

Good morning, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Committee Members. I am honored to come before you today as President Biden's nominee for Deputy Secretary of Defense. I am grateful for your consideration of my nomination. I am also grateful to the Committee for your stewardship of the national defense authorization bill over the past 60 years. A bipartisan focus on defense is more critical than ever. Your ongoing dedication to effective governance is a ballast for American national security.

I want to thank you, Senator Shaheen for your words of support. As the first woman elected to the Senate from the state of New Hampshire, and the first woman to become that state's governor, you are a model to all those who aim to break barriers. And Secretary Gates, thank you for your generosity in introducing me today. It was an honor to work for you when you were Secretary, and if confirmed, I hope to follow your example of principled leadership.

My deepest thanks go to my husband, Tom, whose love and support have been my anchor for 27 years. Our greatest joy is our three children, who teach me patience and humility—routinely. I am also grateful for my large and formidable Irish-American family. My parents' lifetime of service to the United States Navy set a standard of selflessness and dedication for all of us.

I am honored to sit before you today in the hopes of carrying on that family legacy of service. If confirmed, I would be returning to the department where I launched my career as a civil servant in 1993. Over the next three decades, I worked alongside women and men—civilian and military—who dedicate their lives to our national defense. They are my colleagues and friends, and I could not be prouder at the prospect of serving with them once more.

The overriding mission of the Defense Department is to deter adversaries and defend the United States and her citizens. Challengers who seek to undermine America's interests by force should never doubt our resolve or readiness to thwart their aims. The department is most effective when it is working in concert with other tools of national power. Our military strength bolsters the work of our diplomats, reinforces our alliances and partnerships, and strengthens our prosperity.

The job of the deputy secretary of defense is to support the secretary and the president in fulfilling their national security responsibilities. If confirmed, I will provide Secretary Austin and President Biden my candid advice on defense matters. I will also strive to improve institutional discipline and accountability across the Defense Department in support of their priorities.

Foremost among my charges would be to help translate the rhetoric of strategic competition into the reality of execution. If confirmed, I would seek to increase the speed and scale of innovation in our force. China's military modernization is the pacing challenge of our time. Armed conflict between the United States and China is not desirable, and it is not inevitable. The U.S. military plays a critical role in preventing that outcome. Even as we stand ready today, we must modernize our concepts, capabilities, workforce, and budget for deterrence to endure. The Defense Department cannot do this alone. It must work closely with Congress and pursue partnerships with industry, research institutions, civilian departments and agencies, and America's allies and partners.

Our greatest military advantage is America's Total Force, supported by its military families. We must not forget that the Defense Department's workforce is America's workforce. The pandemic has tested the U.S. military just as it has tested all Americans. The Defense Department has a vested interest in leaning into COVID response efforts, as Secretary Austin has committed, and President Biden has directed.

Among its benefits, defense support to national COVID efforts protects force health, lowers suicide rates and domestic abuse, and reduces food insecurity.

Most challenges facing the force did not begin with COVID and they will not disappear at its end. If confirmed, I will assist Secretary Austin in bringing enduring, consistent focus to Total Force health and quality. We must root out violent extremism, systemic racism, sexual assault and harassment, and other inhibitors to readiness. And this *is* a matter of readiness. We will not be able to attract and retain the world's finest force, one that represents our democracy, if we cannot hold accountable those who threaten its viability from within.

The Department must also manage its business operations efficiently and in line with performance goals. If confirmed, I would build on existing efforts to make clear and accountable progress toward a clean audit. I would also immediately assess the disposition of responsibilities previously assigned to the Chief Management Officer and make any adjustments needed to improve oversight of these operations.

Our success in meeting these goals requires a regular and constructive dialogue between the Department and Congress. If confirmed, I commit to helping Secretary Austin facilitate regular communication and exchange with you and your staff. The nation needs us to work together.

Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I would bring to these challenges a professional life spent dedicated to improving the nation's security. I would bring the first-hand experiences of a former military dependent and career civilian. I would bring an insider's knowledge of the levers for action and an outsider's drive for reform. I would bring a dedication to restoring healthy civil-military dynamics and establishing regular order. And I would be proud to put another crack in the glass ceiling of a department I have spent most of my adult life serving.

I look forward to your questions and am grateful for this time with you today.