

Supervisors support military's mission

By BUSTER JOHNSON
Chairman of the Mohave
County Board of Supervisors

The Mohave County Board of Supervisors stepped forward during our February 6 meeting to support our nation's security, our military infrastructure and personnel and the economy of the State of Arizona.

We unanimously voted to support the Air Force proposal to establish a pilot training center for the F-35A Joint Strike Fighter aircraft at one or more existing military installations in our country. Two of the four possible bases are within Arizona: Luke Air Force Base and the Tucson International Airport Air Guard Station.

Historic Luke Air Force Base has been a valuable contributor to the country and this state since 1941. Protection of our environment has been a priority at Luke as the base has been in good standing with Maricopa County Air Quality Department, the Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team and every federal and state environmental agency pertinent to conserving the clean, natural landscape that we love.

Named after the Phoenix-born, World War I Medal of Honor winner, Lt. Frank Luke, Luke Air Force Base is an integral part of America's national defense. As our older fighter aircraft are retired from service, the new highly

technical F-35A is necessary to the continued security of this country and all of our military services' future missions. The establishment of F-35A training at Luke would benefit America and our allies tremendously. But it would also economically benefit Arizona and, yes, Mohave County.

Upwards to \$17 million in tax revenues would be added to the economy in Arizona. That boost helps the state and keeps the legislators from sweeping county and city revenues to cover state costs; which has been a problem during recent years.

Currently, Luke contributes more than 7,000 jobs and \$2.7 billion annually to the economy. The F-35A training mission will bring about \$125-\$150 million more in construction-related projects with between 1,532 to 2,657 new construction jobs to the state.

As a veteran and a proponent of economic development, I overwhelmingly support keeping our defenses strong and Luke Air Force Base healthy. Technology and threats to our freedom have changed dramatically during the last 40 years. During those years, F-16 fighters have served us well, but their time is past. The F-35A training mission will keep our defenses strong well into the future and, should that mission be sited in Arizona, boost the state's economic health and security.