

Opening Statement of William A. LaPlante, Jr

Nominee for Under Secretary of Defense, Acquisition and Sustainment

March 22, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your consideration of my nomination to serve as the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment. I am honored by the trust and confidence that President Biden and Secretary Austin have placed in me.

I would like to begin by thanking the Committee for your decades of bipartisan work for the Department of Defense. The situation in Ukraine today demonstrates the importance and urgency of the work this Committee has done—day-in and day-out for the past 61 years.

I also would like to take a moment to thank some of the many people who have shaped my life and career, and without whom I would not be sitting before you today. That list begins with my family—my parents and siblings, who always impressed upon me the value and imperative of public service. It includes my wife, Joanne, and my children Claire and Caroline, who have been steadfast in their love and support. My wife, daughters, and extended family are all watching today's hearing from locations across the country.

I have also benefitted tremendously from the mentorship of many in the national security arena for whom and with whom I have been privileged to serve: Dr. Ash Carter, Secretary Frank Kendall, Secretary Debbie James, Mr. Bob Work, Dr. John Hamre, Dr. Frank Miller, Ms. Lisa Disbrow, Mr. David Shedd, Dr. Paul Kaminski, and Dr. Craig Fields, to name but a few.

The mission of delivering and sustaining timely, cost-effective, and uncompromised capabilities for the armed forces and the DOD has never been more important than it is today. China, our pacing threat; an increasingly authoritarian Russia focused on regional hegemony; malign actors; and other existential threats pose grave risks to the global order and threaten our way of life.

If confirmed, my service as the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment would be the culmination of more than 36 years in the national security and non-profit technology communities -- including as the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, member of the Defense Science Board, and as a member of the Section 809 Panel charged to reform the defense acquisition system.

Looking forward, the defense acquisition system must be focused—laser-like—on delivering capability that meets the needs—both current and future—of U.S. forces. Our troops must have what they need to confront and overcome rapidly evolving challenges from a fast-moving pacing threat and peer competitors.

We will do this by transitioning emerging technologies: hypersonics, artificial intelligence, autonomy, directed energy, and others, into programs of record and fielding them for operational use.

We must improve our ability to acquire software and software-intensive systems.

We must sustain our fielded weapon systems in a cost-effective manner.

We must strengthen the Defense Industrial Base and our supply chains. We must tap the innovation of the private sector by lowering barriers to doing business with DOD for small businesses, non-traditional commercial firms, and startups.

And we must empower and enable the dedicated professionals who comprise the defense acquisition workforce.

If confirmed, I will strive to accomplish these and other priorities, as determined by the Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Defense.

I will devote myself to this critical mission.

In all that I do, I pledge to work closely and transparently with this Committee, and with the Congress.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.