

**Senate Armed Services Committee**  
**Advance Policy Questions for Mr. John Phelan**  
**Nominee to be Secretary of the Navy**

**Duties and Responsibilities as Secretary of the Navy**

**What is your understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary of the Navy?**

The Secretary of the Navy is responsible for leading the Department of the Navy, which includes the Navy and Marine Corps, ensuring they are properly trained, equipped, and ready to defend the Nation's interests. This role involves setting strategic priorities, managing budgets, strengthening shipbuilding and maintenance efforts, and enhancing the welfare of Sailors, Marines, and their families. The Secretary must also drive innovation, improve operational efficiency, and uphold accountability within the force. Additionally, the position requires close collaboration with the Congress, the Department of Defense, the CNO/CMC, industry partners, and allied nations to maintain maritime superiority and effectively support national defense objectives.

**What management and leadership experience do you possess that you would apply to your service as Secretary of the Navy, if confirmed?**

Throughout my 35+-year career in business, I have overseen and funded large, complex organizations, managed significant budgets, and driven operational efficiency in dynamic and challenging environments. I have a track record of helping transform organizations by fostering accountability, streamlining processes, and implementing strategic reforms—skills that are directly applicable to leading the Department of the Navy. I understand the challenges of workforce management, recruiting, and retention, and I have successfully built teams that balance experience with fresh talent. Just as in business, the Navy must adapt to evolving challenges, and I will bring a results-oriented, innovation-driven approach to ensure our naval forces remain the most capable and lethal in the world.

**If confirmed, what duties and responsibilities would you assign to the Under Secretary of the Navy?**

Under Title 10, the Under Secretary of the Navy performs the duties and exercises such powers as the Secretary of the Navy may prescribe. The Under Secretary serves as the Chief Management Officer of the Department, which carries the primary responsibility for the business operations of the Department of the Navy. Additionally, the Under Secretary oversees a number of other matters assigned by the Secretary of the Navy. If confirmed, I will review the current duties and responsibilities assigned to the Under Secretary and will work closely with the Under Secretary to identify any appropriate reassignments, delegations or other measures allowed by law that may more efficiently align responsibilities towards facilitating warfighter readiness.

**If confirmed, over which members and organizations of the Navy would you direct the Chief of Naval Operations to exercise supervision and what would be the scope of such supervision? What other duties would you assign to the Chief of Naval Operations or the Commandant of the Marine Corps?**

Under Title 10, the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps perform their assigned duties under the authority, direction, and control of the Secretary of the Navy and are directly responsible to the Secretary. If confirmed, I will review the supervisory responsibilities of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps and consider any appropriate reassignments, delegations or other measures allowed by law that may more efficiently align responsibilities towards facilitating warfighter readiness.

**If confirmed, what innovative ideas would you consider providing to the Secretary of Defense regarding the organization and operations of the Department of the Navy?**

If confirmed, I would prioritize innovation in four key areas: personnel, shipbuilding, operational efficiency, and financial accountability. First, I would advocate for bold recruitment and retention reforms, cutting bureaucratic red tape and improving quality of life initiatives to attract and retain top talent. A key component of this effort would be reinvigorating the Navy's marketing strategy, leveraging both traditional and digital platforms to better connect with today's generation. The upcoming 250th anniversary of the Navy and Marine Corps presents a unique opportunity to celebrate their proud history while inspiring the next generation to serve. We must ensure this milestone is not only a commemoration but a catalyst for strengthening the force.

Second, I would push for a more agile, accountable and flexible shipbuilding strategy by streamlining procurement, enhancing budget flexibility, strengthening partnerships with the defense industrial base, and holding contractors accountable for cost and schedule overruns. I would also drive operational modernization by leveraging emerging technologies, enhancing warfighter training through AI and simulation, and fostering a culture that prioritizes adaptability and mission effectiveness over rigid compliance. Finally, I would emphasize financial accountability, ensuring the Department of the Navy achieves a clean audit as soon as practicable, a critical step in restoring public trust, improving efficiency and readiness, and maximizing every defense dollar. These efforts would ensure that the Navy and Marine Corps remain the world's most capable and formidable maritime force.

**Conflicts of Interest**

**Federal ethics laws, like 10 U.S.C. §208, prohibit government employees from participating in matters where they, or certain family members or organizations with which they have certain relationships, have a financial interest.**

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to disclose any potential conflicts of interest, including investments, business ties, family relationships, or other connections that could be perceived as influencing your decision making?**

Yes

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, that if a conflict of interest arises, you will recuse yourself from participating in any relevant decisions regarding that specific matter?**

Yes

**Do you commit, without qualification, if confirmed, to decision-making on the merits and exclusively in the public interest, without regard to private gain or personal benefit?**

Yes

### **Major Challenges and Priorities**

**What do you consider to be the most significant challenges you would face if confirmed as Secretary of the Navy?**

Shipbuilding, passing a department-wide audit, and recruiting and retaining Service members are the most significant challenges that I see within the Department of the Navy.

**What plans do you have for addressing each of these challenges, if confirmed, and on what timeline?**

I have spent my career leading businesses, recruiting talent, driving performance, and solving problems. I will work alongside our industry partners and uniformed and civilian leadership to deliver innovative solutions on time and within budget starting on day one.

As a businessman I understand the importance of financial audits. They represent accountability to Congress and the American people. I will endeavor to instill a culture of ownership, transparency, and accountability in the Department of the Navy.

**The Chief of Naval Operations published her strategic guidance, the “2024 NAVPLAN,” seeking readiness for sustained high-end joint and combined combat by 2027. What plans do you have that will support her strategic goals of readiness for the possibility of war with the People’s Republic of China by 2027 and enhancing the Navy’s long-term advantage?**

The Department of the Navy’s ability to maintain and modernize complex weapons platforms is key to strengthening our naval forces with combat relevant capabilities. If confirmed, I will prioritize accelerating the development of a lethal, modernized naval force capable of countering China’s challenges across the conflict spectrum. I will focus on fleet modernization, maintenance, and sustainment to ensure readiness for prolonged conflict if necessary. I will work with Congress and this Committee to secure necessary resources and will closely monitor progress, keeping the Committee fully informed.

### **Identifying and Addressing Systemic Problems**

**In 2017, the Navy conducted a Comprehensive Review of Surface Force Incidents after a series of incidents including the tragic collisions of the USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62) and the USS John S. McCain (DDG 56) with civilian merchant ships and the resulting combined loss of 17 U.S. Sailors. The review listed a series of systemic and endemic faults within the Surface Force and issued dozens of actions and recommendations for changes to the**

**Surface Force. While some GAO reports indicate the Navy has successfully monitored changes to Surface Warfare Officer training, other GAO recommendations still remain open, such as addressing fatigue and inadequate sleep. To what extent has the Surface Force been successful in tracking and implementing the recommendations from the 2017 Comprehensive Review? Who is in charge of tracking completion of those recommendations? Has the Navy conducted a review of the adequacy of the changes that have been implemented to ensure the systemic and endemic faults have been corrected?**

The collisions of USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain are tragic, and my heart goes out to the families and teammates of the Sailors lost in those incidents. I understand the Navy has taken significant action to ensure these incidents are not repeated, not only in the surface fleet, but across the breadth of the Department.

If confirmed, I look forward to getting additional insight into what the Navy learned from those incidents and how those lessons are being applied, including the incorporation of any outstanding GAO recommendations.

**In the fallout of the Glenn Defense Marine Asia (GDMA) scandal, numerous Navy personnel, including a significant number of Navy admirals, were investigated for bribery, corruption, and violations of criminal conflict of interest laws and executive branch ethics regulations. Some were prosecuted and convicted in federal courts, and many more were subject to public censure and forced into early retirement from the Navy. Are you satisfied with the actions the Navy has taken in response to the GDMA scandal to ensure that its officers and other personnel are trained—throughout their careers—on Government ethics and standards of conduct and the Navy’s core values? Explain the steps the Navy has taken to train its personnel at each stage in their career on Government ethics and standards of conduct.**

If confirmed, I will expect every Sailor, Marine, and civilian – including myself - to act with utmost integrity and comply with Government ethics laws and standards of conduct and the DON’s Core Values. While I am not aware of all the actions the Department of the Navy has taken in response to the GDMA scandal, in order to maintain an ethical culture, I believe that a continuum of quality training needs to be provided throughout an individual’s career. If confirmed, I will ensure that initial and annual training, as required by law and regulation, are faithfully executed. Moreover, I will continue to support the programs that were established to provide milestone-based legal training on issues associated with incremental leadership responsibilities. This includes, but is not limited to, government ethics and standards of conduct training for prospective executive and commanding officers; major commanders; and Flag Officers.

**In 2021, the Navy conducted a Command Investigation and Major Fires Review following the fire on the USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) which resulted in the total loss of the ship. To what extent has the Navy been successful, through its Learning to Action Board or otherwise, in implementing and assessing the approved recommendations from these investigations?**

I understand the majority of the Learning to Action Board’s overall recommendations are implemented, improving shipboard firefighting and safety during maintenance periods and

fostering strong relationships with community first responders to provide additional support, when required. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing the lessons from this tragic event and driving resolution on any remaining recommendations to ensure enduring solutions preclude complacency and sustain adherence to fire safety requirements across the Fleet.

**A 2023 GAO report found that the Navy still has not shared lessons learned about fire safety across the Fleet nor has it developed a Navy-wide standard for evaluating the effectiveness of fire safety trainings. To what extent is the Navy tracking these open recommendations from the GAO towards completion?**

I do not have insight into the particular systems and processes Navy uses to share such lessons. However, if confirmed, I will be committed to instilling a culture of shared learning. I look forward to reviewing the Navy's actions regarding fire safety and any specific open recommendations from GAO.

### **Navy and Marine Corps Readiness**

**How would you balance the near-term demand for naval forces with the need to generate readiness and surge capacity for future contingencies?**

If confirmed, I would prioritize Fleet readiness first, while continuing emphasis on building the fleet of tomorrow to ensure we are prepared to deter future conflict, defend the homeland, and protect American interests. Our Nation and our sailors deserve a lethal, modern fighting force, and I believe this will be achieved through proper, on-time maintenance and strategic modernization of the fleet we have today and dedicated efforts to deliver the fleet of tomorrow as expeditiously as possible. It also demands the right mix of depot capability and capacity across the commercial and organic industrial base to ensure that the Navy can surge to meet increased maintenance demands when necessary. If confirmed, I commit to ensure that this mix is maintained.

**To what extent has Optimized-Fleet Response Plan (O-FRP) been successful in stabilizing rotational deployments and making them more predictable?**

It is my understanding that the O-FRP has allowed the Navy to project forces around the globe to support U.S. national security in a predictable manner. I understand the O-FRP is a 36-month schedule for surface ships that dedicates time for maintenance, training/certification and deployment/sustainment and aligns to support deployments of Carrier Strike Groups and Amphibious Readiness Groups. The O-FRP has been successful with regard to providing stable, predictable maintenance and repair schedules for the vital Navy Repair Shipyard Industrial Base, while generating sufficient operational forces to support operational demands. Notional O-FRP dedicates 8-months for Maintenance, 10-months for Training/Certification and 18-months for Sustainment. While ships don't normally deploy for 18-months at a time, I understand O-FRP allows Operational Commanders to have surge capacity of forces in times of escalation or conflict.

**Amphibious warfare ships account for nearly 75 percent of deferred maintenance in the fiscal year 2025 budget request.**

**If confirmed, how would you address the deferred maintenance accruing to the amphibious warfare ships?**

It is my understanding the Navy conducted an Amphibious Ship Maintenance Study to identify areas where the Navy can apply its Get Real Get Better methodology. That study covered broad aspects of maintenance planning, execution, government oversight, and quality control. If confirmed, I would evaluate the results of the study and progress achieved in order to continue to reduce deferred maintenance on amphibious warfare ships.

**Given the current operational tempo, are the Navy and the Marine Corps able to maintain desired dwell ratios?**

Dwell ratios are critical periods for training, maintenance, as well as Quality of Service and Quality of Life for our personnel in between deployments. While the current operational tempo poses challenges; I am committed to closely monitoring and assessing the impact on dwell ratios. By prioritizing personnel readiness, optimizing deployment schedules, and implementing efficient resource management practices, I will aim to uphold the desired dwell ratios for our Sailors and Marines. My focus will be on balancing operational requirements with the well-being and readiness of our Service members to sustain a high state of readiness across the Naval force.

**Budget**

**In its 2018 and 2024 reports, the National Defense Strategy Commission recommended that Congress increase the base defense budget at an average rate of three to five percent above inflation through the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP).**

**If confirmed, by what standards would you measure the adequacy of funding for the Department of the Navy?**

If confirmed, I will work with the Department of Defense to ensure the Department of the Navy has a balanced budget that aligns with the President's priority to achieve Peace through Strength. As the Secretary of Defense has directed, we must act urgently to restore the warrior ethos, rebuild our military, and reestablish deterrence.

The budget should be focused on delivering resources to ensure America's maritime forces – our Navy and Marine Corps team – are ready, resilient, flexible, and forward-deployed to do our Nation's tasking.

**How will you ensure the Navy and the Marine Corps are appropriately resourced to simultaneously modernize, grow readiness, and take care of their people?**

If confirmed, I will work with the Department of Defense to ensure the Navy and Marine Corps have a balanced budget that aligns with the President's priorities. The budget will prioritize the Navy and Marine Corps ability to deploy and fight in this decisive decade, invest in our Warfighters, and invest in the health of our industrial base.

The budget should be strategy-driven to meet the requirements of the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and the President's priorities to preserve peace through strength.

**Section 222a of title 10, U.S. Code, provides that not later than 10 days after the President's submission of the defense budget to Congress, each Service Chief must submit to the congressional defense committees a report that lists, in order of priority, the unfunded priorities of his or her armed force. If confirmed, would you agree to support the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps in providing their unfunded priorities lists to Congress in a timely manner?**

Yes.

### **Alliances and Partnerships**

**Mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are one of our greatest comparative advantages in competition with near-peer rivals.**

I agree. Mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships enhance deterrence, provide additional strength and lethality and are a strategic competitive advantage over our near-peer rivals. Today's operating environment is interconnected, multi-domain, and requires integration with Allies and partners across all warfighting functions. In an era of strategic competition, our alliances and partnerships enable unified action to deter our adversaries during competition and complicate adversary decision making.

**What do you see as the role of the Department of the Navy in building relationships and interoperability with allies and partners?**

In today's security environment, the United States will be more secure and prosperous if we work alongside Allies and partners who align with our objectives and work across the instruments of national power to advance the President's national security objectives. If confirmed, I will ensure that our maritime forces work with not only our strongest Allies but also emerging partners in order to leverage their unique capabilities and regional expertise to grow our access, interoperability and combined lethality to deter potential adversaries such as the PRC and limit malign influences that seek to challenge our security.

**If confirmed as Secretary of the Navy, what specific actions would you take to prioritize and strengthen existing U.S. alliances and partnerships, build new partnerships, and take advantage of opportunities for international cooperation?**

If confirmed, I will leverage all the security cooperation tools available to support the President's America First Foreign Policy. Under the direction of the President and Secretary of Defense, the Department of the Navy will work to identify and advance opportunities to improve our global force and basing posture, strengthen interoperability with partners in priority regions such as the Indo-Pacific, and expand collaborative development and production of weapons and munitions to increase productivity of our industrial base. If confirmed, we will conduct bilateral and

multilateral exercises with both our strongest Allies and also emerging partners to maintain our competitive advantage and grow our influence where it makes the United States more secure. Using these and other means we can expand U.S. reach around the globe while lessening the burden on the United States and the American taxpayer by leveraging the combined capabilities of our partners to strengthen our collective security.

## **Indo-Pacific Region**

**What are the key areas in which the Department of the Navy must improve to provide the necessary capabilities and capacity to the Joint Force to deter Chinese aggression and, if necessary, prevail in a potential conflict with China?**

In the face of China's rapid development of sophisticated military capabilities and continued aggressive behavior that threatens regional stability and security, the Department of the Navy has an urgent mandate to fully resource the fighting force required to reestablish deterrence. If confirmed, I will lead the Department to meet this challenge, focusing on weapon and system modernization; investing in our forward deployed force posture and required infrastructure; prioritizing the Indo-Pacific; energizing key alliances and partnerships; and, expanding the core of our capacity through a re-doubled emphasis on recruitment, retention, and shipbuilding. I pledge to work with the Congress to provide the Joint Force a lethal, integrated Navy and Marine Corps team of combat-ready forces.

**How would you assess the threat to Navy forces and facilities from Chinese missile forces? In your assessment, have Navy investments, posture shifts and/or new operational concepts sufficiently addressed this threat?**

I do not yet have access to the information necessary to assess these threats. China continues to rapidly develop and field both an increasingly sizable and sophisticated conventional missile force and nuclear force. Forward deployed and expeditionary Naval forces are critical to maintain freedom of the seas in peacetime and prevent an adversary from controlling the seas in wartime. If confirmed, my goal would be for the Navy and Marine Corps to provide joint and allied forces with the best resourced, most lethal naval force to ensure our freedom of maneuver and to protect our national interests. If confirmed, I will thoroughly examine this issue and ensure Naval forces and facilities have the protection they need to carry out their missions.

**In your assessment, what are the priority investments the Department of the Navy could make that would help implement the National Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific?**

I do not yet have access to the information necessary to make an assessment. I believe providing resources to conduct forward operations, securing greater access and logistics to operate forward; and developing the right force posture in the Indo-Pacific are essential to reestablishing and strengthening deterrence. Identifying and making – with the help of Congress – the key investments in the force structure, capabilities, and capacities to deter and defeat adversaries will be critical for implementation. In addition, we must prioritize rebuilding our military through the training and exercise of naval and naval infantry forces with regional Allies and partners, to establish new and strengthen existing strategic maritime partnerships, and enhance interoperability and lethality in support of a safe and secure Indo-Pacific. If confirmed, I will



thoroughly examine this issue to ensure the Department of the Navy's investments are properly prioritized.

**What is your current assessment of the risk of operational failure in a conflict with China as a result of a critical logistics failure?**

Although I lack access to information to fully address the risk of operational failure, I recognize that our logistics and sustainment capabilities and capacities are critical to any successful campaign, and any conflict with China invariably will be fought under the conditions of contested logistics. If confirmed, assessing our logistics capabilities in support of maritime and joint operations, and addressing any gaps found, will be a priority.

**In your opinion, what role will Guam play in a conflict with China? Do you believe Guam's infrastructure is currently adequate to support the current and future mission?**

I understand the strategic significance of Guam to our national security and position as a Pacific power. Guam is a critical strategic hub in the Pacific due to its proximity to Taiwan and the South China Sea. However, its aging infrastructure and increasing DoD on-island presence present challenges. Continuous modernization to enhance its defense and resilience against missile and cyber threats will be critical. If confirmed, I intend to support collective DoD efforts to ensure our force posture on Guam is balanced with the appropriate defenses and risk mitigations necessary to enable continued and unimpeded access to the Western Pacific.

**What is your view of the role of unmanned systems in deterring conflict in the Taiwan Strait?**

Unmanned systems can play a crucial role in deterring conflict in the Taiwan Strait. These systems, operating in the air, surface, and sub-surface domains, provide the Combatant Commander with a host of low-cost, attritable, scalable, and resilient capabilities. By providing persistent surveillance, intelligence gathering, defensive, and strike capabilities, unmanned systems will enhance lethality and serve as a strong and efficient deterrent to quickly respond to provocation while reducing risks and maintaining flexibility in the region. Integration of unmanned systems into naval and joint force architecture is a force multiplier for providing combat capacity against peer competitors and adversaries. An integrated manned/unmanned force, leveraging the unique and disruptive elements that unmanned systems provide, is a critical component of our capability to deter and, if necessary, prevail in conflict against a peer competitor like China who enjoys a numeric advantage, and thereby plays a crucial role in deterring conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

**What are the key areas in which the Navy must improve to provide the necessary capabilities and capacity to the Joint Force to deter Russian aggression and, if necessary, prevail in a potential conflict with Russia?**

If confirmed, I will ensure the Department of the Navy is manned, trained, and equipped to promote America's national security interests and to support the President's priority to reestablish peace and prosperity through strength. I am committed to defending U.S. interests and promoting national security, in close partnership with our regional partners and Allies with aligned interests. The Department of the Navy must collaborate with Allies and partners in the

region, continue to modernize our surface and submarine fleets globally, improve our logistics and resupply capabilities, and maximize our mobility to rapidly deploy forces to key littoral terrain. We must also ensure that our NATO Allies invest in the capabilities they need to more robustly deter Russian aggression and maintain interoperability with our Allies.

**In your view, are there investments the Navy should prioritize for the competition with Russia below the level of direct military conflict in order to counter Russian malign influence and hybrid warfare operations?**

The Navy must prioritize non-traditional investments such as cyber capabilities, information operations, and enhanced anti-submarine warfare. Engaging with Allies and partners through joint exercises and cooperative deployments focused on countering hybrid tactics will strengthen our collective resilience. Investment in scalable, cutting-edge hardware and software in support of a variety of autonomous systems, artificial intelligence, and advanced sensors and munitions will enable the Department of the Navy to field flexible response options for combatant commanders to respond to a variety of adversary actions.

**How do you assess the Navy's current posture to support operations in Europe?**

I do not yet have access to the information necessary to make this assessment. The Department of the Navy's current posture in Europe is robust but requires continuous adaptation to evolving global threats. It will be important to continue work with our Allies and partners in the region to identify areas of collaboration that strengthen ally and partner capabilities and provide a credible deterrent. Forward deployed forces provide critical maritime power projection. If confirmed, I commit to support the Administration in an assessment of global posture laydown and appropriate scaling of our naval posture in Europe to meet our commitments to NATO.

### **Middle East**

**Iranian-linked Houthi rebels continue to launch drone and missile attacks against U.S. and international vessels in the Red Sea, disrupting global commerce and putting the United States, its allies and partners at risk. If confirmed, how would you adjust or augment the current strategy to be more effective to deter and counter Houthi attacks?**

Forward-deployed Navy assets have executed persistent deterrence and precision strikes to impose greater costs on Houthi operations. We must adapt our technologies and tactics based on the lessons we are learning in response to Iranian backed Houthi drone and missile attacks against U.S. and international vessels in the Red Sea. I am committed to looking at our full suite of capabilities to ensure we can confront and defeat threats of this nature and to ensure we have more cost-effective solutions to counter such threats.

### **Acquisition**

**Congress has expanded and refined the acquisition-related functions of the Chief of Naval Operations, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the other Service Chiefs. If confirmed, how would you synchronize your acquisition responsibilities and those of the**

**Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition, with those of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps?**

I am committed, if confirmed, to ensuring the Navy-Marine Corps team functions optimally; our sailors and Marines deserve no less. The Department of the Navy's acquisition process require collaboration between the uniformed Services and the Secretariat to provide the best equipment to our Sailors and Marines. The Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps play critical roles in developing requirements, identifying trade-offs, and protecting against requirements creep. Once requirements are set and resources provided, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition has responsibility to acquire and deliver within cost, schedule, and performance thresholds. If confirmed, I look forward to revitalizing the engagement and synergy across the Department of the Navy as we deliver incredible capability to the fleet.

**Congress has authorized a range of authorities, including the Middle Tier of Acquisition authority, rapid acquisition authority, and the software acquisition pathway, to tailor the acquisition process to enable the rapid delivery of new capabilities.**

**In your view, what benefit has the Department of the Navy derived from its utilization of Middle Tier of Acquisition authorities?**

It appears the Department of the Navy (DON) has fully embraced the use of the Middle Tier of Acquisition (MTA), and I am encouraged by the codification of these authorities in the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act. The DON has proven the effectiveness of the MTA pathway, which in my view allows programs to start faster and often get capability to the fleet faster. The MTA pathway also enables the DON to "fail fast" and rapidly pivot, if needed, to more promising solution sets.

**In your view, what benefit has the Department of the Navy derived from its utilization of the rapid acquisition authority?**

Similar to the Middle Tier of Acquisition (MTA) pathway, I believe rapid acquisition authority allows the Department of the Navy (DON) to respond in the most expedited manner to critical fleet and combatant commanders needs. It is my understanding that the DON has leveraged rapid acquisition authority to address emerging operational contingencies. With the coming strategic challenges, tools that support rapid acquisition will be more essential than ever before.

**How will you ensure that rapid acquisition pathways are not inundated with unnecessary or unwarranted bureaucratic processes?**

It appears the use of many of the new acquisition pathways have only existed over the past five to six years. If confirmed, I look forward to utilizing and accelerating these hard-won pathways; having these tools in the toolchest is absolutely critical to being able to get more capability into the fleet at a much more up-tempo pace. I am aware that the Department of the Navy (DON) has leaned in significantly to delegate authorities and streamline approvals to minimize unnecessary or unwarranted bureaucratic obstacles. If confirmed, I will scrutinize any barriers to these novel and promising pathways, and will

continue to streamline processes. I am also supportive of the Forged Act's efforts to apply these same improvements to the ways in which DON conducts oversight of Major Capability Acquisition programs and eliminate obstacles that impede these rapid acquisition pathways.

**How will you seek to balance the need to rapidly acquire and field innovative systems while ensuring acquisition programs provide effective capabilities for the joint force?**

It is clear to me that we must deliver capabilities faster, and if confirmed I'm committed to sparing no effort in achieving that outcome. That means a mix of innovative technologies, with perhaps non-traditional players, but also ensuring rigor and accountability for the key strategic and power-projecting assets and programs that the Navy and Marine Corps bring to the table.

**Based on your experience, how would you structure the Navy to conduct better tradeoff analysis so that programmatic investments are not stove-piped and can be assessed against the impact of various alternatives?**

As I understand it, there exists a robust process for analysis of alternatives, with the objective of selecting an optimal solution prior to proceeding with an acquisition program. If confirmed, I am committed to instilling a greater focus on capability portfolio management and to eliminating stove pipes that exist today. I believe that if we provide more flexibility within our Program Executive Offices, we will achieve better acquisition outcomes.

**What is your assessment of the adequacy with which the Navy has been transitioning nontraditional defense contractors from research and development into production contracts? What steps, if any, would you take to improve the Navy's ability to do business with nontraditional defense contractors?**

It appears that organizations the Department of the Navy (DON) put in place, such as NavalX, have helped create venues to connect more broadly with nontraditional defense companies, and I believe that more effort is required to integrate the technologies these firms offer into Naval environments. If confirmed, I look forward to working with industry, defense innovation organizations, and Congress to knock down barriers to entry with respect to doing business with the DON. I am equally convinced that the DON's traditional contractors will continue to play a critical role into the future as well. The DON needs to more effectively employ these critical opportunities as we face down adversaries in both the distant and near future.

## **Test and Evaluation**

**What do you see as the role of the developmental and operational test and evaluation communities with respect to rapid acquisition, spiral acquisition, and other streamlined acquisition processes?**

Test and evaluation of all systems, regardless of acquisition approach, is critical. I understand that the Department of the Navy's acquisition policy provides program managers and test teams guidance for developing tailored, capabilities-based test and evaluation strategies that best align with the selected acquisition pathway to include urgent capability acquisition, rapid prototyping and fielding (mid-tier) acquisition, and rapid and iterative software capability acquisition. If confirmed, I will continue these efforts to ensure that each program has the appropriate level of test and evaluation rigor to assess effectiveness, suitability, survivability and safety while providing the data needed to inform acquisition and fielding decisions.

**Are you satisfied with Department of the Navy's test and evaluation capabilities? In which areas, if any, do you feel the Navy should be developing new test and evaluation capabilities?**

As the Department of the Navy continues to develop systems capable of operating autonomously with greater endurance and at increased ranges, it may not be practical to always conduct live testing of these systems in all of their intended operational environments. Innovative solutions must be identified to bridge this gap, much as the increased use of high-fidelity models and simulations, to evaluate weapon systems across a broader range of representative operational conditions. If confirmed, I am committed to assessing the Navy's test and evaluation capabilities to identify areas for improvement to ensure we continue to field the weapon systems our warfighters need.

**Do you believe that current Navy test and evaluation facilities and personnel and technical test apparatuses are up to par for what is needed for the modernization challenges of the Navy, now and in the near future?**

As the complexity of weapon systems increases, test and evaluation facilities must continue to evolve and adapt to meet these demands. Stable investments will be needed to ensure the Department of the Navy meets the demands of future weapon systems. With respect to the test and evaluation workforce, they must continue to implement best practices to support programs that incorporate iterative and accelerated development strategies. Additionally, developmental and operational test teams must be fully integrated and utilize Capabilities Based Test and Evaluation methodologies to enable these programs to "test like we fight" and provide data in a mission context throughout the acquisition lifecycle.

**What do you see as the operational test and evaluation needs for non-developmental or commercial items to ensure they can still meet the technical requirements and human factor needs of environments often more complex and demanding than commercial settings?**

Operational test and evaluation will play a vital role in ensuring systems that incorporate non-developmental or commercial items are effective, suitable, survivable and safe. In cases where robust, mature commercial items are utilized there may be opportunities to leverage data from previous tests to reduce government testing and expedite fielding. Having a thorough understanding of the risks associated with these items will enable programs to strike the right balance between the need to rapidly field the capability and the level of data needed to inform decision makers that the system can execute its intended mission. If confirmed, I will focus on reducing the barriers that impede the fielding of needed capabilities while ensuring the level of

testing is adequate to support sound decisions.

### **Audit**

**If confirmed, what specific actions will you take or direct to enable the Navy to achieve a clean financial audit in the most expedited fashion?**

If confirmed, achieving a clean audit for the Department will be a priority to ensure the Department meets the Congressional deadline of 2028.

**What are the benefits to Navy missions and effectiveness of achieving and maintaining a clean audit?**

Achieving a clean audit will enable the Navy to improve operations, be more effective, and prevent wasteful spending. A clean audit permits the Department to be transparent with the public and Congress and ensures we are using taxpayer funds for the benefit of our country. Specifically, a clean audit improves the accountability of our assets to enable the warfighter needs.

**How will you hold Department of the Navy leaders and organizations responsible and accountable for making the necessary investments and changes to correct findings and material weaknesses identified in the audit process?**

If confirmed, I will ensure leaders and organizations are held accountable through an entity-wide governance structure that conducts mandatory and regular audit readiness reviews, which will ensure audit is a priority throughout the Department. Senior leaders will be held accountable for audit outcomes through performance standards and evaluations and Flag Leadership promotions will be tied to successful execution of audit responsibilities.

**Based on your experience, how do you see improved data from Navy financial management IT systems that support audit help Navy decision-making and readiness?**

Improved data management can significantly enhance decision-making and readiness by offering a clearer, more accurate financial picture. This enables agile reallocation of resources when needed, which increases buying power, and that in turn, improves force readiness outcomes.

### **Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility (RHBFSF)**

**The Department of the Navy is continuing efforts to close and remediate the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility after several high-profile fuel leaks in 2021. The Navy needs to continue to rebuild trust not only with the local population, but also with sailors and their families who reside in the area.**

**If confirmed, what steps will you take to continue to communicate transparently with the local community and sailors and their families in the area to ensure concerns are investigated property?**

Nothing is more important than the health, safety and well-being of Sailors, Marines, civilians, their families, and neighbors. The Navy Closure Task Force – Red Hill (NCTF-RH) conducts extensive community outreach regarding tank closure, remediation, and water security via a robust combination of open houses, webinars, podcasts, websites, roundtables, engagements at neighborhood boards, and participation at State-led discussion forums. If confirmed, I will make sure that this active outreach will continue throughout the Navy response efforts at RHBFSF.

**The challenges at RHBFSF have highlighted several significant infrastructure challenges relating to power, water infrastructure, and others, on Oahu. If confirmed, how will you prioritize resourcing these necessary improvements to avoid any future water contamination or power generation shortages?**

I plan to take the lessons learned from this incident to ensure the Department is focused on proactive improvements to our infrastructure in order to provide sustainable and resilient infrastructure in support of operations.

### **Cost of Recapitalizing the Fleet**

**Despite the Navy’s existing 355-ship policy goal, the Navy is currently operating with 287 battle force ships. Every year over the past decade, the Congress has added funding to the President’s budget request for shipbuilding, and yet the Navy has failed to grow the fleet according to the 30-year shipbuilding plans.**

**If confirmed, what actions would you take to ensure growth of the fleet to the 355-ship policy goal?**

The Navy is currently operating with 295 battle force ships, and if confirmed, I am committed to ensuring the Navy continues its coordination with Congress, OSD, and industry to increase our national shipbuilding capacity. I understand this will require targeted efforts to improve shipyard productivity and address workforce development issues across the shipbuilding supply chain ecosystem, and I am committed to making this a priority as growing our fleet is of critical importance to our Nation.

**What is your view on balancing the need for the 30-year shipbuilding plan to provide a stable demand signal for industry and the need to be flexible in response to changing requirements?**

I understand and agree that the Navy’s 30-year shipbuilding plan is a key communication tool to industry of the future demand signal for the number and types of ships required. While requirements may evolve at the macro level due to changing world and operational environments, I do not anticipate these changes being abrupt or significant enough to drastically change the Navy’s plans that are published annually. We must provide a fixed plan as a stable demand signal for industry.

**The 30-year shipbuilding plan assumes that construction backlogs will be eliminated and ships will be produced on-time and on-budget. If confirmed, what would you do to support industry in controlling costs and reducing build-spans for ships?**

If confirmed, I plan to work closely with the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development & Acquisition to identify opportunities to get our shipbuilding programs back on track, delivering prioritized and critical capability on time and on budget. Our plan to improve shipbuilding must address the size and modernization of public and private shipyards, the depleted shipbuilding workforce and the number and quality of suppliers and subcontractors.

### **Improving Government Technical Control in Shipbuilding**

**The *Constellation*-class frigate was intended to be an affordable capability based on a parent ship design. The previous Secretary of the Navy certified basic and functional design completion in August 2022 in order to start construction, but the GAO report *Navy Frigate (GAO-24-106546)* found that most basic and functional design packages remained incomplete due to Navy-directed changes to the proposed design.**

**What is your view of the relationship between the Navy’s Senior Technical Authority and the Program Manager in reviewing and approving designs on Navy ships?**

Relationships are crucial, and in designing and producing the ships our Navy needs, few relationships are as crucial as those between our technical and program management communities. This relationship must be one that is committed to delivery of the most capable and lethal equipment that our Warfighters can utilize while doing so cost effectively and with urgency. For this reason, the relationship between the Navy’s Senior Technical Authority and the Program Manager must be based upon unity of purpose, pragmatism, and with clarity toward the goal of efficiently delivering capability to the Fleet.

**If confirmed, what improvements would you make to coordinate and control lead ship design activities?**

Both lead ship design efforts as well as construction of early ships within a class have presented significant challenges for the Department. I am keenly interested in determining the root causes for these issues. If confirmed, it will be my highest priority to ensure basic principles and best practices are applied to lead ship design activities. This, along with a critical look across the breadth of the acquisition process, are crucial in rebuilding our fleet.

**The GAO’s report “Navy Shipbuilding, Increased Use of Leading Design Practices Could Improve Timeliness of Deliveries” May 2, 2024, (GAO–24–105503) recommended reevaluation of requirements, the incorporation of end user representation in design choices, the creation of a digital ship design library, and timelines to approving design products.**



**Do you support recommendations #1, #3, #4, and #6 from GAO's report? Why or why not?**

I support the GAO's recommendations to improve Navy shipbuilding efficiency, particularly regarding the reevaluation of requirements, the creation of a digital ship design library, and the establishment of clear design approval timelines. These measures will enhance program stability, reduce costly redesigns, and improve ship delivery schedules. Implementing these best practices aligns with the Navy's ongoing efforts to optimize shipbuilding, mitigate risks, and ensure readiness.

**If confirmed, what other options would you explore for improving lead ship performance?**

If confirmed, I would explore options to ensure critical systems are matured before integration to reduce design and construction risks. Expanding collaboration with industry and shipbuilders early in the process would improve design feasibility and production efficiency. Additionally, leveraging digital ship design tools and advanced manufacturing techniques would streamline processes and reduce costly delays. Strengthening contractor accountability and incentives for meeting cost and schedule goals will also drive improvements in lead ship performance.

### **Technical Workforce**

**A significant challenge facing the Navy today is a shortage of highly skilled data scientists, computer programmers, cyber, and other scientific, technical and engineering talent, especially those needed to work at Navy institutions outside of the defense laboratories and technical centers (which currently benefit from specific workforce authorities available to Navy labs). If confirmed, what actions would you take to increase the recruiting and retention of scientists, engineers, software coders, and in other technical positions across the Navy's enterprise?**

The crucial role that our high-performing civilian employees with qualifications in fields such as data science, cybersecurity, and engineering cannot be understated as they are key contributors to meeting the Department of the Navy's mission. It is imperative that we remain focused on attracting and hiring individuals with these core technical skills while simultaneously implementing strategies to keep our current technical cadre employed within the Department by providing opportunities for growth, competitive compensation, and a positive work environment. If confirmed, I will examine existing human capital strategies and work with appropriate stakeholders to develop new and innovative approaches that will target highly-skilled individuals committed to the ideals of American greatness.

### **Ford-class Aircraft Carriers**

**What are your views on the procurement of CVN-82 and CVN-83? Do you believe the two ships should be part of a block buy?**

It is my understanding that the Navy maintains a Battle Force Ship Assessment and Requirement (BFSAR) objective of 12 nuclear aircraft carriers (CVNs) and a commitment to sustain a Title 10 minimum of 11 CVNs. A 2023 Navy Report to Congress recommends an optimal CVN procurement strategy of two-ship buys with three years of advance procurement, and four years between builds, to reduce supply chain and industrial base risks to production and reduce acquisition costs to taxpayers. Such a block buy for CVN 82/83 is the most efficient and cost-effective means of acquiring FORD class aircraft carriers. It is my understanding that the CVN 80/81 two-ship buy saved approximately \$4B versus single ship buys. It is my understanding that the Navy estimates a two-ship buy for CVN 82/83 will support CVN construction efficiency and stabilize the CVN industrial base, delivering a substantial procurement savings. If confirmed, I will authorize an examination of whether a block buy for CVN 82/83 is the most efficient and cost-effective means of acquiring FORD class aircraft carriers. If a block buy is confirmed as the best approach, I will pursue funding for a block buy.

**Do you support the fiscal year 2025 plan to delay the CVN-82 buy until fiscal year 2030, or would recommend that we buy it sooner?**

Balancing Navy topline, Fleet requirements, vendor capacity and reducing unit costs are some of the critical factors for determining where best to place individual ship acquisitions. In the case of CVN 82, if confirmed, I will work with Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Financial Management and Comptroller, as well as the Chief of Naval Operations, to determine the optimal acquisition timeline in consideration of those factors.

**What is the optimal number of years of advance procurement for the Ford-class aircraft carrier?**

Advance procurement is a critical authorization from Congress that provides sufficient lead time for vendors to deliver sequence critical material on time to support the most efficient and effective build strategy for a nuclear aircraft carrier (CVN). If confirmed, I will work with Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Financial Management and Comptroller to determine the best optimal timing of advance procurement to maintain the industrial base and deliver schedule of our CVN program.

### **Columbia-class Submarines**

**The *Columbia*-class will replace the *Ohio*-class ballistic missile submarines and are expected to ensure the nation's most survivable nuclear forces remain effective into the 2070s. However, costs for the program have continued to grow and projected completion dates are slipping. Navy leaders have testified that if a higher Navy topline or outside funding is not provided, the investment required by the *Columbia*-class program will result in equivalent reductions elsewhere within the Navy budget.**

**If confirmed, what steps will you take to arrest cost growth and schedule slippage in the *Columbia*-class program?**

If confirmed, I will ensure a comprehensive affordability review and implement targeted actions to address the underlying causes of cost growth and schedule slippage in submarine construction. This will include evaluating current processes, identifying inefficiencies, and developing proposals to streamline operations, improve cost management, and ensure timely delivery. My focus will be on driving accountability, optimizing resources, and fostering closer collaboration between stakeholders to prevent further delays and cost overruns.

**The Navy has proposed selectively extending the operational life of certain Ohio-class submarines to mitigate the risk of *Columbia*-class delays. If confirmed, what mitigation options would you consider in the event the *Columbia*-class program incurs schedule delays that prevent the lead ship from deploying in 2031?**

If confirmed, the recapitalization of the Navy's Ballistic Missile Submarine Fleet would remain my top acquisition priority, as the Columbia class is vital to maintaining the survivability of the nuclear triad. It is my understanding that the Navy is working closely with industry to identify and implement mitigation actions. If confirmed, I will evaluate all proposed options to address the delay and ensure the program meets its critical objectives.

**If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring that the *Columbia*-class program will remain the Navy's highest priority shipbuilding effort?**

If confirmed, I commit to ensuring that the Columbia-class program remains the Navy's highest priority shipbuilding effort. As the cornerstone of our submarine-based strategic deterrence, it is the most survivable leg of the Nuclear Triad and critical to our national security.

### **Attack Submarine Force Levels**

**The Navy's current requirement for attack submarines is at least 66. However, the Navy currently has less than 50 attack submarines in the fleet inventory.**

**Do you support the 2-per-year *Virginia*-class submarine production requirement, growing to at least 2.33-per-year in support of the agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, referred to as AUKUS?**

Yes, I fully support the current submarine production requirement. The execution and delivery of submarines, along with the successful implementation of the tri-lateral AUKUS agreement, are critical strategic imperatives. Achieving this requires once-in-a-generation investments and a unified effort from both government and industry to strengthen the defense industrial base. It is my understanding that the Navy is deeply committed to the health of the submarine industrial base and is working closely with our industry to increase overall production capacity.

**How could the Navy improve attack submarine readiness through changes to the**

## **maintenance, repair, and overhaul enterprise?**

It is my understanding that the submarine industrial base supplemental funding provided by Congress is key to supporting both domestic submarine production and operational readiness. By focusing on workforce development, advancing manufacturing technology, and expanding large-scale fabrication and outfitting capacity, we can better support our critical strategic partnerships. The supplemental funding not only strengthens the shipyards involved in new construction but also boosts the capacity of the Navy's four public shipyards, which are crucial for repairing and modernizing nuclear submarines. If confirmed, I would continue to pursue this holistic approach that ensures a more efficient, effective, and ready attack submarine fleet.

## **Navel Reactor Fuel**

**The Director of Naval Reactors, in their dual hatted role in the Department of Energy, has a statutory responsibility to supply naval reactor fuel for the existing and future fleet of submarine and surface ships. The Director of Naval Reactors estimates that an adequate supply of such fuel will not be available in the late 2040's. The Department of Energy currently does not have a capability to enrich or recycle spent Naval fuel. They estimate that it will take at least a decade to develop such a capability to be able to meet existing and future Navy fleet requirements. If confirmed will you commit to advocate for the necessary funding and programs within the Department of Energy to meet current and future Naval reactor fuel requirements?**

The Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, or Naval Reactors, is responsible for keeping the U.S. Navy's aircraft carriers and submarines safely operating around the globe under nuclear power. If confirmed, yes, I will continue to work alongside Naval Reactors, and in coordination with the Department of Energy and its National Nuclear Security Administration, to ensure continued availability of enriched uranium to fuel the U.S. Navy's nuclear fleet. It is my understanding that the Navy has sufficient enriched uranium to support Navy shipbuilding into the 2050's, and Naval Reactors is directly engaged with the Department of Energy and its National Nuclear Security Administration on efforts to meet future enriched uranium requirements.

## **Ship Maintenance**

**The Navy has experienced continuing problems maintaining the current fleet, including experiencing cost overruns and delays in schedules. These problems have plagued both public and private shipyards.**

**In your view, what are the benefits and challenges of establishing a fully rotatable pool of spare and repair parts to avoid maintenance availability delays and cannibalizations?**

Improving maintenance throughput for our submarines and surfaces ships hinges on several key levers, including having the correct material available at the start of a maintenance availability, which significantly reduces the risk of schedule delays,

minimizes the need for parts cannibalization, and allows ships to return to the fleet faster. Accomplishing this by establishing a fully rotatable pool of spare and repair parts for our submarines and surface ships may provide some benefit to reducing delays but also presents challenges due to the multiple configuration and maintenance requirement differences between platforms.

**In your view, how could contract changes for new and growth work in private yard availabilities be made more efficient?**

If confirmed, I look forward to working with all stakeholders to focus on efficient change management, which is critical to delivering ships on time. For new work, I understand the Navy team is continuing to explore ways to improve execution planning by awarding the larger, more complex availabilities earlier, allowing the collective team to better identify new or growth work before starting the availability. For growth work and changes during execution, I look forward to working with stakeholders to learn more about the positive results being realized from pilots currently in progress, which aim to drive down change cycle time during surface ship availabilities being performed in private ship repair yards, and to identify opportunities and timelines to scale these pilots across the surface portfolio.

**To update and improve the capability of the Navy-owned public shipyards, the Navy has been pursuing a Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program (SIOP). The Committee is not aware of a specific plan to expand the capacity or improve the efficiency of private sector shipyards.**

**In your view, can the SIOP plan be accelerated without harming the public shipyards' ability to improve readiness of the nuclear fleet?**

The Navy's four public shipyards are strategic enablers to the National Security of the United States. For over 100 years these shipyards have played a vital role in our Nation's defense. As we look into the future, these facilities will continue to have an out-sized role essential to our National Defense and are required to maintain our current and future nuclear-powered platforms. The Navy remains fully committed to the needs of our force and to ensure the safety of our shipyard workforce, the public, and the environment. Accordingly, the Navy is making historic investments to modernize these century old facilities to modern standards. Change will not happen overnight. It takes deliberate planning and time to ensure we do this in a smart fashion to upgrade facilities without impacting production. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to accelerate the SIOP plan without impacting our readiness.

**Should the U.S Government spend money to expand private shipyards?**

I understand the Navy stood up the Maritime Industrial Base Direct Reporting Program Office in 2024. That organization is focused on industrial base health for shipbuilding, repair and the supply chain. If confirmed, I will seek to understand the ongoing analysis of where investments should be made. I am committed to working with Congress to identify those critical investments required to enable our industrial base to support our maritime needs. In the meantime, the authority granted by Congress to support the private

ship repair yards in the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act will be critical in supporting the industrial base.

## **Missile Defense**

**Aegis ballistic missile defense (BMD) ships perform their mission in support of other Navy assets, as well as in defense of U.S., allied, and partner forces on land. There continues to be higher demand for Aegis BMD ships than the number of ships available at any given time.**

**Do you view BMD as a core Navy mission?**

Yes, Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) is a core Navy mission.

**How would you balance the competing demands for Aegis BMD ships? Are there opportunities to transition some of the defense of land-based forces to other Navy or land-based assets, to free up Aegis BMD ships for maritime-focused missions?**

The Navy uniquely provides missile defense from the sea. This capability allows for the forward projection of missile defense, as demonstrated in the Red Sea last year, and enables sea forces to operate within the threat range of adversary missile systems, enhancing our lethality. To balance the competing demands for Aegis BMD ships, if confirmed, I will direct the Navy to enhance ship deployment efficiency, transition certain land-based defense missions to other platforms, and emphasize the doctrinal use of naval forces. By advocating for multi-mission destroyers and strengthening collaboration with other military branches, I will aim to maintain a strong maritime focus while ensuring effective integration into the national Ballistic Missile Defense System and any future requirements for defense of the homeland. Combatant Commanders rely on Navy Destroyers for offensive and defensive effects across multiple mission areas.

## **Nuclear Enterprise**

**Every Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) has reaffirmed the importance of all three legs of the nuclear triad. Additionally, due to the rapid expansion of adversary nuclear capabilities, the last two administrations have also elected to pursue additional supplemental capabilities to manage the threat of escalation, including the W76-2 warhead, the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile, and the B61-13 gravity bomb.**

**Do you support full funding for the modernization of each leg of the nuclear triad and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) weapons complex?**

Yes. It is critical to maintain and modernize all three legs of the triad; the nuclear command, control, and communications systems; as well as the Department of Energy's ongoing efforts to modernize the Nation's nuclear weapons stockpile and infrastructure. The Navy is committed to modernizing its contribution to the triad through development of the Columbia-class SSBN replacement for the Ohio-class SSBN and fielding a life

extension to the TRIDENT II D5 missile to carry through the life of the Columbia-class program.

**Do you believe the current Navy program of record is sufficient to support the modernization of the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad?**

Yes, I believe the Columbia-class SSBN Major Defense Acquisition Program will fully meet the Navy's requirement for a survivable strategic deterrence platform. In conjunction with the fielding of the successor to the TRIDENT II D5 Life Extension (D5LE), D5LE2, the combined weapons system will fully meet the requirements of the sea-based leg of the strategic nuclear triad. If confirmed, I will review each of these programs to ensure effectiveness, responsiveness, survivability, flexibility, visibility and on-time delivery of capability to the Nation.

**The first Trump Administration identified a need to begin development and redeployment of a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile to address known gaps in U.S. tactical nuclear forces – gaps which have only been exacerbated by the rapid growth of Chinese, Russian, and North Korean arsenals. Congress supported this effort on a bipartisan basis and has directed the Navy and the National Nuclear Security Administration to establish a formal program to deploy this weapon no later than 2034.**

**If confirmed, do you commit to complying with existing statutory requirements to continue funding development of the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile and work towards meeting the congressionally-mandated date of 2034 for initial operational capability?**

Yes. If confirmed, I will ensure the Department complies with existing statutory requirements to continue funding development of the Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N) in support of a 2034 initial operational capability.

**In 2014, then-Secretary of Defense Hagel directed a comprehensive review of the DOD nuclear enterprise in response to adverse incidents involving U.S. nuclear forces. The review yielded recommendations to improve personnel management, enforce security requirements, increase deliberate senior leader focus and attention, enact and sustain a change in culture, and address numerous other concerns. More than ten years later, responsibility for addressing these recommendations and monitoring implementation of corrective actions has been transferred from OSD to the Military Services.**

**In your view, is the Navy maintaining appropriate focus on implementing the corrective actions recommended by the 2014 nuclear enterprise review?**

My understanding is that the Department of the Navy has maintained a strong focus on implementing the 2014 nuclear enterprise review recommendations, prioritizing readiness, personnel management, and security across its nuclear platforms, weapons, infrastructure, and personnel. An Echelon 1 nuclear regulator conducts regular assessments, while the Navy Nuclear Deterrence Mission Oversight Committee ensures continuous oversight and transparency. If confirmed, I will uphold the Navy's commitment to nuclear security, safety, and readiness—aligning capabilities with threats,

reinforcing deterrence, and ensuring sustained oversight of corrective actions.

**If confirmed, how would you ensure that the Navy continues to improve the training, readiness, morale, welfare, and quality of life of the Sailors charged to execute and support the Navy's nuclear mission?**

I understand the criticality of the Navy's nuclear mission and the important role of our nuclear trained Sailors. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy to provide the highest-level training, readiness, and Quality of Service for all Sailors, improving their readiness to fight and win. It is my understanding the Navy has succeeded in implementing lessons learned in the Red Sea, creating a rapid feedback loop to the Fleet training centers to provide more ready forces. Furthermore, I will review current Quality of Service initiatives and, working closely with the Chief of Naval Operations, I will focus Department efforts on effective, efficient improvements to the amenities and care we provide our Sailors.

### **Amphibious Fleet Requirements**

**What is your view of the requirement for the Navy to have 31 amphibious warfare ships in the active inventory?**

I understand the required minimum inventory for Amphibious Warships is 31 ships, to include no less than 10 large deck, amphibious assault ships. If confirmed, I would maintain the inventory as required by law while directing the Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the Marine Corps to evaluate our 30-Year Shipbuilding Plan and Force Structure to ensure our inventory is sufficient.

**If confirmed, how would you support the Commandant of the Marine Corps' goal of having three deployable Amphibious Readiness Groups and Marine Expeditionary Units at all times?**

As a Navy-Marine Corps team, we will generate ready and certified forces to meet our service and joint requirements. The Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act delineated in statute a requirement for not less than 31 traditional amphibious ships. I support procuring our amphibious ships affordably and as efficiently as possible to meet this requirement.

It is my understanding that the Navy is working with the Marine Corps to identify a path to meeting presence requirements. Additionally, the Navy is focused on improving ship maintenance outcomes across the portfolio to improve operational readiness levels. If confirmed, completing availabilities on time and with required work completed would be a top focus of mine and challenge to the maintenance and acquisition communities. Fleet commanders must be able to depend on every ship to be on-time and ready.

### **Ready Reserve Force (RRF) recapitalization**



**DOD has developed a three-pronged recapitalization strategy for the Ready Reserve Force (RRF) and Military Sealift Command surge fleet consisting of a combination of constructing new vessels, extending the service life of certain vessels, and acquiring used vessels.**

**What is your understanding of the Navy's recapitalization strategy for the RRF and the affordability of acquiring more than 40 sealift vessels as outlined in the latest 30-year shipbuilding plan?**

The Navy needs to recapitalize its fleet of Ready Reserve vessels. I understand the Navy, Military Sealift Command, and the Maritime Administration are executing a 2-part strategy that includes buying used roll-on, roll-off vessels, and building new ships. If confirmed, I will review this plan to ensure it is the most cost-effective way to quickly recapitalize sealift capacity.

**To what extent do you believe the Navy has identified the appropriate mix of used and new ships to meet sealift and auxiliary requirements?**

I understand the Navy conducts market research to identify candidate vessels for the buy-used program and utilizes this research to continually evaluate the appropriate mix of new and used ships needed to satisfy the sealift requirement. The buy-used program is critical to replacing lost capacity and complements the new construction program while the new vessel is in the design and construction process.

I understand the Navy procures auxiliaries through new construction avenues and assesses the feasibility of buying used vessels if necessary.

If confirmed, I will review each of these strategies to ensure we deliver the required capacity to the fleet efficiently and on-time.

## **Unmanned Systems**

**The Chief of Naval Operations identified that robotic autonomous systems are a crucial pillar for the future naval force in Navigation Plan 2024.**

**What steps will you take to integrate unmanned systems into the existing fleet while ensuring operational effectiveness and readiness?**

The Navy's recent IOC of the MQ-4C Triton high-altitude UAS and its introduction of the MQ-25 Stingray unmanned aerial refueling tanker are crucial steps towards a future of Manned-Unmanned Teaming in Naval aviation. These "pathfinder" platforms establish the foundation for autonomous airborne operations within the fleet force structure. The MQ-4 is already realizing rapid improvement in intelligence gathering and dissemination across multiple forward locations as Fleet Commanders increasingly employ its sophisticated sensor suite. The MQ-25 will carry similar importance within the Carrier Air Wing (CVW), immediately increasing strike fighter availability by taking over refueling duties from F/A-18 E/Fs. I understand the Navy is developing a comprehensive training and support pipeline for the MQ-25, ensuring proficiency

with unmanned systems while maintaining current fleet readiness. If confirmed, I will study recent actions taken to determine how to integrate future unmanned systems into the fleet.

**If confirmed, how will you prioritize funding for unmanned systems in the Navy's budget and ensure that all the needs for doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities are addressed?**

The unique capabilities that unmanned systems bring to the naval and joint force are a tremendous force multiplier, and I believe the Department of the Navy should appropriately and adequately resource the right solutions and doctrine, organization, training, personnel and facilities that support these capabilities, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. There can be no dispute that unmanned systems are now very much part of the landscape of modern war. Also revealed is the rapid pace of innovation for these systems, as well as the rapid operational adoption of the evolving systems in battle. If confirmed, I will thoroughly examine this issue to ensure the Department of the Navy investments are properly prioritized in this area by ensuring appropriate system selection through early, data-driven analysis. This will include championing joint investment in enabling technologies like autonomy, mission systems, and communications to guarantee interoperability across services and with coalition partners, for example through ongoing all-domain attritable autonomous systems efforts. I will prioritize timely infrastructure and logistical readiness, such as the ongoing modifications to Nimitz-class carriers for unmanned system integration. Furthermore, I will advocate for smart investments in programs like Collaborative Combat Aircraft, fostering competition—including non-traditional industry players—to drive down costs, accelerate timelines, and maintain technological superiority.

**How do you plan to ensure interoperability between manned and unmanned systems, both within the Navy and with other branches of the armed forces?**

I understand the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force are aligned on key enabling technologies, including mission systems, autonomy architecture, and communication and command architecture. This alignment ensures that both manned and unmanned platforms can operate effectively together, enhancing interoperability across branches. If confirmed, I will commit to continue collaboration with the other services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to ensure that systems are compatible and ready to integrate seamlessly in joint operations, supporting interservice coordination and maximizing mission effectiveness.

**What role do you see for small businesses and non-traditional defense contractors in advancing unmanned technologies?**

Small businesses and non-traditional defense contractors play an essential role by bringing innovation, competition, and agility into developing cutting-edge solutions rapidly. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the Department of the Navy continues to promote Small Business Innovation Research / Small Business Technology Transfer (SBIR/STTR) programs, and DoD small business programs that encourage participation from smaller firms in critical Navy programs such as the submarine industrial base. This will streamline acquisition processes making it easier for small businesses and non-traditional defense contractors to contribute, establish partnerships facilitating knowledge exchange between traditional primes and innovative newcomers, support incubators/accelerators by nurturing groundbreaking ideas that transform into viable products/services benefiting naval operations involving unmanned tech advancements

and enable warfare centers and laboratories to actively engage with ecosystems that include non-traditional and small business partners to drive experimentation and fleet integration.

**The Navy divested all legacy Hornets (F/A-18C/D) from its active component squadrons and has stopped buying Super Hornets. What is the Navy’s plan for upgrading and maintaining its Super Hornet fleet and on what timeline will this plan be executed? What capabilities are being added or should be added to maintain the Super Hornet’s relevance in the high-end fight?**

I understand the Navy intends to use capability upgrades and Service Life Modification to enhance inventory and maintain tactical relevance of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet with those modifications already underway and fully mature. Those upgrades, including Beyond Line-of-Sight communications, passive survivability systems, and future weapons capabilities, will deliver relevant lethality and survivability, while ensuring that the aircraft can provide the capacity to augment the capability provided by the F-35C. Should I be confirmed, I will work to ensure the Department is making investments in capability and sustainment to maintain the Super Hornet's tactical relevance in a future conflict and to carry out the required missions articulated in the National Defense Strategy.

**The Navy delayed the development of the F/A-XX next generation strike fighter in the FY 2025 budget request. What is your view on the future of the carrier air wing and the need for developing the F/A-XX? Where do you see Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) fitting into this future? In what ways could the Navy and Air Force work together on next generation aircraft, if any?**

I understand that the F/A-XX next-generation aircraft, offering significant advancements in operational reach and capacity within contested environments, is intended to enable Carrier Strike Groups to outpace adversaries while maintaining naval air dominance. I also understand the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force are collaborating closely to ensure interoperability through shared enabling technologies like autonomy, mission systems, and communication architectures. This collaborative approach, encompassing both manned and unmanned platforms, including Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA), will maximize operational effectiveness and flexibility across the services. In my view, aligning technology development and operational requirements will ensure the Services are poised to fully leverage next-generation unmanned systems, ultimately enhancing capabilities and long-range mission effectiveness.

**The Navy is investing in extending the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye into the 2040s as part of its naval battle management function.**

**What is the Navy’s approach to air battle management command and control and how do the Navy and Air Force intend to execute joint air battle management in a high-end fight?**

I understand the Navy, in conjunction with the Air Force, Joint Staff and the combatant commanders, is beginning an Office of Secretary of Defense’s (OSD) Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE)-directed study to define the requirements for joint air battle management in a high-end fight. The results of this study will inform me, if confirmed, and the rest of the Navy leadership as to any potential investments needed in

airborne command and control capabilities.

**Given the new capabilities the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye will bring to the battlespace, and the new tactics and concepts of operation it will enable, does the Navy perceive a need for expeditionary squadrons of E-2Ds? Why or why not?**

The E-2D Advanced Hawkeye is designed to operate as part of the carrier air wing (CVW), and it is the airborne centerpiece of the Carrier Strike Group air warfare and surface warfare missions. I understand that in conjunction with the Air Force, the Joint Staff and the Combatant Commanders, the Navy is beginning a study to define the requirements for employment of expeditionary joint air battle management capabilities. The results of this study, to include the concepts of operations, basing options, training, materiel, and doctrine, will inform me, if confirmed, and the rest of the Navy leadership as to any potential investments needed in expeditionary airborne command and control capabilities.

### **The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program**

**The follow-on modernization of the F-35 is scheduled to bring key warfighting capabilities to the fleet, but the budget and schedule remain in flux. The total number of F-35s planned for the Department of the Navy was set at 680, but the Marine Corps alone has articulated a requirement for 420 F-35B and F-35C.**

**Do you believe that the plan for 680 aircraft can fully accommodate the needs of both the Navy and the Marine Corps?**

I understand the United States Navy and Marine Corps continuously evaluate the number and types of platforms to ensure they can meet their commitment to defend U.S. interests around the globe, maintain a high state of readiness for any contingency, and be prepared to ensure Naval and Marine air dominance in times of war. If confirmed, I will evaluate this requirement and ensure the Navy and Marine Corps are right sized to meet these objectives.

**How many of the Marine Corps' current F-35Bs will not be upgraded to Block 4?**

My understanding is that the Marine Corps has not yet fully defined the desired capabilities for a Block 4 upgrade. Therefore, if confirmed, I will evaluate the Marine Corps' Short Take-Off and Vertical Landing (STOVL) variant of the F-35, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Marine Corps evolving operational needs and translate those into clear requirements for a potential Block 4 upgrade.

**What is the appropriate mix of F-35B and F-35C in the Marine Corps?**

I understand the Marine Corps continually assesses its platforms—ensuring it has the right number and types—to fulfill its mission of defending U.S. interests globally, maintaining a high state of readiness, and guaranteeing Naval and Marine air dominance in times of war. If confirmed, I will evaluate this requirement to ensure the Marine Corps

is appropriately sized to meet these objectives.

**What do you view as the biggest challenges to successful integration of the F-35 into the carrier air wing?**

The F-35 is the most lethal and capable multi-mission aircraft in the United States Navy's inventory. It provides stealth, sensor fusion, and interoperability that is unmatched by any 4th generation aircraft. Accordingly, it serves as a deterrent against our most advanced adversaries and is in high demand. Unfortunately, the speed at which the Navy can procure and deploy these aircraft to promote our national security objectives remains the biggest challenge to successful integration of the F-35 into the carrier air wing.

**The F-35B brings new capabilities and operational possibilities to the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). What is your vision for how the F-35B can enhance amphibious assault ship connectivity with the joint force? What are the Navy's current plans to achieve that vision?**

The F-35 delivers unparalleled joint force connectivity and will remain a force multiplier for decades to come. Due to its rapid deployability with Marine Expeditionary Units, my vision is to use F-35B as a critical asset for crisis response, providing the Joint Force with immediate connectivity, advanced sensing capabilities, and fire support. This ability to rapidly process and share data across the battlefield, especially at the tactical edge, provides a decisive advantage over adversaries. If confirmed, I plan to prioritize investments in capabilities, such as F-35B, that enhance warfighter situational awareness and enable decision dominance, creating a more lethal and effective force.

**Modernization of Marine Corps Capabilities**

**The Marine Corps' concepts for modernization of its amphibious capabilities have included Ship-to-Shore Connectors, Landing Ship Medium, LCU-1700s, and Amphibious Combat Vehicles.**

**What is your assessment of the current capability of amphibious maneuver and assault systems in the Navy and Marine Corps?**

I understand that amphibious surface mobility is critical to enable ship-to-shore and shore-to-shore maneuver and sustainment in support of distributed maritime operations. Navy is modernizing its landing craft inventory with the steady procurement of Ship to Shore Connector and LCU-1700s to ensure the fleet has the capacity needed for global crisis response and amphibious operations. In addition to landing craft, a purpose-built Landing Ship Medium (LSM) is essential and will be procured and delivered to support intra-theater operational mobility and tactical maneuver to enable naval expeditionary forces, such as Marine Littoral Regiments, campaigning to deter threats in the Indo-Pacific, and in times of crisis or conflict. If confirmed, I will confer with the Commandant of the Marine Corps to understand the Marine Corps' current capabilities as well as the readiness of the assets and any gaps in capabilities that the Marine Corps has identified.

**If confirmed, how would you prioritize the development and acquisition of capabilities required for sea basing, connectors, and armored amphibious assault and tactical mobility ashore to achieve a full spectrum capability in the Marine Corps?**

If confirmed, I will confer with the Commandant of the Marine Corps to understand the Marine Corps' current capabilities, as well as the readiness of the assets and any gaps in capabilities that the Marine Corps has identified. In my view, I believe the development and acquisition of capabilities required for sea basing, connectors, and armored amphibious assault and tactical mobility ashore should be prioritized to holistically support the amphibious warfare requirements of the Marine Corps. We must have prioritization must include a realistic balance between new acquisitions and effective, economical upgrades to legacy capabilities.

**Given the Marine Corps' operating concept of the stand-in force, how will the Navy ensure that such forces are adequately sustained in a contested environment?**

I understand the Navy has identified Contested Logistics as one of five Key Capabilities in the 2024 Navigation Plan. Contested Logistics includes essential skills, technologies and assets to achieve strategic naval objectives, including supporting sustainment of Marine Corps stand-in forces.

## **Munitions**

**Navy munitions inventories—particularly for precision guided munitions and air to air missiles—have declined significantly due to high operational usage, insufficient procurement, poor program execution, and a requirements system that does not adequately account for the ongoing need to transfer munitions to our allies.**

**If confirmed, what steps would you take to ensure the Navy has sufficient inventories of munitions to meet the needs of combatant commanders?**

Recent events have exposed the inability of our munitions industrial base to meet the demands of a high-intensity conflict. Modern weapons often rely on complex, global supply chains, leaving us vulnerable to adversaries. If confirmed, I will implement a multi-pronged approach. First, I expect the Department will invest in cutting-edge technologies like hypersonic weapons, directed energy, and autonomous systems, while enhancing our cyber warfare capabilities. Second, I expect the Department will revitalize the industrial based by incentivizing domestic production, streamlining regulations, and securing critical supply chains. Third, I expect the Department will order a renewed focus on operational wargaming, leveraging data and analysis to ensure our commanders have the most effective weapons and munitions for any contingency. These actions will guarantee our military remains the most lethal fighting force in the world.

**If confirmed, what changes in budgeting and acquisition processes would you recommend to facilitate faster Navy munitions replenishment rates?**

If confirmed, I will direct a munitions acquisition and industrial base strategy that aligns resources and objectives. It will encompass organizational structure, acquisition processes, and communications with industry. The Department will build on momentum that Congress has given us in legislation. We will also provide industry a clear demand signal to build investment strategies and accurately plan. I would also explore all means to onboard new commercial entrants and increase competition. The department also needs to create a stable funding stream that is protected from programmatic rebalancing to maintain a consistent demand signal and encourage small businesses to participate.

**If confirmed, how will you address the cost-exchange ratio challenges experienced in the Red Sea where more expensive rounds are used to defeat anti-ship threats?**

The Red Sea engagements provided valuable lessons. While cost exchange ratios are a useful metric against low-cost threats, they don't encompass the full complexity of naval warfare. I fully support a Captain utilizing the most effective means available to eliminate threats and protect their multibillion-dollar ship and crew. However, we must provide them with a wider variety of reliable options beyond their current limited and costly solutions. If confirmed, I will prioritize expanding development of layered ship defense capabilities, including guns, directed energy, loitering munitions, and other innovative technologies.

**The Navy has long been at the forefront of development for new and novel energetic materials, especially at places like the Naval Surface Warfare Center- Indian Head Division and the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake. However, since the end of the Cold War the Navy has struggled to maintain investment to keep up with developments from adversary nations in this space.**

**What do you see as the levers to motivate the defense industrial base to make additional capital investment (for facilities and tooling), as well as research and development investments to broaden the range of energetic materials available to the Navy?**

The defense industrial base has several options to pursue additional capital investment to refine and expand their ability to deliver energetic materials solutions to the Navy. OSD and Navy Manufacturing Technology programs, Small Business Innovation Research grants, Small Business Technology Transfer grants, the Office of Strategic Capital, and other OUSD R&E programs all provide significant capital investments opportunities. In addition, procurement officials can better apply contracting incentives to encourage industry to meet or exceed production deadlines. The organic industrial base serves as a critical lever to develop, transition, and surge energetics capacity by working industry.

**How is the Navy considering incorporation of new energetic materials, like CL-20, or new manufacturing processes for energetics, like biomanufacturing, into existing munitions to increase explosive effects or operational envelope of its weapons?**

I understand that the Navy is working to integrate higher performance energetic materials, like CL-20 into existing munitions as they allow for increased lethality while

decreasing size. From what I understand, the Navy's organic industrial base locations at Indian Head and China Lake are at the forefront of exploring these modern processing methods for both energetics, and non-energetics, that will allow for scaled approaches or bring on additional entrants. I am also aware that biomanufacturing of energetic ingredients may provide a great opportunity to decrease reliance on foreign sources.

### **Freedom of Navigation**

**In your view, what role should the Navy play in supporting the freedom of navigation in international waters, including in the South China Sea and in the Arctic?**

The Navy plays a vital leadership role in ensuring international waters and airspace are free and open. This freedom of navigation and overflight is crucial to the flow of global commerce and to the national security interests and prosperity of the United States, as outlined in the Title 10 mission of the Navy.

The Department of the Navy plays a pivotal role in preserving these navigational rights through presence and global operations. Protecting this freedom of navigation and overflight is especially important in strategically contested areas like the South China Sea and the Arctic.

**If confirmed, how would you lead the Navy in engaging our allies in the common cause of ensuring freedom of navigation?**

Freedom of navigation and overflight is fundamental to our national interests and the preservation of the global economic order. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Department of the Navy continues to defend America's access to the global commons, including freedom of navigation and overflight rights. I will work closely with our Allies and partners to ensure a shared understanding of the necessity of freedom of navigation, to reinforce our collective security, and to vigilantly assert and preserve the navigation and overflight rights that are essential to our collective security and prosperity.

### **Cyber and Electronic Warfare**

**Section 1657 of the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the appointment of an independent Principal Cyber Advisor (PCA) for each Military Department, to act as the principal advisor to the Secretary concerned on all cyber matters affecting that Department.**

**If confirmed, how would you plan to utilize the Navy PCA as part of your leadership structure?**

If confirmed, I will ensure the PCA remains my independent advisor solely focused on the Department of the Navy's (DON) cyberspace activities, in accordance with section 392a of Title 10 of the U.S. Code. I will expect the PCA to certify the adequacy of the



DON's cyberspace activities budget and provide funding recommendations based on their analysis. In addition to coordinating within the Navy and Marine Corps, I expect the PCA to effectively engage with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Combatant Commands, and Military Departments to ensure I am fully informed of the Department's cyberspace activities.

**What are the Department of the Navy's top 3 Cyber Challenges, and how will you use the Principal Cyber Advisor to address them?**

The Department of the Navy's top three challenges are: securing defense critical infrastructure and weapon systems; increasing cyber force readiness; and executing critical modernization efforts. Removing legacy information technology, modernizing cryptography, implementing zero trust, and hardening classified networks all contribute to modernizing the Department of the Navy. Importantly, the readiness of our military and civilian workforce is critical for achieving our priorities in cyberspace.

It is my understanding that the Navy and Marine Corps have made notable progress in strengthening cybersecurity and resiliency in operational technology environments and in improving the readiness of their personnel in the Cyber Mission Force. Additionally, the Department of the Navy recently delivered the first fully validated implementation of a true Zero Trust architecture in the Department of Defense. If confirmed, I will expect the PCA to work closely with the Chief Information Officer and Navy and Marine Corps stakeholders to drive tangible outcomes in these areas.

**In November 2023, the Navy released its inaugural Cyber Strategy. In your view, how well postured are the Navy and the Marine Corps to meet the goals outlined in the 2023 Department of the Navy Cyber Strategy?**

The 2023 Department of the Navy Cyber Strategy outlines an effective path forward for the naval services in cyberspace. I believe the Navy and Marine Corps can achieve the goals outlined in the Department of the Navy Cyber Strategy and are demonstrating success in key areas. Where work remains to be done, I will support the necessary combination of personnel, resources, and funding to drive credible outcomes in alignment with the Department of the Navy Cyber Strategy.

**If confirmed, what will you do to enhance Navy and Marine Corps information dominance capabilities?**

If confirmed, I would seek a detailed briefing on our information dominance capabilities and determine resourcing, workforce, and innovation priorities to integrate into the joint force's modernization efforts. I will maintain a close partnership with our industrial base which will be critical in achieving success. I would also engage with the Secretary of Defense to ensure our maritime information forces have the authorities needed to accomplish national security objectives.

**Given the difficulty in defining where cyber operations and electronic warfare merge, if confirmed, how you would organize, train, and equip the Navy to minimize gaps and seams in these two critical mission areas?**

The Information Warfare Community integrates Naval information-based capabilities to include cyber operations and electronic warfare. If confirmed, I will empower the Naval Information Warfare Community to recruit, retain and promote the most skilled and qualified Sailors to train and conduct integrated fires to effectively deter and combat threats to our Nation. These actions align to the Department of the Navy Cyber Strategy which calls for effective sequencing and synchronization of non-kinetic effects to generate decisive advantages.

**The Navy has had the hardest time among the military services in training and retaining cyber forces provided to US Cyber Command for the Cyber Mission Force.**

**What ideas do you have to improve the readiness of cyber mission forces within the Navy?**

If confirmed, I will advocate for integrating cyber course curricula into service training centers to bring force generation under direct service control for greater efficiency. I will advocate for continued investment in recently acquired infrastructure to ensure all training is completed before personnel report to their teams, maintaining readiness and effectiveness. I will continue to work with CYBERCOM to implement cyber incentives that help drive advanced skills and retain a qualified workforce and I look forward to working with Congress on this issue.

**In what ways could Navy cyber forces be better leveraged to address tactical cyber effects at a theater warfighting level?**

I believe the Navy is in a unique position to take advantage of extended access granted via waterways to support cyber effects in the littoral zone. Small cyber tactical teams deployed on Navy platforms could be force multipliers in a contested environment.

### **Navy-related Defense Industrial Base**

**What is your assessment of the Maritime Industrial Base (MIB) program office? If confirmed, how would you coordinate this office with the Program Executive Officers?**

It is my understanding the Navy's Maritime Industrial Base program office is the Navy's lead organization to integrate, facilitate, and support efforts across the Department of the Navy, the Department of Defense, other U.S. Government agencies, and industrial base partners to develop and execute programmatic efforts to increase the capacity of the maritime industrial base, to scale and deploy modern manufacturing technologies, and to support the development of a new generation of skilled workforce that support our national security programs. This effort includes closely working with the Program Executive Officers to ensure real portfolio and platform needs and requirements are being met. Revitalizing the Nation's maritime industrial base is a national security imperative. If confirmed, I would work with these offices to ensure the industrial base is capable of supporting the Department of the Navy's national security missions, and ability to surge in response to a dynamic threat environment.

**What is your assessment of the systems and processes for identifying, evaluating, and managing risk in the Navy's industrial base, especially the shipbuilding industrial base?**

The Navy's industrial base, particularly the shipbuilding sector, plays a critical role in ensuring national security, so understanding and being responsive to the systems and processes for managing risks within this sector is vital. The Maritime Industrial Base program office directly reporting to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition (ASN RD&A) is responsible for assessing, tracking, and reporting on the performance of the industrial base and its ability to meet the Department's shipbuilding acquisition programs' needs. If confirmed, I intend to better understand the drivers that are impacting the performance of the Navy's industrial base and the ways we can more proactively respond to those drivers.

**If confirmed, would you support expanding the strategy of dedicated industrial base funds currently used for the submarine industrial base to other capabilities?**

Stabilizing, modernizing, and expanding the defense industrial base may require dedicated industrial base funds, and likely a model similar to that currently used for the submarine industrial base. The dedicated funding model for the submarine supply base is addressing the unique challenges and complexities associated with nuclear platform construction and maintenance, especially given the high costs, long production cycles, and specialized workforce required. Applying this approach to other defense capabilities would require careful evaluation of the needs and landscape of each sector. If confirmed, I will undertake this evaluation.

**If confirmed, how will you improve the timeliness and quality of the qualification, certification, and test process for suppliers to participate in the Navy's industrial base?**

If confirmed, as the Navy develops advanced munitions and the maritime industrial base, I will ensure the Department eliminates the bureaucracy that prevents these capabilities from transitioning to the battlefield.

**If confirmed, how will you ensure prime contractors leverage new or expanded sources of supply?**

The Navy must ensure that both our prime contractors and our Program Offices can equally access our new and expanded sources of supply. We can structure contracts and incentives to build resiliency in the production lines. The Navy should evaluate its license rights over technical data and proactively certify new sources where critical sub-components have been identified. We must partner with our Primes, to balance adding new sources vs spreading procurement too thin.

**How would you seek to ensure the Navy engages with the broadest industrial base possible, including traditional contractors, nontraditional contractors, and small businesses?**

This is one of the most exciting times to be developing new warfighting solutions for the Navy. Navy has access to a new set of commercial entrants and a revitalized organic industrial base. Navy must use it all and leverage existing programs to reach all types of businesses. If confirmed, I would instruct my acquisition executives to develop engagement plans to bring our challenges and opportunities directly to industry and to our defense association partners who can reach up and down our supply chains, in collaboration with our Department of Defense innovation organization partners.

## **Operational Energy and Energy Resilience**

**The Department defines operational energy as the energy required for training, moving, and sustaining military forces and weapons platforms for military operations, including the energy used by tactical power systems and generators. Department of Defense energy requirements are projected to increase due to technological advances in weapons systems and the execution of distributed operations over longer operating distances.**

**If confirmed, how would you lead the Navy in harnessing innovations in operational energy and linking them with emerging joint operational concepts in order to reduce contested logistics vulnerabilities for warfighters?**

If confirmed, I will leverage my experience and harness the Department of the Navy subject matter experts to identify and accelerate operational energy innovation advancements that improve warfighting capability. These innovations, coupled with emerging joint operational concepts, will assist with reducing contested logistics vulnerabilities for our warfighters.

**In what specific areas, if any, do you believe the Navy needs to improve the incorporation of energy considerations and alternative energy resources into the strategic planning processes?**

If confirmed, I will work to understand the role of energy considerations and alternative energy resources in the Navy's strategic planning process.

**How can energy supportability that reduces contested logistics vulnerabilities become a key performance parameter in the requirements process beyond just a "check the box" consideration?**

If confirmed, I will use my business background and exercise oversight to ensure that key energy performance indicators are aligned with mission needs. I believe that the integration of energy supportability issues early in the capability development process is essential to enhancing our warfighting capabilities while also mitigating logistical risks in contested environments.

**It is essential that DOD maintain capability to sustain critical operations in the event of an energy disruption—including commercial grid outages.**

**If confirmed, specifically to Guam, how would you inculcate energy resilience as a mission assurance priority for the Department of the Navy, including acquiring and deploying sustainable and renewable energy assets to support mission critical functions and address known vulnerabilities?**

If confirmed, I will ensure that mission assurance assessments and installation energy plans inform the evaluation of generation, distribution, and storage technologies available to meet Department of Navy energy resiliency requirements. Furthermore, the

Department of the Navy is part of a whole of government effort to mitigate known vulnerabilities, including vulnerabilities to cyber threats to Guam's energy infrastructure, to ensure that the Navy and Marine Corps critical missions are supported.

**How can the Department of the Navy better integrate energy security and resilience as standard components of its Military Construction (MILCON) programs, in your view?**

The DON integrates Installation Energy Plans into the master planning process to inform necessary enhancements of the Department's energy security and resilience posture. If confirmed, I will ensure critical mission energy requirements identified in the Installation Energy Plans are included in the MILCON process to better support warfighter readiness.

### **Installation Modernization and Resilience**

**Decades of underinvestment in Department of Defense installations has led to substantial backlogs in facilities maintenance, and substandard living and working conditions for sailors and Marines.**

**In your view, how is the readiness of navy shore installations linked to the readiness and lethality of naval power?**

Navy and Marine Corps shore installations are the platforms from which our Sailors and Marines train, equip, and operate their aircraft, ships, submarines, and weapons systems for future deployment. This makes the capabilities of these installations a key component of the readiness of the Fleets and Fleet Marine Forces and facilitates the lethality of the Navy and Marine Corps forces. Infrastructure and facilities capabilities are derived from military operational requirements. Shore Installations are a critical piece of mission performance that directly impact the operations and maintenance of our offensive and defensive weapons systems and the Quality of Life and Quality of Service for Sailors and Marines.

**In your view, does the Department of the Navy receive adequate funding for base operations support, writ large? Please explain your answer.**

From what I understand, the systemic underfunding of the maintenance, sustainment, and modernization funding for aging shore infrastructure requirements has led to a backlog of maintenance needs and degraded systems across the DON. Like many communities across the Nation, the Department shore installations are upwards of 60 years old. Modernization of the core utilities, telecommunications, and transportation infrastructure is far more expensive and requires significantly more funding to upgrade. If confirmed, I will look for innovative solutions to update the Department's infrastructure within our designated budget and available authorities.

**Do you have any specific plans to leverage infrastructure modernization to improve the quality of life for Navy and Marine Corps service members and their families, who are under considerable strain as a result of repeated deployments?**

Quality of Life is an important aspect of Readiness. Ensuring Sailors and Marines are afforded the quality resources from which to work and quality facilities in which to live is a top priority. If confirmed, I am committed to identifying and supporting opportunities that will sustain and improve the quality of life for Sailors, Marines, and their families and I am supportive of the Department's efforts to prioritize critical infrastructure and Quality of Life projects, including the focus on unaccompanied housing.

## **Environment**

**According to the GAO, the Navy has identified 127 installations with known or suspected releases of perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).**

**What is your understanding of the Department of the Navy's strategy for monitoring drinking water on Navy and Marine Corps installations, as well as public and private drinking water off-installation, for PFOS, PFOA, and other contaminants?**

It is my understanding that consistent with Department of Defense policy, the Navy and Marine Corps will monitor and treat for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in drinking water, in compliance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) April 2024 National Primary Drinking Water Regulation final rule requirements, for Navy and Marine Corps-owned drinking water systems in the United States, including those drinking water systems not subject to EPA's rule, but which provide drinking water to our on-installation communities.

For public and private drinking water wells off-installation, I understand the Navy has been proactively addressing elevated PFAS levels from Navy and Marine Corps sources under federal cleanup law, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). Currently, the Navy addresses PFAS in private wells from Navy and Marine Corps sources in accordance with the Department of Defense policy memo, "Prioritization of Department of Defense Cleanup Actions to Implement the Federal Drinking Water Standards for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program." This policy describes DoD's plans to incorporate EPA's PFAS drinking water levels into DoD's ongoing PFAS cleanups and prioritize actions to address private drinking water wells with the highest levels of PFAS from DoD activities.

**If confirmed, how would you further efforts to identify and remediate PFOS/PFOA contamination on Navy installations, including reserve component locations?**

This program is vital to protect the health of Sailors, Marines, civilians, their families, and the communities in which they serve, and I will commit to supporting this program to the benefit of our long-term mission goals.

## **Science, Technology, and Innovation**

**What are the key technologies that the Navy should be focused on to support modernization activities?**

I recognize that invention, innovation and modernization are the driving forces behind technological breakthroughs, ultimately leading to a more dominant maritime force. Our potential adversaries have demonstrated significant science and technology capability that challenges our capacity to maintain our technological lead. I believe the Department should focus on technologies across a spectrum of cutting-edge fields, including artificial intelligence driven autonomous systems and advanced decision-making systems, quantum capabilities, advanced materials and maritime cybersecurity. A forward-looking approach will ensure our naval superiority.

**What do you see at the role of the Navy's in-house laboratories and research and development centers in supporting Navy modernization goals?**

The Office of Naval Research, Naval Research Lab and the Naval Warfare Centers are critical to the Naval fighting capabilities. They are engines of innovation, bringing the warfighter, industry and domain area experts together to tackle hard technical challenges and deliver for the Fleet and Force. They actively work in a number of areas that address the scientific and technological foundation needed to support Naval modernization goals with emerging technologies including cyber, directed energy, advanced sensor technologies, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, quantum sensors and quantum computing, advanced manufacturing technologies for ships, submarines and air platforms, advanced electronics, swarming technologies, space and terrestrial robotics, hypersonics, biotechnologies for logistics advantage and warfighter performance, communications and networking technology, and advanced electronic warfare (EW).

It is important to maintain a robust portfolio that not only works with industry and other stakeholders to develop disruptive capabilities, but also supporting the increased lethality, survivability and affordability of our current platforms.

**Are there enduring technology areas that might not be considered emerging (for example, energetic materials, or corrosion control) that the Navy should remain focused on as categories outside of the modernization priorities?**

I understand that the Office of Naval Research, Naval Research Lab and the Warfare Centers are actively working in several foundational areas that address the scientific and technological components supporting operations in the harsh maritime environment, significant deep ocean depths and other unique Naval mission areas. The Navy fights from the deep oceans to space and to pace the threat requires a wide range of superior technology across numerous domains.

**How should the Navy make investment decisions to balance the needs between these emerging and enduring technology areas?**

It is a national security imperative to achieve and maintain unquestioned and unchallenged global Naval technological dominance. To do so, I believe the Navy must strike a balance between investments that make the current Fleet and Force more lethal and survivable with -

higher risk - potentially high impact capabilities in the future. Visionary investments made many years ago resulted in the capabilities our Sailors and Marines have use in the fight with great effect today. Near-term readiness will be paramount to ensuring deployed and deploying forces are prepared for any challenges they may encounter. Still, the Department of the Navy must make investment decisions in Naval cutting-edge science and technologies that will be transitioned to industry and acquisition to scale and support. The Navy incorporates science and technology into its war games to shape the future of the Fleet and Force, and experiments at sea to drive the solutions it needs near term. Naval research teams bring industry, leading researchers and other innovative problem solvers to the table to help us make the right choices. If confirmed, I intend to make strategy-driven, data-informed decisions maximizing effectiveness to balance near-term capacity with future capability requirements and modernization opportunities with enduring Naval needs.

**If confirmed, what steps would you take to support the Navy's in-house innovation enterprise at its labs and engineering centers?**

The Naval Warfare Centers and Naval Research Laboratory have a proud legacy of innovation, seamlessly transitioning cutting-edge scientific discoveries into real-world capabilities for the Naval Services and our Nation's fleet. Today, they are agile and on-call supporting the warfighter pivoting technology to pace our adversaries. The workforce, comprised of brilliant scientists, engineers, and dedicated business and administrative personnel, is a strategic advantage. These individuals, working collaboratively across the Naval Research and Development Enterprise (NRDE), form the very foundation of technological edge, driving discovery, development, and delivery of critical technologies to our warfighters.

If confirmed, I am committed to further strengthening the Naval laboratory enterprise, recognizing its critical role as our "technical bench." This enterprise spans the full spectrum, from groundbreaking science and technology development, to providing indispensable technical expertise, to acquisition programs, and sustaining our fleet and force to support the Naval research and development enterprise efforts to address workforce challenges, anticipate emerging technology requirements, and modernize infrastructure.

**If confirmed, how would you ensure that a greater percentage of the technologies being developed by Navy labs transition into programs of record for deployment to the warfighter? How would you ensure that appropriate technologies are transitioning more quickly into programs of record?**

The ultimate goal of research investments is to put capability into the hands of Sailors and Marines to fight and win. Sailors and Marines operate in a world of evolving security threats and rapid technological change. It is vital to accelerate discovery and delivery, and key to that is partnerships with industry and the Nation's commercial innovative capacity. Successful transitions in the innovative naval prototype and future naval capability portfolio have coupled the pioneering science and technology development of our research and technology teams such as the Warfare Centers, Office of Naval Research and the Naval Research Laboratory, academia and other partners with commercial industry earlier resulting in faster capability with firm commitments to acquisition to support smoother integration into our Fleet.

Additionally, our Naval Warfare Centers, have consistently provided responsive technical



leadership and engineering support to our programs of record, directly connected to the Fleet and Force, they are a key enabler for transitioning technologies into the demanding environments our warfighters operate within.

In that regard, I would encourage and support quick reaction efforts that apply new technology capabilities to solve current warfighting gaps and give us an advantage over our adversaries.

**What efforts is the Department of the Navy making to identify new technologies developed commercially by the private sector and apply them to military and national security purposes?**

The Navy must seek ways to engage new industry partners to support the Fleet and Force. I understand NavalX, working in conjunction with the Naval Warfare Centers and Department of Defense innovation partners, works to lower the barrier of entry to bring new capabilities to the table. They execute deliberate and dedicated efforts to foster innovation ecosystems with non-traditional, commercial industry partners and enable the exposure and experimentation of those commercially available and developing technologies in operationally relevant environments supporting transition opportunities. Navy efforts to spearhead innovation and competitiveness in critical and emerging technologies is essential as Navy is fostering the transition of science and technology from across traditional and non-traditional partners. Office of Naval Research develops and enables the business of innovation within the Department of the Navy to expand the Naval industrial base via engagement with traditional and nontraditional innovative commercial partners, entrepreneurs, and academia to innovate and rapidly identify and transition cutting edge technologies with military application to the warfighter for competitive advantage.

**How do you think the Navy needs to approach the testing, experimentation and integration of such commercial technologies in parallel with traditional innovation processes?**

Rapid experimentation is a foundational learning tool used across the full spectrum of technology maturity. The Navy and Marine Corps must focus on conducting a wide array of experimentation, bringing new and enduring industry partners, the research teams, and most importantly the Sailors and Marines to learn and drive solutions. Navy must learn from these experiments as well as current system employment in operations.

**Military Health System (MHS) Reform**

**Do you support the implementation of the MHS reforms mandated by the NDAAs for FYs 2017, 2019, and 2020?**

Yes. I understand the mandated reforms intended an integrated system of readiness and health. The MHS is critical to the Navy's ability to generate medically ready operational forces, and I understand the DON is committed to helping stabilize the MHS with a staffed and ready medical force.

**Will you ensure that the Navy continues to provide the military medical personnel needed to provide care in these facilities?**

Yes. The Department is committed to supporting the Defense Health Agency with predictable military staffing to support healthcare delivery for our Sailors, Marines and their families, concurrently continuing to train, sustain, and modernize our medical forces in support of operational missions.

**If confirmed, how would you ensure that the Navy reduces its medical headquarters' staffs and infrastructure to reflect the more limited roles and responsibilities of the Navy Surgeon General?**

It is my understanding that Navy Medicine underwent two significant cuts of both military and civilian manpower due to the transfer of military treatment facility oversight to the Defense Health Agency. If confirmed, I will ensure our medical headquarters structure complies with the readiness responsibilities retained by the Navy and the Marine Corps.

### **End Strength**

**The Navy's active-duty end strength was 352,633 in FY 2021 and has fallen to a requested average end strength of 332,933 in FY 2025. The Marine Corps' active duty end strength is also shrinking from 179,678 in FY 2021 to 172,300 requested in FY 2025.**

**Do you believe that Navy and Marine Corps end strengths are appropriate and sufficient to meet national defense objections? Please explain your answer.**

Navy and Marine Corps end strength must be sufficient to address the Nation's security challenges. If confirmed, I would assess Navy and Marine Corps end strength together with the mission requirements and budget factors driving those numbers.

**GAO report "Navy Readiness" (GAO-24-106525) found that surface ships were undermanned by 19 to 37 percent leading to work overload. If confirmed, what steps will you take to support adequate personnel aboard ships?**

I understand the Navy has significant gaps in sea assignments, largely from increasing operational requirements. My understanding is that the forward deployed ships are manned at the highest levels to ensure operational readiness. Proper ship manning is essential to operational readiness and the well-being of our Sailors. If confirmed, I would ensure the Navy aggressively addresses these gaps and employs effective efforts to attract and retain America's best and brightest.

### **Navy and Marine Corps Reserves**

**What is your vision for the roles and missions of the Navy and Marine Corps Reserves? If confirmed, what objectives would you seek to achieve with respect to the organization, force structure, and end strength of the Navy Reserve? Of the Marine Corps Reserve?**

Warfighting Readiness is Priority One. The Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Forces provide strategic depth to the most powerful Navy and Marine Corps in the world and stand ready to

carry out missions across the globe. The Reserve Forces can rapidly mobilize and deploy to support emerging and steady-state operations for the Navy, Marine Corps, and Joint Force. If confirmed, I will work with leaders across the Department of Navy and the Department of Defense to expand our Nation's Maritime Dominance by ensuring our Reserve Components are sized and organized for maximum readiness and lethality.

**Do you expect to meet prior service accession goals for the Navy and Marine Corps Reserves this fiscal year? Please explain your answer.**

It is my understanding from public reporting that the Navy and Marine Corps are both on track to meet their accession goals this year. If confirmed, I will work with the Services to meet accession goals.

### **Recruiting and Retention**

**The 2024 National Defense Strategy Commission stated that “The DoD workforce and the all-volunteer force provide an unmatched advantage. However, recruiting failures have shrunk the force and raise serious questions about the all-volunteer force in peacetime, let alone in major combat.” In addition, DOD studies indicate that only about 23% of today's youth population is eligible for military service, and only a fraction of those who meet military accession standards are interested in serving.**

**In response to military recruiting difficulties, the Navy has lowered enlistment standards more than any other service, including accepting category IV recruits at the maximum amount allowed by law and lowering the test scores required to serve in dozens of enlisted ratings.**

**In your view, what is the risk associated with accessing large numbers of category IV recruits, and if confirmed, do you intend to continue with this practice?**

The Department of the Navy must play a role in inspiring America's young people to serve, ensuring they meet the high standards of enlistment, and developing them so that they continue to meet those high standards throughout their careers. I am committed to evaluating and thus ensuring the highest fitness and aptitude standards. I understand the Navy has recently accepted additional recruits with lower Armed Forces Qualification Test scores, but requires they complete the Future Sailor Preparatory Course intended to improve aptitude prior to bootcamp. If confirmed, I intend to review the risks, benefits, and mitigation strategies the Navy has put in place, and will assess if any changes are necessary.

**Rather than relying solely on ever-higher compensation for a shrinking pool of volunteers, what creative initiatives would you implement, if confirmed, to expand the pool of eligible recruits and improve Navy and Marine Corps recruiting?**

Service in the Navy or Marine Corps offers the American public a value proposition that is both exciting and unique relative to typical private sector occupations. I understand the Navy and Marine Corps, and the Department of Defense as a whole, have been

proactively exploring opportunities to expand the pool of eligible recruits. If confirmed, I would consider all potential options to expand our reach across the country so that the Department of the Navy maximizes our ability to find high-quality young Americans interested and able to serve. I would also ensure we are making informed and right-sized investments and modernizing our efforts to recruit effectively in an evolving market for talent and effectively conveying the value of service within our two military branches.

**In your view, what effect do current recruiting standards—particularly DOD-wide criteria for tier-one recruits—have on recruit attrition and/or future success in the Navy and the Marine Corps?**

I believe higher-quality recruits are more likely to succeed. If confirmed, I will review data concerning the degree to which current recruiting standards predict success in the Navy and Marine Corps. If these standards are less likely to yield effective lethality and deterrence, I will work with leaders in the DoD to modify those standards.

**What recommendations would you have for increasing the pool of youth who are both eligible and disposed for military service?**

I believe the Department of the Navy should be partnering with all stakeholders to demonstrate the value of service to one's personal and professional growth and future opportunities. The opportunity for training and education is world class and we should be showcasing that to all Americans. The Department of the Navy must play a role in inspiring America's young people to serve, ensuring they meet the high standards of enlistment, and developing them so that they continue to meet those high standards during their careers. If confirmed, I look forward to sharing the story of naval service with lawmakers, educators, and community leaders who can carry that message back to their communities.

## **Military Compensation**

**What is your assessment of the adequacy of military compensation?**

Regular evaluation of military compensation is necessary to ensure that pay and benefits for Service members remain competitive. I understand that the 14<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) found that regular military compensation remains very competitive relative to civilian earnings for those with similar education levels and work experience. The QRMC also found that special and incentive pays remain effective means of increasing the recruitment and retention of personnel with skills that command higher wages in the civilian marketplace or who need to be compensated for particularly arduous or dangerous duties. Ultimately, the relevant gauge of the adequacy of military compensation is whether we are able to recruit and retain sufficient talent to man the Navy and Marine Corps. It is my understanding that the Navy and Marine Corps are currently achieving recruiting and retention goals in the aggregate, but face challenges for specific skillsets. If confirmed, I will work closely with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to preserve our recruiting and retention in an ever-changing environment.

## **The GI Bill, Voluntary Education, and Credentialing Programs**

**Do Navy and Marine Corps Voluntary Education Programs contribute to military readiness, in your view? Please explain your answer.**

It is my understanding that the voluntary education programs play a key role in enhancing military readiness because they contribute to the development of a skilled and accomplished force and promote recruitment and retention. From my experience in the private sector, I recognize that education is a powerful recruiting and retention tool that helps members of a team realize their full professional and personal potential. An educated force that is skilled, adaptable, and flexible is essential for addressing emerging global threats and challenges.

**What progress have the Navy and Marine Corps made in identifying and leveraging credentialing programs, both to enhance a sailor or Marine's ability to perform his/her official duties, and to qualify the sailor or Marine for meaningful civilian employment on separation from the military?**

I understand that the Department of the Navy Credentialing Opportunities Online (COOL) program offers Sailors, Marines, and DON civilians many opportunities to earn licenses and certifications that validate their knowledge and experience, while opening doors to new opportunities in both the Department and the civilian sector. I understand successful programs like these come through meaningful partnerships with Congress and other stakeholders.

**What is your vision of the role and mission of the Naval Community College?**

My vision of the U.S. Naval Community College (USNCC) is to provide accessible, high-quality educational opportunities to enlisted Sailors, Marines and Coastguardsmen that are aligned with the operational needs of our naval services. The goal is to deliver naval-relevant curricula for maximum warfighting effectiveness. Additionally, USNCC educational offerings will improve the professional and personal development of Service members. If confirmed, I would seek to build upon the initial successes of the USNCC, continuing to work in partnership with accredited universities and institutions to ensure the program is developing Service members who can outthink and outfight any adversary.

## **Non-Deployable Service members**

**In your view, should Sailors and Marines who are non-deployable for more than 12 consecutive months be subject either to separation from the service or referral to the Disability Evaluation System, as is current Department policy?**

The Navy and Marine Corps must maintain a globally deployable force. It is my understanding that Sailors and Marines who are non-deployable for more than 12 consecutive months will receive an individualized review that weighs whether their continued service is in the Nation's best interest. If confirmed, I commit to evaluating existing policy and processes to ensure our personnel are being properly cared for, while simultaneously maintaining an effective fighting force capable of achieving the mission.

**Under what circumstances would the retention of a service member who has been non-deployable for more than 12 months be “in the best interest of the service”?**

I understand the determination of whether it is in the best interest of the Service to retain a service member who has been non-deployable for more than 12 months is based upon an individualized review of several factors, including the likelihood that the member will be able to return to deployable status and the member’s unique skills and qualifications to fit identified needs of the Service.

**In your view, should a Sailor or Marine’s readiness to perform the required specific missions, functions, and tasks in the context of a particular deployment also be considered in determining whether that service member is deployable?**

Yes, the ability of a Sailor or Marine to perform the specific job function should be a consideration when making any assignment.

**What are your ideas for addressing the challenges of medical non-deployability in the reserve components?**

If confirmed, I would seek to better understand the unique challenges associated with non-deployable Reserve Component members. Along with the Service Chiefs, I would consult with the Chief of the Navy Reserve and the Commander of the Marine Corps Forces Reserve to understand their current process, demands, and challenges, and would welcome their feedback and proposed solutions.

**Military Family Readiness and Support**

**What do you consider to be the most important family readiness issues for sailors, Marines, and their families?**

Family readiness is an important tenet of warfighter readiness. If we take care of our families, our warfighters are ready. In that vein, some of the most pressing issues facing Sailors, Marines, and their families are increased access to health care, spouse employment, and reliable quality and affordable childcare. These issues, along with many others, are vitally important to the readiness that allows our Sailors and Marines to deploy far from home with reasonable assurance that their families will be safe and have what they need to cope with what are often long absences. Through my interactions with our brave Service members, I am acutely aware of the many sacrifices our families make for us every day. I am committed, if confirmed, to ensure that families do not just endure, but thrive, in the Navy and Marine Corps family.

**If confirmed, how would you ensure that the family readiness issues you identified are properly addressed and adequately resourced?**

Family readiness and quality of life issues will be a top priority if I am confirmed. It is my understanding that the Navy and Marine Corps provide a comprehensive range of programs. I plan to examine these programs to learn how we can improve our family readiness, measure

program effectiveness, and ensure adequate resourcing.

**The Navy completed a Quality of Service review after a string of suicides. If confirmed, how will you continue the work to improve the quality of service of sailors? Are there any new efforts you would undertake?**

It is my understanding that the Navy currently has an effort led by a three-star admiral addressing quality of service issues associated with that review. If confirmed, I will seek a briefing to understand how the report's recommendations have been implemented so far, any barriers the Navy faces in implementing the remaining recommendations, and any additional initiatives that effort is pursuing.

### **Suicide Prevention**

**The number of suicides in each of the Services continues to concern the Committee. Over the past several years, the Navy has struggled with suicides for sailors in a limited duty status, and sailors assigned to ships in long-term maintenance. If confirmed, what would you do to maintain a strong focus on preventing suicides in the active Navy and Marine Corps, the Navy and Marine Reserve, and in the families of your sailors and Marines?**

The loss of any Sailor, Marine, civilian, or family member to suicide is one too many, and we must remain committed to ensuring the health, safety and well-being of all members of our military community. If confirmed, I will prioritize suicide prevention strategies that are evidence-based, explore opportunities to address unit climate health, and ensure members and families have access to necessary resources and that commanders encourage their use. It is critical for Sailors and Marines to foster their mental, physical and spiritual well-being to continue their mission to protect our Nation and remain combat-ready, lethal fighters. If confirmed, I will continue to advance an approach that guards our greatest asset, our people, by ensuring that our Sailors, Marines, and civilians have the necessary support to meet the demands of the warfighter's mission.

### **Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention and Response Programs**

**Do you believe the policies, programs, resources, and training that DOD and the Military Services have put in place to prevent and respond to sexual assault, and to protect service members who report sexual assault from retaliation, are working? If not, what else must be done?**

There is no place for sexual assault in the Navy or Marine Corps. Offenders must be held appropriately accountable, and victims must be able to access the resources that they need. No one should fear retaliation for reporting this crime. I understand that both Services within the Department of the Navy are resolute in their efforts to reduce the prevalence of these behaviors and ensure comprehensive care to those who seek help. In partnership with Congress, the Department of Defense and the Department of the Navy have taken meaningful steps to reduce prevalence of sexual assault, as evidenced by the findings of the most recent annual report on sexual assault in the military. If confirmed, I will ensure these programs have the support and

resources they need to succeed and continue making progress.

**If confirmed, what would you do to increase focus on the prevention of sexual assaults?**

If confirmed, I will continue the emphasis on addressing problematic behaviors before they escalate and focus on evidenced-based prevention programs. I will review the Department of the Navy's current prevention strategies and prioritize data-driven initiatives that leverage behavioral science and lessons learned from both civilian and military sectors. I will encourage the implementation of tailored prevention strategies to reduce harmful behaviors by equipping leaders at all levels with the skills and resources necessary to quickly address emerging behaviors that are harmful and set conditions for healthy climates.

**What is your view of the necessity of affording a victim both restricted and unrestricted options to report sexual harassment?**

Statistics seem to indicate that sexual harassment may be underreported. I am committed, if confirmed, to look more closely at this issue. I believe the Department of the Navy should explore available avenues to eliminate barriers for Sailors, Marines and civilians to come forward and report sexual harassment. Ensuring sexual harassment victims have options for reporting fosters trust in the system and encourages survivors to come forward.

**Domestic Violence and Child Abuse in Navy and Marine Corps Families**

**What is your understanding of the extent of domestic violence and child abuse in the Navy and Marine Corps, and, if confirmed, what actions would you take to address these issues?**

Domestic violence and child abuse have lasting consequences for military families, negatively impact the readiness and resilience of the total force and are unacceptable. My understanding is that data concerning these cases is reflective of national trends. Understanding the unique pressures of deployment, extended family separations, and warfighting is vital to addressing these issues. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to improve victim safety, ensure access to available resources and reporting options, and promote help-seeking behaviors of Sailors, Marines, civilian personnel, and their families.

**In your view, what more can the Navy and Marine Corps do to prevent child abuse and domestic and intimate partner violence?**

If confirmed, I will focus on promoting the health, safety, and well-being of Navy and Marine Corps members and their families. I will ensure leaders prioritize efforts to strengthen the resiliency of our warfighters and emphasize the importance of seeking help and encourage early intervention.

**Whistleblower Protection**

**Section 1034 of title 10, U.S. Code, prohibits taking or threatening to take an unfavorable personnel action against a member of the armed forces in retaliation for making a**



**protected communication. Section 2302 of title 5, U.S. Code, provides similar protections to Federal civilian employees. By definition, protected communications include communications to certain individuals and organizations outside of the chain of command, including the Congress.**

**If confirmed, what actions would you take to ensure that sailors, Marines, and civilian employees of the Department of the Navy who report fraud, waste, and abuse, or gross mismanagement to appropriate authorities within or outside the chain of command, are protected from reprisal and retaliation, including from the very highest levels of the Executive Branch?**

I fully appreciate the important role that whistleblowers play in combatting fraud, waste, abuse, and gross mismanagement. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Department of the Navy abides by the applicable laws, regulations, and rules regarding whistleblower disclosures and protections; reprisal allegations are properly investigated; and appropriate administrative or disciplinary actions are taken against personnel who engage in illegal reprisal or retaliation.

### **Joint Officer Management**

**What modifications, if any, would you recommend to Junior Qualified Officer (JQO) prerequisites necessary to ensure that military officers are able to attain both meaningful joint and Service-specific leadership experience, as well as adequate professional development?**

From my experience in the private sector, leaders capable of thinking and working beyond siloed responsibilities can play an outsized role in advancing strategic objectives. If confirmed, I will consult with the Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the Marine Corps to assess the needs, benefits, and challenges of joint qualification requirements. I understand Joint Professional Military Education opportunities are intended to ensure the Navy and Marine Corps provide competent, well-educated, and qualified officers capable of operating in the joint force and the Service echelon commands. If changes to joint qualification requirements are necessary, I will work with the Secretary of Defense to propose statutory and/or policy changes as appropriate.

**What are your ideas for improving the JQO system better to meet the needs of reserve component officers?**

The Navy and Marine Corps Reserves are critical components of the Total Force and are integrated into current Joint Training Requirements. We will continue to prioritize Joint integration and innovative solutions to ensure the Reserve Components continue to receive the training needed to operate in the Joint environment. I am not aware of any modifications that are needed at this time. However, should present circumstances change, I will review the new information available and solicit the advice and views of relevant individuals before making any decision that may come before me on this matter.

**In your view, should the requirement to be a JQO be eliminated as a consideration in selecting officers for promotion and assignment?**

I believe the joint qualification requirement as a consideration in selecting officers for promotion and assignment has historically provided the Navy and Marine Corps with a highly qualified cadre of officers capable of working strategically with cross-Service partners. If confirmed, I will consult with the Services to assess the need for, as well as benefits and challenges of, joint qualification requirements for promotion and assignment. Should change be warranted, I will work with appropriate stakeholders to address that need.

### **Officer Promotion Policies and Processes**

#### **In your judgment, how effective are the Navy and Marine Corps at identifying, promoting, and rewarding top performers?**

I understand Navy and Marine Corps promotion selection board processes, informed by the performance evaluation system, are designed to select the very best of fully qualified officers for promotion. These processes should be fair, objective, and merit based. If confirmed, I will require regular review of these processes to ensure they are effective in building a capable, ready, and lethal force.

#### **Similarly, how effective are the Navy and Marine Corps at identifying and removing underperforming or counterproductive servicemembers?**

It is my understanding that both Services have mechanisms in place to identify and, when necessary, remove underperforming and/or counterproductive members. Such individuals are identified by their reporting seniors in the annual performance evaluation process, resulting in direct inputs to the promotion selection board process. I am committed, if confirmed, to reviewing these policies and procedures to ensure they are aligned with the principles of retaining the best talent and restoring lethality and deterrence.

#### **In your view, what should be done to improve Navy and Marine Corps talent management, both in the Active and Reserve Components?**

If confirmed, I will look closely at this issue. I understand both the Navy and Marine Corps are currently modernizing their talent management systems. I will assess, in consultation with the Services, whether any additional authorities and flexibilities are needed to optimize the development, evaluation, assignment, selection, and promotion of high-performing, high-potential Sailors and Marines who can outthink and outfight any adversary.

#### **If confirmed, how would you ensure compliance with the requirements of law and regulation regarding the investigation and promotion board consideration of adverse and reportable information in the context of both general and flag officer and O-6 and below promotion selection processes?**

It is my understanding the law and DON policy provide the parameters to ensure promotion boards properly consider adverse and reportable information in the selection process. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Department of the Navy continues to adhere to these directives. I also will consult with the Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the

Marine Corps to review mechanisms for holding leaders accountable. Accountability is essential to restoring lethality and rebuilding an effective fighting force.

**Do you believe Navy and Marine Corps procedures and practices for reviewing the records of officers pending the President's nomination for promotion or assignment are sufficient to enable fully-informed decisions by the Secretary of the Navy, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, and the President?**

I understand the procedures and practices for reviewing the records of officers pending nomination for promotion are robust and include collaboration with appropriate investigatory agencies to identify any adverse or reportable information concerning selected officers. If confirmed, I will consider, in consultation with the Service Chiefs, whether any improvements are necessary to ensure promotion and assignment decisions are based on merit.

**In your view, are these procedures and practices fair to the individual military officers proceeding through the promotion or assignment process? Please explain your answer.**

I understand promotion and assignment processes are designed to ensure the right personnel are placed in the right roles. If confirmed, I will review these processes to verify that they are fair and merit-based and will be vigilant in identifying opportunities for improvement.

### **Professional Military Education (PME)**

**What is your view of the Commandant of the Marine Corps' proposal to replace "non-observed academic fitness reports" with an evaluation that documents how well a Marine did at a professional school, assigns the Marine a class rank, and differentiates high-performing Marines from low performers?**

If confirmed, I will seek a briefing on this practice. It is my understanding that the Marine Corps introduced observed academic fitness reports in 2020. I have not formed an opinion on this matter and will consult with the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

**What changes or reform would you recommend to the PME system to ensure that tomorrow's leaders have the intellectual acumen, military leadership proficiency, and emotional maturity necessary to ensure the Navy and Marine Corps meet the national defense objectives of the future?**

I am committed to review this matter if confirmed. I believe that professional military education could be improved through use of cutting-edge technologies, expansion of joint-service training, and emphasis on critical thinking and strategic decision-making. These reforms will ensure our leaders are intellectually equipped and strategically proficient to meet current and future national defense objectives. I will consult with the Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of Marine Corps to review, explore, and implement necessary changes and reforms.

### **Department of the Navy Civilian Personnel Workforce**

**In your judgment, what is the biggest challenge facing the Navy and Marine Corps in effectively and efficiently managing their civilian workforce?**

I believe the biggest challenge facing the Navy and Marine Corps in effectively and efficiently managing their civilian workforce is work underway right now to size this workforce appropriately to meet the Department of the Navy's most pressing missions. We cannot afford an oversized civilian workforce working on the wrong things. If confirmed, I am committed to working with leaders across the Department of Defense to build and sustain a lean and highly technical civilian workforce that contributes directly to readiness and lethality of our naval forces.

**In your view, do Navy supervisors have adequate authorities to address and remediate employee misconduct and poor duty performance, and ultimately to divest of a civilian employee who fails to meet requisite standards of conduct and performance?**

It is my understanding there are adequate authorities to take various informal and formal corrective actions, such as suspensions and removals, but they appear to be overly burdensome and time-consuming. If confirmed, working with Congress and leaders across the Department of Defense, I would explore ways to streamline the disciplinary process.

**What recommendations do you have to improve DOD's management of its civilian workforce?**

The Department of the Navy's highly technical civilian workforce plays a vital role in supporting warfighting readiness, contributing to Department of Defense mission capabilities and operational effectiveness. Our civilians are able partners with our warfighters, and essential to maintaining the strength of the all-volunteer force. As we right size and refocus the civilian workforce, we must likewise commit to a campaign to recruit America's best talent to public service.

**What do you see as the impact of the Navy civilian workforce on Navy and Department of Defense missions? Are there "health metrics" that the Navy is or could be using to help ensure that the civilian workforce is adequately sized for all of the tasks assigned to it?**

The civilian workforce plays a critical role in mission readiness. Within the Department of the Navy, civilians provide continuity and expertise to our Sailors and Marines, and many of them are veterans themselves. It is my understanding the Department conducts workforce analysis to determine civilian and military staffing requirements for peacetime and mobilization operations. I also understand that the Department has been advancing data-driven decision-making regarding workforce composition, readiness, and allocation. If confirmed, I will review existing metrics and drive improvements.

**In what ways does the Navy civilian workforce take on tasks that would otherwise have to be done by military personnel, and thus taking them away from their core warfighting functions?**

The civilian workforce primarily relieves military personnel of non-core duties by managing business, technical, and logistical support functions, such as base maintenance, IT systems

management, acquisition of major weapon systems and other supplies and services, financial operations, human resources, research and development, and specialized technical expertise in areas like engineering, medicine, law, and cybersecurity. Civilian trades make up the bulk of the workforce responsible for major repair and overhaul of platforms and weapons systems. Additionally, civilian mariners are filling operational missions that augment and enable the warfighters to deter threat. The Department's alignment of work ensures that Sailors and Marines can prioritize combat readiness, mission execution, and strategic defense operations.

### **Congressional Oversight**

**In order to exercise legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress receive timely testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information from the executive branch.**

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to appear and testify before this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to provide this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs such witnesses and briefers, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information, as may be requested of you, and to do so in a timely manner? Please answer with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to consult with this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs, regarding your basis for any delay or denial in providing testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information requested of you? Please answer with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to keep this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs apprised of new information that materially impacts the accuracy of testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information you or your organization previously provided? Please answer with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to provide this**

**committee and its subcommittees with records and other information within their oversight jurisdiction, even absent a formal Committee request? Please answer with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to respond timely to letters to, and/or inquiries and other requests of you or your organization from individual Senators who are members of this committee? Please answer with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to ensure that you and other members of your organization protect from retaliation any military member, federal employee, or contractor employee who testifies before, or communicates with this committee, its subcommittees, and any other appropriate committee of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.**

Yes