

Thank you, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished Members of the Committee. It is an absolute honor to come before you today as President Biden's nominee for General Counsel of our great Army.

I am joined here today by my brother, Dr. John Ricci of New Jersey, and my daughter Maria Smith, a 10th grader with straight A's who took delight in informing her Government teacher that she would be missing class today, but that he should not worry, as she will be watching our government in action first-hand! My 21-year-old son and college student, Joseph Smith, could not be here today, as he was needed to work a shift at our local grocery store, where at times he worked for 21 days straight at the height of the pandemic, demonstrating a dedication to duty that is endemic in our family. For that I must thank my parents, Hector and Maria Ricci, who proudly hail from Puerto Rico and are watching today. It is they who instilled in me a great sense of duty and selflessness, personal discipline, and goodwill, for which I am deeply grateful.

I am also grateful to President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Secretary Wormuth for the confidence they have shown in me by nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I would be incredibly excited to return home to the Army and resume my service to its soldiers and civilians. I served as an Army officer for just shy of 22 years, first as a personnel officer, then as a Judge Advocate, retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Every day, I had the immense privilege of watching soldiers put their team, mission, and country first, taking great risks and making personal sacrifices to achieve our shared goals. I remain grateful to my family and those of all our service members and civilians who make this service possible.

Should I be confirmed, my experiences in the Army have prepared me well to assume the duties of General Counsel and do right by our soldiers, civilians, and family members. As a Judge Advocate, I worked on a broad spectrum of legal issues including military justice, equal opportunity, fiscal law, and operational and administrative law. I deployed to the Middle East twice, first to DESERT STORM in 1992 and then in support of IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM in 2004. I have served in operational and intelligence units, service and combatant command staffs, and in the Office of the Judge Advocate General and the office of the General Counsel. I understand the importance of the collaborative relationship that must exist between these offices and have been fortunate to work with many of the lawyers presently serving in both offices, including the current Judge Advocate General of the Army, an extraordinary leader with whom I served at Fort Hood.

Since retiring from the Army, I have worked as a federal civilian lawyer, currently leading a dynamic team of attorneys in the Office of the General Counsel at the Department of Agriculture. Last year, I was privileged to serve the Army as a civilian member of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee, where our five-member team completed a comprehensive review of the Fort Hood command climate and culture that has been the impetus for great change at Fort Hood and across the Army and DoD.

If confirmed, I commit to serve our soldiers and civilians selflessly in ensuring the Office of the General Counsel provides the highest quality legal services to Secretary Wormuth and the Department, and to further the cooperative relationship enjoyed by the Department and this Committee. This is a momentous time; a time where our Army is embarking on a complete cultural transformation for the benefit of its soldiers. At Fort Hood I witnessed the damage inflicted on soldiers and their units by the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment. If confirmed, I will ensure that current initiatives respect the rule of law and due process and assist Army leaders in bringing about real change for the brave men and women that serve our country. The current momentum must not fade; success is a must.

I am also committed to helping the Department tackle a range of challenges such as the quality of housing on and near Army installations, beating the COVID pandemic, and ensuring we have the appropriate acquisition authorities to get our warfighters the equipment they need.

Senators, thank you for your consideration of my nomination, I look forward to answering your questions.