

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
CHAIRMAN, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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[To conduct a confirmation hearing on the nomination of
General Eric M. Smith to be Commandant of the Marine Corps](#)

(As prepared for delivery)

REED: Good morning. The committee meets today to consider the nomination of General Eric Smith to be the 39th Commandant of the Marine Corps. General, I would like to welcome your wife, Trish; your daughter, Elise, and son-in-law, Matthew; and your son, Travis, and daughter-in-law, Hadley. I know that military service runs deep in the Smith family—especially service in the Marine Corps—and I thank each of you for your selfless commitment to the nation.

General Smith, you are well qualified to serve as Commandant of the Marine Corps. As the current Assistant Commandant, you have been instrumental in helping to modernize and lead the Corps the past several years. Prior to this assignment, you led the Marine Corps Combat Capability Development Directorate and served as the Senior Military Assistant to both the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Defense. An infantryman by training, you have commanded Marines at every level and across multiple theaters.

Indeed, this leadership experience and understanding of the joint force will be critical for successfully guiding the Marine Corps in today's complex global security environment. The Marine Corps is in the midst of a substantial transformation, focused on competition in the Indo-Pacific but capable of global employment. The service is restructuring around two concepts – Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations. The key element of these concepts is a more flexible amphibious force that can support a broader naval fight once ashore. Rather than simply acting as a landing force, the Marine Corps intends to help control the sea and air in support of the joint force.

To achieve this, the Marine Corps is prioritizing a number of modernization efforts, including deep sensing, long range fires to include anti-surface capabilities, enhanced air and missile defense, and improved ground and amphibious combat

vehicles. These platforms will equip the Marines with improved force protection, lethality, and mobility.

I have appreciated the Marine Corps' thoughtful approach during this restructuring, including its regular communication with Congress. Further, I appreciate the Marines' willingness to modify structure decisions – such as increasing the number of cannon batteries or the size of fighter attack squadrons – when experimentation and war gaming demonstrate the need. General, I would like to know your plans for continuing these modernization efforts, and any concerns you have with the Marine Corps' ability to operate as envisioned by Force Design 2030.

As the Corps shifts to become a more technical force capable of operating in forward, dispersed environments, it will require more seasoned, experienced Marines. As such, the service will continue to see the average age and retention rate of its Marines increase. These trends, while generally positive, will require the service to reconsider how it manages its enlisted force. The Marine Corps has not experienced the same level of recruiting disruptions as the other services, but it is not immune from these challenges, particularly in its reserve forces. I would ask for your views on the Marines' talent management strategies and opportunities to succeed in the current recruiting environment.

Considering the challenges facing the United States today, it is important for the Marine Corps to operate not just as its own service, but as a part of the joint force. Succeeding against our potential adversaries will require all U.S. military services to work together, operate faster, and deliver greater capabilities from farther distances in contested environments. These are significant challenges that will require joint experimentation and collaborative research and development to overcome. I am encouraged by the kind of work underway at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, where, in particular, technologies are being developed to help enable logistics in a contested environment. I hope you will share your views on service and joint experimentation, and how the Marine Corps can ensure that its capabilities are interoperable and complementary across the force.

Finally, your highest priority must be ensuring the readiness of Marines to perform their missions. If confirmed, you will be expected to support a culture of leadership, trust, and teamwork throughout the force, with no tolerance for behavior that erodes that culture. General Smith, I would ask that you share how you plan to address this responsibility.

I am confident that you have the requisite skills and experience to provide the nation's Marines, their families, and Marine civilian employees with the leadership they deserve.

Thank you, again, for your continued willingness to serve. I look forward to your testimony.

Let me now recognize the Ranking Member, Senator Wicker.