

DCIA at Texas A&M

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Joshua Krueger:

... Burns holds the highest rank in the foreign service career ambassador and is only the second serving career diplomat in history to become Deputy Secretary of State. Director Burns retired from the State Department US Foreign Service in 2014, before becoming president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Director Burns is a crisis tested public servant who spent his 33 year diplomatic career working to keep Americans safe and secure.

Prior to his tenure as Deputy Secretary of State, he served as Undersecretary of State for political affairs from 2008 to 2011, US Ambassador to Russia from 2005 to 2008, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs from 2001 to 2005, and US Ambassador Jordan from 1998 to 2001. He was also Executive Secretary of the State Department and special assistant to former Secretaries of State Warren Christopher and Madeline Albright. Minister Counselor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy in Moscow, Acting Director and Principal Deputy Director of the State Department's policy planning staff, and special assistant to the president and senior director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council.

Director Burns received three presidential Distinguished Service awards at the highest civilian honors from the Pentagon and from the United States Intelligence Community. He is the author of the bestselling book, the Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal. He earned a bachelor's degree in history from La Salle University and Masters and doctoral degrees in international relations from Oxford University, where he studied as a Marshall Scholar. So without further delay, please join me in welcoming to the stage the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mr. Bill Burns.

Greg Vogle:

Howdy. Not bad for a boy from Alabama, is it? Huh? All right, you guys are growing on me. I got to tell you, the Aggies have turned out tonight for you, Mr. Director. This looks like midnight Yale at Cal Field. I'm telling you right now. It is an honor to have you here, sir, and the time that you're spending at a great institution, the Bush School, who you served with in your past. We're humbled to have you here, and thank you for making time to come. And as President Bush 41 said, "Public service is a noble calling." You represent, you epitomize that, sir. So thank you for being here. And we're going to get rolling. So I'll hand it to you first to make any introductory remarks you'd like and then we can go. I can start with questions.

Director Burns:

No, that's great. Well, it's wonderful to be here with all of you. Wonderful to be back at the Bush School and at A&M. As Greg mentioned, I had the privilege as a very young diplomat of serving in the Bush 41 administration. And it was truly a remarkable moment, an intersection of transformative changes on the international landscape, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and intersecting with the remarkable group of American public servants President George H.W. Bush, also a former director of CIA, Jim Baker, the Secretary of State, Brent Scowcroft, Colin Powell. I don't think there's a period in my long public service that I learned more than in that era.

And I have to say it's also a privilege to be sharing a stage with Professor Vogle as well, who is one of the most remarkable officers ever to serve at the CIA. And for those of you students in this audience, as you think about a career in public service, Greg really embodies the best of CIA. You could not have a better role model than Greg Vogle. So it's great to be with all of you.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, thank you very much. You mentioned the word transformation and you said we are in a time of transformation. Could you expand on that a little bit, your thoughts on that?

Director Burns:

Sure. Well, you think back 30 years ago to the George H.W. Bush era, that was one of those plastic moments that come along maybe a couple of times a century, when events and relationships and influence are accelerating across the international landscape. Then it was the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany.

Fast-forward 30 years, I think we're in another of those transformative moments. I continue to believe that the United States should approach that landscape with optimism and confidence. I think we still have a better hand to play than any of our rivals, but we're no longer the only big kid on the geopolitical block. The rise of China, the incredibly complicated dangers posed by Vladimir Putin and his mix of grievance and twisted ambition, and then a world in which we see lots of problems without passports, the kind of challenges that go beyond the grasp of any one nation state, whether it's climate change, energy security, food, water, health insecurity. And then on top of that, a revolution in technology which is changing the way we live, work, fight, and compete. And so that's the complicated era. That's the set of transformations that I think we have to deal with at CIA as an intelligence service.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, and you know this much better than I do, but the set of challenges I perceive are greater than some of the challenges that we've faced in the past in our career. How is the agency rising today to meet the myriad of challenges that are out there?

Director Burns:

Well, I mentioned a few of them and we're working fast to up our game to deal with a lot of those hugely important challenges for our country and for our society. To start maybe with Russia and Putin's aggression in Ukraine, now 14 months old, I'm really proud of the work that CIA officers have done working with our colleagues across the intelligence community to provide accurate early warning that that war was coming, to help the Ukrainians to defend themselves alongside their courage and tenacity, and to help President Biden cement and mobilize a coalition of countries to support the Ukrainians against Putin's aggression.

And then the President also decided to do something a little novel, and that was to declassify some of our secrets even before the war began to deny Putin the ability that I had seen him use too many times in the past to shape false narratives. And this put Putin, I think, from the beginning of the war on in the kind of uncomfortable and unaccustomed position of being on his back foot. So that's on Russia, that's how we've tried to approach it.

China is, as all of you know very well, the biggest long-term geopolitical challenge we face as a country. So at CIA, what we've tried to do is organize ourselves to deal effectively with that challenge, to supply policymakers with the intelligence that they need. We've formed a new mission center focused exclusively on China. Mission centers are kind of the organizational building blocks at CIA. We're hiring and training more Mandarin speakers. In just the last couple of years, we've roughly doubled the size of the budget that we devote to the China threat across CIA.

Then in technology, another of those big transformative challenges we face. We formed another new mission center, which aims primarily at building better partnerships with the private sector on technology issues. We can't compete effectively with China for all the incredible skill we have across CIA and technology and science and data and cyber and digital issues unless we have a better connection to the private sector and can learn from partners in the tech sector about the pace of innovation and the kind of supply chain vulnerabilities that American policymakers need to pay attention to as well.

We've also set up something called CIA Labs, which works with academic institutions and startup communities around the country also to deepen our understanding and our capability to support American policymakers. And on top of that, our biggest challenge, our biggest opportunity is to recruit the very best talent across American society, a lot of that represented in this room. We've had literally hundreds of A&M graduates serving at CIA over the years and hundreds serving there today. And I hope many of the students in this audience will follow in their footsteps as well, because at our core, we are a human intelligence service. We're animated by the quality of the people and their commitment to their agility and their sense of patriotism. And that's what's going to set us apart from other intelligence services in the years ahead.

Greg Vogle:

So you bring a unique perspective to the agency. You're a phenomenal diplomat, one of five career ambassadors. You've spent a lifetime on the diplomatic stage, you've worked very closely with us in the past, and now you've seen the light and you've come on over;

Director Burns:

Only took 35 years. But yeah.

Greg Vogle:

So talk to the audience a little bit about the difference of being a policy maker and implementer and now director of intelligence.

Director Burns:

Well, they're two very distinct professions, and I'm very well aware of that. My job now is to support policymakers, it's not to become a policymaker as well. I know for a fact that over the years as I worked with close CIA colleagues and officers in embassies around the world, that I was a much better diplomat, a much better ambassador, a much better negotiator because of the skill and the insights that CIA officers provided for me. And I'd like to think, I hope that in the two plus years I've been director of CIA, that my experience on the policy side, my understanding of what matters most to policymakers will make me a more effective CIA director.

Now, as a good Irish Catholic, I think sometimes I'm doing penance for my sins because as a policy maker, the instinct oftentimes when faced with a choice between bad and worse is to ask the CIA for yet another piece of analysis that somehow is going to make it easier to make those complicated choices.

And so now on the receiving end, I know how that feels as well. Although I have to admit, it's kind of liberating too. If you're in the White House situation room, in my role now, you can lay out the ugly landscape and all those hard choices and then put your hands up and say, "Over to you, policy makers."

The one thing I've learned over the years though, that I think is critically important for us at CIA is to remain an apolitical institution. Is it a lot easier said than done in today's polarized politics, especially in Washington. Any of you have nostalgia for Washington, just talk to me afterwards and I'll cure you of that too. But we have to remain apolitical. We have to play issues straight down the middle without a whiff of either partisanship or policy agenda.

And that's what all of my colleagues at CIA and I pride ourselves on as well. It's not easy to tell policymakers what we think they need to know, not what they want to know. I remember as a senior policy maker, it's not fun when somebody tells you that your great new idea is not so great and not so new as well. But that's our job. It sounds trite sometimes to say speaking truth to power. It's not easy to do, but that's what we have to do. And we get ourselves in trouble as an agency and as a nation, and we make bad choices when we don't keep that in mind.

Greg Vogle:

Absolutely, sir. I want to drill down on one of the issues that you're very, very familiar with given your history with the individual and where we are now in Ukraine. Can you talk to us a little bit about how we got there and where we're going to go from there?

Director Burns:

Sure, yeah, I'd be glad to. And most of my gray hair, I think came from dealing with Vladimir Putin over much of the last 20 years. I've watched him over much of the last two decades deal in a very combustible mix of grievance and ambition. It's always seemed to me that his two principal ambitions were to restore Russia as a great power after what he saw to be the humiliation of the decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And then of course to establish himself as a great Russian leader.

And in order to accomplish that, he's thought he's needed to do two things. One, create a sphere of influence in Russia's neighborhood where he'd controlled the choices of some of his principal neighbors. And second, to create a very repressive authoritarian order in Russia. Both of those instincts stemmed from a fundamental mistrust of his own people, his own political elite, and of the choices that his neighbors might make.

Over more than the last decade, I think Putin has come to see Ukraine, a democratic Ukraine, stubbornly independent, moving more and more toward the West in political and economic and security terms, as the main threat to that ambition. And then I think over the last couple of years that view has hardened even further in Putin's mind. As his grip on power has tightened, as his circle of advisors narrowed, that sense of destiny and his appetite for risk also increased. And you have to remember that that circle of power, that circle of advisors is composed of people who either believe what Putin believes about Ukraine and Russia's role in the world, who learned a long time ago that it's not career enhancing to question his judgment.

And so you fast-forward then to fall of 2021, and I think Putin had convinced himself that strategically his window of opportunity for establishing control over Ukraine was beginning to close, and technically he saw as he looked ahead to the beginning of 2022, a favorable landscape. He thought that Ukraine was a weak and divided country, that the Europeans and the United States were distracted and risk-averse, and he thought he had modernized the Russian military to the point that they could achieve a quick decisive victory at minimal cost.

Now, he got each of those assumptions profoundly wrong. He used to say, I remember in conversations I had with him, that Ukraine's not a real country. Well, real countries fight back and it's just what the Ukrainians under President Zelensky's leadership have done with such courage and tenacity. It turned out there was a lot more western solidarity with President Biden's leadership to support the Ukrainians, and it's turned out that the modernized Russian military was not nearly up to what Putin thought they were up to as well.

The challenge though is that when faced with a whole series of setbacks on the battlefield and a whole series of catastrophic economic damage to Russia that Putin rather than back down has characteristically doubled down. He still believes today that he can make time work for them, or at least convince us that he can make time work for him, that he can grind down the Ukrainians, that he can wear down the United States and our European allies, and that ultimately Ukraine matters more to him than it does to us.

I think the challenge as we look ahead to answer the last part of your question, Greg, is on the battlefield, I think as the Ukrainians prepare to launch another offensive this spring is to puncture that

sense of arrogance on Putin's part. To convince him and his generals that not only are they not going to be able to advance further into Ukraine but that as every month goes by, they risk losing more and more of what they've illegally seized right now. That's going to be a tall order. The Russians are quite dug in, but the Ukrainians are quite determined, and I've learned over the course of the last couple years not to underestimate their drive or their capability as well.

Then the very last thing I'd say that I think is important for all of us to keep in mind is by any measure, this has already been a massive strategic failure for Russia. You look at the weakness of the Russian and military that's been exposed, the losses and manpower and material, the long-term economic damage that Russia has suffered. He's gutted the Russia middle class that I saw emerging when I was ambassador there 15 years ago, and he's in many ways mortgaged Russia's future for the next couple generations as well.

He thought by this invasion he was going to fracture NATO. Now you have a NATO that's stronger and more cohesive than any time since the Cold War that rather than being weaker is adding new members. Finland just joined. Sweden is likely to join soon as well. So by any stretch of the imagination, by any definition, this is a massive own goal for Russia as well.

Greg Vogle:

So what are you thinking? There was a misstep or a miscalculation, or Putin is totally backed into a corner that we have an open conflict with NATO instead of what we are doing to support the Ukrainians? What are the possibilities that we go to war?

Director Burns:

Well, we have to understand, I think that risks come with this conflict as well, and risks come with supporting Ukrainians, which we need to continue to do I think as a country and as an alliance. I think Putin has a healthy understanding of the power and cohesion of NATO. Right now, his military is having a hard enough time. It's got its hands full dealing with a much smaller military in Ukraine right now. So I don't think he's spoiling for a fight or a confrontation with NATO.

And President Biden, on the other hand, has made very clear that the United States is not looking to get directly involved in this conflict in Ukraine right now too. But as you know very well, Greg, there can be inadvertent collisions. We saw one of them over the Black Sea recently as well. And so that puts a premium on communicating very directly and very firmly what the consequences of some of those can be as well.

But I don't want to pretend to any of you that there's a kind of risk-free next six months. There's going to be more nuclear saber-rattling, I imagine, meant to intimidate. We don't see any signs on the ground right now of Russian preparations for use of tactical nuclear weapons or big changes in nuclear deployments as well. So while we can't be intimidated by that nuclear saber-rattling, it's important not to take it lightly either.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, yesterday you talked about another subject that probably keeps you concerned a lot is the connection between the PRC and Russia, the economic colony. What do you see as the PRC's plans and intentions now as they observe the situation?

Director Burns:

Sure. Well, you talked about, yeah, what keeps you up at night? There's a certain amount of interrupted sleep that comes with this job, I've noticed over the years. I think the Russia/China partnership is a significant one today. I would not underestimate the commitment of either President Xi or President Putin to that partnership. The Chinese are buying a lot of cheap energy from the Russians right now. They're doing a lot of business economically as well.

I think one of the risks that Russia runs as it looks out over the coming years is the risk of becoming an economic colony of China, dependent on exporting its energy and its raw materials to the Chinese market, and then increasingly dependent for some kinds of technologies on the Chinese as well. Becoming an increasingly dependent junior partner in a way.

Beginning of February of '22, so several weeks before Putin launched his invasion, Xi and Putin proclaimed what they called a friendship without limits. And I think, as I said before, you don't want to underestimate their commitment to that partnership. But it turns out that friendship, at least so far, does actually have some limits. One of the things that we've been most concerned about in Washington and many of our European allies share this is the risk of the PRC supplying weapons and ammunition to Russia for use on a battlefield in Ukraine.

And so the president and Secretary Blinken and others have been pretty public about making clear the serious consequences that would flow from doing that. We don't have evidence today that the Chinese have yet begun to supply weapons or ammunition. I think it's been important that some of the Europeans have spoken up as well on that too. So it's a partnership that we watch very carefully.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, I'm sure I won't be the first person to ask you this question, but it's a question I get from these great students all the time. What's the possibility of the PRC going after Taiwan?

Director Burns:

That's a very good question, another of those things that occupies a lot of our attention and energy at CIA. I'd say several things. First here, again, I would not underestimate President Xi's determination to control Taiwan. His publicly stated preference is to accomplish that by means short of the use of force, by means short of a military conflict. I think the truth is today that President Xi and the Chinese military leadership have some doubts about whether they could accomplish a successful invasion right now.

I think no one has watched Putin's experience in Ukraine more intently than President Xi has, and I think that experience has probably deepened some of those doubts about the capacity of the Chinese to successfully invade Taiwan today. Having said all that, I think the risks of conflict are likely to grow further out you get into this decade and beyond it. I think we know that President Xi has instructed his military to be ready for such a conflict by 2027. The operative phrase there is be ready. It doesn't mean that he's made a decision to launch an invasion in 2027 or 2028 or 2026, but it does mean, as I said, that I think the risks grow the further you get into this decade and beyond it.

Greg Vogle:

I'm going to switch gears on you. You ready? All right. I know this question is a little near and dear to many of our students hearts here because they all want to go into public service and many of them want to be officers in the CIA. Talk to them about what the CIA's looking for, what the CIA's doing as far as clearance process. What would you advise them to do if they were looking for that in the future?

Director Burns:

Well, I'll start with some of the mechanics and then I'll get to the point about why I think CIA is such an incredibly important place to work and offers such opportunities for any of you interested in public service. First on the mechanics, we've taken steps to significantly accelerate the onboarding process, the length of time it takes from an application to a final job offer. When I became director, it took nearly two years to bring people in the door, which is crazy. We've now reduced that by surging personnel, by creating a modern digitalized system for managing applications to reduce that to close to 180 days, which puts us at least in a more competitive position. We had a backlog two years ago of 10,000 applicants. We've cut that to less than a hundred now. So we're making progress.

We're also making progress in creating the kind of diverse workforce that we need. It's not just the right thing to do to reflect the richness and diversity of American society, it's the smart thing to do for us as an agency, an agency with global responsibilities operating in lots of very complicated, incredibly diverse landscapes around the world too. So we're making progress in all those areas. We're stepping up recruitment this year in all 50 states. We're focused on prospective officers who have language skills, who have technology skills as well, whether it's in STEM subjects or anything else. Those are, given all the challenges I was talking about before, increasingly important to our future as what I still believe is the world's best intelligence service as well.

The broader point I'd make is about public service. My whole life has been shaped by public service. I grew up as an army brat with three brothers as we bounced from army post to army post around the country. I had the best possible model for public service that I could have in my dad as well, who became a two-star general in the US Army as well, served proudly in Vietnam. And so that instilled in me at a pretty early age, a sense of the value of public service.

And then I joined the foreign service, my first kind of gainful employment after I got out of graduate school. Public service also shaped my future there as well. By the magic of alphabetical seating, I was



seated in the entering foreign service class on the first day with Lisa Carty, and we eventually got married and have two wonderful daughters. But public service for me has been an opportunity, it may sound corny to say, but it's an opportunity to serve a cause bigger than yourself, in this case, the interests and values of our country. And to do it, as Greg knows very well, with people who share that sense of commitment.

That's what impresses me most about CIA. It's people who are not going to read about their achievements in the media and the headlines. A lot of the work that we do at CIA is not well understood across American society, but it's hugely important. And you don't do it for the money, you do it in large part for the respect of your peers. You want the respect of people you serve with who share that same kind of commitment. And that's what's animated me over the last 40 years in public service. And that's what gives me energy and focus every day at CIA.

And if you're really lucky, as I've been over the course of my career, and never underestimate the value of luck or serendipity in anybody's career. You get a chance to play a very small part in history and sometimes a chance to shape it a little bit as well. And to do it at this remarkable moment of change on the international landscape at this moment of huge challenges for our country, I think is an incredible opportunity. I would not have traded the experiences I've had in public service for anything, and I hope many of the students in this audience will consider that as well. We'd love to have you at CIA.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, I'm going to switch again. These are some questions that the students have submitted. And following that vein of life of public service, can you talk about some of the defining moments in your career that you really look back on and say, this is what it's all about?

Director Burns:

Yeah, part of it was I mentioned my experience as a very young, impressionable diplomat working for Secretary of State Baker in the Bush 41 administration. I think I learned an enormous amount then about how to apply American power in the world with skill and humility and optimism as well. I've never forgotten that even as the international landscape has changed.

I've had a lot of really interesting experiences over the years. Many of them involving working closely with CIA officers. I led 20 years ago what were then secret talks with the Libyans, with Muammar Qaddafi. Certainly the creepiest dude I ever dealt with. It's a technical intelligence thing. We were in the process of trying to convince him to take responsibility for the terrorist attack on Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie at the end of 1988, to pay compensation to the victims and essentially get out of the business of terrorism. And also renounce, give up what was a rudimentary nuclear program then too. And that eventually worked. But along the way, I learned a lot.

I remember meeting Qaddafi out in the middle of the Libyan Desert on one of these secret trips. And so Qaddafi is sitting in this old Libyan army tent with a single light bulb hanging down from the ceiling. It's three o'clock in the morning, which was his prime time for conversations, not my prime time. And we

have this conversation three, almost four hours in Arabic. But he had this weird habit of pausing mid conversation and staring up at the ceiling for three or four minutes.

Now, I was trained as a diplomat to carry on a conversation, so that's a little off-putting. But what would pass the time for me in those long pauses is he was wearing what you can only describe as a yellow pajama top with photographs of dead African dictators on it. So for those three or four minutes, I would try to see if I could identify them. And by the end of the three or four hour discussion, I got pretty good at that.

But the one thing I never forgot in all those hours of talking to Qaddafi was what he was responsible for, the blood he had on his hands. One of my best friends at my first post as a diplomat in Jordan was a CIA officer who was killed on Pan Am 103. So as professionally committed as I was to try to get a good outcome for American interests in those conversations with Gaddafi, I never once forgot what he was responsible for as well.

Greg Vogle:

I heard you speak this afternoon to a small group, and one of the big takeaways I had was the advice that you gave to them about take your time, enjoy the moment, be prepared when you get on the field. But I think that'd be great if you could share that with this large group.

Director Burns:

Sure, at my age, I'm great at free advice to everybody. One of the really impressive students I met with this afternoon just asked, "At 25, what was the advice you wish you had gotten?" And the first, as Greg mentioned, was don't be in such a rush. In any profession, I learned this as a diplomat and now I'm learning it at CIA as an intelligence officer, you want to learn your profession.

I talked to all the entering classes of new recruits at CIA, I used to do the same thing with young diplomats. And inevitably, you'd have a lot of type A personalities who'd say, "What's your 15 year plan for getting ahead?" And I would say, "I hate to burst your bubble, but serendipity always plays a role." You've got to prepare well, learn your profession, but take the time to learn it right.

The second thing I guess was you want to stretch yourself a little bit at each successive stage. You don't want to be so fixated on getting up the next rung on the professional ladder, but you want to try to learn new things and do things that go a little bit outside your comfort zone. Now, if you wind up curled up in the fetal position in the corner of your office, that's probably a signal that maybe it was a little bit too much of a stretch that time, but that was some of the advice I got early on. And it was good advice too, because that's how you grow. That's how you rise to be able to execute more senior responsibilities.

And then the last thing, and in some ways the most important, which I wish somebody had emphasized more to me when I was my 25-year-old self, is take care of your people. The dirty little secret sometimes, and it's not just true in public service, it can be true outside of it, is that people can rise to very senior positions and sometimes not be great at taking care of their people or being good leaders as well. And so at the junior most stages of your career, you want to learn the importance of that. That

you're not going to be able to motivate your officers, get the best out of them unless you're treating them with dignity and respect, unless you're setting high standards and you're living up to them yourself. But you also understand that you got to take care of them and their families and instill in them a sense that they need to take care of each other.

That's one of the things I'm proudest of, and Greg, you know this from your own career at CIA. It's a community of people and we have our flaws and make mistakes like everybody else, but it's a community of people that looks out for one another and is dedicated to trying to find more resources and more ways in which we can provide the support that a lot of people are doing as we sit here this evening in College Station doing really hard jobs in some really hard places around the world.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, I'm Winchester on questions, so I'm going to turn it over to you for any closing remarks, anything you'd like to leave with the students and the audience to keep them motivated, because you got a motivated bunch here.

Director Burns:

Well, first, as I said at the very beginning, it's really a privilege to be here with all of you. And I greatly admire everything that's been accomplished at the Bush School and at A&M. And to the students in the audience, I hope you'll consider a career in public service. I hope you'll consider CIA. I think it's an opportunity, as I said before, to do things in the service of our country, in the service of things that are bigger than ourselves or our own ambitions or anything else. And to do it with a group of people who share that kind of motivation as well, and to do it at a time which matters enormously for our country.

That international landscape we were talking about before, Putin's sense of grievance, the dangers he poses, the rise of China, the revolution in technology. We didn't even talk about all the challenges across the Middle East. We may think we can disengage from the Middle East, but it always reengages us. And so there's a whole range of challenges out there, but that makes this, I think, not only a very important moment for our country and for CIA but also, I think, a real set of opportunities, a set of opportunities for young people to contribute to what's best for our country at a crucial moment too. So I just want to thank you for the chance to come back to the Bush School. It's really a great pleasure to be here, to be with all of you, to be with so many people whose service I have great respect for, especially for you, Greg. So thank you.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, if you want to come back and talk about the Middle East, the door is open and we'll round all these Aggies up again to come back.

Director Burns:

I'll ruin all your digestion for dinner if I do that.

Greg Vogle:

Sir, once again, thank you so much. It's an honor for me to be sitting up here beside you and having the opportunity for you to talk to these long ball hitters. I'll paraphrase Bush 41. He said something about when duty calls, let them say we stood. Sir, you've stood for a lifetime. Duty is a hallmark of what you've done for our country, and we can't thank you enough. But a small token of what we'd like to do is we'd like to give you something, and if Gracia and Summer and Derek would come up, we have a presentation for you, sir.

Director Burns:

Thank you.

Gracia Luo:

Dr. Burns, thank you so much for sharing your wisdom you've gained throughout your experience serving this country and giving us the opportunity to glean from your perspective on current events. On behalf of the Bush School body, I know I can confidently say that your encouragement will carry on with us to reflect and remember the why that called us to public service in the first place. As a token of our gratitude for your time here today and your service to the American people, we would like to present you with this flag that flew during the 25th anniversary celebration of the Bush School this past year.

Thank you so much again for your insights today and your service. I know all of us here today will hold on tight to the things we've learned and gained from your reflections shared here today. Thank you.

Director Burns:

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Great time with you guys. Thanks for having me. Thank you. Thanks a lot. That's very nice of you. Thank you very much.

Greg Vogle:

Thanks, sir.

Director Burns:

Thank you. Really appreciate it. Thank you all. Greg Vogle:

All right. Thank you.

Director Burns:

Thank you very much.