

Thank you, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe.

I am honored to come before you as President Biden's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower & Reserve Affairs.

I am joined here today by my cousin, Rachel Fulton Gray, who was a great support to my wife Penny and me during Penny's illness. I know that Penny, along with my parents, is looking down on me. They are largely responsible for me being here today, and I miss them terribly.

Across my career, I have accumulated a breadth of leadership experience, having served in the military, worked in the private sector, launched and led nonprofit organizations, and, in my current job, served in state government.

The thread that unites my experience is a desire to serve. I was 17 when I first raised my right hand and swore a solemn oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, as a new cadet at West Point.

My father served in the Navy in the Korean conflict, on the USS Lewis which saw significant action. As a proud sonarman, he would tease me about being an officer and not having to work for a living... a saying all of you who are military veterans will recognize. But his love of this country and for the military lives deep in me.

I have worked with military leaders on multiple initiatives to increase diversity in the force. In every case, my guiding light was an effort to improve our ability to fight and win wars.

On the West Point Board of Visitors, I had the good fortune to work with Lt. Gen. Bob Caslen, my friend Rep. Steve Womack, and other Board members in fighting sexual harassment and assault; expanding the diversity of our entering classes; and most of all, centering character development as a way to deliver the Army the best leaders possible.

Our military faces an incredibly dynamic threat environment, with disruptive technologies and powerful adversaries. If confirmed to the role of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower & Reserve Affairs, I would focus on ensuring the Department can attract and retain a lethal and effective force to meet those challenges.

That means attracting the best talent. We know that smart, creative people will seek out and thrive in an environment that is challenging, inclusive, diverse, and led by leaders of character. Whether in the civilian workforce, the Guard, the Reserves, or the active force, leadership rooted in our essential core values - selfless service, personal courage, honor, respect, and integrity - plays an important part in growing our overall talent.

We also have to retain that talent. Where it makes sense, we should look at broadening opportunities, reviewing standards to ensure they align with the needs of the service; and increasing flexibility in our talent management systems.

And always, we must take care of our families.

If I'm confirmed, our core values will guide my efforts in support of Secretary Austin, all of our military services, and in my work with this Committee to deliver a smarter, stronger, more resilient, more capable total force for our country.

Senators, I look forward to your questions.

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