

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF MELISSA DALTON**

### **NOMINEE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR HOMELAND DEFENSE AND HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS**

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to be considered as President Biden's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs. I am grateful to President Biden, Secretary Austin, Deputy Secretary Hicks, and Under Secretary Kahl for their trust and confidence in me.

I wish to thank my family, friends, and mentors for their encouragement, particularly my husband and true north Jason, my two amazing children Jacob and Isabelle, and my parents, Ann and Ravi. My father chose to make this country his own as an immigrant from India. He and my mother imbued within me a deep respect for the foundational values of our great nation. I come from a family committed to public service and have been drawn to it since I was 22 years old. I am honored by the prospect of serving in this new capacity.

I began my career at the Defense Department as a civil servant during the Bush Administration and served for a decade in several policy and intelligence roles. I then spent six years at the bipartisan think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I was honored to return to OSD Policy last January as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities as a member of the Biden-Harris Administration. If confirmed, I would bring my experience as a defense leader, thinker, and practitioner to the position.

As Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs, I would look forward to advancing enduring Department priorities and new focus areas, such as Arctic security and climate policy, if confirmed. My office would prioritize issues that impact our homeland defense as the Department's number one priority. If confirmed, my priority would be defeating the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains the most immediate threat to U.S. national security and to the health, safety, and readiness of our Service Members. In addition, if confirmed, I would ensure DoD maintains resilience to execute our most critical national security functions, and to provide continuity to other parts of the government, in the face of all-hazard threats. The resilience of our critical infrastructure and capabilities at home strengthens deterrence of potential adversary aggression and enables a robust foreign policy abroad. If confirmed, I would ensure DoD's unparalleled and flexible capacity is leveraged effectively and appropriately in support of Federal, State, and local leadership; law enforcement; public health; and emergency management.

Under the updated OSD-Policy organization, Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs will also focus on Arctic security and global resilience. The Arctic is a complex theater of growing strategic importance. I appreciate this committee's leadership in prioritizing this region. In

addition, as Secretary Austin has stated, to keep the nation secure, we must tackle the existential threat of climate change. Climate change already touches most of what the Department does, and this threat will continue to have implications for U.S. national security. Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs is also the office from which DoD supports civil authorities responding to extreme weather events, including wildfires and hurricanes. If confirmed, I would provide oversight of these distinct but also interrelated issues, as part of a whole-of-government approach.

If confirmed, my office would unite policymaking on both sides of the Southwest Border—bringing our defense relationships with Central and South American neighbors under the same policy oversight umbrella as our support to the Department of Homeland Security and local partners on the border. This organization will help us make better and more holistic policy across these issues to address the drivers of migration and effects in the homeland as part of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. More broadly, if confirmed, I would seek to forge even deeper bonds with our Western Hemisphere neighbors, based on principles of mutual respect and equality and a commitment to economic prosperity, security, human rights, and dignity.

On many of the issues in this portfolio, DoD plays a critical supporting role to other departments and agencies. If confirmed, I am committed to making sure that DoD supports civil authorities to the best of our ability, without compromising DoD's core missions and warfighting readiness. I would also focus on building relationships and trust across government and reinforcing the strong tradition of healthy civil-military relations in the Department and in our democracy, to do this job as effectively as possible, if confirmed.

I have deep appreciation for this committee and its role in the formation and oversight of our national security policy. If confirmed, I commit to consulting with you regularly to advance our nation's priorities in an active, bipartisan, and cooperative spirit together.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.