

Lloyd Austin  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
19 January 2020

**Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Reed, members of this committee.**

**I'm grateful for your time this afternoon, especially during these momentous days. It was apparent to me -- and to all Americans two weeks ago -- how seriously you take your duties to the constitution. I thank you for that steadfastness.**

**I know you share my gratitude for the steadfastness of the men and women of the Department of Defense as well, who share your devotion to that founding document.**

**Many of them are serving overseas. Some of them are just outside this room. All of them are keeping us safe.**

**We owe much to their selflessness and that of their families.**

**I want to thank Senator Sullivan and Secretary Panetta for their kind words of introduction. I *personally* owe much to their mentorship and support.**

**And, of course, I thank my wonderful wife, Charlene, who -- like today -- has stood by my side for more than forty years ... guiding me, supporting me, making me a better man.**

**I am also grateful to President-elect Biden for asking me to serve my country again. I value the strength of my relationship with him, and I am humbled by the trust and confidence he has placed in me.**

**I hope this hearing will help me earn *your* trust.**

**Let me say at the outset that I understand and respect the misgivings some of you have expressed about having another recently retired general at the head of the Defense Department.**

**The safety and security of our democracy demands competent civilian control of our armed forces ... the subordination of military power to the civil.**

**I spent nearly my entire life committed to that principle. In war and in peace I implemented the policies of civilians elected and appointed over me ... leaders like Secretary Panetta.**

**I know that being a member of the president's cabinet -- a political appointee -- requires a different perspective and unique duties from a career in uniform.**

**So, if confirmed, you can expect me to empower my civilian staff. Indeed, I plan to include the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in top decision-making meetings ensuring strategic and operational decisions are informed by policy.**

**I will rebalance collaboration and coordination between the Joint Staff and the OSD staff to ensure civilian input is integrated at every level of the process.**

**And I will make clear my expectation that the Pentagon work hand in glove with the State Department on all foreign engagements and activities.**

**Now, I also know that a large measure of civilian control of our military lies right here with this body.**

**If you confirm me, I can assure you the Pentagon under my leadership will respect your oversight responsibilities. We will be forthcoming and transparent.**

**I will provide you my best counsel. And I will seek yours.**

**Just like you, I will also take seriously the many challenges facing our country, the most immediate of which, in my view, is the pandemic.**

**If confirmed, I will quickly review the department's contributions to coronavirus relief efforts, ensuring we are doing everything we can ... *and then some* ... to help distribute vaccines across the country and to vaccinate our troops and preserve readiness.**

**We'll also do everything we can for our military families as well. They, too, are educating kids at home, losing their jobs, trying to stock the pantry.**

**I know this committee shares my view that we owe them our best efforts to lighten that load.**

**We also owe our people a working environment free of discrimination, hate and harassment.**

**If confirmed, I will fight hard to stamp out sexual assault ... to rid our ranks of racists ... and to create a climate where everyone fit and willing has the opportunity to serve this country with pride and with dignity.**

**The Defense Department's job is to keep America safe from our enemies. But we can't do that if some of those enemies lie within our own ranks.**

**For those enemies and adversaries outside the ranks and around the world, we need resources matched to strategy, strategy matched to policy, and policy matched to the will of the American people.**

**Globally, I understand that Asia must be the focus of our effort. And I see China, in particular, as the pacing challenge for the Department.**

**If confirmed, I know I will need your help to tackle these problems ... and to give our men and women in uniform the tools they need to fight and win.**

**Thank you for the support this committee has always given our military and for the support I know you will continue to render.**

**Mr. Chairman, I did not seek this job. But I consider it an honor. I consider it *my* duty.**

**Throughout my life, subtly or directly, some people believed I wasn't quite good enough ... or maybe that I didn't possess the right qualities to fulfill such duty.**

**I figured out early on that a kid from rural Georgia was going to have to work a lot harder, learn a lot faster, and prepare a lot more to prove myself.**

**I wouldn't be here with you today if I wasn't ready to prove myself again.**

**And I certainly wouldn't be here if I believed the last four years of my life left me too familiar with current operations to change course when needed ... too close to scrutinize people with whom I once served ... or too afraid to speak my mind to you or to the President.**

**You see, I am no longer a general. I am no longer a soldier.**

**I am a citizen ... the son of a postal worker and a homemaker from Thomasville, Georgia.**

**I am a civilian.**

**And if you confirm me, that's exactly how I will lead the Defense Department.**

**Thank you.**