

COMMENTARY

Editorials, Opinions and Letters

Support of Luke as F-35 base important for future

The talk these days is focused on the compatibility of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter with surrounding communities. No entity is more intent on bringing the jet fighter to Luke Air Force Base than Fighter Country Partnership, a grassroots organization committed to support of military installations in Arizona, especially Luke Air Force Base.

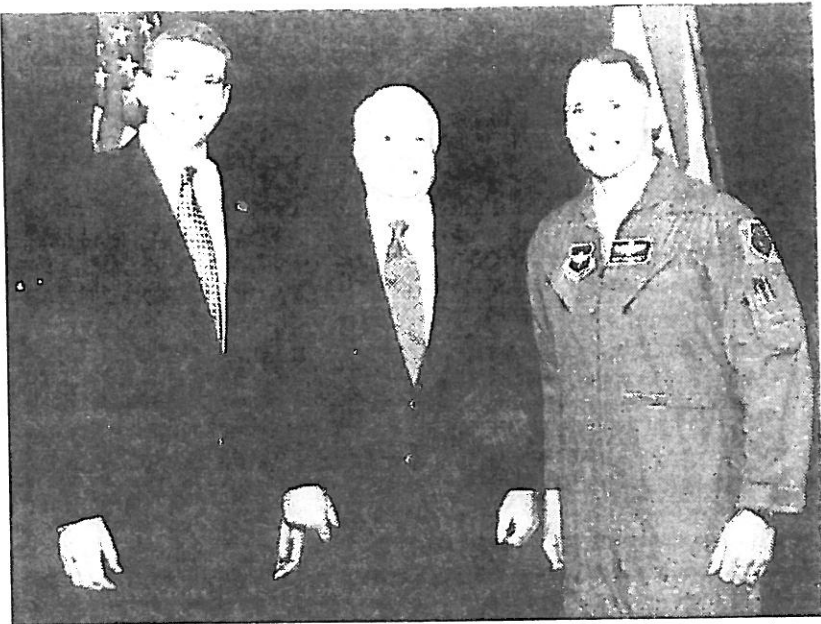
It was made clear Saturday evening during the annual membership meeting of Fighter Country Partnership, which, by the way, does not use the acronym FCP; leaders of the organization want the public to know exactly what it stands for: partnership.

That was the noun used by Luke AFB Wing Commander, Brig. Gen. Kurt Neubauer when he talked about the services and support provided to Luke airmen and women and their fami-

lies by Fighter Country Partnership. Neubauer proclaimed his admiration for the organization and others in the West Valley community for their dedication to the military, not only at Luke, but throughout the military.

It was an evening of giving thanks, and for asking for continued support. Although there were more than 200 people who attended the membership meeting, there are thousands more who have registered their support for bringing the F-35 to Luke.

It is the economic impact, yes, that is always brought up during presentations to the public. Luke and other military installations in Arizona are responsible for bringing billions of dollars into our suffering economy. And, if those billions disappear, the state would severely suffer even more than it does already. We are facing a



Submitted photo

Fighter Country Partnership Chairman of the Board Charley Freericks, U.S. Sen. John McCain, and Luke Air Force Base Wing Commander Brig. Gen. Kurt Neubauer at the annual membership meeting of Fighter Country Partnership last Saturday.

budget crunch the likes of which most of us have never seen. These are scary times.

However, U.S. Sen. John McCain did not dwell on the economic benefits of Luke and other military bases in the state. Nor did that topic come up when he talked about the possibility of the

Department of Defense choosing Luke as a bed-down base for the F-35.

Instead, McCain brought the focus down to the basics: national defense. That is a subject on which he is the most knowledgeable. But, he did have a warning for West Valley residents

about what to expect when the scoping and environmental studies begin in February.

McCain made it clear communities around Luke need to come to a consensus when the subject of encroachment makes its way into the process. He said the concerns of El Mirage and the

Maricopa County Board of Supervisors must be addressed satisfactorily.

He's right. Ignore those two entities at your peril, citizens and leaders of the West Valley. There will be people with no particular interest in where the F-35 is based who will be asking questions and filing concerns when the open houses begin Feb. 22 through 26. All of the remarks taken during the public comments periods will be in writing and in full view of all who must make the decision on where the next F-35 training base will go.

We have made our position clear in the past and we stand by it today. The West Valley needs to preserve Luke's mission. It now serves as the premier training base for F-16 pilots. It must maintain that top standing with the F-35. Visit www.lukeforward.com to register your support.