

Riki Ellison: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, what a great honor. We started this program four years ago, and we've risen it, and it's awesome to see the participation that's here. And thank you, Tom and Kirsten, for joining us today.

Riki Ellison: Winner's associate with winners to win. And we're here today associating with winners to win. In no time in our history that our nation now is shifting to be able to compete against our near peers of China and Russia. That's going to require us to set the conditions to win in every possible way to deter conflict, and you're at the centerpiece of that. But I want to really express the gratitude of each of you because each of you can go out and make a lot more money at Google, a lot more money at Amazon, and you're doing this work for the relevancy of our nation and of our world, and that's tremendous.

Riki Ellison: And like you, back in 1980, some of you, not all of you, obviously, I had the fortune to ... I was hurt and I got a class under Governor Ronald Reagan's national security advisor. And he introduced a concept in 1980 to eliminate and take out nuclear ICBMs. It was a hit-to-kill technology that was not even discussed, but a political idea that went forward to it. And like you, because I've seen the passion, I was there with you yesterday, of the love that you have for this work, that passion of eliminating and negating a nuclear weapon to our population. One of the greatest things in the world you can do is to do that kind of technology and it fuels you.

Riki Ellison: In 1983 I heard the speech of Ronald Reagan. I was ready to go and work in policy and I got drafted, not by the US Army or the Navy, I got drafted by the 49ers. And in 1984 we won a Super Bowl. But that wasn't relevant. It wasn't relevant. And I sought to get involved and I got engaged with a guy named Julian Davidson who worked for von Braun who hired me in Huntsville, Alabama. And my first job was at Lockheed Martin in Sunnyvale, California working on their ERIS, Exo-atmospheric Reentry Interceptor System. And I followed that program all the way through its beginning, it was the second interceptor after Homing Overlay Experiment and all the way through to where I'm at now through six presidents and a real program, that's not an idea, that is saving the world and making the world a safer place today. And each of you are part of that program, you're on the cutting edge of that program.

Riki Ellison: And the demonstrations that we have done even over the past year, salvo shots or Aegis shots are intercepts that are happening virtually every week over in the Middle East. Our capabilities that are in South Korea that are in the oceans around North Korea are keeping that environment stable. You're at that front edge of that. And on Thursday, we launched a missile from a Mark 41 launcher at Vandenberg Air Force Base to go beyond the INF Treaty, which we withdrew from. They didn't choose any other launcher, but an Aegis capable launcher to use that, and that is where we're going. We're going to include our offense with our defense to have an integrated fight that's going to present much more stronger deterrent against China, Russia, and certainly North Korea and Iran.

Riki Ellison: Your projects that you do on the Aegis platform, which is the number one in the world, there's nobody else that on one platform can go from the surface into space and be able to have an integrated air missile defense system. Nobody does that better and nobody does that except for the US Navy and the Aegis systems. You've got Aegis Ashore that's moving forward. And this opportunity that you're seeing is going to be a combination of using both our offense and defense, on this platform particularly, in the Pacific, in Japan, in Korea, in the United States, to keep our nation and keep our way of life the way it is, and not be dominated by the Chinese.

Riki Ellison: So there's a lot here that you should be very proud of. We're very, very honored to honor you here today. We've done this with 18 countries, we've held Defender of the Year events, and awarded over 700 leaders like yourselves around the world. Because that identification, that recognition within your own team elevates the game of play, elevates the atmosphere to win and you will lead to win. So we're tremendously humbled and excited to honor you today.

Riki Ellison: So I'd like to bring up one of our forefront leaders of Aegis BMD. It's our 50th anniversary on the 23rd. Rear Admiral Tom Druggan has been a great advocate, a great leader, and we are fighting to keep him in his place, probably for another decade if we can, here in Norfolk. So Tom, come on up.

Riki Ellison: Just want to take a moment here to clearly articulate how important your mission is today. We have 44 ground-based interceptors defending the United States of America from the North Korean threat. We were promised 64. We are not going to get 64 until, most likely, 2030 timeframe with the next generation interceptor. So there is a gap where this particular group has to fill abundantly, and you're filling it with your LRDR which is going to provide much more reliability and give a better shot doctrine for our GBIs. And you're going to invest in the underlayer of the SM-3 Block IIA, that's going to be on the ships that you are creating those software packages, the Aegis Baseline 9s, and 5.4s, and so forth to be able to launch it on remote, engage on remote, and we're going to look at the Aegis Ashore capability with that. So it's a critical mission that you, in this room, are in charge of, and in making those things happen to make our country safe until that timeframe comes with the next generation interceptors.

Riki Ellison: I just wanted to make sure you knew that, I'm pretty sure you do, but it's very powerful. I think our Vice Chairman, John Hyten, is extremely strong on getting that gap completely full, not doing a partial gap, but completely full to be able to fill that. So that's why that importance is there. The other thing I'd like to say is the game, this ball here represents in a locker room, the game changers, not what the press thinks or the guys that have the most stats is the game changers. And the head coach always gives the game ball to those game changers, and the players in the room know who those game changers are. And you're the game changers in this room that we are identifying with and giving you that ball to run with and to led with.

Riki Ellison: Thank you Tom, that was great explanation, great validness on the mission that you're in. Great teams can bring diversity of talent, diversity of culture together through trust, and the great leaders can invoke trust. And Tom, Jim, that is the critical thing that allows the people that work for you or under you to give their best talents to win. And leadership, whether you're a nine year old kid from Detroit or you're Admiral Tom Druggan, it's about three things. It's about making the right decision at the right time for the right reasons under extreme pressure. The great leaders can do all three of those. It's easy to do one of them or two of them, but to put all three together and to be able to make those decisions that you will do, to excel the work that you're doing in missile defense, that's why you're here.

Riki Ellison: That's why we awarded you and for you to propel that and lead with that to the people around you, above you, below you, alongside of you, and create that trust that they want to give. A lot of people don't want to give or are afraid to give or embarrassed to give. And they need a leader that makes them feel good and comfortable to give, to give everything you got because we're going to need everything you got to win this fight, this long fight that we're going to go against China, Russia to keep the way we love our lives, our families, the way it is, the status quo today, we have to do this. And we have to do it so well that they will never fight and we will never go to conflict. And you are at the point of the spear with this particular technologies that we are talking about in the room. Nobody else in the world is as advanced as you are in defending our country.

Riki Ellison: So thank you for being a champion. Thank you for being a winner, and we're honored to associate with you as winners. Thank you.