

THE HONORABLE MARK T. ESPER
Secretary of Defense Nominee

Confirmation Hearing Opening Statement – 16 July 2019

Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished Members of the Committee – it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you as the President’s nominee for Secretary of Defense.

I want to thank the President for this opportunity and for his confidence in me. I am grateful for the time that many of you have spent with me in recent weeks and thankful for the Committee’s swift attention to my nomination. Although I have served 22 days as the Acting Secretary of Defense, today I appear before you as the Secretary of the Army in accordance with the Vacancy Act.

I would like to begin by recognizing my wife, Leah, and our children – Luke, John, and Kate – who join me today. Like all military families, they have made many sacrifices in support of my service to the nation. Over the past twenty months, Leah has traveled with me many times to meet with Army families and spouses in both the United States and abroad. As a former military spouse herself, she has been an invaluable asset as we focused on a range of family issues. So I want to publicly thank her for her support, and am confident that if I am confirmed, she will assist me in taking care of our great families across the entire Department of Defense.

As many of you know, I am blessed to have served our country in a variety of capacities:

- on active duty in the Regular Army for over 10 years, in both the United States and abroad, and during both war and peace;
- on reserve duty in the National Guard and Army Reserve for 11 years;
- on Capitol Hill as a personal, committee, and leadership staffer in the House and Senate;
- in the Pentagon, first as a war planner in the Army, second as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, and third as a reserve augmentee working for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low-intensity Conflict;
- in the private sector with a major corporation, a defense association, a commission focused on China, and a think tank;
- and for nearly two years, as Secretary of the Army.

I believe this broad and diverse experience has prepared me well for the position of Secretary of Defense.

If confirmed, I intend to bring the same focus, energy, professionalism, thoughtfulness, and commitment to the Department of Defense that I brought every single day to my position as Army Secretary.

I am an avid supporter of the National Defense Strategy and its clear-eyed assessment of the strategic environment we find ourselves in today. The growing threats posed by great power competitors such as China and Russia warrant a re-focus to high intensity conflict across all of the Military Services. This requires us to modernize our forces and capitalize on rapid technological advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, directed energy, and hypersonics.

We must also build more robust cyber capabilities; and with your help, establish the United States Space Force.

At the same time, we must be prepared to respond to regional threats such as Iran and North Korea – all the while maintaining pressure on terrorist groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda.

This need to balance current readiness with modernization – or future readiness – is the Department's central challenge, and will require strong leadership, open and continuous dialogue with Congress, and the courage to make tough decisions.

If confirmed, I intend to continue advancing the strategic goals set forth by my predecessors along three lines of effort.

First, we will continue to build a more lethal force by increasing readiness and modernizing for the future. The goal is to deter war, and this can only be done with a strong, modern, and ready military that has overmatch in all domains. Our adversaries must see diplomacy as their best option because war with the United States will force them to bear enormous costs.

Second, we will continue to strengthen our alliances and attract new partners. A strong network of like-minded nations that are willing and able to fight together is an advantage that our adversaries do not possess. At the same time, I will continue to press our allies and partners to contribute more equitably to our shared security.

And third, we will reform the Department, beginning with the fourth estate. No reform is too small. In the Army, we found billions of dollars in savings, by overturning hundreds of small stones that many said wouldn't make a difference. I will also continue to take the approach that bureaucratic processes should not come at the expense of our men and women serving around the world.

The bottom line is this: in an era of mounting fiscal challenges and competing demands, we must actively seek ways to free up time, money, and manpower to invest back into our top priorities.

Lastly, as a personal priority of mine, I intend to place particular focus on the wellbeing of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and their families. I understand very well the impact that issues such as housing, childcare, and spousal employment have on the readiness of our service members. I heard this firsthand during the dozens of town halls and private meetings that my wife and I held across the Army over the last twenty months. Our military families are willing to make great sacrifices for their country, and in return, I am committed to ensuring they are cared for properly.

As I promised to this Committee during my confirmation hearing to become Secretary of the Army, if confirmed, I will approach these priorities with the values and behaviors proven to maximize the effectiveness of any team: to act with integrity; to collaborate broadly; to treat others with dignity and respect; to encourage innovation, critical thinking and straight talk; to empower people; and to hold leaders accountable. These principles – and the values we hold dearest as a profession – must be lived, promoted, and upheld day-in and day-out by leaders at every level.

Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, and Members of this Committee – Thank you again for your time and consideration today. I am honored to be a part of the greatest military in the world, and if confirmed, I will continue to work closely with this Committee and the entire Congress as we prepare to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

I am grateful for your consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.