion. That includes \$5.9 billion of authorization for the Administration Budget Amendment to fund missile defense.

Missile defense is something that we saw suffer during the last administration, at a time when it is more necessary now than it ever has been before. Everybody has missiles.

I look back, and you've heard me say this before. I look wistfully at the days of the Cold War. We had two super powers. We knew what they had, they knew what we had. And mutually assured destruction. It doesn't mean anything anymore. But nonetheless, that's one of the major things that we [inaudible] in this bill, and we can give you a breakdown on that.

We had an additional 8,500 additional soldiers; 1,000 additional -- this is over and above what you knew about yesterday, so this is all in this.

Well, I'll do this, I'll just see what areas of interest you have in that and try to respond to your questions.

DWG: I'm sure we will have a lot of questions about the details of the NDAA, so thank you for loading that up. We'll begin over on the left with Sidney.

DWG: Senator, Sidney Friedberg, Breaking Defense.

There are two big pieces of legislation moving at once. One is the NDAA [inaudible]. [Inaudible] ranking Democrat on the House side. How can we be on the one hand saying we don't have enough money for defense; and we're laboring under a Budget Control Act cap. And yet at the same time, we're going to cut revenue on a massive scale. How do those things add up? How do you expect to achieve more funding for Defense while slashing government revenue?

Senator Inhofe: I'd say first of all, the problem is not the inadequacy of money, it's the wrong priorities. The top priority should be defending America, and go back and read the constitution. That's what it should be, the top priority that we have. And during the Obama years, it wasn't.

DWG: What was it?

Senator Inhofe: Well during the Obama years you, he had this statement, and this was his policy, and the Democrats all went along with it, and that's a thing that's very significant. That you can't do anything about sequestration in the military without adding money into the military unless you put an equal amount into the social

programs. What does that tell you? It tells you that there is no difference in the priority between the two.

I don't say that critically of Obama. Liberals never are real strong on defense.

So the President very clearly, and I actually talked to him about this way back in October before he took office, a year ago now, not just recently, that it's going to, the money is there but you're going to have to change the priorities. Now where you cut, that's a hard question. I'm not on the finance committee. I won't have that much to do with that.

But you have seen already the President in his rhetoric making his Tweets, that that should be the priority. That should be the number one priority, and it has not been before.

DWG: So cut --

Senator Inhofe: And remember when I was talking about in the '60s, over 50 percent of our revenues went to defending America. Now it's 15 percent. That demonstrates real clearly that that has changed over the years.

DWG: And that's before the social programs -- Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. So should we go back to [inaudible] Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: I can't tell you where we go back and how we do it. No. I can't do that. But I do know that that's going to be the challenge that we're going to be facing, and the two committees that do address that are pretty busy right now. But I think the leadership from the top is going to have to say we're now going to reprioritize and put defending America back where it belongs. Not just because the constitution says so, but because we have a greater threat than we've ever had in the history of this country.

DWG: Hi, sir. Do you support the Air Force being allowed to launch on commercial payloads on excess ICBM rockets?

Senator Inhofe: If that's the price they have to pay to be able to have the resources to launch the rockets, then I would say yes.

DWG: Aren't you concerned with the effect that putting these motors on the market might have on the small launch developers?

Senator Inhofe: It might be. I would be concerned about that. But overriding that concern as to who might get the short end, I want to be able to say that somehow we're going to have to be able to afford to do all this stuff and it's not going to be easy.

DWG: Was this a topic during conference?

Senator Inhofe: I don't recall that it was. I don't recall it was. I can't remember. I didn't miss any of the meetings.

DWG: Good morning, Senator. The summary that came out of the conference report mentioned that NDAA would be [inaudible] space-based sensor layer, but there aren't really any details in that. Can you sort of fill us in a little bit on what that space-based extra layer involves and why, how it will help in missile defense?

Senator Inhofe: No, I can't.

DWG: Because it's classified or just --

Senator Inhofe: A little bit of each, but it's also ignorance.

DWG: In terms of just the missile defense increase by 50 percent increase. Do you have any concern about the agencies' and the industrial base's ability to absorb such a big increase in such a short time?

Senator Inhofe: I do. Yes. I do have a concern. Often the industrial base is overlooked when you're looking at programs, and the lack of predictability is the biggest enemy of the industrial base. They can't respond quickly. And that's a problem that we deal with on a regular basis saying you can't just change something overnight and expect -- you know, if you sit in on those meetings, some of them you're not allowed to sit in on and some you are. But I'm sure you're aware that when you make a major change it's something that changes the whole work force and the whole industry all over America. And outside of America. And it can't be done. Every time I see, whether it's an F-35 or any kind of a new [inaudible]. We went to the JC-46, one of the great things that's happening right now in the military. But the changes that took place, it's almost as if the members are not aware that you can't -- I came from industry, and you can't make those changes and adjust to it. So I'd say my answer is yes.

DWG: So are you optimistic or pessimistic that all that money will be spent? That some of that money won't be spent [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: Obviously, you can't, there are a lot of cases that we all know about where you can't spend a whole bunch of money some place even though it's, it can be actually authorized inappropriately. If it can't be done, you've got to use common sense.

DWG: Everybody [inaudible] the Budget Control Act caps that are still in place. What actions are the Republican party [inaudible]? [Inaudible].

Senator Inhofe: Since Jeff Sessions is no longer in the Senate, I'd give you a different answer. Because he was always the one that regardless of what, that had to be a number one thing.

With me, it's not so much. My number one priority is to do the military the way it has to be done to save my 20 kids and grandkids. Then I look at the cap. We may end up having to [inaudible]. I don't know. I do know that if you -- we have to see where the votes are on that. I would think they would be to actually extend the caps.

DWG: To extend the cap?

Senator Inhofe: I think that would ultimately have to happen, if you really want to do what has to be done, have it [inaudible].

DWG: For the FY18 cap, do you see for the fourth time since the BCA has been passed, relief for at least '18, or are you pessimistic that despite your work, you're going to be confined to the 549 [inaudible] national defense?

Senator Inhofe: Well, no. In fact of course this is authorization we're talking about, that passed last night, not appropriation. But I'm not, no. I'm not convinced we have to. I think we have to exceed that and I think we will exceed that, mainly because we now have a House and a Senate and a White House, and while, you know, defending America should not be a partisan issue, you know out of the votes [inaudible], even though the other side, and they're certainly not budget hawks, but nonetheless, they have priorities other than defending America.

So I think now, if we were to have to go beyond the caps, I think very likely that would happen. It would happen because we have a different Congress and we have a different administration.

DWG: So the [inaudible] budget hawks, do you see them [inaudible], that they would be in favor of the [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: No. I'd say there would be a vote on that take place, and I think they'd lose.

DWG: One of the questions, your Chairman McCain has said he's had better relations with Ash Carter than he's had with Secretary Mattis. Is that your experience too?

Senator Inhofe: Not at all. No, not at all. Mattis, I just, he's a godsend. I disagree respectfully with -- I do disagree on a few things with McCain, and I think you folks have probably seen this. This is one area, because I think we've got the right people there. I think there is a personal thing with, let me word this right here.

DWG: It's all right.

Senator Inhofe: I know, because I didn't say it. [Laughter].

I really believe that there's bad blood between the President and Senator McCain. We

all know that. They're not good friends. So I think that perhaps that's resulted in being a little overly critical of different parts of his administration. But that would be the last one that I would find that I can justify being critical of. I know, I really believe that he's the right guy there. It's an honest difference of opinion.

DWG: Senator, Wilson [inaudible] from Air Force Magazine.

You've been strongly opposed to another round of base realignment and closure. Can you talk a little bit about why? And then are there any conditions under which you would support a new round of BRAC?

Senator Inhofe: Yeah, if it's done at the appropriate time. But to authorize it now, to be done at the time that the authorization would take place. As you know, this is another one of the areas where I disagree with John McCain.

My reason is this. BRAC rounds are good. I've been through all five BRAC rounds. The first one being I think 1989. It was right after I got, I was in the House at that time. I was in the House Armed Services Committee for eight years before coming to the Senate. I think most of you know that.

The BRAC rounds, when you talk about excess resources, excess capabilities, and you're in the middle of growing and rebuilding the military, it doesn't make sense to do it at that time because you don't know what you're going to need. And I think common sense would dictate that if it requires more resources on the ground, then it's cheaper to do it with something that we already own today than closing.

The second thing is, I'll argue to the death on this because we've really studied this thing. No matter what you do and when you do it, another BRAC round is going to cost money the first four years. And it always has. It's always cost a lot more than they say. This is a time when our defense budget cannot afford, we need to be getting into things -- readiness, end strength, the things that are going to put us in the position we need to be in now. So we'd be competing with those dollars. So the two reasons that I would oppose it now, are those two reasons.

Generally, I know what's going through your mind. Maybe not yours, but other minds around the table. You know, Inhofe has five major military installations in the state. Obviously, I do care about that. But I look at it differently. Rather than to try to keep them in existence by refusing to have a BRAC round, I'd rather have them come out and [inaudible]. That's better than any of the competition, and I'll give you a couple of examples.

We used to have five ALCs, and we competed with them and ended up, we got rid of two of them. That's when Kay Bailey Hutchison and I got into it on the Floor. You might remember that. It wasn't a lot of fun. But we won. So now we have three of them, they're down to three. That's in Utah and Georgia and Tinker Air Force Base in

Oklahoma. They come to Oklahoma now from Utah and Georgia to see how we're doing what we're doing, because we're doing a better job.

The same thing is true with the least known of our military establishments, and that's in the McAlister operation. It's an Army depot. We do things, every time, in fact I'll say this. With all five BRAC rounds, we are the only state where all five, all of our military installations, have up-sized and taken on a greater mission and greater financial responsibility, and a greater number of people. That's each one of the five that we have. And it's because, you guys, I know you won't believe this, because you'll say everybody has community support. But they don't. In ours, if you're at [Altus] or any of the places that we have there, and there's a problem with the school system, they build a new school for them. That's community support. We actually do. Other people don't do it. So we have done very well.

I wouldn't be at all concerned, the reason that I frankly won that battle in terms of this bill is that it has nothing to do with being concerned about losing one of our bases. That ain't going to happen. And history has shown that it hasn't happened. We're the only state with all of ours qualified to flourish with each of the five BRAC rounds.

DWG: In terms of the right time, what are the signals that you would look for that indicate that the military is healthy enough to finish this expansion we're in now, and now we're ready for BRAC?

Senator Inhofe: First of all, the BRAC suggestion now wasn't going to be next year. It was going to be, I think the first change would have been in 2020. But I would say we are looking at our capabilities as opposed to the threats that are out there, and let me give you an example.

One of the criticisms, many criticisms as you know by now and probably already knew that I had with the Obama administration was when we first got in, he first got in -- well, no. Prior to that. When George W. was there, I was part of the program to put in a ground-based interceptor and a radar in the Czech Republic and Poland. The reason for that was that everything, all of our ground-based interceptors are on the West Coast. That's where the threat was at that time. It's not true anymore, and we knew that it wasn't going to be true. So that would take care of both Eastern United States and Western Europe. And I remember, I got to know [inaudible] pretty well during this. And he said to me, he said how do we know that if we do this we're going to just really make Russia, I mean they're going to hate us for it and they're going to take action against us if we agree to do this. He said, can you assure me that under no circumstances will you renege on this thing once we agree? I said absolutely. The first thing that Obama did was bag that program. I forgot what your question is, but that's the answer.

DWG: I want to return to the question on the BCA, but also talk about authorization and [inaudible]. Since you just passed the authorization bill, I'm curious, you increased

a lot of line items. Ninety F-35s, [inaudible]. But when it comes to actually appropriating that money, what are you telling industry to look for? And should we follow the figures in the authorization bill? Or should they be looking for what's going to happen ultimately in the appropriations bill to know [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: It's a difficult thing for them. They're going to have to try to guess, and that's why I say that that unpredictability is the biggest enemy in the work force out there nationwide.

What I'd do is take what we have right here, and this is last night's product. That's what we're going to pass and it's going to be on the books. Then if I were one of the defense contractors, I'd be looking real carefully to see how the Senate and the House are responding to this change that we have, and try to sense where the appropriators are going to take it.

I can't tell you right now, and I don't think anyone around this table can, and yet, but the industry out there that has to support this stuff, they have to make huge decisions, and they're going to try to make that evaluation.

So I don't think anyone out there is going to be able to say, are they going to follow this lead? Are they going to appropriate what we're authorizing. We're going to be pushing hard to do that because we really believe that we need to, but that hasn't been done yet. So I can't tell you. I can't look into the near future, which it will be, and see what that's going to be.

DWG: Separately, I wanted to ask you about Tinker and what are the kind of top couple of maintenance issues that are facing [inaudible] right now.

Senator Inhofe: There's one huge problem that we have. We can't find enough engineers. In fact the commanding general at Tinker right now, I happened to be on a panel with him and with the presidents of both OSU and OU and he said we would hire every graduating engineer that you can get us because that's the biggest problem that they're faced with right now.

Now they're in pretty good shape in terms of operating personnel because we've been doing it for so many years. And one of the things that's attractive to industry coming into the Tinker, where I will be, I'll be riding on a horse in a parade and two days from now, through Tinker, we have the base, we have the manpower there. And a lot of people don't, but we do. That's not a shortfall for us. I'd say the biggest problem we have is with engineers right now.

DWG: [Inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: This budget?

DWG: Yes. Do you have enough suppliers and --

Senator Inhofe: Oh, yeah, we do. See, in our industrial part that's a part of Tinker, it's attached to it. It's huge now. I remember, I can say some things that other people can't say because I've always had conservative credentials, and when they get on -- we had one major building that we were going to, and we were trying to put into Tinker and it was already there but it was not being used, and the conservatives were complaining about it, and my response was, I want to make sure that we always have excess capacity in each one of our installations because when a BRAC round comes or something changes, that's where people would go to, and that's exactly what happened. So we do have that. We have that capability that I know that Georgia and Utah both wish they had. They've told me this.

DWG: Back to the BCA. You say you don't know what [inaudible] House appropriations bill. Their defense markup goes to the caps. Is there any interest there to go above the caps? You say there will be a vote. Where will the vote come?

Senator Inhofe: No, I'm talking about when they go through the appropriation process, those guys who are on the committee are going to make a lot of decisions as to what to do. You can remember many times when we have gone over and gone under caps. They're there. No one walks away thinking I'm recommending we do that. Clearly, I want to make the adjustments within the budget. And I think we can do that only by shifting priorities. I'm not totally optimistic we're going to be able to do this. I was only speaking for myself.

DWG: -- priorities, the BCA [inaudible]. You couldn't just say okay, we'll take away from domestic and pump it into defense if you don't [inaudible].

Senator Inhofe: I disagree with that. I think you can do that.

DWG: Without changing the 2010 --

Senator Inhofe: If it ends up the caps are broken readjustments can be made. Caps are put there by Congress, and Congress can change what Congress puts there.

I'm not saying this is going to be easy. And I'm not saying that everyone agrees with me. Our job is to make sure that others know so that they can apply the pressure out there that we have great needs that need to be served.

DWG: A couple of defense analysts [inaudible] said instead of focusing on increasing the size of the military, that your authorization does, at least three of the services, instead of increasing right now, what we need to do is modernize it and increase readiness.

Senator Inhofe: Agreed.

DWG: -- your view on that? Do we have a bigger need to modernize and increase readiness? Or to expand?

Senator Inhofe: We want to -- yes. Our modernization program has suffered and we understand that. We don't have the luxury of waiting around for three years for some new modernization program to take hold. Right now we have =, we do have a readiness problem in many areas, but one is in end strength. Go back to your African example. We have, in terms of looking after our interests in that giant continent, 1300 troops, it's because we don't have any more. And when we try to take troops out of either CENTCOM or EUCOM, and that's where they have to come from. Again, I'm not taking responsibility for the fact they didn't resource it. I'm just saying that I was very much for having it happen. But we just don't have the troops.

When you go through and you look at all three, well, all of our COMs, we don't have the numbers out there. They're just not there. And we pull them away from one place and put them some place else, and that's a serious problem.

If you look at the shifting threats that are out there. Right now in South Korea, we've got 27,000 troops that are there, and we did dedicate two THAADs. By the way, in the new authorization bill we've increased by 24, I think that's about right. Yeah. And then the same thing you can say in Japan. In Japan right now we have 40,000 troops or so, and there, you talk about someone who's really in the target. Japan is, and you know this. What we're doing there is not the THAADs. Instead of that we have [inaudible]. The Aegis system is there. We have two of them.

And that's a change, really, just in the last few weeks. It's a moving target.

DWG: When you're talking about trying to figure out the defense budget, kind of a common theme the last few [inaudible]. You talked about the dollar for dollar. So Mac Thornberry was here [inaudible]. [Inaudible] that BCA was a failed experiment. It turned defense into a payor and [inaudible] the national debt.

Why not just use something like that? Why not just get rid of all of it for the next four years [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: [Inaudible] as we just talked about, that can be done. This is something that was created by Congress. I think he has a good idea. But what does that end up doing? Reprioritizing, which is whatever mechanism it takes to do that, he came up with that one and you know, I don't remember when he said that or exactly how he said it, but you've got my interest up. I'll have to go back and find out.

DWG: So you support something that's just completing getting rid of all the caps [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: If we can achieve a bottom line that agreed with what the caps produce, I'd say yes.

DWG: When you say bottom line, you mean it doesn't increase the [inaudible], if you figure out some sort of [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: Well, the shifting of priorities in your appropriation process.

DWG: I have a question, what's the red line for you on CR. One more Republican has started to say no more CRs. But if you don't have a budget deal for backup, then NDAA that you're about to pass [inaudible]. The natural result is probably a CR. So is the red line like a couple of weeks? Or [inaudible] no CR at all?

Senator Inhofe: Most people you talk to, most of the members would probably say it's going to be a CR. [Inaudible]. It sickens me that that is the case because we've been doing that. It's almost as if the threats aren't changing, our commitments aren't changing. But they are changing. We've been talking for the last 30 minutes or so about the change in the threats that we're facing in this country. And a CR doesn't address that. A CR says we've been unsuccessful again. I haven't given up.

DWG: Chairman McCain has been tough on nominees who've got a background in the defense industry. He doesn't want to see too many more come down, [inaudible] others. Where are you on that? Do you think he's [inaudible] defense industry background? Or are you concerned --

Senator Inhofe: This is an area that we don't have total agreement. I look at it as the individuals, when we have individuals that come along that have really good ideas. Things that we can do. What I've noticed, I don't agree with you on that, but what I've noticed is when we're asking questions of the nominees that come in and they, normally they volunteer that yes, I've been with a contractor. And they actually have contracts with the government, just associating with that. But they're bringing knowledge with them, and how to do things cheaper. There's kind of a tendency that assumes, and this is not McCain I'm talking about, but other members, because I hear the questions and you hear the questions that come up in these committee hearings, that somehow industry is all on the take and that they're the bad guys. But look, they're the knowledgeable ones too. So I just, I look at it just a little bit differently.

I started out, I was a builder and developer for 20 years. And I was doing things primarily on the coast and South Texas, building things, making money, losing money, doing what I think American s are supposed to do [inaudible] actually. And the biggest problem I had was the federal government. I look at it perhaps a little bit differently than other people do. I think we need to have the knowledge and the background.

I go in, go down to Fort Worth and go into some of the places where they're cranking this stuff out. A lot of the F-35 stuff is down there. And I think, you know, how much

more this costs us because we're not listening to the logic of the people who are making this stuff. Sure, you've got to run a tight ship, but you also have to produce the stuff.

DWG: Another thing I wanted to ask you about, some of the things that Chairman McCain does when industry executives come before the committee. He's been very tough on Lockheed Martin executives and very tough on the F-35 program. Do you agree with his approach there? Or do you think that's maybe [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: I would say it's a style that is not my style. But I know he's sincere. When he asks the question, he builds his case on the F-35, and it's hard to, I won't argue that. I can remember when the B-1 was being [inaudible]. We had the same arguments that time. But somebody's got to do it, and we need to have right reins, we need to hold them as best we can. But my style would be to work with them maybe a little closer.

DWG: In the event you become chairman, Lockheed executives maybe don't need Alka Seltzer in the morning before they come before the --

Senator Inhofe: I'm going to ask you all a big favor here. Don't even use that word, it's not appropriate at this time. I'm talking about chairman. I know nothing will be off the record, but he's got a problem, and I'm very sympathetic.

Senator Inhofe: When are we going to get to the general aviation stuff? [Laughter].

DWG: Thanks, I'm Katrina [inaudible], with the Financial Times. I wondered if I could take you to Africa where I reported for 12 years [inaudible].

Senator Inhofe: You say you worked in Africa?

DWG: Yes.

Senator Inhofe: Where?

DWG: In Kenya and Sierra Leon, Congo, Djibouti.

Senator Inhofe: I've been to all those places you just mentioned in the last three weeks. We'll have to visit sometime.

DWG: I wondered if I could ask you about the direction of the administration [inaudible] when it comes to Africa. How serious they are taking the continent and what it requires.

Particularly when it comes to appointments. I understand you have reservations [inaudible], so I wondered if you could talk a little bit about the Assistant Secretary and also the NSC appointments.

Senator Inhofe: That's great. It's the appropriate time for you to ask that because I made a request yesterday. We had eight of them. Today, as soon as I get back, we're going to have I think eight more. I'm personally interviewing every applicant, and most of them in Africa, as you well know, are not political appointments. The ambassadors there that are coming out of there. To talk to them about, to see if they really have a clear understanding of what Africa's all about, and what they're doing. And I'm actually visiting with them, each one of them.

Yes, the answer to your question is yes. This administration does, I was saying if there's time I'd tell the story. I'll shorten the version. But I got a phone call about a year ago on October 9th, and it was from Trump. I didn't know the guy. In fact, confession is good for the soul. We had 17 Republicans running for President, even number 17. But when he called he said could you come to New York tomorrow and visit with me? I said I'm not doing anything. Sure. I went there and I was so pleased, because what I found was that he was taking, as I recall, a table about the size of this table. There were 14 people. And they were from different [inaudible]. One health care, energy. I was there really for the military, and I think it was because Jeff Sessions said [inaudible], we were good friends.

But he also was there because of some of the over-regulation that I complained about in the, in my chairman ship of the Environment and Public Works Committee.

So in talking about the areas where each one of us around that table could be, has some background that might be helpful, I included Africa, and I told him how many times I'd been there and what the problems were in Africa and why we didn't have [inaudible] the employment situation. How many people are down there.

So he, and he expressed an interest. You can talk to any of the people around that table on October 10th and I'll tell you, we talked about that problem quite a while. Along with the over-regulation stuff. And you know, I don't think you guys in the media have done a real good job of explaining to the people how all these regulations, and not just executive orders but the CRAs. In fact the first CRA that he signed was my bill. So the first signing ceremony he had was me, [inaudible]. We hardly ever, those are the three subjects we talked about. The military, Africa, and then the over-regulation. So yes, he is sensitive to that, and oddly enough, if you talk to the people, and you know, this because you've been over there so I assume you know this, Obama wasn't very well respected in Africa. You would assume for obvious reasons, that he probably should have been. But he wasn't. And the guy that was really well respected was Bush. He went in there with all his programs and with AIDs and all the different things that he was dealing with.

So yes, he is sensitive to Africa. He's knowledgeable.

DWG: With our last three minutes we'll swing over to the far right. Ellen.

[Inaudible] on the command. Did that come up at all?

Senator Inhofe: No, and the reason it didn't is because we're too far along in conference with [inaudible], and it's, but we talk, and that's something that doesn't have to be in conference. If you, already as you know, we're going to be addressing the end strength problem, and it's a matter of adjusting [inaudible] going to be.

I think a change that we can make, and we don't have to wait for an authorization bill, is to go ahead and start manning Africa. They have nothing, and they're totally dependent upon [inaudible].

So the answer is yes, but not, nothing happened as a result of Niger because we were too far along before.

DWG: [Inaudible] AFRICOM [inaudible]?

Senator Inhofe: Anything [inaudible]. Right now they've got nothing.

DWG: Yesterday Chairman [inaudible] said [inaudible] and it as great [inaudible]. Was there anything that in conference was actually kind of [inaudible] yet?

Senator Inhofe: In our conference?

DWG: Uh-huh.

Senator Inhofe: There were quite a few things that were controversial, but you're aware of all of them because this happened some time ago. And a lot has been written, and I'm glad it has.

You know, that there is [inaudible] for example. This is on the record and she knows that, that she wants to stop any executive sessions, wants to have everything out in the open. It sounds really good at home, but she, it doesn't work. You can't talk about -- You wouldn't be surprised, you'd know, but if you were watching back in one of these meetings, if it's on the record and all that, it's a totally different environment than we're working with [inaudible]. They're thinking about how is this going to be used at home as opposed to what's the right thing to do? I know you don't like to hear that, but --

DWG: We are basically right at 9 o'clock so we need to put an end to the session, but I do want to say once again, thank you for coming in. I appreciate your thoughts and your insights today, and I wish we had more time, but we'd love to have you back.

Senator Inhofe: I appreciate that very much. Thank all of you guys.

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