

209 Post-Election Rendezvous

Heather "Lucky" Penney: [00:00:00] Welcome to the airspace advantage podcast brought to you by PenFed. I'm your host, Heather, lucky penny here on the airspace advantage. We speak with leaders in the DOD industry and other subject matter experts to explore the intersection of strategy, operational concepts, technology, and policy when it comes to air and space power.

It's time for the rendezvous, and we're here to break down the impact of the 2024 election and what that means for defense, air power, and space power.

And we've got Mitchell Institute Dean, Lieutenant General Dave Deptula. Jeff Raleigh, Rolison, Todd Sledgehammer. Anthony Lazer finally, last we've got Charles Galbreath.

So let's start at the top. We're going to set a little bit of context here because I think it's important to understand the strategic role that we live in before we dive into the election results and those consequences.

But, I do want to say, gentlemen, what do you think of Donald Trump's victory and what that means for national defense? We'll start off, laser, then Raleigh, and then sledge.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: [00:01:00] So I think as you go forward, think it's going to be very positive for national defense. I think that you're going to see a focus on national security on funding for the Department of Defense and everything that we do, and it's not going to, it's going to be along the same lines. I mean, it's not like we're seeing.

Donald Trump for the first time. So if you go back and you look at the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which is focused on great power competition, strategic deterrence, and building a more lethal force, I expect to see the same thing as he comes forward.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Raleigh how about you?

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: Yeah, think I echoed laser's comments and I think just a pragmatic look at, what the trump administration did in the past and how it supported a robust, space force now in his 5th year and the commitment to various space initiatives to include, You know, NASA, think this is an exciting time to look at a [00:02:00] change in administration and the opportunities that

come with a demonstrated, preference for defense and the requisite spending to make that happen.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah, I would agree with what's been previously said. I think the other thing we can't overlook is the fact that he's got a united government. you know, he'll have a decent majority in the Senate, which allows him to get his nominees confirmed much more quickly. Um, they'll also be able to do some things, in terms of spending, Uh, Senator Wicker has tried to add money.

I know there's a lot of interest in adding money to defense spending. And although it hasn't been called yet, uh, by the time this podcast airs, I'm pretty sure that the Republicans will keep the house. So. that opens up the door for a, Parliamentary trick called reconciliation that will allow Congress to do a lot of budget things, by having single party control that will help him rebuild the national defense infrastructure.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: And that'll be really important because budget has been one of the major challenges that This entire last administration has been beset by so [00:03:00] let's go a little bit into the context that Donald Trump will enter into office with because the world is a very unstable place. Right now. We've got Russia's war against Ukraine.

We now have North Koreans that are in Ukraine fighting on Russia's behalf. China's pushing hard in the Pacific. Iran is on the march to the Middle East with all of their proxies from the Houthis to Hezbollah to Hamas. Um, so it is a really dangerous place right now. And I'd really appreciate your thoughts on what Trump's victory means for an approach in these regions.

Is there a nuance to how he's going to tackle these various challenges? Or do you expect to see a fairly uniform approach?

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: Yeah, lucky. Those are great questions. And I think the answer those really going to involve as we start seeing Trump's cabinet take form and they sit down to formulate the details of its overall vision on the nation and specifically, uh, its national security Congress gets an influence sledge talked about this at a previous meeting.

It appears that the Republicans get to control the House and the Senate, but they are by slim majorities, which [00:04:00] means they're going to have to work together and compromise something that, as we've seen, continues to elude

Congress until the last minute when they have to come to an agreement and pass legislation.

So we said earlier, this is his second term, so it's not unknown. We have seen the national security strategy in the past. We expect it to continue. Uh, we do expect him to take a more, forceful approach, dressing China and specifically, calling for more resources to advance those. Uh, the other thing is, you know, again, a push and we've seen it before as you'd look at the alliances and to include NATO and it's a push for them to increase their spending.

And then again, you'll see continued support for Israel, stronger stance against, Iran. And then probably, and we can talk about this later, a restricted support for Ukraine.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah. I'll jump in here, Heather. I think past this prologue, we've seen it in his, first administration. It's going to be America first, rather than multilateralism and, [00:05:00] uh, in our U.

S. national interest to have a stable international order, and that's really what I think President Trump is going to try to look for there. laser hit on it, he's going to demand that NATO pay more of the burden of defending Europe, particularly with Ukraine. That doesn't mean we're going to cut Ukraine off completely, but I, I think the gravy train is over.

I think an interesting thing coming out of the Middle East, every major leader in the Middle East With the exception of Iran, of course, has, congratulated President Trump on his re election and has been generally positively or well received in the region that he has been re elected. So, I think that is going to be the centerpiece of trying to reinvigorate the Accords.

And also, focus on countering Iran as the problem actor in the region. And then the last thing I'll say is, uh, is this is probably going to be more of a wild card because I think it's going to require a non kinetic solution. But how does a Trump administration manage competition with China in the Pacific?

Heather "Lucky" Penney: That's [00:06:00] going to be a big question and a really important one. Raleigh, before we move on, what do you think from the space side?

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: I think through the turmoil, I think there's opportunity for our commercial space infrastructure to provide some resources across the

world that that may be underutilized now and it's a way to really expand our dominance on the commercial market within the space community.

So I'm excited to the transition of leadership and the different political climates that are evolving just create more opportunity for our commercial. Um, and I think it's important for the commercial space market to really exert its power and to sledges comment about, what's going on in Indo pay comm that's, that's even more of a need to really bring a robust commercial capability alongside our, our national defense capabilities that we're enabling, hopefully through a robust budget submission in the coming years.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So gentlemen, I'd like to go back to what Sledge had talked about regarding Ukraine because I really, I'm really interested in what your [00:07:00] specific predictions are, um, there. as Sledge, as you mentioned, we're probably need to expect that it's not going to be a gravy train for Ukraine anymore, but from a Mitchell perspective, we're very concerned that we continue to supply Ukraine with the tools necessary to bring this conflict to a successful resolution.

I mean, that said, we know that the Biden administration limited, uh, placed limited limitations and constraints upon Ukraine, which were wholly self defeating. They were more focused on not losing than they were on winning. So we need to identify clear and attainable goals and then empower the Ukrainians to go after them.

So they can bring this to a resolution quickly, because it can't be a forever war.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah. And if I actually, if I can jump in first here on this one, um, I mean, because I've been banging my spoon on the high chair for about, well, for a while here, we're more than two and a half years into the Ukraine war, and we still don't know what the U.

S. objectives and strategy is. So what does victory look like? Um, I think that's a question that needs to be addressed. and the typical solution from Washington to any problem is to throw money at it. I think those days are over and we've got to [00:08:00] look at what can we do in terms of policy and whether it's, you know, allow the Ukrainians unrestricted access to strike weapons.

What can we do that doesn't cost money? That will achieve those objectives

Heather "Lucky" Penney: and not constraining their target sets, things like that, sharing intelligence. There are elements that we can do to support their operations that don't necessarily require money,

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: right? And what can we what can the United States do to inflict pain or influence on Russia?

That doesn't require kinetic or direct conflict there. So there's a lot of different options that are, that are out there, but it's really about how do we get both parties in a position to negotiate an acceptable when I do that in air quotes and acceptable piece.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Raleigh Lazor, anything to add?

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: Yeah, I'll just follow on him. I thought your, last sentence, this can't be a forever war. I think I haven't heard anybody disagree with that from Congress. And then, you know, you've heard it from Trump also. And of course you've heard him say that he can end the war in Ukraine in one day, uh, which again, getting into what Sledge just said, okay, then what does that [00:09:00] look like?

What is the end state? Congress remains divided. Uh, although I think if you brought it up for a vote in the house and Senate, you're going to see continued aid. But again, going back to what Sledge said, they want to know what the end state looks like. I think it's going to be a push to find an end state and force the European Union countries of Europe, NATO to play a growing role in the determination of how that, comes about and what it looks like.

And ultimately, this is going to fall in the new secretary of state, secretary of defense. Or an envoy that will probably be appointed to oversee Ukraine, which is what I expect. And that will then get into what Sledge is saying is develop the plan, the timeline, and whatever the end state is supposed to look like.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: And I think hopefully that whatever this turns out to be is not something that further emboldens or empowers Russia. I think for our strategic implications, that would be an outcome that would be necessary for the United States. I'd really like your thoughts because you recently traveled to Ukraine and you met with senior [00:10:00] military and political officials just two weeks ago.

It was your second trip. So what are your thoughts based off of this experience? And what advice would you give to Donald Trump?

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): well, the first thing I'd say, Heather, is that this war in Ukraine is not just about Ukraine. U. S. and Western alliance credibility is on the line here, and you can bet that China's leadership is watching every step we make very intently, and we can't afford to go from a disastrous exit in Afghanistan to a subsequent failure to support Ukraine.

That tells every adversary to just wait us out because we'll tire and quit. Worse, while the U. S. and our allies should be applauded for the support that we've given to Ukraine, as it's been fundamental to their continued survival, the Biden administration has been effectively deterred by Putin. slow rolling aid and [00:11:00] imposing restrictions on strikes into Russia, which has already been alluded to.

The general perspective in Ukraine is that the U. S. is more concerned with the potential fallout of Russia losing than with Ukraine winning. Now, let me summarize his perspective. in a comment from a senior Ukrainian political official who told me, quote, for a nation so strong, why are you working to be so weak?

You know, let, let that sink in. That sums up the perspectives of the current U. S. leadership approach by not just Ukraine, but most U. S. friends and partners overseas. All of that said, just like you mentioned earlier, this can't be or become a forever war. That's why the Biden strategy of quote, as long as it takes [00:12:00] is so bankrupt.

Ukraine's population can't absorb the losses and we need to get back to rebuilding our own military capabilities and capacity because in some areas we're actually, depleting it. which is hard for some people to imagine, but it is indeed a fact. We need to define, what an adequate victory looks like and then unleash Ukraine to strike critical centers of gravity behind Russian's lines that will impose costs on Russia to the degree that it'll be in their interest to settle.

Now, those who are concerned about the risk of nuclear war. Should actually be more worried about the risks involved with capitulating to Putin's nuclear saber rattling. What's going on gives incentive to every adversary nation in the world to pursue nuclear weapons. Biden's actions have stimulated nuclear proliferation, [00:13:00] not tempered it.

And we need to take actions that enhance credible deterrence, not undermine it. So our policy with respect to Ukraine must focus on providing them the means to reverse Russian aggression, not just hold the trenches that they're stalemated in, because of a lack of capability, by the way, to achieve air superiority and all.

I'll stop there because that's a topic we can spend an entire podcast on.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Yeah, we've gone into that a lot. I mean, the reason why it looks like World War I entrenched warfare, and it's a, it's this war of attrition atrocities, because they don't have real air power doing. Doing the job for them. general Deptula, you mentioned we need to be able to get back to rebuilding our forces.

So if you had time to brief Donald Trump on the state of the air force and the key decisions that he needs to prioritize in this coming year, what would you tell him? What would you say to his administration?

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): well, Heather, first, I would [00:14:00] make the time if given the opportunity. Uh, so time folks, if you're listening, that's an invite,

Heather "Lucky" Penney: right?

You know, you

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): know, my time is not the issue here is the president elects, but here's what I'd say, Mr. President elect every single national security option you need to have as president is underpinned by air power and space power. Due to decades of underfunding and neglect and recapitalization of our geriatric combat aircraft, the Air Force is now the oldest, the smallest, and the least ready it's ever been in its entire history.

And that would be since 1947. And I'd repeat that, because while all of you out there have heard me say that, the President elect has not. And the Air Force leadership needs to be telling that as well, or they'll never get the resources they desperately need. It's not hyperbole, it's fact. Your [00:15:00] number one military priority should be to rebuild your Air Force because it's the Department of Defense's indispensable force.

As no joint force operation can be conducted without some element of the Department of the Air Force, that includes both the Air Force and the Space Force. America's air power arsenal today is in a death spiral. Modernization was delayed for far too long in far too many mission areas. The bill is due now.

We've got two legs of the triad that need to be recapitalized, long range strike, air superiority, air and missile defense, mobility, training, munitions, and next

generation uninhabited systems. We can no longer continue shrinking the Air Force as a means of paying for modernization because guess what, Mr.

President, there's no more room to shrink. And the Air Force is already on track to lose more [00:16:00] aircraft than it's going to buy over the next five years without replacement. Retiring more aircraft than we buy is a terminal vector for our air capabilities. Additionally, we can't choose between either conventional or nuclear modernization.

This nation needs both, and the funding needs to be provided to do both, or you'll find yourself in a precarious situation without the force to back up those deals that you want to make with potential adversaries. Second, you need to command. The Department of Defense leadership to use cost per effect analysis and instill discipline in roles and missions among all the armed services to ensure that we are getting the most out of every defense dollar.

Why are we funding Army long range missiles that cost as much as a single F 35 per [00:17:00] shot? And an accompanying Army ISR aircraft when the Air Force and the Space Force already have more effective, efficient options. Third, you might ponder that our sister services also possess aircraft. So you might ask, why can't you use those?

Oh, you can. But those aircraft make up the air arms of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Those air arms are dedicated to facilitating the core functions of their parent services, operations on the ground, at sea, and in the littorals. However, there's only one air force. It's not just another air arm, but rather a service specifically dedicated and structured to exploit the advantages of operating in the third dimension to deliver the effects That you desire.

It's this unique and specific focus that keeps our nation on the leading edge of the challenges that we face. Or in other words, what makes aerospace power one of America's asymmetric [00:18:00] advantages. Fourth, we need to get back to buying. The Air Force needs the resources to recover from the death spiral it's in to produce modernized equipment.

Here's a short list. Next Generation Air Dominance's Penetrating Combat Aircraft, the F 35, the B 21, Collaborative Combat Aircraft, EA 37B, KC 46, and the list goes on. And guess what? We need more pilots, too. We got a shortfall of over 2, 000. Combatant commanders are calling for more air power capacity today and tomorrow, not less.

Fifth, people matter. We're running our Air Force people into the ground because nearly all the missions we now perform are high demand, low density. We also need to give them a reason to serve. People require a vision and a compelling reason to push it up. We're on dangerous ground here, too. Finally, you asked me [00:19:00] about air power, but I'm a champion of space power, too.

Since you've been gone, the Space Force you created has not been allocated the resources necessary to execute the missions assigned to it. Plus, the main reason you stood up the Space Force was to consolidate all Department of Defense space missions into the Space Forces, And guess what? That has not happened.

And you need to force that on the intelligence community, or the intelligence community, will continue to slow roll your intent to unify all military and space intelligence operations. And you need to discipline the Army, the Navy, and the Marines to hand over their own mini space components to the Space Force.

So far, they're refusing to integrate. This flies in the face of your vision of consolidating space activities To maximize effectiveness and efficiency.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So that's a

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): lot.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: It's a lot.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): But that's what I'd tell them.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: No, I [00:20:00] mean, it's all things that this administration needs to hear. And so folks, you heard it here.

If you know the president elect or anyone on his transition team, share this podcast so that they can hear it. Or. let us know and General Tula will make time on his schedule. So Charles, I'm going to ask you the same question. What from a Space Force lens, if you had the opportunity to speak to his transition team or to the president elect, what would you tell Donald Trump?

Charles Galbreath: Well, General Tula did a great job of teeing it up. And I'm going to just re emphasize a couple of those points. First of all, the Space Force has to continue to grow. Uh, the fact that it's budget decreased at its fifth year is ridiculous. Um, the service needs to be growing for a variety of reasons. Not the

least of which is the fact that the mission set that the space force has, isn't just to support global operations like air force space command always did in the past.

It's to do that and secure our space architecture from the growing threats from countries like Russia and China. [00:21:00] And then further. We know that those nations are also developing their own space capabilities to hold our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and guardians at risk in the event of a fight. And we need to be able to deny their access to space and their ability to target our forces.

And so that's a three fold increase in mission, at least, and the budget has not responded. So it has to grow from a financial perspective and from a personnel perspective. When Donald Trump was president before and he established the Space Force, he said it would be an equal service. We're not there yet.

We are not on a, on an even footing with the other services. Case in point, when you send general officers to a joint meeting and the Space Force representative is a colonel or a lieutenant colonel, we're not on equal footing. All the other services, are bringing general officers to the fight in those discussions and the Space Force just doesn't have the manpower to support.

So that's got to increase. the policies [00:22:00] that are necessary to enable the Space Force to do those missions that I described earlier, needs to be updated. The fact that we're willing to self deter. You know, our own actions and our own operations has got to change. And so we need to look at policies related to the Space Force as well.

So there's a lot that needs to be done to get the Space Force where it needs to be.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Sounds like the devil's in the details. And we need to shift our mindset and the policies that follow to empower our guardians to do the things that they need to do to shape, deter, and prevail in the space domain.

Charles Galbreath: The Space Force is still in the process of defining itself and articulating to the American We all recall how quickly the Space Force stood up five years ago.

And as a result, a lot of people are left wondering, What was the real purpose for the Space Force? Why do I need to have that? Unlike the Air Force that proved itself in the crucible of World War II, we established the [00:23:00] Space Force before a global conflict involving space assets. And, and that I think is a good thing because it's better

Heather "Lucky" Penney: potentially visionary, right?

If we do it right and resource it

Charles Galbreath: absolutely visionary to deter that conflict from happening in the first place. That's what we need to do. But at the same time, we've got to be able to convince the American people, the members of Congress, as well as our allies around the world that space is absolutely critical.

To not only future conflicts, but the ongoing competition that we face with China.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Well, I think this will be an important legacy for Donald Trump and one that he should be interested in. And I'm going to make a shameless plug for you and Boots because you guys just completed an excellent space endurance workshop.

So, uh, folks, if you're listening to this, be on the lookout for that rollout and for that paper, because I think it's going to give you some really great insights regarding where we should go with the Space Force.

Charles Galbreath: Thanks, Heather.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So Donald Trump comes to the job with a track record, given that he had four years in office already, and so how should that shape our expectations for the next four years?

What do you expect will continue and what [00:24:00] will change? So what's, what remains the same and what's different? Sledge, do you want to start us off?

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Um, yeah, that's a pretty tough question there. I, think we know what to expect from him. I think this time, um, he's going to be more prepared on day one. Um, I mean, he's already, um, already starting, uh, well, before the, uh, the election, even he has started a privately funded, transition team.

And I know those are going to be looking at the big rocks. my understanding is that he's going to designate Robert Wilkie, a former congressional staffer and, uh, Secretary of Veterans Affairs to lead the transition of the Department of Defense. So I think they're going to hit the ground running on day one.

There's going to be a significant number of executive orders. Um, I don't think many of those are going to be defense related. I know there's a lot of policies and regulations that are going to get overturned. Obviously, um, Mr. Trump campaigned on immigration and crime. And the economy as being his things, I think that will initially, uh, hold his [00:25:00] focus, and then he'll pivot to defense as things, uh, as we go through the FY 26 budget cycle.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: And clearly that's going to be, based off of the advice of whoever he puts into play. So the people, the faces to the spaces is going to be crucially important, probably to the direction that he plans on taking the department.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Yeah, let me jump in here and offer that. That transition team, hopefully, will bring to the president elect's attention, just how fast the threats facing the United States are accelerating.

And how

Heather "Lucky" Penney: different they are from the last time he was in office as well. No, that's

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): true. That's true. And that there is this general perception in the United States, populace that we are King Kong in the context of, having the strongest military in the world. Uh, and the fact of the matter is, we as a nation have never faced the number of threats that are facing us today, and, the United States military has been [00:26:00] in decline since, the collapse of former Soviet Union.

And we need to recover. someone needs to bring to his attention, Mr, Mr. President, do you understand that as an example, and all the services to a degree are in this position, but know, since we're most familiar with the Air Force, do you understand that the combat capability of the United States Air Force is less than half that it is today?

And it was in 1991. I mean, are the threats greater or less than when we fought Iraq? so the degree of challenges that are facing America's defense to have sufficient deterrent capability to prevent aggression really need attention.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So I'm really glad you brought that up because I think it's underappreciated, not just by the American public, but many of our politicians regarding how complex and dangerous today's global environment is.

I mean, we've recently seen [00:27:00] North Korean troops train in Russia and now they're on the battlefield in Ukraine. I'm surprised we're not getting more play out of that across the broader media because of what this implies regarding alliances and relationships across Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and their proxies.

I mean, this is a very dangerous environment, but we're seeing isolationist elements. From both parties, many get people want to sort of either build a wall around the nation, focus on America, but the reality is that our adversaries are playing for keeps, and we need to still proactively shape the world to suit our interests.

Uh, so that may require strong engagement And so here, Mitchell, we are a huge peace through strength advocate, and I think the last four years show the risk of perceived weakness and the inability to decisively project power.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): I take you back to the comment that I relayed to you all, from a senior political official in Ukraine.

How can a country as strong as yours work [00:28:00] so hard to be so weak? I mean, that does not bode well for our ability to deter potential adversaries. very much.

Charles Galbreath: You know, Heather, one of my favorite expressions is an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Right.

Charles Galbreath: And absolutely, we need to be engaged in order to help that prevention from future conflicts, because we need those alliances to be strong.

If the only person telling you that you're great is the reflection in the mirror, you're not a great nation, right? You need to have universal respect from all nations. You need to be feared by our potential adversaries. You need to be admired by our allies. So there's a combination of things that we need to do to stay engaged because if we leave a vacuum, our adversaries are going to fill it in a heartbeat.

And just as a reminder, national security isn't just about the Department of Defense. There's a whole element of national power that needs to be brought to

bear. And a key part of that is the State Department and the engagement that they can [00:29:00] have.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: And it's not just about the investment in DOD. We also need to ensure that when we do engage our troops, we, Sledge, like you said, we need to understand why, what our interest is, and what the outcome is, and what our exit strategy is.

We can't be cavalier with how we throw our lives and weapons around.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: I agree, and going back to Charles there, I think we need to give the Governor a harumph on that. That was an outstanding answer. Um, the other,

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: the other, uh,

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: the other thing, I mean, you know, Except

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): one caveat. You gotta get rid of those in the State Department who subscribe to a notion of appeasing, um, those who might threaten us.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah, and I think the other part, to kind of finish out my thought here is we no longer have the sanctuary of the homeland. I mean, for most of our history, we've relied on two oceans and friendly countries to our north and our south. And whether you're looking at space, whether you're looking at cyber, uh, now our adversary's ability to project power to include, China's recent ICBM test and the fact that the North Koreans.

[00:30:00] fired a missile that spent a significant amount of time in space with the range theoretically to hit the United States and also their defense minister saying that they were accelerating the development of their nuclear program. The homeland is no longer a sanctuary and the only way you can credibly deter is for your adversaries to know that you have the capability and the will to respond.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: Amen. Yeah. Just, I mean, just three sentences, you know, uh, again, it's isolationism goes back to our very founding. It's always been easy for Americans to say what happens in Europe stays in Europe until it doesn't as history taught us. And Winston Churchill once said that those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: All wise words. So what are the main issues you think are going to compete with defense? We've never heard that much about national security on the campaign trail, but given the conflicts in play, Donald Trump cannot ignore defense. It's got to be a massive priority as we move forward. In fact, I'd argue that [00:31:00] much of the current instability we see across the globe has come from the Biden team not prioritizing a more assertive stance on the world stage.

Their focus seemed to be on not losing and tamping down conflict, but all that does is draw out conflict and cost you blood and treasure.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: I'll go first. Lucky. So the election was about issues that voters were concerned most about. And you've mentioned them earlier from the economy, immigration, inflation, crime, jobs, and while national security and threats posed by China, Russia, North Korea, non state actors underpin all of those.

That issue was not the nearest alligator to the boat. Now, national security, and we've seen it, and we know it. We watched it when he was president earlier, is a priority and will be a priority for the Trump administration. They may not have pushed it in front of everybody as they were working down the election, but it will be a priority.

as they wrote again, we talked about the national defense strategy and the majority leader [00:32:00] just reached a letter, from the house focusing on the 1st 100 days. And in there includes rebuilding our military to address national security issues. So, the Trump administration is expected again to take a more asserted stance across the globe.

And that's going to be coupled with increased participation and support by our allies. And you've heard him say it over and over again. And, you know, without being chicken little, our new Secretary of Defense needs to ensure the President, Congress, and the American people need to understand the threats posed.

You were just talking about it. I don't, they're not seeing that on a day to day basis. What they're seeing on a day to day basis is what impacts them. And it's up to, again, the new leadership to be able to convey that. Yeah, Heather, if I could actually just repeat your question there. What are the main issues you think will compete with defense?

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: I think the main issue is going to be our national debt. I mean, we don't really talk about that a lot. And, I agree that we've, you know, we, do need more resources for [00:33:00] defense, but at some point you've got to address the elephant that's in the room. And we spent in fiscal year 25, it will be not 892 billion on defense, and we're spending 1.

3 trillion to service the national debt. There's a mismatch there. So we've got to figure out how do we grow our economy to get out of the position where we're borrowing for the future productivity to pay for what we're doing today and focus on national defense. I think that's going to be the balancing act between, um, modernizing and restoring readiness in the department of defense and having a viable economy.

You know, the other list.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: Well, and just on there is being good stewards of the money that is given to the Department of Defense and not spending 80 times the amount of, uh, for a soap dispenser. I mean, again, we can look at programs that we've wasted money on, and that's why we tend to get beat up. I mean, you know, Sledge, you're exactly right.

And we do need additional funding, but we got to make sure we spend [00:34:00] that funding correctly.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Yeah, I just throw in their army long range precision hypersonic strike, competes real well with that soap dispenser in terms of wasting resources.

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: Well, general, that's, that's exactly where I was going to roll in, right?

We really need a clear definition of lanes in the road between our services and the, and the investments that we're going to get after. So we can economize and scale. Otherwise we're just going to keep going after the same stuff and we're going to compete for it. And. And we're just going to keep spending the same dollars over and over.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Let me just add there, you got to be careful about how you pick your words, because when people hear lanes in the road, what they do is they clam up and they go, yeah, this is mine. Don't touch it. I would, I understand what you're trying to say, but at the same time, we need

to open up those lanes and expose every service to, that's what I talked about earlier, cost per effect analysis.

If there [00:35:00] are systems inside a particular service that can deliver capability, that systems in another service, 20 to 100 to 1000 times more expense, what are we doing? Keeping those systems.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Well it also comes down to roles and missions, right? Absolutely. So, I get where folks are talking about lanes in the road because what they're really saying is roles and missions and not duplicating roles and missions that are not core to your service in ways that are not cost effective.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: I was just going to throw in maybe this is a good. Thing for the department of government efficiency to look at.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Absolutely.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: It is.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: I think that's a mic drop moment. Let's move on to the next question.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Let me just add one more to this. Okay. And that's the viability of social security and Medicare. Okay.

That is a huge element in the elephant in the room that nobody's going to touch until it is upon us. in 10 years, because why should politicians risk [00:36:00] their capital? But it is huge, and it's going to add, it's going to be another one of those issues like servicing the debt.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Yeah. It's going to be a major drag on our ability to do what we need to do within the Department of Defense.

So that brings us into the budget, right? Let's talk about the defense budget submission. First of all, um, do you see the current plan getting torn up and rejiggered or are they just going to tailor and do a little few changes here and there for FY 26?

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Torn up and rejiggered.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Torn up and rejiggered.

Gentlemen, that's your

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: vote. I didn't like torn up, but they're going to go through it in detail and take out the stuff that doesn't directly impact the warfighter and then make sure that they rewrite the bills on the priorities that they have set.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah, I think it's only fair for the incoming administration to put their spin on the ball.

I'm more concerned about what happens with FY25. I mean, we're under a continuing resolution until the 20th of December. Congress is back on the 12th of November. [00:37:00] That gives them about five or six weeks to kind of figure out what they're going to do. Are they going to be able to clear the deck and get FY25 appropriations and the Defense Authorization Act done before the end of the year?

Or are they going to kick it down the road, um, you know, with another short term CR? I'm hearing It's possible after the 31st of March. Um, and for those of you that remember recent history, the Fiscal Responsibility Act that, went into effect last year, lifted the debt ceiling until the 1st of January, 2025.

And if Congress is unable to get an appropriations bill by 20, by the end of April in 2025, uh, then the automatic 1%, uh, across the board cuts come into play. So, there's, and that would be devastating 'cause that's about a \$50 billion cut to defense that focuses on. procurement, O& M, and RDT& E. So it would be a train wreck.

So, we'll see. I hope they can clear deck and start the new administration, uh, with FY26 and on we go. But, I'm not optimistic based on recent history.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: [00:38:00] Just carrying, you know, continuing on where Sledge, it really is going to depend on President Trump, um, because he's going to give the direction of what's going to happen and it will directly impact the House's ability to try to get those bills passed.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Sledge, I had no idea that those cuts were really into the meat of the services. I would really think that if they were going to cut anything, they should really focus on the bureaucracy of the Fourth Estate. I understand that needs to be targeted, but still.

It's really outstripping our war fighting capability.

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: Yeah. and we're hamstringing that ability, if they don't get this 25 action done, that the flow of money, if that's delayed into the new year to the acquisition. Professionals and the contracting officers is going to get delayed by months after the bill is actually even appropriated. So, you know, we're having real combat effects that are delayed because they can't get their act together.

And so, yeah, just ledges point that closing out [00:39:00] 25 has to be paramount across the board over.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Well, we'll see if they get it done, um, because it clearly has been something that's been a challenge so far, but maybe they'll be motivated, uh, given how the Senate and House compositions are going to shift when the new session comes in.

So let's now turn to Congress, um, and talk about the Senate. Could you gentlemen explain how the Republican majority may impact the Senate Armed Services Committee and the defense appropriations?

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Laser, you want to jump on that one first?

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Sure. I can do

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: that. Okay. So, um, with the republicans regaining the majority in the Senate, we have Senator Roger Wicker becomes chair and Senator Jack Reed becomes ranking member in great shape and even more so.

And, you know, we can talk a little bit about the budget priorities, but we know Senator Wicker And soon to be chairman wicker is going to be pushing for increased defense budgets and Senator Jack Reed [00:40:00] has always been supportive until sort of this year, but again, supportive, but you're going to see a larger push looking at Senate appropriations.

You got vice chair. Collins, she's expected to maintain her position as the top Republican and take gavel as the chair. And then aside from some new members, Republican membership will see few changes given that Senator Fisher, who had a tough race, was, uh, won a race and got reelected. Um, there was rumor, and this is where.

Things maybe get a little shaky in the Senate, um, or a little different. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was considering taking the appropriations gavel due to his seniority as he stepped down from Republican leader. But we're hearing that may not be the case.

And we're not sure yet, but he is expected to come back to the appropriations committee and given his seniority and his interest in a national security, he may choose to take the gavel on the subcommittee on defense, and that will cause a reshuffle, uh, in the Republican subcommittee as a [00:41:00] Senator Collins may take a different subcommittee as a lead, but she'll still keep the gavel.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So what kind of policy or budget priority adjustments should we see based on these changes?

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: No, I think laser hit it there. I think you'll see a higher top line for defense and national security. I don't think there'll be prescriptive and how the budget's allocated. I mean, it'll, there'll be programs to get added, you know, subtracted.

I think there are going to be fewer personnel policy provisions, the poison pills that we've seen in previous administrations that will then have to be stripped out. I think you'll see fewer of those going forward.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: I'll add, um, I think in a defense industrial base for sure. Um, and then, if you look at our planning process, I think there's going to be a really big push.

And I know wickers very, very focused on streamlining the acquisition process and adopting, uh, what the commission, the recommendations that the commissions, recommended.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So these changes aren't just the member level, [00:42:00] because their staffs will change out too. So, could you gentlemen talk about the impact, uh, especially among the professional committee staffs?

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: Yeah, and there's a difference between the House and the Senate, but obviously, you know, we're going to move from minority and majority. They're going to, you know, the stupidest thing is they actually switch sides in the committee. I don't quite understand that, but we did. Uh, so you got to pick up.

I guess it's time to clean your desk out, and, uh, throw away some papers that you shouldn't be collecting. I mean, it's the truth. I don't quite understand it, but they're going to do it. They're going to switch sides. And I know 1 of the offices is bigger for the staff director. Um, but, um, it's really not gonna be a change.

looking at the ratio, we'll probably keep right around the same as we switch from minority majority. So there'll just be a member difference. And then you'll typically have some more majority staffers and you do a minority. So the Republicans may add a staffer or two. The other thing that may happen is some of the staffers that are currently sitting on sec, [00:43:00] Senator Wicker's, uh, staff on the Armed Services Committee.

May get asked to go take administration jobs to include in the Pentagon. So you may see some new faces there, but overall it's gonna stay fairly stable, in the Sack.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So, there have been some major shifts given some senators failed to win their elect elections, and I'm thinking specifically about Senator Tester or also retirements like Senator Manchin.

How is this going to shape the dynamics?

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: You want to go first, Sledge?

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah, no, I think, obviously, different, leadership, you've got some different priorities. Again, though, I don't think there's going to be a, a major shift, there because national security interests are security interests, regardless of who's in the positions.

you know, it just remains to be seen, who replaced Senator Tester. Um, I, my understanding is probably going to be Senator Schatz from Hawaii. It'll move up, um, but he is going to be the, uh, the ranking member, so he'll be in the minority party who doesn't have quite as much, influence there and as laser had so brilliantly put, we can either [00:44:00] expect Collins or maybe even McConnell to be the, SACTI, uh, chair.

So they will set the priorities, in terms of top line and policy and direction. I think there's going to be minor changes, but I would say if you really wanted to get down into the details, look at the programs that Senator Tester supported, the companies that are located in Montana that want to do business with the Department of Defense.

And those are the ones that are going to be the most impacted. And I would look at, obviously, that's an ICBM state. So what does that portend for the Sentinel program for the Air Force?

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: I just, uh, looking at a couple other members, um, representative banks and to be Senator Banks. They'll be coming in.

the Republicans are gonna need to add a member, on the sa. so, Senator Banks and to be Senator Banks could be the next Republican member. With Manchin leaving, uh, that may just neutralize and then they wouldn't have to add anybody else. So I think we're fine. The only other race people have been watching, but [00:45:00] I think, uh, it's going well for Senator Rosen from Nevada.

So again, as Sledge said, not, really a lot of change, but I think the one we may be seeing is, uh, newly elected Senator Banks may be coming on.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Raleigh, I want to bring you into this, uh, specifically because Sledge had mentioned with Tester, Not winning his election. What happens to Sentinel?

But the ICBM recapitalization, that is a national priority. That nuclear recapitalization is a must do. Is it really that, is it really that, at risk?

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: I don't think so. I think given some of the, operational utility that that brings and and the budget commitment that has been in there so far.

I think that sustains it. but anytime there's a big political shift to those programs go under intense review. But I think the committee. Um, is going to be stable enough through the continuity of the professional staff, like laser was saying that they're going to maintain, oversight of that and make sure that it stays on track.

But I think, from [00:46:00] a Sentinel perspective, I'm not so worried about that other than the Space Force, just making sure or the Air Force, making sure they've got the right narrative and they're executing as planned.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Lucky, if I could come at that from a slightly different direction here, I don't really think it's the congressional leadership that matters.

And I think Secretary Kendall said this, the Air Force cannot afford the modernization bill that it has with the B 21, with NGAD, now with Sentinel, given the resources that we are allocated or appropriated every year. Congress needs to realize that regardless of who's there, and they need to change the calculus so the money and the resources are there for the Air Force to modernize.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Yeah, I mean, one of our colleagues, JV Venable, has this great analogy, you know, we talk a lot about the cliff of recapitalization that the service has seen because of 30, more than 30 years of deferred, uh, recapitalization, so we're seeing all of these bills pile up at the same time, but the last time we really recapitalized, or actually built initially, uh, the ICBM enterprise was in the [00:47:00] 1950s.

And at that point in time, in order to be able to make that investment, the president chose to double the size of the Air Force's budget relative to everyone else, relative to the other services, to ensure that our nation had that strategic deterrent. And I think that that is crucial to look at is the relative investment necessary.

Thank you.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Well, and a similar anecdote there, the entire KC 135 fleet was appropriated in a single fiscal year. Think about that. Yeah.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: You know, Lucky, I Tester didn't carry the entire program. I mean, you've got one, The Trump administration has already said they're going to include nuclear triad modernization in the budget request.

And then two, you've got a whole bunch of leaders and members in the defense committees, both in the house and the Senate, as well as members, new and old from Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, that are going to be supportive of this program. So, you know, again, we've got to watch it, but I think there's going to be support.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): [00:48:00] Yeah. Let me also throw out there, I think it's

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: vulnerable.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Let me also throw out there that there are some ideas, innovative ideas on how to deal with this, and that is, uh, Air

Force and the Navy partnering up and, uh, sponsoring, and I think all of you have heard this before, a nuclear deterrence fund that's separate from the service, budgets, that would make sure that, uh, we don't get ourselves in a situation where the Air Force and the Navy are sacrificing all their conventional capabilities to fund nuclear deterrence, which is really a nationwide imperative.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: All right, folks, let's go through the House. I'd like you to go over those changes and, and also specifically talk about the defense appropriators with, Representative Kay Granger. Who represented Fort Worth, Texas, which is home of F 35, her retirement as well.

So could you let it give us an overview of what's going on, what on the house side?

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: Just real quick. So we still have Rogers, the Senate House Armed Services Committee, still have Rogers as [00:49:00] chair, and we have Adam Smith as ranking member, both coming back. I do know that we're going to see the next NDAAO coming out of the house side, it'll be Quality of Life.

Part 2 and then again, Rogers will be advocating for increased defense budget. And then when you look, um, where the really is, the, the change is going to be on the house armed services committee is they lost a whole bunch of members, Republican and Democrats, because several of them went. And ran for Senate and won, so Banks is gone, Kim is gone, Slotkin is gone, all over went into the Senate, Gallego is still out there, waiting to have his race called, I don't remember it's been called yet, and then Lambourne retired.

And a lot of these were chair ranking members of subcommittee. So that's where the big change is going to be. And we're not going to know they get back. And then they decide who's going to be in what committees. And then if you go over on the appropriators, I mean, you talked about Granger being gone.

I mean, she was a great advocate for the F35. but again, F35 is [00:50:00] in every state where, and every place it's located based has been had people that are supporting the F35. So again, with the loss of Granger. and she's been a great appropriator. I don't see threat to the F35 program, even though there's a lot of opposition out there.

And then when you come in, you know, for the house appropriators, Calvert, were a little concerned about his race, but, chairman Calvert will be back and he'll stay as chair. And then of course, full committee chair is going to be Tom

Cole, who, and the only one thing about Calvert is he's going to need a waiver because of term limits.

And chairman Cole. Expect to give it that limit. And then on the other side, a ranking member will be Betty McCollum, uh, will stay as a subcommittee, as the Democrat. So I think we're in good shape, both on house and Senate. Uh, and specifically on defense appropriations.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah, I would say the threat to the F 35 program is not Congress.

It's the anemic numbers that are requested every year in the, uh, Air Force budget.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Again, another mic drop [00:51:00] moment from Sledgehammer. So, General Deptula, Charles, what are your thoughts on all of this?

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): well, Heather, um, let me kick this off by, sort of stating the obvious to those of us who've been around the Air Force for a long time, and that's at the Department of the Air Force.

Um, really needs to double down on cultivating every congressional member new and sitting. The other services have always performed better than the Air Force in this regard, although, you know, I hear from the other services that the Air Force does. So, you know, it depends upon where you sit. But the Historically, the Department of the Air Force comes up with some very insular pathways forward and expects Congress to readily support.

And guess what? It doesn't work that way. There's no clearer indicator than the allocation of total obligational authority for 30 years in a row. The air force was funded less than the army and the Navy. [00:52:00] So I think it's pretty evident that the department of the air force approach is falling short and it needs some serious attention.

Charles Galbreath: You know, to reemphasize on the space side, particularly, I think every freshman. Congress person, right? Everybody in Congress needs to understand the importance of space capabilities, our reliance on them, and the threats that are posed to those capabilities by countries like Russia and China. They also need to understand that in order for us to deter those countries from taking actions against our space capabilities and having devastating impact, And so, Members of Congress need to understand, as Sledge talked about, in order to

deter that type of attack, we need to have a credible capability and a perceived willingness to use it.

That involves changes in policy, that involves funding the right capabilities and the right personnel and the growth of personnel within the Space Force. There's gonna be two issues that I think are gonna come up, will probably get a lot of attention very [00:53:00] rapidly. Candidate Trump talked about establishing the Space National Guard.

very much. And we'll see what happens with President elect Trump and with President Trump his second time around. I've advocated that that is not a good idea, that we should leverage the, integrated approach through the Space Force Personnel Management Act. The only way, in my view, that a Space National Guard makes sense is if there's incredible growth on both the active duty side and the guard side.

That's going to require a lot more funding and the other issue, of course, way above my pay grade, but that is the housing of U. S. Space Command right now, operational in Colorado Springs, but there's an enormous pull, uh, to Alabama that I'm sure, President Trump is going to be feeling, very quickly.

I just urge everybody to make decisions based on what is best for our national security and not what is best for one state. Raleigh, I'd love to get your perspective on this. Yeah, I mean, Secretary Kendall has talked for the past [00:54:00] year about the need to grow the Space Force budget. General line has, talked about it.

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: General Saltzman's talked about it and it goes down to resilience and the ability to respond and protect our missions and and way of doing our operations on orbit and obviously with, um, the new, the newest command space futures command coming online. All of these things need resources and so much like Charles was saying, you know, we've got some really hard decisions coming up and I hope that our resources match the rhetoric that we're laying down about the need, but couldn't agree more about the need to get a.

A really in depth threat brief to the newest members of Congress. Um, there's a fantastic briefer on the S2 staff, um, that just breaks down the threat to the space environment better than anyone that I've seen. [00:55:00] so Chief Lurch, if you're listening, that's you. get up to the Hill and brief these guys.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: I love that. I get a good call out there.

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: Okay. Is

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): that a classified brief or unclass? He can do both. It's one of the best I've seen. That's great. We need to get him on, uh, one of the cable news channels.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: So, um, John Deptula, uh, what about the air power side of the ledger? I mean, we've talked a lot, uh, historically as well as today about just the cliff, the recapitalization cliff that the air force is facing from NGAD to ensuring that we're buying more aircraft than we're retiring, maxing out a B 21 production, F 35, the nuclear triad.

So the list is really long. And so Secretary Kendall just earlier this week made a really stark admission that we don't have enough money and we're finally hearing them say that in public. How would you advise the incoming leadership team to prioritize for the Air Force?

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Well, Heather, I think as all of us here feel very strongly about, the [00:56:00] recapitalization bill is way overdue and it needs to be paid. Now, my good friend and former chief of staff of the Air Force, Mark Welch, uh, said it best, and I quote, without air power, we lose.

Period. Unquote. Folks, we're running out of air power. The Air Force needs to clearly articulate what life looks like if we do not reverse the decline in our Air Force. America's national security is at risk without Air Force modernization. And I'm here to tell you the other service components will not succeed without modern, sufficient, modernization.

Air Force airpower. Three decades of underinvestment in the Air Force has had consequences. Now, uh, it's important to recognize that no past Air Force leader sought to defer modernization. Uh, nor does the current leadership. These circumstances were forced upon the Air Force by other [00:57:00] priorities. But regardless of what those were, those water over the dam, we either get real about modernization, or we face the very real risk of losing a future war.

Buying aircraft in production or close to production is essential. We spent the past 20 years funding these programs. We can't afford to pivot off them in the hopes of some sort of theoretical set of new options. We also need to look at training and readiness accounts. very much. The current figures are terrifyingly bad.

Crews are simply not getting the hours they require in the air and the risks are profound. Furthermore, and I think most people recognize this, the industrial base is extremely fragile. We either get real about building production capacity or we risk the continued spiral downward and move from becoming a global force to one with much, [00:58:00] much less capability.

The Russia Ukraine war should have been a huge warning siren, but we've done little in response. Not to Ukraine, but to replenish our own warfighting weapons capacity. Short war story. You know, as a warfighter, I didn't want just in time delivery. I wanted mountains of munitions to apply at a rate and over the period of time necessary to win.

If you go back to 1991 during Desert Storm, we had that capacity. But ten years later, in Operation Enduring Freedom, it went away, and it's only atrophied more since. The next time, our forces will be in need of munitions, aircraft, and pilots that we simply lack the capacity to produce. So, DOD and this next administration needs to, to, to correct these deficiencies now and perhaps President elect Trump will [00:59:00] act to make that goal one of his priorities.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: What I'm hearing from you, and I think we all agree, it's buy, buy, buy, then fly, fly, fly.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): That's a great way to put it. Or launch, launch, launch.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Okay. Okay. You got that, Charles. Yeah, I'll second that one too. Yeah. So, Lazer and Sludges, you were to offer advice to General Alvin and Saltzman in engaging with the new Congress, what would you advise them?

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: General Deptula just talked about it is making sure that they engage with the Hill first one and we'll have a complete list of all the new members that have come in. And we need to engage with every single 1 of them get the briefings that we were just talking about making sure they understand what we do from an air and space force.

And it can't be just for a hearing or pre hearing. They need to take time to visit. which I know goes against the very nature of personnel in the air and space forces, but it is all about developing relationships. Answer [01:00:00] information, uh, request for information immediately, even when it's not the whole answer.

And Sledge and I were both frustrated a lot of times with the Air Force because, you know, you send over a simple question and it takes a month to get something back and that doesn't help build relationships. Use the defense fellows we have up there. All right, and then make sure that we succinctly explain what the air and space force priorities are and the impacts of those priorities.

If they're not met, stay ahead of the news media members and staff don't like to be surprised. And the 1 thing I haven't seen, and maybe I'm wrong here, and you guys can tell me, but we always used to have each of the installations, each of our bases, bring officers and enlisted up to meet with Hill members and staff.

Uh, so that they can get. And I don't know where that program been. Maybe it's just because I just haven't been aware of it, but I think that's important. And then I'd also in sledge, maybe you've seen it, but we used to have these warfighter brown bag [01:01:00] lunches and do some events on the hill. All of that is about building relationships, making sure people understand what we do.

Sort of getting it everything. General.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: Yeah, before I get my staff perspective, I want to just back up and kind of give you an anecdote or my first experience with professional staffer when, when I, um, when I was the liaison to the house. So, day one is the house liaison officer, a professional staff member from the House Armed Services Committee came down, sat in my office and said, the Air Force's reputation is that you're unresponsive and lethargic.

I'm like, okay, give me two years and we'll talk about it again. Two years later. The same staffer is sitting in my office and I say, how did I do? I'm about to leave, unresponsive and lethargic. So I guess I didn't move the needle a whole lot. Now, um, after I retired and went over to work as a staffer for a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I went down to the Air Force Senate liaison office and said, your reputation is that you're lethargic and unresponsive.

[01:02:00] And two years later, I told Billy Ray Thompson, you're still lethargic and unresponsive. So that would be my number one thing is. Be proactive, be frequent, and answer the question, because as a staffer, I usually would ask a question of the legislative liaison, and I needed an answer in 24 to 48 hours.

And if I didn't have the answer, I was going to go with my best guess. That's just the way it is. Two weeks on Capitol Hill is a lifetime, and you can't wait for

a fully staffed staffer. response. So if I were going to advise the Secretary of the Chief, I would say put the right people on Capitol Hill, whether they be your liaisons or your defense fellows, empower them to speak on behalf of the Air Force and respond quickly to Any RFIs or questions they might have and understand that they're not going to get it 100 percent right 100 percent of the time But they're going to be good enough.

They're going to move the needle Um, and then the second thing and I think this is more of a strategic communications plan I would tell them have a plan [01:03:00] communicate that plan with congress before you've made a decision on it So loop them into the planning process and allow them to be involved and then once you develop a plan Stick to it.

What always frustrated me is when the Air Force budget request came over to the Hill every year and I would look at it and go, well, this is 180 degrees out from what you asked last year. So have a plan, stick with it. And I understand when leadership changes, you're going to change things a little bit, but you've got to, you know, stick with it.

I still wake up in a cold sweat over the way that whole thing went down, but let's, you know, those are the kind of things they do, but, and to just, I guess, put a really fine point on what laser said. It is truly all about relationships. And if you're the chief and the secretary, and you're the first time you're meeting members of Congress is at the posture hearing, you failed miserably.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Raleigh, what would you tell General Saltzman?

Jeff "Rowlie" Rowlison: Yeah, same thing. Get over to the Hill and make it personal. And then empower FML and LL to do their jobs, right? Exactly what [01:04:00] Sledge and Laser were saying. This is not hard. It just takes a lot of work and a lot of confidence in the team that you've empowered to go, go be your advocate on the Hill.

And I think where we've done that well, we've had some victories. We have historically as an Air Force and now with the Space Force, Bobby Hutt is creating that culture on the Space Force side. But that's that's growing. So I think there's a lot of work to do to that regard, but just empower those those folks and get after it.

Anthony "Lazer" Lazarski: sort of talked about it a little bit, but just a couple of things that's going to happen immediately when they come back. So that because they're. We're not going to get right on these approach bills, and we're

not sure what's going to happen with them. But number 1, they're going to go immediately into an emergency supplemental.

Um, and that is going to be 1 of the 1st focus because of the hurricanes. We have fires and everything else. So that's going to go 1st. Not sure everything that's going to be in there, but that'll be a focus. Number 2 is leadership elections, [01:05:00] both in the House and the Senate will happen within the 1st and 2nd week when they get back.

So that'll preoccupy them. And then they obviously, they've got to be working the appropriate. Proofs bills, and they're going to be working with the defense authorization bill, uh, which they hope to try to get filed by the first week of December and try to get the defense authorization bill done both House and Senate by mid December.

And then the last thing, and I can turn it over to Sledge here, but, uh, the CR, because we're probably, I mean, there's a good chance we may need another CR.

Todd "Sledge" Harmer: No, I think, uh, you, you nailed the landing there, Lazer. That's good.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: All right. Well, with that, we're going to sign off. Thanks for everyone for joining us today.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Yeah, this was a great session, Heather, and, great inputs by everybody here.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: It's going to be exciting times.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): Yes.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: Let

Charles Galbreath: Thanks, Heather. Uh, yeah, everybody take a deep breath.

Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.): It's going to be an interesting four years. See you next time.

Thanks a lot. See you next time. Thanks.

Heather "Lucky" Penney: With that, I'd like to extend [01:06:00] a big thank you to our guests for joining in today's discussion. I'd also like to extend a big thank you to you, our listeners, for your continued support and for tuning into today's show. If you like what you heard today, don't forget to hit that like button and follow or subscribe to the Aerospace Advantage.

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org. Thanks again for joining us and have a great aerospace power kind of day. See you next time.