

Opening Statement for Michael Sulmeyer
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy
Senate Armed Services Committee

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the nominee to serve as the first Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy. I thank President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Deputy Secretary Hicks for their confidence in me to submit my name for your consideration. And I thank Senator Rounds for the very kind introduction.

I also wish to thank my wife, Danielle Polebaum. Among other things, she is a gifted lawyer and the most amazing mother I've met, as we welcomed our first child, Vivienne Sulmeyer, six weeks ago. Danielle's parents, Gilda Brancato and Elliot Polebaum, are wonderful in-laws and grandparents. I am also so fortunate to call the Popkins, the Chhabras, and the Watters family as well. A special thanks to my uncle, Larry Popkin, an all-star high-school football and tennis coach who served in the Army many years ago. He turns 90 today back home in California.

My parents, Irving and Gail Sulmeyer, passed away years ago. My father was an attorney who served in the Navy as a young man. He instilled in me an appreciation for history, the law, and public service, and he made the mistake of letting his elementary school-aged son take apart his first personal computer. My mother did the heaviest lifting, raising me day in and day out, all while trying to understand why I needed a second phone line for my computer's Bulletin Board System in the days before the World Wide Web. I would not be the person or professional that I am today without them.

While I got my start in information technology at a young age, I began my career in national security at the Defense Department during the George W. Bush presidency. I was also fortunate to learn from civilian and uniformed leaders at the bipartisan Center for Strategic and International Studies. I studied civil-military relations as a graduate student, but my interests in technology were rekindled when I joined the cyber policy team in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. After a stint building a cybersecurity research program in academia, I have had the privilege of resuming public service at U.S. Cyber Command and the U.S. Army.

This is the experience I would bring to the job if confirmed as the first Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy. That experience has taught me about the value of public-private partnerships, the criticality of human capital, and the imperative of a bi-partisan approach to cybersecurity and cyber policy. If confirmed, I would look forward to working with all members of the committee to address your concerns, resolve your questions, and collaborate with you to strengthen our national defense.

So many of the pressing national security challenges that confront the United States today have a nexus to cyber policy. From China's brazen efforts to target our critical infrastructure to Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, we see our adversaries using cyber operations to threaten our security and our economy, to enable the theft of intellectual property and other sensitive data at the strategic level, and of course to shape the battlefield at the tactical level. Resilient military communications and logistics increasingly rely on a safe and secure cyberspace. Advances in artificial intelligence could dramatically expand our cyber vulnerabilities or our cyber advantages, depending on our investments and our policies. Our readiness as a force, and how we collaborate on tough challenges with allies and partners, also reflect and inform cybersecurity. As such, my overriding goal, if confirmed, would be to generate the combat power and sustained readiness in cyberspace necessary both to advance American interests and to defend them from current and future threats.

To achieve this, I would begin by accelerating U.S. Cyber Command's efforts to meet and defeat threats to our nation. I would do so in close partnership with the commander of U.S. Cyber Command, General Haugh. I would also train my focus on the personnel who execute our mission—military and civilian; active, Guard, and Reserve. We must retain and recruit the nation's top talent to deter, and when necessary, defeat our adversaries. I would also ensure the Department is poised to expand the partnerships we need to both fortify the Department's cybersecurity, and to make the most of our nation's advantages in artificial intelligence and quantum information science.

In closing, please let me underscore my appreciation for this committee's bi-partisan approach to our national defense, and to cyber-related issues in particular. The creation of the position for which I have the distinct privilege to be nominated is a product of your bi-partisanship, memorialized in the National Defense Authorization Act that established this new role. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you closely and collaboratively to ensure that DoD's strategies, plans, and capabilities in cyberspace advance and defend our nation's interests at home and abroad.

I thank each of you for your consideration and I look forward to your questions.

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