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TRANSCRIPT

**CSIS-TCU Schieffer Series**

**The Taiwan Relations Act at Forty and U.S.-Taiwan Relations  
“Keynote Address by Representative Gerald Connolly (D-VA)”**

EVENT DATE

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TIME

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LOCATION

**CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C.**

FEATURING

**Representative Gerald Connolly (D-VA)**

MODERATOR

**Richard Bush**

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- Richard Bush: Ladies and gentlemen, it's my great privilege to introduce our next speaker, Congressman Gerry Connolly, who represents the 11th district of Virginia. That's just across the river – Fairfax County, City of Fairfax, and part of Prince William.
- Richard Bush: Congressman Connolly was elected to Congress in 2008 after a distinguished career in local government, including five years as the chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. He is a senior member of the House Committee on Oversight, and in that capacity is kind of busy these days, I would expect.
- Richard Bush: He is also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House, where I happened to work for a dozen years. On the Foreign Affairs Committee, he has demonstrated leadership on issues such as foreign-assistance reform, war powers, and democracy promotion abroad, which is not irrelevant to our subject today.
- Richard Bush: More germane to our purposes, Congressman Connolly is co-chair of the Congressional Taiwan Caucus. Even more germane, he worked on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the frenetic days that the Taiwan Relations Act was drafted. He was present at its creation.
- Richard Bush: Please join me in welcoming Congressman Gerry Connolly. (Applause.)
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: Thank you so much. And I apologize in advance for being the speaker between you and lunch. (Laughter.)
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: You know, the Taiwan Caucus that was just mentioned has 200 members. It's one of the largest caucuses in the Congress, and certainly one of the largest in terms of bipartisan support, and I think says something about the support in Congress for Taiwan.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: Today I'd like to touch on a few themes, including Congress's unique role in shaping U.S.-Taiwan relations, how Taiwan's evolved in the intervening 40 years, and how the Taiwan Strait could be a proving ground for both our relationship and for U.S. leadership.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: This is a momentous occasion. This week marks 40 years since the Taiwan Relations Act became law. As a Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer in 1979, I can attest to the commitment of Congress in making the TRA not just aspirational, but also an operational policy document that underpins the entirety of the U.S.-Taiwan relation.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: When the Carter administration proposed the executive branch's draft of a Taiwan Relations Act, it lacked several of the key provisions that we now most associate with the act itself, including provisions related to Taiwan's security. This is kind of extraordinary. On February 5th, 1979, then-Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher testified before our committee in support of the administration's draft bill. He told Congress not to worry about Taiwan's security because, quote, "Any effort by the People's Republic of China to resolve the Taiwan issue by other than peaceful means would be inconsistent with its evident desire to have better relations with the U.S. and our allies and friends," unquote.

- Rep. Gerald Connolly: He also went on to assure Congress that, quote, “The People’s Republic of China does not have the military capability to invade Taiwan and has not attempted to acquire that capability.” Wouldn’t you like to eat those words? (Laughter.)
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: Congress fortunately rejected the State Department draft and replaced it with much stronger language regarding U.S national-security policy and security commitments related to Taiwan, including stating declaratively that it is U.S. policy to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist and resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security or the social or economic systems of the people of Taiwan – pretty forthright – and that the United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: The provisions of the TRA have served to deter the use of force against Taiwan to settle the issues across the strait and to ensure that the fate of Taiwan will be settled in a peaceful manner. Congress decided how the relationship would be defined. And today the TRA, perhaps the preeminent example of congressional foreign policymaking, if you think about it, it’s a freestanding statute, untethered to an appropriations bill or to the National Defense Authorization Act. And it’s kept the peace for 40 years, allowing Taiwan to transform itself in that time period into a flourishing democracy with a powerhouse economy and vibrant civic society.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: For 40 years, the TRA has facilitated a partnership committed to strengthening commercial, cultural, security and other cooperation between the United States and Taiwan, as well as to promote regional stability and prosperity. Since it became law, Congress has enacted an additional 75 pieces of law or resolutions to help undergird that relationship with respect to Taiwan.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: These laws and resolutions define relations between the United States and Taiwan with respect to defense posture, U.S. engagement with Taiwan, support for Taiwan’s democracy, Taiwan’s participation in international organizations, and more. And they continue to this very day. Just recently Congress addressed the issue of the right of Taiwan officials to travel in the United States.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: Congress also played a critical role in eliciting official administration statements on Taiwan policy. For example, during a 2011 House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on Taiwan, then acting secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, Dr. Peter Lavoy, provided what remains a most comprehensive Defense Department statement about our security relationship. He noted – if I can turn a page – that, quote, “the preservation of stability in the Taiwan Strait is fundamental to our interests of promoting peace and prosperity in the Asia Pacific writ large.”
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: He also stated, “a Taiwan that is vulnerable, isolated and under threat would not be in a position to discuss its future with the mainland, and might invite the very aggression we would seek to deter, jeopardizing both our interests in regional peace and prosperity and the interests of the people of Taiwan.”
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: Taiwan has evolved, and it has come a long way since TRA became law. I first visited Taiwan in the late 1980s. It was a one-party state, not a democratic state that banned travel or business with the mainland. Its economy was primarily driven by small manufacturing, family-based manufacturing, and pollution was off the charts.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: I've had the great fortune of visiting Taiwan two dozen times since, and I've witnessed an enormous and extraordinary transformation. Today Taiwan is one of the most vibrant democracies in the region. It has gone from being a recipient of U.S. bilateral aid in the '50s and '60s to becoming our tenth largest trading partner and itself a provider of development assistance.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: But measuring Taiwan's evolution against itself, however, is not sufficient. We also must consider Taiwan's progress vis-à-vis that of the mainland, and we recall those words of Warren Christopher. While on democratic development there is no comparison, the economic and military fronts tell a very different story. Relative to mainland China, Taiwan's economy has shrunk as a share of the global economy. In 1980, Taiwan's economy was one-quarter that of the mainland. By 2017 it was one 20th of the mainland's, and while Taiwan accounted for less than 1 percent of the global economy, China made up 20 percent.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Taiwan has also become more vulnerable in terms of military power as the mainland's defense budget has outgrown Taiwan's enormously. In 1996, Taiwan's defense budget was \$9.5 billion and China's was 10.7—rough parity. By 2019, Taiwan's defense budget was only \$10.5 billion, but mainland China's was 228 billion, making it the second largest defense spending of any country in the world.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Against this backdrop, we've got to recognize that Taiwan's position in the world is fraught with challenges. China has become increasingly aggressive in its efforts to isolate Taiwan diplomatically. Taiwan has lost 16 allies since 2001; just 17 countries remain who maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and China is working on all of them.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: China has also lobbied aggressively to exclude Taiwan from participation in international organizations, including the international firefighter and police games in my own home county of Fairfax a few years ago. It's that level of detail they pay attention to.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: With that in mind, I'd like to pose a couple of questions to ponder and assert some principles with which to guide the future of our relations. First, is a growing adversarial U.S.-China relationship helpful or harmful to Taiwan? The latest national intelligence strategy identifies China as an adversary, reflecting a shift away from a U.S. focus on combatting terrorism to a focus on great power competition.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: President Trump has sparked an ever-escalating trade war with Beijing that has ripple effects for our trading partners in the region and around the world, not least of which is Taiwan. China's embarked upon an aggressive, expansive global Belt and Road initiative that could pose a challenge to America's model of development and influence. And is there a potential for Taiwan to become a victim or a pawn in this great power competition?

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Second, what does Taiwan's own political trajectory mean for the United States relationship? As Taiwan enters its own 2020 presidential campaign, there's a fight for the direction of its future. Some candidates have criticized President Tsai Ing-wen for not taking active steps toward more independence, while others have increasingly called for engagement — more close engagement with the mainland. If

Taiwan moves closer to China, does that diminish or actually undermine the justification for U.S. arms sales to Taiwan? If China is seen as less of a threat, what is the rationale for those sales? This is an important question also because it underscores the reality that the future of our relationship with Taiwan is not entirely in our control.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Regardless of how these questions are resolved, several key principles have long underpinned the unofficial relationship between the United States and Taiwan, and in my view will continue to do so. Number one, Taiwan's future must be, and will be, determined by peaceful means. The United States will protect Taiwan's autonomy and democracy and considers any efforts to shape Taiwan's future through force a matter of grave security concern to us. Beijing should not misread U.S. support for Taiwan, which entails both the provision of defensive arms to Taiwan and the maintenance of our own capacity to resist coercion that would threaten the people of Taiwan. There's an element of creative ambiguity built into that. And that's by design.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: As we mark 40 years since the enactment of the Taiwan Relations Act, and look forward toward the next 40 years, one thing is clear: Taiwan, through economic and democratic vibrancy, is charting its own course. And the U.S. commitment to Taiwan is and must be seen as strong, firm, and unwavering. But against the backdrop of great power competition, a major question persists: Will the template for U.S. global leadership prevail in the Taiwan Strait? Is Taiwan's economic and democratic vibrancy a sufficient bulwark against the overwhelming military and economic strength looming just 81 miles offshore? The answers to these questions are not just important for Taiwan's future, but frankly for our own in the emerging competition with Asia's new giant.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Thank you so much for having me here today. And I look forward to your questions. (Applause.)

Richard Bush: Thank you very much, Congressman Connolly. If you don't mind, I'd like you field your own questions, if that's OK. You're probably really good at it.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: And if you don't mind, I'm going to do it sitting down.

Richard Bush: OK. Wait for the mic. Identify yourself. Keep your questions brief so we can have a lot of questions.

Richard Bush: Thank you for those questions that you posed us. That will structure our discussion for the rest of the afternoon.

Richard Bush: But who'd like to ask the first question? Don't be shy.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Lunch? (Laughter.)

Richard Bush: Over there. OK. Stanley.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Hey, Stanley.

- Q: Hi. You may not know, but now retired for three years. Remember the days together, working – the first thing I worked on in the Congress was the Taiwan Relations Act. So it has a memory.
- Q: My question: How worried are you, if at all, about an actual Chinese military attack on Taiwan? Are you worried about deterrence? Do you think that the economic dependence of China on exports makes it all but impossible, unless Taiwan declares independence? Or do you think President Xi is just determined on his watch to reunify, whether peacefully or not?
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: Yeah. Good question. Candidly, I worry about the volatility of this administration's signals to China.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: So one of the first things the president did was basically renounce the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And I think they're probably still swilling champagne in Beijing over that decision. It was an unbelievable unilateral withdrawal from the region. It was an abandonment of allies who had negotiated with us in good faith. It was a message to other countries who were looking for U.S. protection rather than Chinese protection, like Vietnam, that they couldn't count on that. And so that was one signal that maybe we're retreating from the region.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: On the other hand, Trump's aggressive posture with respect to China up to now with respect to trade – you know, bilateral trade issues – is pretty aggressive and sends a different signal in terms of the willingness of the United States to take on China directly, albeit on economic issues. But what else might we be willing to do?
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: And so I think it's a mixed message we're sending, but it – I think China has to be careful about miscalculating. I also continue to believe that, given China's integration with the global economy, it would be one of the biggest losers if you created that kind of fundamental instability in terms of markets, investment, stock markets, value of – you know, of goods produced in your own country. And it has a lot to lose.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: And finally, I mean, in Chinese tradition, their view of history is not like ours. And they can wait. And so, you know, in the interim, clearly they're using all the levers at their command to persuade others and some in Taiwan that their future clearly is with the Mainland, and frankly the economic and military success of China reinforces that.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: But I just think they need to be very clear about miscalculating and reading U.S. intent. And that's why, you know, my perspective is a congressional perspective. But I think you probably would agree, Stanley, that I think support for Taiwan in Congress has not waned at all. And, you know, Article 1 basically gives the power of war and peace to Congress.
- Rep. Gerald Connolly: Yes, sir.
- Q: Congressman, Gregory Ho from Radio Free Asia, also from Hong Kong.
- Q: We've talked about Taiwan today, but I think the future of Taiwan is a better look at Hong Kong nowadays to prevent Taiwan fall into the situation now Hong Kong trapped, in the so-called China's economic trap. Are there any recommendation

you put forward to Taiwanese people that things that happen inside Hong Kong should be prevented in the Taiwan island?

Q: Second question is, do you agree that Hong Kong is talking about the rendition treaty with China? Taiwan government has expressed concerns that they might need to have a travel warning to Taiwanese travelers to Hong Kong. It will be easier after the rendition treaty that Hong Kong government has the obligation to send so-called fugitive to the motherland.

Q: Third is today is a sad day for Hong Kong –

Richard Bush: (Off mic.)

Q: Oh. Thank you. (Laughter.) Thank you, Congressman.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Hong Kong is a wonderful place and a fascinating amalgam of Western and Eastern cultures. When Hong Kong reverted to the Mainland control, the phrase being used was one China, two systems. And there was a Chinese commitment to respect the traditions of Hong Kong politically and a series of freedoms, press freedom and the like.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: I think that in the intervening years, the broad perception is that Beijing has not fully respected that commitment. And if Taiwanese are looking for reassurance from the Hong Kong experience, I don't think they find it. And I think the way Beijing has managed Hong Kong has actually – if their desire was ultimate integration with Taiwan, I think their own behavior has made that more difficult, not less difficult. And you know, we'll see how it evolves. But – and, frankly, the consolidation of power by President Xi doesn't reassure people that China is evolving in a certain way that is more receptive to democratic norms and institutions.

Richard Bush: Oh, there's one right here. Ashad Khalil. He's a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, law professor.

Q: Congressman, you've mentioned the ways in which a leader in the United States can sometimes upset policy with certain kinds of statements and initiatives. In the many years of Taiwan's democratic elections now, we have seen candidates come to Washington, or be assessed by Washington, in terms of the chance that they will take steps to upset U.S.-Taiwan relations. Taiwan's facing a presidential election in about a year or so. How much concern is there in Washington about non-traditional and potentially disruptive candidates?

Rep. Gerald Connolly: I don't know that there's a lot of – at least I can only speak for Congress – but I don't know that there's lot of concern at that granular level, despite the fact that we have visiting candidates and delegations. I think we tend to look at the relationship, certainly in the context of the Chinese relationship. And what is really interesting to me – you know, because I now span 40 years of looking at Congress both as a staff member on the Senate side and now as a member on the House side, working with Stanley – and that China has not made more progress in winning friends and influencing people in the Congress. It has very little goodwill in the Congress. And so – and that has served Taiwan's interests, you know, writ large.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: But I don't – I think there is some concern about an emerging accommodationist view in Taiwan politics with respect to the mainland, as I alluded to. But I wouldn't want to overstate that. Maybe that's just lack of familiarity with detail, or maybe it's because we continue to sort of see things in broader terms, especially given the overwhelming fixation on the bilateral relationship with China. I don't know if that's a satisfying answer, but honestly I don't think many members of Congress think at that level.

Richard Bush: I'll ask you a question. Do you think it would be in the interests of the United States to do a bilateral free trade agreement with Taiwan? And do you think there would be the political support in the Congress for approving it?

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Everything the United States does with respect to Taiwan obviously is done in cognizance of a reaction in Beijing. I would say, however, that the difference between the executive branch – and it doesn't really matter whether it's Republican or Democrat – and the legislative branch is we care a lot less about that than the executive branch. And in fact – in fact, I would say that there's a little bit of spunkiness in the legislative branch that we're not about to let Beijing tell us who we sell weapons to, who we trade with, who we rub shoulders with in international organizations, who gets to come to our country and visit. And so I think over time you're seeing sort of rebellious acts by Congress that get at that. I think we chafe at executive constraints. And frankly, as the relationship with China deteriorates, I think you'll see more of that, not less.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: But I don't think Congress – I should add, Congress is not going to do anything precipitate, however. We're very aware of the fact that you don't want to – it's one thing to rattle the cage; it's another to put a stick in it. (Laughter.) It's an old American English expression. (Laughter.)

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Anyone else? Well, thank you so much for having me and enjoy your lunch.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Oh, is there someone over there? OK. Yeah, go ahead. Go ahead. I schlepped all the way over here. I'm happy to have a question. (Laughter.)

Q: Thank you so much, Congressman Connolly. And I would just say that as a constituent of yours it's great to see you here. I'm from McLean, so. Russell Hsiao with the Global Taiwan Institute.

Q: Can you – you being here, of course, is a testament already, I think, to the bipartisan support for Taiwan in Congress. Can you just speak more and sort of more – elaborate more in terms of what you see as, you know, sort of the Democratic perspective on Taiwan policy, but moreover about the level of bipartisan support that Taiwan enjoys in Congress? I would just note that, you know, the Taiwan Travel Act, you know, passed unanimously, but there have been other measures also that have been – you know, that has bipartisan support. But could you highlight that a bit in terms of what you – from your vantage point about bipartisan support for Taiwan?

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Well, you know it's gone through an evolution. So after Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT fled to Taiwan in '49, I think Taiwan was seen through the prism of the Cold War, and it was going to be a bastion of anti-communist resistance, and we were going to protect it; and we sent the Seventh Fleet into the strait, and we were going

to shore them up. We weren't going to – but during those years, Truman and subsequently Eisenhower were not going to provide the kind of military support that allowed Chiang Kai-shek to win back the mainland. We were going to support Taiwan so the mainland couldn't cross the strait and forcibly incorporate Taiwan, and we were going to buy some breathing space for the government in Taiwan. In those days we supported the KMT view that actually they represented China, not the crowd in Beijing.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: All of that changed with the recognition of the People's Republic of China, and a unique relationship developed with a non-nation-state state. And as I said, it is also unique, I think, in foreign policy history in the United States where the Congress asserted itself and actually wrote the foreign policy with respect to Taiwan. That is an unusual event. You know, there were lots of other times Congress will assert itself. You know, ultimately on the Vietnam War Congress asserted itself by defunding the war. But it is rare that Congress gets into a level of detail that it did with the Taiwan Relations Act and actually circumscribed by law how – what that relationship would be.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: And I would say – here we are celebrating 40 years of it. And I would say congressional support for Taiwan is different than it was during the Cold War, but in some ways more attractive because there's a more comfortable embrace of a democratic society that is demonstrably so – very vibrant, lots of debate, lots of different points of view, an economic powerhouse, important trading partner and investment partner.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: And so, you know, I would just say – and I would also say that, as I said, there's a lot less goodwill toward Beijing in Congress than one might expect, you know, given the evolution of years. In fact, well – and so I think members are happy as an expression about that dissatisfaction with that relationship to double down on the one with Taiwan, and that's why you have over 200 members who are members of the caucus.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: You know, and that – believe me, that's unusual. I mean, we have lots of caucuses, you know, and I head a lot of them. But we don't have 200 members for most of those caucuses. You know, I head the Georgia Caucus. And, I don't know, maybe we've got 30 members, 40 – not 200. So it's a powerful expression of support that I hope Beijing pays attention to.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Yes, sir.

Q: Hi, Congressman. I'd like to follow up on Richard Bush's question. Is a free-trade agreement or some sort of bilateral trade or investment agreement with Taiwan rattling the cage or putting a stick in it? I mean, is that something that the Congress would support?

Rep. Gerald Connolly: I'm so sorry. I couldn't hear you. (Laughter.)

Q: I understand. Thanks.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Well, it depends on the fine details, right? I don't think Congress is going to engage in an overly provocative act that could jeopardize Taiwan and its security. On the other hand, Congress, as I said, chafes at Beijing's presumption of being able to

review and tacitly approve of measures between Taiwan and us. And Congress has a lot less respect for that than the executive branch does.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: So if the right kind of economic agreement could be drawn up, I believe it probably would have a fair chance in Congress. But remember, generally – I mean, those agreements are negotiated by the executive branch, not by Congress, through USTR or some other mechanism. And so we react to those. We don't initiate them. We could direct they be initiated, but generally on trade Congress has historically allowed the executive branch to take the initiative, and then we dispose of it.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Yes. Yes.

Q: Thank you very much, Congressman. Alex Parcan from Human Rights First.

Q: First, before I ask my question, I'd say congratulations for UVA yesterday. And that's very difficult for me to say – (laughter) – as a Maryland native.

Q: My question is, we've talked a little bit about coercive efforts by the Mainland towards Taiwan already. And you mentioned that these are items of concern to Congress at this time; I think something along those lines in your remarks.

Q: I wonder if you could talk about any particular red lines that might exist in that area, or perhaps just overall general congressional appetite for dealing with that threat in a more proactive way.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: I'm sorry. I – some of what you said – and the sound system got muffled. You were asking about what is the red line with respect to –

Q: Coercive efforts by Beijing –

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Oh, coercive.

Q: – in Taiwan. Yes.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: Yeah. Well, I think I mentioned that there's a certain ambiguity in how the United States expresses itself with respect to the defense of Taiwan and our commitment to making sure there is not a coercive solution across the strait.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: I quoted an assistant secretary from eight years ago, right, so it's relatively recent. And it was pretty declarative. So I think it would be most unwise to test the United States commitment to the right of Taiwan to its own self-determination. The ultimate solution will be decided by the Taiwanese people, not by us and not by Mainland China. And, by the way, we will respect the will of the Taiwanese people.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: We obviously don't want Taiwan to do things that are going to provoke Beijing, like declaration of independence. That would be unwise and very difficult for the United States to defend. But it would not be difficult for the United States to defend deterring a direct military threat of assault on Taiwan to incorporate it into mainland China. And I – again, I – you know, it is always unwise to underestimate the United States. History tells you that. People who have done it, including in that region, doesn't work out very well. So I mean, you know, provoke the United States at your peril. We may be slow to act, but in the case of Taiwan, given the deep and

broad support for Taiwan in Congress, no president can ignore that if something were to happen.

Rep. Gerald Connolly: I don't want to directly say here's a red line, but if we got a red line, you know, any military coercion to address the status of Taiwan I think would be a red line, certainly for Congress.

Richard Bush: On that bracing note, I think that we should bring this session to a close. You've been very generous with your time, but I'm aware that there are votes coming up on the floor of the House and I don't want you to miss them as your constituent. (Laughter.)

Rep. Gerald Connolly: You know, I – that's the problem of representing this area in Congress. (Laughter.) You can't even lie. (Laughter.) Somebody will say will you come, you know, Wednesday night to the Rotary Club. I go, well, we might have votes. And only in my district do people go, no, we checked; you don't have votes. (Laughter.) You checked? (Laughter.)

Rep. Gerald Connolly: At any rate, it was great to have you all here today. Thank you so much.

Richard Bush: OK. Thanks. (Applause.)

(End)