

Opening Statement of Earl G. Matthews

April 8, 2025

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the Committee, good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to serve as the General Counsel of the Department of Defense. It is a high honor and distinct privilege to be considered for this role. I'm sincerely grateful for the kind introduction by my dear friend and former teammate on the National Security Council staff, Congressman August 'Pfoto' Pfluger. I have too many friends present today in support of my nomination to acknowledge everyone by name, however, you know who you are and I deeply appreciate each of you for being here. I do want to recognize my wife Tyra, without whose love and support I would not be here today. I must also give special recognition to my aunt, Marietta Matthews-Alston, my mother's sister. Aunt Marietta raised me as her own child upon my mother's death when I was a less than 1 month old infant. I want to recognize her husband, my dear Uncle Ken Alson, his brother my Uncle David Alston, my uncle Norman Matthews, a Vietnam-Veteran and retired career non-commissioned officer in the USAF, his wife my Aunt Brenda Matthews, my aunt Paula Gilmore and her husband Leroy Handy.

I am grateful to the President for the special trust and confidence he has reposed in me by this nomination. I am also thankful to Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth for his support and trust.

I first began working for then candidate Donald J. Trump on the pre-election Department of Defense transition team in the summer of 2016. I was then and I remain today inspired by the President's America First, Peace through Strength national security agenda. If confirmed by the Senate, my lodestar will be to ensure that the military and policy objectives of the President and the Secretary of Defense are achieved in a manner consistent with the Constitution and laws of the United States. My commitment to you, if

confirmed, is that the DoD enterprise writ large will receive timely and accurate legal advice and counsel to ensure that all activities and operations of the Department are conducted in accord with the law.

My commitment to the role for which I have been nominated is undergirded by my family's long lineage of service to the United States. Our legacy of military service dates back to the Civil War. At least one member of my family has served on active duty in uniform during every conflict in which our country has participated from World War I through the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am named after my maternal grandfather who was a soldier in the United States Army. All three of maternal uncles served in the Armed Forces of the United States. Both of my mother's older brothers served in combat during the Vietnam War. As a boy, the male role model in my life and the person who most shaped and influenced the person I am today was my uncle, Russell B. Matthews. Uncle Russ was an O-3-11 Marine who graduated from Paris Island as a 18 year old in 1966 and who served a tour in the Republic of Vietnam. After his 4 years in the Marine Corps, he returned home to Philadelphia and spent a full career as an employee of the U.S. Postal Service. He instilled in his oldest nephew a love of books and a love of country. My 2 uncles and other combat veterans in my inner city Philadelphia neighborhood inspired me to want to serve our country as they did. My service as a military officer has been the realization of a boyhood dream. I applied for a reserve commission in the Army JAG Corps in 1998 when I was a third-year student at the Harvard Law School. I joined our Army fundamentally because of patriotism, because I believe in our Army's foundational mission, to fight and win the Nation's wars and because, although I abhor war, I knew that if our country ever did go to war, I wanted to be in it.

I have been a member of both the Profession of Arms and the Profession of Law for over 25 years. As a member of a forward deployed civil affairs battalion attached to the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), I crossed the berm from Kuwait into Iraq in March 2003 and was one of the first Army lawyers to reach Baghdad during the first week of April of that year. I spent my

first tour in Iraq detailed as an Operations Officer assigned to the Coalition Provisional Authority's Ministry of Justice Advisory Team and as a legal adviser at a major detention facility in Baghdad. My first tour in Iraq enhanced my understanding of the critical role of DoD lawyers in expanding and sustaining the rule of law. This devotion to the rule of law has not abandoned me since. I have been privileged to serve as a uniformed judge advocate in deployments to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq twice, Afghanistan, and to the Horn of Africa. I served an additional civilian tour in Afghanistan as an intelligence officer working closely with interagency partners in support of the American Warfighter. Throughout my military and civilian careers it has been my privilege to serve in the company of and in direct support of American heroes. I have served additional stateside tours as a uniformed attorney in both the Office of the Judge Advocate General of the Army and the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a civilian capacity, I have served as a career DoD civilian attorney at the Defense Intelligence Agency and as senior political appointee in my role as Principal Deputy General Counsel and Acting General Counsel of the Department of the Army. I have additionally served in a non-legal policy coordination role as Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Defense on the NSC staff at the White House.

In all of my previous roles, it has been my good fortune to interact with the highly skilled men and women of the Office of the General Counsel of the Department of Defense and to have worked with attorneys in that office closely, especially during my service on the Joint Staff, the Army Office of General Counsel and the NSC staff. Indeed the first actual General Counsel of the Department I met was William J. Haynes in Baghdad in the summer of 2003. I have interacted in at least some way with nearly every person who has served as DoD General Counsel since. I revere the office and hold its mission sacrosanct. If confirmed, it will be my honor to preserve and advance that mission in support of our Constitution, in support of the men and women of the Department, both military and civilian, their families and the American people that the Department exists to protect. If confirmed, I am also committed to working with this committee and its staff to ensure the

Congress is fully and informed of the activities, initiatives and operations of the Department of Defense. Thank you again for allowing me to be here today. I welcome your questions.