

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR ROGER F. WICKER  
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50**

**DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING**

**Thursday, March 16, 2023**

*To conduct a confirmation hearing on the nominations of Mr. Ronald Keohane to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, and Honorable Nickolas Guertin to be Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition (As delivered)*

**WICKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to thank our witnesses for being here and congratulate them on their nominations.

Mr. Keohane has been nominated by the President to be the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. If confirmed, he will, therefore, be directly responsible for nearly all the policies governing the careers of the military and civilian workforce. During this hearing, I would like to learn how he plans to address the most pressing challenge facing the military, which is the current recruiting crisis. If trends continue, this year the Army, Navy, and Air Force will all fail to achieve their respective recruiting missions. The Army and the Navy will be short by at least ten-thousand recruits each, and the Air Force will fall short on recruits for just the third time in its history.

The foundation of the all-volunteer force is a steady supply of young men and women willing to serve their country in uniform. Without that foundation, the all-volunteer force becomes top heavy and less effective. I expect the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs to be a leader in fixing this problem.

I am also concerned the Department of Defense is increasingly becoming an instrument of controversial social policies. Most of these policies are influenced by the office Mr. Keohane hopes to lead. I believe by prioritizing these policies this administration is exacerbating the recruiting challenge. A large number of Americans do not want to join an organization led by people who are often more interested in fighting culture wars than preparing for actual wars. I am interested in what Mr. Keohane might do, if confirmed, to restore the Department's focus on its mission, which is "to provide military forces needed to deter war and ensure our

nation's security." That is the mission that makes so many Americans-enthusiastic about joining our Armed Services.

Mr. Guertin has been nominated by the President to be the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition. He will, therefore, be responsible for managing the development of weapons for the Navy and Marine Corps. During this hearing, I look forward to learning how the Navy can bring the latest technologies to our warfighters and make sure the systems they currently have are ready to deploy.

I am concerned the Department of Defense is not moving fast enough to create a credible deterrent within the next five years as the threat from China increases. This committee has provided means for the Navy to move faster in acquisition, but they are not taking full advantage of these means. Instead, the Navy relies on cautious, slow methods that delay the delivery of critical assets. By attempting to eliminate risk to acquisition officials, the Navy increases risk on the battlefield. We must innovate. It is time to make the most of existing acquisition authorities so our speed matches or exceeds that of our adversaries.

I am interested in what Mr. Guertin will do, if confirmed, to change the culture of the acquisition workforce to start accepting measured risks and deliver capabilities at the scale and pace the National Defense Strategy requires.

I thank our witnesses and look forward to their testimony.