Senate Armed Services Committee
Advance Policy Questions for HON Hung Cao
Nominee to be Secretary of the Navy

Duties and Responsibilities as Secretary of the Navy

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

The duties and responsibilities for the Secretary of the Navy are established in section 8013 of Title 10 to conduct the affairs of the Department of the Navy (DON). These primarily call upon the Secretary to ensure Navy and Marine Corps personnel are properly trained, equipped, and ready to defend the Nation's interests, prioritizing budgets, strengthening shipbuilding, and enhancing the welfare of Sailors, Marines, and their families.

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

My leadership approach is forged through 32 years of service in uniform as a Special Operations and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) officer, private sector executive, and most recently my service as Under Secretary and Acting Secretary of the Navy.

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

Pursuant to 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 of the Navy, which carries the primary responsibility for the business operations of the Department. If confirmed, I will ensure the duties and responsibilities assigned to the Under Secretary will afford the necessary redundancy with the Secretary of the Navy given we are a warfighting organization.

4. 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 and the Commandant of the Marine Corps?

Pursuant to Title 10, and as members of the Department of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps perform their duties under the authority, direction, and control of the Secretary of the Navy. If confirmed, I will review the responsibilities of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to ensure the Department is the most effectively and efficiently aligned to meet its statutory responsibilities towards facilitating battle force and warfighter readiness.

5. 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 am committed to working with Congress so that we can find the most innovative and efficient ways to operate the Department of the Navy. We must continue to engage with industry to deliver the capabilities our warfighters need to fight and win on the future battlefield and come home safe. We must expand our maritime capacity by investing in the maritime workforce and shipyard construction modernization, encourage small business and public-private partnerships, and maintain a resilient supply chain that will endure in contested logistic environments.

Conflicts of Interest

Federal ethics laws, to include 18 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.

6. 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?

I agree to comply with all conflicts of interest disclosure requirements set forth in the Ethics in Government Act and implementing regulations.

7. 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?

I agree to comply with all recusal requirements under 18 U.S.C. § 208 and implementing regulations.

8. 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?

I commit to deciding matters on the merits based on the public interest, without regard to any private gain or personal benefit.

Major Challenges and Priorities

9. What do you consider to be the most significant challenges facing the Department of the Navy as you assume the responsibilities of Secretary of the Navy?

Increasing the size and readiness of the fleet, strengthening the maritime and defense industrial base, and providing more capabilities and capacity to our warfighters.

10. What are your priorities for addressing each of these challenges, and what specific actions and timelines would you establish during your first year as Secretary?

My three key priorities are: taking care of our Sailors, Marines, and workforce; advancing shipbuilding and defense industrial base; defending our homeland.

For taking care of our people, we must ensure every decision is made with them at the forefront for today, tomorrow and the future.

For shipbuilding capacity and our maritime workforce, we must bring about a more competitive U.S. maritime sector, expanded domestic manufacturing and supply chains, increase opportunities for private investment, and bolster maritime workforce recruiting, training, and retention. Andll these efforts contribute to defending our homeland.

11. How would you measure progress against those priorities, and what metrics would you use to determine whether the Department is improving readiness and advancing its long-term objectives?

We are measuring progress with outcomes. Across all lines of effort, the scorecard for what we deliver can be measured by our ability to complete the mission. Shortening delivery times for shipbuilding and improving quality of life for our workforce with investments in infrastructure are just two examples. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to also ensure we are improving readiness and advancing long term objectives.

The Department of the Navy must balance near-term readiness requirements with the need to modernize the force and prepare for sustained high-end conflict.

12. If confirmed, how would you balance the need to restore and sustain near-term readiness with investments in shipbuilding, aircraft, weapons, unmanned systems, infrastructure, the industrial base, and other capabilities necessary to maintain the Navy and Marine Corps' long-term competitive advantage?

If confirmed, my approach will prioritize Fleet readiness first, ensuring deploying ships and squadrons are fully manned, properly maintained, and loaded with necessary stores, parts, and munitions. Concurrently, we will modernize through smart, high-leverage investments—such as inserting mature, commercial off-the-shelf technologies, expanding our high-low mix of attritable unmanned systems, and utilizing modular software-defined systems. We will protect science and technology research and innovations while eliminating excessive and redundant overhead to reinvest savings into our maritime industrial base and shipbuilding accounts.

13. What metrics and data do you use to make tradeoffs across readiness and modernization, including how to better inform risk analysis and budgetary tradeoffs across these priorities?

I will utilize data-informed analytics, Naval Warfare Development Center wargaming, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab simulations, and Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation portfolio analyses. Specific data streams will include depot maintenance cycle times, supply chain part-shortage lead times, platform operating and support (O&S) costs versus capability gain, and operational risk assessments. When tradeoffs are required, I will make decisions informed by one standard: whether the investment maximizes warfighting lethality.

14. How would you ensure that the Department's budget, acquisition decisions, force structure, and readiness priorities remain aligned with the National Defense Strategy and the operational requirements identified by the combatant commanders?

I will maintain continuous engagement with leaders throughout the Department, the Joint Staff, and Combatant Commanders. I will maintain alignment of our Program Objective Memorandum directly to the operational problems identified in Combatant Commander Theater Campaign Plans, to ensure our resources fund real-world warfighting capability. I will actively involve the CNO and CMC in setting acquisition requirements to prevent requirements creep and ensure programs transition rapidly from concept to operational fielding.

15. What would you identify as the most significant readiness risks facing the Navy and Marine Corps today, and what actions would you take during your tenure to address them?

The most significant readiness risks facing the Navy and Marine Corps include maintenance delays, deferred maintenance, and a constrained industrial base capacity. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to identify and address the principal drivers of readiness risk through clear metrics and accountability, improved maintenance planning and execution, targeted investments in public and private repair capacity, strengthened supply support, and disciplined modernization. My priority will be to ensure the force is properly maintained, trained, equipped, and able to meet current operational demands while preserving the surge capacity and future capability required for major contingencies.

16. How would you ensure that the Department is prepared to deter, and if necessary, prevail in a major conflict with the People's Republic of China while maintaining the ability to respond to other global contingencies?

The DON must provide combat-ready Navy and Marine Corps forces to deter Chinese aggression and, if necessary, prevail while retaining the flexibility to respond to other contingencies. If confirmed, I would prioritize fleet readiness, modernization, shipbuilding, and the industrial capacity needed to sustain operations. This includes contractual reforms incentivizing our shipbuilders to deliver faster and on budget while modernizing our shipyard repair capacity. I would also strengthen burden-sharing with allies and partners and align DON resources with the National Defense Strategy.

17. What specific steps would you take to ensure that the Navy and Marine Corps can sustain high-end joint and combined operations in a contested environment,

including with respect to munitions, maintenance, logistics, command and control, distributed operations, and industrial-base capacity?

If confirmed, I will work to ensure the Navy and Marine Corps are prepared to sustain high-end joint and combined operations by strengthening the readiness and resilience of the naval force. This includes improving munitions availability, maintenance execution, logistics capacity, command-and-control resilience, and the ability to operate in a distributed manner with joint and allied forces. I will prioritize investments in the public and private industrial base, supply-chain resilience, and forward sustainment, while using clear readiness metrics to identify and address gaps before they affect operational capability.

18. How would you assess whether the Department is making sufficient progress in preparing the force for a high-end conflict, and what indicators would you use to determine whether additional corrective action is required?

To assess progress on our preparation for a high-end conflict should be measured by our ability to change the way the Department of the Navy does business. Specifically, we need to assess how we are executing Navy-wide acquisitions to enhance industry access with lowered barriers for transactions. We need to assess the reforms to requirements to ensure they are clear and stable. And we should assess our structure to speed up delivery by creating single, accountable officials, streamlining to simplify our way of business.

Identifying and Addressing Systemic Problems

The Department of the Navy has conducted numerous investigations, reviews, and studies following major accidents and operational failures. These reviews have frequently identified systemic problems and issued recommendations intended to address underlying causes rather than individual incidents.

19. If confirmed, what process would you establish to ensure that significant findings and recommendations from Navy and Marine Corps investigations, independent reviews, and oversight organizations are tracked to completion?

The Navy has established the Office of Warfighting Advantage (OWA) to review and catalog significant risks to warfighting readiness and quality of service for Sailors and Marines. OWA integrates findings from existing Department of the Navy oversight organizations and assessment processes, including the Naval Inspector General (NAVIG), Naval Audit, Safety Command, Board of Inspection and Survey and Fleet Improvement Offices. If confirmed, I will continue to drive progress towards correction of deficiencies, and risk reduction efforts through these processes.

20. Who should be accountable for ensuring that corrective actions are implemented, and how would you ensure that senior leaders remain accountable when recommendations are not implemented on schedule?

The Secretary of the Navy is ultimately responsible for ensuring corrective actions are implemented. SECNAV, in collaboration with the CNO and CMC, will hold Commanders accountable. By evaluating needs, required actions, and monetary impact for each planned course of action – command leadership should be able to more effectively and rapidly implement actions with core milestones to meet objectives.

21. How would you determine whether an action has actually corrected the underlying systemic problem rather than simply satisfying the requirement to complete a recommendation?

If confirmed, I would rely on entities such as NAVIG to help identify measurable, outcome-based effectiveness through evidence to support routine oversight and ensure corrective actions was effective.

22. What role should independent organizations, including the Naval Inspector General, the Department of Defense Inspector General, and the Government Accountability Office, play in assessing whether corrective actions have been effective?

Organizations including NAVIG, Naval Audit, DoW IG, and GAO, are critical to credibility and accountability. External oversight plays a key role ensuring concerns are identified early and corrective actions implemented are effective.

23. How would you ensure that lessons learned from major incidents are disseminated throughout the Fleet and incorporated into training, doctrine, requirements, acquisition programs, and operational practices?

If confirmed, I will continue to foster a culture of collaborative learning to embrace problem solving and adopt improved operational processes. The DON must stay agile and relevant to an adaptive enemy that may train to delay and disrupt our force generation in the homeland or abroad. We must incentivize command behaviors that promote problem-solving and enable the sharing of effective solutions across the fleet.

In the fallout of the Glenn Defense Marine Asia (GDMA) scandal, numerous Naval officers, including a significant number of 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.

24. What is your assessment of the ethical climate in the Navy?

The Department of the Navy is committed to safeguarding its most important assets – people, resources, and trust from the American people. There has been renewed commitment to ensuring the highest levels of accountability and integrity at every rank. Leaders are encouraged to model ethical behavior with a "tone from the top" approach,

while younger Sailors, Marines and civilians are directed to report cases of ethical failure without hesitation.

25. 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?

To my knowledge, following the GDMA scandal the Department of the Navy conducted a thorough review of its ethics and professionalism programs to ensure the Department maximized all available resources to emphasize ethics training for all Department personnel throughout their careers. In addition to training requirements identified in 5 C.F.R. § 2638 Subpart C, the Department also provides in-depth ethics and professionalism training at the Senior Leaders Legal Course, which is required for all prospective commanding officers, executive officers, and command master chiefs. The Naval War College established the College of Leadership and Ethics and flag officers, general officers, and senior executives receive ethics training at various executive symposiums throughout the year. If confirmed, I intend to work closely and collaboratively with our senior leaders to ensure we continue to drive ethical and professional leadership.

26. Please describe the steps the Navy has taken to train its personnel at each stage in their career on Government ethics and standards of conduct.

I understand that the Department has several avenues by which senior officials, service members and civilians receive ethics and professionalism training throughout their careers. New flag and general officers are required to attend ethics training, which also extends to members of the Senior Executive Service. Furthermore, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations issues an annual ethics and standards of conduct memo for flag officers. The Marine Corps offers similar training for its general officers and senior executives. Specifically, the Marine Corps hosts a General Officer Offsite and an Executive Offsite at least once per fiscal year, where attendees receive annual ethics training. The Navy and Marine Corps provide in-depth ethics and professionalism training at various stages of career development for uniform and civilians, which emphasis on prospective commanding officers, executive officers, and senior enlisted leaders.

Each employee or service member that is new to the Department receives initial ethics training that meets the Office of Government Ethics regulatory requirements. Additionally, any service member or civilian who is required to file an Office of Government Ethics financial disclosure report must complete interactive annual ethics training. The Office of the Assistant General Counsel for Ethics develops annual interactive on-line training that is available to all Department employees and meets the Office of Government Ethics annual training regulatory requirements. Many commands

require annual in person ethics training for all employees. In addition to initial and annual ethics training, the Navy offers specialized ethics training for specific groups, when requested. Finally, as part of career transition, all personnel are afforded pre-separation ethics briefs that includes a review of post-Government employment conflict of interest restrictions on their future employment.

Navy and Marine Corps Readiness

27. How would you balance the Navy and Marine Corps' near-term operational demands with the need to generate sufficient readiness, maintenance capacity, 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 and defend the homeland. Our Sailors and Marines deserve a lethal, modern fighting force, and I believe this will be achieved through disciplined, 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 industrial base to ensure the Navy can surge to meet increased demands when necessary.

28. What is your assessment of the Navy's current force-generation and deployment model? What changes, if any, would you make to ensure the Navy can meet combatant commander requirements while preserving sufficient time for maintenance, training, modernization, and recovery?

Based on lessons learned in support of operations, the Navy is reviewing and modifying the current force generation model to better meet Combatant Commander requirements. The Navy must generate, employ, regenerate, and sustain combat-credible forces in an environment characterized by strategic competition, compressed decision timelines, contested logistics, and the prospect of protracted high-end warfare. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring our legacy deployment-centric operational cycles meet the mark so we have a continuous, adaptive, and combat-focused force generation model that maximizes the Navy's ability to provide ready forces.

29. To what extent has the Navy's current deployments and force-generation model improved the predictability and sustainability of rotational deployments? What additional changes are necessary to reduce disruptions to deployment schedules and improve readiness over the long term?

The Navy's current force generation model has not changed its predictability and ability to generate forces for on-time deployments in support of Combatant Commander requirements. This allows personnel to plan well in advance when they will be deployed. Leveraging lessons learned in support of operations, the Navy is reviewing and modifying the current force generation model to more efficiently manage predictability and sustainability of rotational deployments. We are replacing the legacy deployment centric operational cycle with a continuous, adaptive, and combat-focused force

generation model to respond to crisis, generate combat power, and sustain operations. This will be accomplished via waterfront-driven design, objective readiness assessment, standardized certification criteria, and performance-to-plan barrier removal. This will allow the Navy to improve our readiness, have force package flexibility, more efficiently train and certify, and maintain a more resilient command and control architecture.

30. The Navy continues to face significant maintenance demands across the fleet, including challenges associated with aging ships, maintenance backlogs, shipyard capacity, and competing operational requirements. If confirmed, what would be your priorities for reducing maintenance backlogs and increasing the availability of ships and other naval forces?

If confirmed, my priorities for reducing backlogs and increasing the availability of naval forces will be to improve maintenance planning and execution; reduce delays caused by material, parts, and contract-change issues; and strengthen public and private shipyard capacity and workforce. I would focus on completing maintenance availabilities on time and to the required standard, reducing deferred maintenance, and aligning operational schedules with realistic maintenance and modernization requirements. I would also use clear readiness metrics and accountability to focus resources on the platforms and capabilities most critical to Fleet readiness and surge capacity.

31. Can you identify specific areas where artificial intelligence or data-driven decision making can support more informed decisions related to maintenance and logistics backlogs?

Super intelligence and data-driven decision making can improve maintenance and logistics outcomes by helping the Navy identify emerging equipment issues, forecast material and repair requirements, prioritize maintenance actions, and better manage shipyard workloads and supply-chain risk. These tools can support predictive maintenance, improve visibility into the status of parts and repairs, and help leaders assess the readiness effects of maintenance delays and resource decisions. If confirmed, I would support their responsible use alongside the technical expertise and judgment of Navy maintainers, engineers, logisticians, and commanders.

32. How would you prioritize maintenance requirements when operational demand, depot and shipyard capacity, modernization requirements, and available funding exceed the Navy's ability to address them simultaneously?

When requirements exceed available capacity and funding, the Navy must prioritize maintenance based on operational necessity, safety, strategic risk, readiness impact, and the need to preserve future force-generation capacity. If confirmed, I would work with Navy leadership to make those tradeoffs transparently, using disciplined planning and clear metrics to protect the readiness of forces needed for current operations and contingency response. I would also seek to avoid false economies by ensuring that deferred maintenance decisions account for their long-term effects on cost, availability, safety, and service life.

33. Given the operational tempo required to meet current combatant commander demands, are the Navy and Marine Corps achieving sustainable deployment and dwell-time ratios? If not, what specific actions would you take to improve dwell time and ensure that operational demand does not come at the expense of long-term readiness and retention?

Sustained operational demand can place pressure on deployment and dwell-time ratios, with potential effects on maintenance, training, personnel readiness, and retention. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to monitor these impacts closely and align deployment schedules with realistic maintenance and training requirements. I would prioritize predictable force-generation cycles, adequate depot and shipyard capacity, and disciplined management of operational demand to preserve both near-term readiness and the long-term health of the force.

34. What metrics would you use to assess whether the Navy and Marine Corps are generating sustainable readiness? How would you ensure those metrics account not only for current operational availability, but also for maintenance, training, modernization, personnel readiness, and the ability to surge forces during a major contingency?

I would assess sustainable readiness through a balanced set of measures that includes operational availability, maintenance completion and backlog trends, equipment mission-capable rates, training and certification status, personnel manning and qualification levels, munitions and logistics readiness, modernization progress, and surge capacity. These measures should be reviewed together rather than in isolation, so that near-term force availability is not achieved at the expense of maintenance, training, personnel, or future capability. If confirmed, I will support clear metrics, regular senior-level review, and accountability for addressing identified readiness gaps.

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).

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

If confirmed, my primary standard for measuring the adequacy of funding for the Department of the Navy is the President's Budget (PB) request, which is developed through a rigorous, analytical, and threat-informed process. This process carefully weighs operational risks, industrial base capacities, and strategic imperatives to deliver the most lethal and capable Navy and Marine Corps team possible. The PB27 request represents the definitive, adequate baseline of funding required to posture our forces for great-power competition.

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

people?

We ensure fully supportable resourcing of our dual-service team through a disciplined budget development process. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to strengthen our maritime industrial base to secure our supply chains and accelerate shipyard throughput, expedite modernization and lethality, and enhance operational readiness for today's fleet. Crucially, we must invest in building the Force of the Future by recruiting and retaining the highly specialized, technically skilled Marines and Sailors we need in contested environments. Finally, as reflected in PB27, we must take care of our Sailors and Marines by aggressively funding unaccompanied housing, including the Commandant's Barracks 2030 initiative, and transforming our installations into resilient power projection platforms. This balanced model ensures our modernization plans never outpace our ability to support our people and deploy a lethal, globally responsive naval expeditionary force.

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.

37. 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, if confirmed, I will fully support the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps in timely providing their Unfunded Priorities Lists to Congress. While these lists are submitted directly by the Service Chiefs as required by law, I want to emphasize that the Chief of Naval Operations, the Commandant, and I are in lockstep alignment on the strategic priorities of the Department of the Navy. Our collaborative budget development process ensures we have a unified vision of what is needed to man, train, equip, and enhance our force. If confirmed, I will continue to work side-by-side with our Service Chiefs to ensure that any unfunded requirements identified to Congress are clearly understood, strategically aligned, and ready to be converted directly into immediate combat capability.

Alliances and Partnerships

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

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

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. The DON's role centers on securing the global maritime commons, deterring aggression, and ensuring that combined

international maritime forces can operate seamlessly as a unified network across all domains. If confirmed, I will engage with allies and partners to enhance interoperability and ensure that our naval partnerships are fully utilized to advance maritime security.

39. 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?

Today, our shared security depends on all elements of our power. We need strong militaries, strong economies, strong industrial bases, secure supply chains, and above all, strong and capable partners. The National Defense Strategy highlights burden-sharing as a key tenet for our international partnerships, to shoulder a fair share of collective security. If confirmed, I will ensure the Department of Navy continues to support the NDS priorities and remains actively engaged with partners and allies to foster operational interoperability and prioritize deepening industrial cooperation with nations that actively meet defense spending targets, reject protectionist policies that artificially restrict defense trade, and invest their own capital in procuring American capabilities and building a more resilient industrial base.

Indo-Pacific Region

40. 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?

The Department must improve readiness, modernize weapons and platforms, strengthen forward posture and supporting infrastructure, and expand the industrial capacity needed to deliver and sustain naval forces. If confirmed, I would focus on timely maintenance, shipbuilding, munitions production, and recruiting and retaining our Sailors and Marines. I would also strengthen cooperation with allies and partners to increase burden-sharing and provide the Joint Force with the capabilities and capacity required to establish a strong denial defense along the First Island Chain. deter Chinese aggression and, if necessary, prevail in conflict.

41. 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?

The Department of the Navy is acutely aware of the challenge posed by the People's Republic of China's rapidly expanding, multi-domain missile inventory, including conventional ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and an increasingly sophisticated hypersonic arsenal. These capabilities are explicitly designed to challenge freedom of navigation, target our forward facilities, and contest our operational access across the Pacific.

I have full confidence in the warfighting capability, adaptability, and lethality of the United States Navy and Marine Corps. We are preparing for and confronting this threat

through aggressive investments, modernized posture, and operational evolution. Rather than relying on static, concentrated footprints, our naval forces are operationalizing concepts such as Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO). By operating as a dispersed, mobile, and highly networked fleet across littoral terrain, we significantly complicate adversary targeting while maximizing survivability. Concurrently, the Department is prioritizing Integrated Air and Missile Defense, mobile long-range fires, fielding next-generation interceptors, directed energy, and advanced electronic warfare, while hardening forward airfields, ports, and critical infrastructure alongside our regional allies.

While our strategic initiatives have substantially strengthened our deterrence and tactical posture, sustaining our competitive advantage requires relentless focus, expanded domestic munition inventories, and resilient command-and-control. If confirmed, I will ensure our Sailors and Marines maintain the asymmetric warfighting edge required to deter aggression and prevail in conflict.

42. 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 believe providing resources to conduct forward operations, securing greater access and logistics to operate forward, and developing the right force posture in the 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. And C5ISRT is a crucial piece to this. 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 Pacific. If confirmed, I will thoroughly examine this issue to ensure the Department of the Navy's investments are properly prioritized.

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

The Department of the Navy is keenly aware the People's Liberation Army would seek to sever our maritime resupply architecture and degrade operational endurance in conflict. Logistics is the pacing factor for sustainment in the Pacific.

I am confident in the Navy's ability to ensure persistent combat power, and contested logistics is among my highest strategic priorities. The Department is actively preparing for the operational realities of a contested theater. To ensure dispersed surface action groups and Marine Littoral Regiments operating under DMO and EABO do not deplete critical ordnance, fuel, and spare parts, we are executing focused initiatives across three core lines of effort:

1. Hardening and Diversification,
2. Next-Generation Connectors, and

3. Pre-Positioning & Partnerships.

If confirmed, I will work aggressively with Congress to accelerate the modernization of our strategic sealift fleet and secure our critical defense supply chains.

44. 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?

As sovereign American soil, Guam serves as an indispensable operational anchor and power projection platform in the Second Island Chain. In any potential conflict with the PRC, Guam will play a vital role as the central hub for forward naval repair and resupply, undersea operations, long-range aviation staging, munition distribution, and joint theater sustainment.

Guam maintains vital foundational capabilities with the legacy shore footprint infrastructure requiring investments and improvements. To directly address this, the Department is preparing and executing multi-service modernization efforts aligned with U.S. Pacific Command operational requirements to adequately support the high-tempo sustainment and defeat the potential saturation attacks associated with a high-end fight. If confirmed, I will maintain rigorous oversight to ensure all infrastructure investments on Guam are delivered swiftly and validated directly against theater combat architectures.

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

Unmanned systems 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 , attritable, scalable, and resilient capabilities. By providing persistent surveillance, intelligence gathering, denial capabilities, 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. Leveraging unique and disruptive unmanned systems in an integrated force is a critical component of our capability to deter and, if necessary, prevail in conflict against a peer competitor like China which enjoys a numeric advantage.

Europe

46. 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 and ready to advance America's national security interests and to support the President's policy of peace through strength. The Navy and Marine Corps must provide the Joint Force with ready, survivable, sustainable, and interoperable maritime forces able to

contribute to deterrence and, if necessary, collective defense. In the European theater, our approach must be grounded in a sustainable division of responsibilities: Canadian and European NATO Allies should take primary responsibility for the conventional defense of Europe, while the United States continues to provide extended nuclear deterrence, maintains readiness to meet its Article V commitments, and contributes focused conventional capabilities where they are most needed. For the Department of the Navy, key priorities include improving fleet readiness and availability; strengthening maritime logistics, sealift, resupply, repair, and munitions capacity; maintaining undersea and anti-submarine warfare advantages; improving integrated air and missile defense; increasing interoperability, training, planning, and exercises with Allies; and strengthening the defense industrial base needed to sustain maritime operations. These efforts should enable the Navy and Marine Corps to support NATO deterrence and defense while ensuring U.S. forces remain postured for global requirements, including the defense of the homeland, the Western Hemisphere, and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific

47. 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?

Yes. If confirmed, I would prioritize investments that improve the Department of the Navy's ability to detect, attribute, resist, and respond to malign activity below the threshold of direct conflict, while preserving focus on warfighting readiness and the most consequential requirements of the Joint Force. Priority areas include resilient cyber defenses and mission assurance; secure and resilient command, control, communications, and information systems; maritime domain awareness and intelligence sharing; counter-disinformation and operational information support, as appropriate and consistent with law and policy; anti-submarine warfare; and scalable unmanned and autonomous systems, advanced sensors, and precision munitions. The Department should also pursue artificial intelligence-enabled decision advantage and resilient software and data architectures that improve the speed, accuracy, and survivability of maritime operations. Equally important, the Navy should strengthen allied and partner capacity through practical combined training, exercises, operational planning, information sharing, and interoperability. These activities should help Allies develop the capabilities needed to assume primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense and improve the Alliance's ability to deter and respond to coercion, sabotage, cyber activity, and other hybrid threats.

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

The Department of the Navy's posture in Europe is being rigorously examined as part of the Department's broader EUCOM Force Posture Review to emphasize that European Allies should assume primary responsibility for the conventional defense of Europe. The United States will continue to provide extended nuclear deterrence, maintain forces ready to meet Article V commitments, train, exercise, and plan alongside Allies, and provide focused conventional capabilities that contribute to NATO's defense. If confirmed, I will work with Department leadership, the combatant commanders, the Joint Staff, and Allies to implement naval posture against evolving threats, operational requirements, readiness, sustainment, interoperability, and the need to position the Joint Force for simultaneous or opportunistic challenges across theaters. I would not prejudge the outcome of ongoing

posture reviews; however, the objective should be a credible, durable, and European-led conventional defense of the continent that preserves the Navy's ability to meet global mission requirements.

Europe taking primary responsibility for its own conventional defense.

Middle East

The war with Iran continues to tax the capacity to forward deploy naval forces.

49. If confirmed, what would you do to ensure that naval forces are not faced with overextended deployments in supporting the Iranian conflict?

Recent operations have allowed the Department to examine how supply and demand apply to crisis and conflict. To maintain the flow of forces, we must reinvigorate the defense industrial base to increase repair capacity and maintenance performance, thus increasing the availability of forces. Recent positive trends at Norfolk Naval Shipyard are an indicator of improved performance, which can be replicated at other public shipyards. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for our Sailors and Marines who face potential deployment extensions, and I will work closely with them and their families to ensure transparency when schedules change to support Combatant Commander requirements.

50. What steps would you take to maintain appropriate commercial activity is maintained in the Persian Gulf?

Maintaining the safe passage of lawful maritime commerce through the Persian Gulf is important to U.S. national security and economic interests. If confirmed, I would ensure the DON provides ready, capable naval forces to support Combatant Commander requirements, consistent with direction from the President and Secretary of War. I would also work with allies and partners to strengthen their contributions to maritime security and deter threats to commercial shipping.

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, and its allies and partners at risk.

51. If confirmed, how would you adjust or augment the current strategy to be more effective to deter and counter Houthi attacks?

If confirmed, I would review lessons from operations against Houthi threats and work with DON leadership to ensure naval forces have the readiness, capabilities, and sustainment needed to support the President's objectives and Combatant Commander requirements. This includes current efforts to: map and dismantle our adversaries supply chains; rapidlygenerate of rapid countermeasures to improve our threat-detection capabilities; and implement a fully integrated sensor network to provide our strike groups and partners a layered defensive shield for operations. I would emphasize timely incorporation of effective and affordable defenses against missile and unmanned threats,

and enhanced burden-sharing with allies and partners to strengthen maritime security.

Recently, you publicly stated that Iran "blew the hell out of Bahrain."

52. If confirmed, how you will communicate these types of losses to Congress?

If confirmed, I remain committed to working collaboratively and transparently with Congress across all issues in our shared mission to the citizens of this great nation.

53. If confirmed, how will you rebalance forces and assets to the Fifth Fleet as a result of the damage to NSA Bahrain?

If confirmed, I will continue working closely with the Office of the Secretary of War, USCENTCOM Commander and the Chief of Naval Operations to ensure our Fifth Fleet posture is resilient, combat-credible, and strategically-aligned. We are applying lessons learned from the impacts to Naval Support Activity Bahrain to evaluate our enduring posture in theater, including nodes in and outside the region. Consistent with the Administration's priorities and broader Department of War requirements, we will optimize Fleet asset apportionment, maintain readiness, deter aggression, and defend freedom of navigation in collaboration with our regional partners.

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.

54. 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 to ensuring the Navy and Marine Corps team functions optimally; our Sailors and Marines deserve no less. The Department of the Navy's acquisition process requires collaboration between the uniformed Services and the Secretariat to provide the best equipment to our forces. The Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps play critical roles in developing capability requirements, identifying trade-offs, and controlling requirements creep. Once capability requirements are set and resources are 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 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.

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

The DON has fully embraced the use of the Middle Tier of Acquisition (MTA) rapid prototyping and rapid fielding pathways. The DON has proven the effectiveness of the MTA pathways, which in my view allows programs that meet the pathways' parameters to start faster and often get capability to the fleet sooner. The MTA pathway also enables the DON to rapidly pivot, if needed, to more promising solution sets.

56. 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. 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.

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

If confirmed, I will scrutinize any barriers to these pathways and will continue to streamline processes. The Department of the Navy (DON) has leaned in significantly to delegate authorities and streamline approvals to minimize unnecessary or unwarranted bureaucratic obstacles.

58. Similarly, how will you prevent rapid acquisition pathways from being abused to reduce competition in the acquisition process, and thus increase the possibilities for future vendor lock?

If confirmed, I will support the appropriate use of rapid acquisition pathways while ensuring they do not become a means to avoid competition or create unnecessary vendor dependence. I would emphasize clear requirements, documented justification for acquisition approaches, early market research, competitive opportunities where practicable, and regular review of outcomes. I would also encourage the use of open architectures, modular design, acquisition of appropriate technical data and associated rights, and transition planning to preserve the Department's ability to sustain, upgrade, and compete capabilities over time.

59. 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 will be committed to sparing no effort in achieving that outcome. That means a mix of innovative technologies, including those provided by non-traditional contractors, 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.

60. What metrics would you use to determine whether the Navy is actually becoming more effective at moving a capability from validated requirement to contract award, production, fielding, and sustained employment, especially in making risk tradeoffs in speed, scale, competition and cost?

If confirmed, I would ensure that the Navy establish a balanced set of lifecycle metrics to assess whether the Navy is moving capabilities from validated requirements to sustained employment more effectively. These metrics could potentially include: time from requirement validation to contract award(s); the extent of competition and appropriate use of rapid acquisition pathways; schedule and unit-cost performance; prototype transition and production throughput; software delivery and quality; operational availability; sustainment costs; and open-architecture implementation. These measures must be considered together: a program that moves quickly but cannot scale, sustain readiness, control cost, or preserve future competition has not made effective risk tradeoffs.

61. 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?

There is 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.

62. What is your assessment of the adequacy with which the Navy has been transitioning non-traditional 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 non-traditional defense contractors?

The Navy recently established the Department of the Navy's Rapid Capability Office (DONRCO), which is focused on pursuing business with non-traditional defense contractors and pursuing capability at the speed of relevancy. If confirmed, I look forward to working with DONRCO, 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 effectively acquire capability from across industry as we face down adversaries in both the distant and near future.

Test and Evaluation

63. 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, middle-tier rapid prototyping and fielding 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.

64. 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 their intended operational environments. Innovative solutions must be identified to bridge this gap, such 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.

65. Do you believe that current Navy test and evaluation facilities and personnel and technical test apparatuses are up to par with 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.

66. 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

67. 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?

The Department has made significant progress toward sustaining or achieving clean opinions across all its financial statements, and I will ensure we finish the job. As Acting Secretary, I have already accelerated the Navy audit opinion, and the Marine Corps is on track for its fourth clean opinion. If confirmed, I will ensure the Department capitalizes on its progress and achieves its audit goals ahead of schedule.

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

The audit is not a "back-office" exercise, it is a warfighting imperative. Reliable financial information enables leaders to make timely, informed decisions and ensures every dollar is accountable to the American people. The work that goes into achieving a clean audit opinion improves our internal processes and controls, makes us more efficient, and gives us confidence in the accuracy of our data. It helps us to see our internal workings from a new vantage point and enables higher quality decisions that impact the lives of Sailors and Marines. When we know with confidence what we have, where it is, in what condition, and at what value, we can make quicker and better decisions to enable operations and sustain our forces.

69. 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?

The accountability system is already in place. On both the civilian and uniformed side of the Department, we have set a strong tone at the top that emphasizes audit readiness as a leadership responsibility. Audit goals are explicitly written into the annual performance plans for our Senior Executive Service leaders. Every major audit challenge has a designated senior leader who owns it, a plan to fix the root cause, and a deadline. We frequently monitor progress through established audit governance forums, using metrics that track progress toward goals and highlight risk areas. If confirmed, I will continue to hold all leaders accountable to correct deficiencies in their respective portfolio.

70. 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?

Audited data is a strategic enabler of effective DON leadership, sound resource management, and mission readiness. By providing reliable and validated data, DON

leadership will have greater confidence and transparency to make informed, timely, and defensible decisions. The leaders can make evidence-based decisions in identifying shortfalls, assessing and managing resources, and establishing priorities for workforce, maintenance, modernization, and operational requirements. This transparency strengthens accountability and reduces the risks of misallocating resources. High-quality data drives smarter decision-making, optimized resource allocation, and a more ready, capable, and lethal Navy and Marine Corps.

Cost of Recapitalizing the Fleet

Despite the Navy's existing 355-ship policy goal, the Navy is currently operating with 288 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.

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

If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring the Navy continues its coordination with Congress, OSW, 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. This Administration has made this a critical priority, and if confirmed, I look forward to leading this effort.

72. 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 specific requirements may evolve 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 shipbuilding plan that accurately captures the needed size and composition of the future fleet as a stable demand signal for industry.

73. 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, and Acquisition to identify opportunities to get our shipbuilding programs back on track and to deliver prioritized and critical capabilities on time and on budget. Our plan to improve shipbuilding must address the size and modernization of public and private shipyards, the need for an increased use of distributed shipbuilding, 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. Since then, the Navy has cancelled the *Constellation*-class frigate program.

74. 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?

The relationship between the 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.

75. If confirmed, what improvements would you make to coordinate and control lead ship design activities for other shipbuilding programs?

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 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, will be 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.

76. 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.

77. 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 would 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).

78. 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?

If confirmed, I will take deliberate and focused action to modernize how the Navy recruits, develops, and retains world-class scientists, engineers, and software professionals across the enterprise. I will ensure the Navy maximizes the use of Direct-Hire Authorities, the Cyber Excepted Service, and the specialized personnel flexibilities available under Science and Technology Reinvention Laboratory demonstration projects.

Retention must be addressed through a competitive total-rewards model and modern career progression frameworks. While the Department cannot always match commercial sector salaries dollar for dollar, we can substantially close that gap by aggressively utilizing targeted financial incentives, including recruitment, relocation, and retention bonuses, student loan repayment programs, and special salary rates. Furthermore, I will champion performance-based compensation structures and create technical dual-track career pathways that allow preeminent software architects, data scientists, and engineers to advance in grade, compensation, and influence without requiring them to transition away from hands-on technical work into administrative management.

79. How do you think the Navy can improve the use and synchronization of the existing panoply of tools and authorities to be more effective for the workforce of the future, and to identify any gaps in those authorities?

If confirmed, I would focus on integrating workforce data and decision-making, improve execution of existing authorities and building flexible talent pathways.

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.

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

The Columbia class remains our number one acquisition priority because it recapitalizes the nation's sea-based strategic deterrent. Our undersea advantage is our primary deterrent. Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager (DRPM) Submarines has the authorities and priority mechanisms needed to protect the sea-based nuclear deterrent. If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with DRPM Submarines and Deputy Secretary of War to support the Columbia-class program.

81. 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?

The Navy is managing the OHIO-to-COLUMBIA transition to sustain continuous sea-based deterrence through COLUMBIA's transition. DRPM Submarines integrates new construction and OHIO-class sustainment under a single accountable leader, enabling focused management of the transition. If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with DRPM Submarines, Deputy Secretary of War, US Strategic Command, and stakeholders across the Navy to ensure we are meeting our strategic requirements.

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

The Columbia class remains our number one acquisition priority because it recapitalizes the nation's sea-based strategic deterrent. Our undersea advantage is our primary deterrent, and, if confirmed, I am committed to working closely with DRPM Submarines and the Deputy Secretary of War to support the Columbia-class program.

Attack Submarine Force Levels

The Navy's current requirement for attack submarines is at least 66. However, the Navy currently has fewer than 50 attack submarines in the fleet inventory, dipping to as few as 45 boats in the coming years.

83. 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?

If confirmed, I am committed to supporting AUKUS and working with DRPM Submarines to improve the health of the submarine industrial base and increase the operational availability of U.S. attack submarines. This is best accomplished through a holistic approach that includes overseeing ongoing investments required to increase capacity, enhance capabilities, and grow the skilled workforce, as well as efforts to reinvest in submarine maintenance. These complementary efforts will ultimately improve the effectiveness of the U.S. submarine force and advance our commitments under AUKUS Pillar I to increase the presence of allied submarines in the Western Pacific.

84. What steps would you take to improve our production rate of attack submarines?

If confirmed, I am committed to working with DRPM Submarines to continue improving the *Virginia*-class production rate. The Navy needs to expand its use of distributed shipbuilding. Distributed shipbuilding frees up our prime shipyards to do what they alone can do, while expanding opportunities across the industrial base.

85. How does taking an equity position in private shipyards fit within your strategy?

If confirmed, I would direct the Navy to look at all investment options to accelerate shipbuilding and look forward to working with Congress to ensure the Navy has appropriate authorities to take advantage of those options. If an equity position within a private shipyard is justified, it would be structured in a fashion to encourage other forms of equity and debt investment, thus leveraging private capital markets while offering a potential return of taxpayer funds for reinvestment in the industrial base.

86. How could the Navy improve attack submarine readiness through changes to the maintenance, repair, and overhaul enterprise?

If confirmed, I will work closely with DRPM Submarines and Deputy Secretary of War to assess opportunities to further improve our submarine maintenance outcomes including early identification of requirements, prompt contracting, and full funding to prevent long lead-time parts from stalling repairs. For example, we anticipate that the intermediate and depot-level maintenance capabilities developing in Western Australia as part of the AUKUS partnership will help increase the availability of attack submarines in the Pacific fleet, obviating the need for them to travel to Pearl Harbor.

Naval Reactor Fuel

The Director of Naval Reactors, in his 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.

87. 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?

Yes, if confirmed, I am committed to work closely with the Department of Energy to support current and future fuel requirements for Naval reactors. The 75+ year history of Naval reactors and our clear nuclear-powered warship advantage largely speak for themselves so yes, it will be a key priority for me to keep this capability supported.

Ship Maintenance

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

88. 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.

89. 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, 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 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).

90. 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 government-owned and operated shipyards are essential to national defense, performing modernization and depot-level maintenance of the fleet. The current capacity, condition, and configuration of dry docks, buildings, utilities, and equipment limit the shipyards' ability to sustain the fleet. 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. Accordingly, the Navy is making historic investments to modernize these century old facilities through SIOP. Since 2018, the program has completed over 60 projects and delivered over 350 pieces of industrial equipment. It has taken 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 readiness. Through stable, predictable and long-term investments, SIOP can accelerate safely alongside critical fleet sustainment operations.

91. To what extent should the U.S Government spend money to expand private shipyard capacity?

The Administration has led a national effort to revitalize and rebuild the domestic maritime industrial base to advance national security and economic prosperity. We need more private shipbuilding capacity in the United States to meet the Navy's growing demand. The Administration is revitalizing shipyards across America through stable, predictable, long-term investments intended to increase shipbuilding capacity, accelerate delivery of ships, and support high-skilled, high-wage American jobs. In August 2026, the Navy established the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Defense Industrial Base, which will spearhead initiatives to expand the domestic manufacturing ecosystem, mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities and integrate dual use commercial technologies to enhance the lethality of the Navy-Marine Corps team. If confirmed, I will seek to understand where investments should be made, and opportunities to incentivize industry and private capital investment to multiply the impact of Government dollars. I am committed to working with Congress to strengthen our shipbuilding sector.

92. What steps would you take to expand the capacity or improve the efficiency of shipyards in the private sector?

If confirmed, I will work with the Navy, industry, and Congress to identify targeted investments and process improvements that expand private-sector ship repair capacity and improve maintenance execution. Priorities would include strengthening the skilled workforce, improving facilities and dry dock capacity, increasing material and spare-parts availability, improving supplier and repair capacity, and reducing delays associated with planning, new work, growth work, and contract changes. I would also work with Program Acquisition Executive Industrial Operations to assess results from ongoing maintenance and identify practices that can be scaled across the private shipyard portfolio.

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.

93. Do you view BMD as a core Navy mission?

Yes, ballistic missile defense is one of several core missions for the Navy.

94. 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?

If confirmed, I would work with DON leadership to assess options for meeting missile defense requirements while preserving readiness and our two Services' ability to execute other missions. This would include evaluating opportunities for other capabilities to assume appropriate land-defense missions. Any recommendations would account for operational effectiveness, available capacity, and risk, consistent with force allocation decisions made by the Department.

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.

96. 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, including delivery systems and warheads, and ourour nuclear command, control, and communications systems.. I alsofullyfully support the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration's ongoing efforts to modernize the Nation's nuclear weapons stockpile and production 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 to fielding a life extension to the TRIDENT II D5 missile and fielding the next generation W93/Mk7 warhead to carry through the life of the Columbia-class program.

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

TheThe Columbia-class SSBN Major Defense Acquisition Program will deliver a highly-

survivable and effective strategic deterrence platform. In conjunction with the fielding of the successor to the TRIDENT II D5 Life Extension (D5LE), Life Extension 2 (D5LE2), and the fielding of the next-generation W93/Mk7 warhead program, the combined weapons system will ensure the Navy continues to provide the most survivable leg of the strategic nuclear triad for decades to come. If confirmed, I will review each of these programs to ensure effectiveness, responsiveness, survivability, flexibility, capacity capacity and on-time delivery of capability to the Nation to meet the changing global nuclear landscape, to include implementing any potential changes to the current program of record.

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 that 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.

98. 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 in support of a 2032 limited operational capability and 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.

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

The DON team continues to address recommendations from the 2014 Nuclear Enterprise Review through oversight of our nuclear deterrence mission. If confirmed, I would review the status of corrective actions with responsible DON leadership and assess whether oversight and resources remain sufficient. If confirmed, I will maintain sustained senior-level attention to nuclear security, safety, readiness, and mission effectiveness.

100. 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?

The Sailors who execute and support the Navy's nuclear mission require rigorous training, sustained readiness, and strong support for their well-being and families. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps to provide the highest-level training, readiness, and quality of service for all Sailors and Marines, improving their readiness to fight and win. I will review current quality of service initiatives and, working closely with the Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the Marine Corps, I will focus DON efforts on effective, efficient improvements to the amenities and care we provide our Sailors and Marines.

Amphibious Fleet Requirements

101. What is your view of the requirement for the Navy to have 40 amphibious warfare ships in the active inventory as agreed to by the CNO and Commandant of the Marine Corps?

I am committed to maintaining 31 amphibious warfare ships in accordance with the requirement in Title 10 of the United States Code. The Navy is dedicated to achieving a continuous presence of three Amphibious Ready Groups and Marine Expeditionary Units (3.0 ARG/ MEUs). This generational effort to build, repair, and sustain a larger amphibious force requires distinct and ambitious actions. It requires accelerating ship procurements, extending service lives, expanding the industrial base and shore infrastructure, and addressing challenges of force generation, readiness, maintenance, and modernization. The Amphibious Warfare Ship inventory to support 3.0 ARG/MEU is under ongoing assessment by Headquarters Marine Corps and DON staff, and future Shipbuilding Plans will be adjusted to meet this goal.

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

I fully support the efforts of the Amphibious Force Readiness Board (AFRB), co-chaired by the Vice Chief of Naval Operations and Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. The AFRB assesses progress toward the 3.0 ARG/MEU presence objective on a quarterly basis, pursuing three primary lines of effort to increase the size and improve the availability of the amphibious force: 1) optimized maintenance and force generation, 2) targeted service life extensions, and 3) new ship procurements.

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.

103. 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?

Navy and the Maritime Administration are buying suitable used commercial roll-on/roll-off ships to replace retiring capacity while pursuing new construction to fulfill the long-term sealift requirement. Selective service-life extensions also preserve critical surge capacity where hull condition, material reliability, and cost warrant continued service. Navy's three-pronged strategy provides a viable, credible path to meeting the Joint Force requirement of 10.5 million square feet of surge sealift capacity. The overall affordability of acquiring more than 40 vessels will depend on the procurement profile, hull acquisition and conversion costs, life-cycle sustainment expenses, and annual funding levels. If confirmed, I will use the annual budget process to assess those costs and align purchases with projected retirements and the usable cargo capacity each replacement delivers.

104. 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 support the Navy's current strategy of acquiring suitable commercial roll-on/roll-off vessels to mitigate immediate surge capacity shortfalls while designing and building new ships to meet long-term strategic needs. The precise procurement balance must remain flexible, adjusting to commercial market availability, shipyard conversion capacity, vessel material condition, and new-ship delivery timelines.

For specialized auxiliary requirements, including crane ships and aviation logistics support ships, I support evaluating both purpose-built construction and conversion options against mission-specific operational requirements. Auxiliary conversions are sensible when suitable commercial or government hulls meet military utility thresholds and offer clear schedule or cost advantages over new builds. If confirmed, I will maintain close coordination with the Maritime Administration and U.S. Transportation Command to ensure our auxiliary and sealift vessel mix remains synchronized with operational Joint Force warfighting requirements.

Unmanned Systems

105. What is your assessment of the maturity of unmanned air, surface and underwater systems and their ability to perform operationally relevant missions?

My understanding is maturity currently varies among the different domains. I am also aware of partnerships among Combatant Commanders, Defense Innovation Unit, Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Unmanned Systems (DRPM-UxS), Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Robotic and Autonomous Systems (DRPM RAS), and industry that are driving rapid experimentation and direct warfighter feedback to transition cutting-edge commercial technologies rapidly to the fleet. If confirmed, I look forward to

continuing to develop these capabilities.

106. How do you see the newly established Navy Direct Reporting Program Manager for Robotic and Autonomous Systems aligning with the recently announced plans by the Secretary of Defense's establishment of a 4-star Autonomous Warfare Command?

The DRPM RAS, which was recently established and is aligned to the vision for a 4-star Autonomous Warfare Command (AUTOWARCOM), and DRPM-UxS, and will focus on the Navy-specific matters.

107. Which missions should be prioritized for unmanned surface and underwater vessels?

If confirmed, I will work across the DON and the Department to identify what missions should be prioritized for unmanned vessels. As stated in the CNO's Hedge Strategy, unmanned systems must enhance the capabilities of manned platforms and the warfighter. Whether it is Sea Denial or Sea Control, undersea systems must prioritize missions that the warfighter and our Fleet require of them.

108. What are the principal technical, operational, acquisition, and sustainment risks associated with these systems?

The Navy must build reliable systems with secure autonomy, resilient communications, simple command and control and strong cybersecurity; ensure Sailors and Marines can effectively use these systems in deployed environments; field new capabilities fast enough to keep pace with technology; avoid vendor lock or obsolete systems reduce logistics demands, simplify forward maintenance and battle-damage repair, and provide enough capacity to replace systems as operations require.

109. How should the Navy establish requirements and standards for autonomy, command and control, communications, cybersecurity, navigation, reliability, and human oversight?

The Navy must establish requirements based on Combatant Commander capability gaps derived from joint operational assessments, all domain wargaming, and lessons from our front-line operational forces. These requirements should focus on secure interoperability and government-owned interfaces. This will keep competition open, avoid vendor lock, and allow the Navy to quickly adopt better software and hardware as technology improves. The requirements must also ensure clear human oversight and the ability for commanders to exercise appropriate levels of human judgment over the use of force so autonomous systems operate within applicable legal and policy requirements and standards.

110. What steps should the Navy take to transition mature unmanned aircraft and vessel capabilities into operational programs and integrate them with the manned fleet?

The Navy must set clear requirements that embrace the modular open systems

architecture (MOSA) approach, common command-and-control architectures, and cyber-resilient data links. A competitive industrial strategy, supported by appropriate technical data (with associated rights) and predictable demand, will reduce vendor lock, lower costs, and speed delivery and integration of naval capability. This will allow the Navy to transition proven capabilities into longer-term programs while moving at the speed of the threat.

111. How should the Navy evaluate the appropriate mix of manned and unmanned aircraft and vessels within the future fleet?

If confirmed, I would focus on three factors: mission risk, mass, and integration. DRPM RAS will help ensure autonomous systems are fully integrated and operationally useful. The right mix will not be fixed; it will be refined through wargaming, testing, experimentation, and feedback from operators.

112. What infrastructure, testing, training, maintenance, and operating concepts are required to employ unmanned aircraft and vessels at scale?

Continuous, operationally realistic testing in contested, high-sea-state, and GPS-denied environments and stable, predictable procurement and readiness funding are required to scale unmanned systems.

The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and F/A-XX Programs

113. What is your assessment of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program, including its operational capability, affordability, sustainment, modernization, software, and production requirements?

If confirmed, I will assess the F-35 program's cost, schedule, and performance, and work with the program office, across the Department, and with Congress to ensure the program delivers the capability and availability the Navy and Marine Corps require.

114. If confirmed, what changes, if any, would you seek to implement in the Department of the Navy's management and employment of the F-35?

If confirmed, I will assess the F-35 program's cost, schedule, performance, and readiness trends to ensure it delivers the capability and availability the Navy and Marine Corps require. I would emphasize disciplined coordination among the Joint Program Office, the Services, industry, and operational commanders to align modernization, production, sustainment, training, and operational employment. I would also seek to ensure that lessons from the fleet and Fleet Marine Force employment directly inform program priorities and that modernization efforts deliver tactically relevant capability on an executable schedule.

115. What are the principal challenges affecting F-35 availability and sustainment costs, and what actions should the Navy take to improve aircraft readiness?

The principal challenges include the complexity of the aircraft and its support system,

supply-chain performance, repair capacity, spare-parts availability, software and hardware modernization, and the cost of sustaining an advanced fifth-generation platform. These challenges can be compounded by delays in modernization, test capacity constraints, and insufficient depot, intermediate maintenance, or engineering support. If confirmed, I will focus on improving supply availability, repair turnaround times, reliability, maintainability, and sustainment planning, while working with the Joint Program Office, industry, and the Services to identify and address the principal drivers of cost and reduced readiness.

116. How should the Navy balance F-35 procurement with modernization and sustainment requirements for the broader naval aviation fleet?

The Navy must balance procurement of fifth generation aircraft with the need to sustain and modernize the broader naval aviation enterprise, including legacy tactical aircraft, enablers, weapons, training systems, and readiness accounts. The appropriate balance should be informed by operational requirements, threat assessments, affordability, force availability, and the ability to field capability on a tactically relevant timeline. If confirmed, I will support an integrated approach that avoids creating readiness shortfalls in the current force while preserving the investment needed to field advanced capabilities for future conflict.

117. What steps should the Department take to ensure that F-35 modernization and software development remain synchronized with evolving operational requirements and threats? What steps would you take to avoid making the same mistakes in acquisition of the F/A-XX fighter as the F-35 program has made?

The Department should maintain a disciplined, operationally informed modernization process that translates evolving threats and fleet requirements into clear, prioritized, and stable software and hardware increments. That process must be supported by adequate test infrastructure, software development capacity, digital engineering, realistic operational testing, and early coordination among requirements, acquisition, sustainment, and operational communities. For F/A-XX, if confirmed, I would emphasize mature requirements, achievable technical baselines, open and modular architectures, rigorous cost and schedule realism, and early planning for production, sustainment, training, and weapons integration. The Department must apply lessons from F-35 to avoid concurrency risk, unmanaged requirements growth, and modernization plans that outpace available test and integration capacity.

118. How should the Navy evaluate future fighter force structure requirements, including the appropriate balance among F-35s, upgraded fourth-generation aircraft, and future sixth-generation capabilities desired in the F/A-XX program?

The Navy should evaluate future fighter force structure through a comprehensive assessment of operational demand, threat trends, carrier air wing and Marine Corps aviation requirements, aircraft availability, affordability, survivability, weapons capacity, and the contribution of joint and allied forces. Fifth generation aircraft, upgraded fourth generation aircraft, and future sixth generation capabilities each provide distinct advantages, and the proper balance should preserve near-term readiness while investing in the capabilities needed for contested environments. If confirmed, I will ensure that

force-structure decisions are informed by rigorous analysis and reflect an integrated naval aviation approach rather than treating aircraft procurement decisions in isolation.

119. What are the principal risks associated with relying on a small number of highly capable aircraft platforms, and how should the Navy address those risks through force mix, weapons, unmanned systems, logistics, and distributed operations?

Reliance on a small number of highly capable platforms can create risks related to cost, capacity, attrition, maintenance demands, supply chain vulnerability, and an adversary's ability to concentrate efforts against critical systems or supporting infrastructure. The Navy should address these risks through a balanced and resilient force mix that combines advanced crewed aircraft with modernized legacy platforms, capable weapons inventories, unmanned systems, dispersed logistics, and distributed maritime operations. If confirmed, I will support investments that improve the resilience, endurance, and operational flexibility of naval aviation, while ensuring high end platforms are integrated into a broader force designed to sustain combat power in contested environments.

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.

120. 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 Medium Landing Ship (LSM) is essential and is being procured 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.

121. 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, 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. Our prioritization should include a realistic balance between new acquisitions and effective, economical upgrades to legacy capabilities.

122. 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 already prioritized the sustainment of such forces in a contested environment. 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 in the war with Iran, insufficient procurement, poor program execution, and a requirements system that does not adequately account for the ongoing need to transfer munitions to our allies.

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

If confirmed, I will make munitions readiness a sustained management priority by ensuring our requirements process and our procurement strategies operate in lockstep. I will ensure the Navy's Munitions Requirements Process (NMRP) continues to calculate and defend our core demand signals, specifically combatant commander requirements, war reserve requirements, and vital training and test needs, production lead times, and approved commitments to allies and partners.

My goal is to use our procurement tools to build a resilient industrial base and not degrade the magazine depth calculated by our MRP. Finally, I will pursue a balanced munitions portfolio that preserves high-end weapons for the threats that require them while fielding affordable, scalable capabilities for lower-cost threats.

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

If confirmed, I will make munitions readiness a sustained management priority by ensuring our requirements process and our procurement strategies operate in lockstep. I will ensure the Navy's Munitions Requirements Process (NMRP) continues to calculate and defend our core demand signals, specifically combatant commander requirements, war reserve requirements, and vital training and test needs, production lead times, and approved commitments to allies and partners.

My goal is to use our procurement tools to build a resilient industrial base and not

degrade the magazine depth calculated by our MRP. Finally, I will pursue a balanced munitions portfolio that preserves high-end weapons for the threats that require them while fielding affordable, scalable capabilities for lower-cost threats, and I will use foreign sales as outlined in the President's America First Arms Transfer Strategy to keep production lines operating.

125. If confirmed, how will you address the cost-exchange ratio challenges experienced in the Red Sea where more expensive rounds are used to defeat relatively inexpensive 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 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 high-low ship defense capabilities, including low-cost munitions, guns, directed energy, electronic warfare, 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.

126. 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 most important lever is a credible, sustained demand signal. If confirmed, I will support multiyear procurement, appropriately structured advance procurement, and contract arrangements that give companies sufficient confidence to invest in facilities, tooling, workforce, and research and development. For energetics specifically, the Navy must combine that demand signal with targeted government investment in test infrastructure, pilot production, manufacturing modernization, and workforce development. I would also emphasize competition and resilience by qualifying additional suppliers, reducing single points of failure, and using the Navy's warfare centers to help transition promising technologies through safety, qualification, and production readiness gates.

127. 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 energetic ingredients may provide a great opportunity to decrease reliance on foreign sources.

Freedom of Navigation

128. 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 role in preserving navigational rights and freedoms under international law. These freedoms support U.S. security, economic prosperity, and the flow of maritime commerce. If confirmed, I would ensure the DON provides ready naval forces to support operations consistent with international law and U.S. policy, including in the South China Sea and Arctic, and strengthens cooperative efforts with allies and partners in support of these shared interests.

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

From the United States Naval Academy to my time as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officer, and now as Acting Secretary of the Navy, my service has been defined by my deep appreciation and respect for the power of Naval Diplomacy, to make the world a more free, stable, and prosperous place. Naval exercises like Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) and Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC), EXPRESS series, and UNITAS are all great examples of like-minded nations coming together to enable interoperability and ensure freedom of navigation and open seas for all. We all have a shared responsibility for collective security. If confirmed, I will actively engage partners and allies to ensure adequate resources are allocated to upholding freedom of navigation across the globe.

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.

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

Strengthening the Navy and Marine Corps' cyber posture is key to our ability to fight and win in future conflicts. The PCA will remain a senior, independent advisor on all cyberspace activities to DON leadership, in accordance with section 392a of Title 10, United States Code. I plan to leverage the PCA to bring together stakeholders, resource sponsors, and decision-makers from across the enterprise to align our cyber efforts with operational realities.

131. 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 cyber challenges are ensuring cyber survivability afloat and ashore, building mastery while sustaining highly ready cyberspace operations forces, and executing critical modernization efforts to counter emerging threats, including the increasing threat of superintelligence. If confirmed, I will empower the PCA to address these issues head-on by rapidly identifying and mitigating gaps in our policies, processes and resource alignment.

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?

In my view, the Navy and Marine Corps are well-postured to meet the goals outlined in the 2023 Department of the Navy Cyber Strategy even as technological advancements and the threat landscape have evolved at an exponential rate. If confirmed, I will task the PCA and Chief Information Officer with ensuring we are continuously improving, expanding and adapting our departmental approach to compete and win in cyberspace.

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

The fight of today and the fight of tomorrow require the use and phasing of non-kinetic fires alongside traditional kinetic means. To do so effectively, we must prioritize the development and fielding of information dominance capabilities including cyber and electronic warfare. If confirmed, I will ensure that information dominance capabilities are integrated into Service force design and that we are leveraging advances in technology and partnering with industry to maintain our warfighting advantage.

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?

If confirmed, I will prioritize breaking down legacy silos and ensure that the Department of the Navy is optimally organized to integrate cyber, electronic warfare capabilities, and other non-kinetic effects. Ultimately, this approach will ensure that the Navy and Marine Corps are cohesive, agile, and fully prepared to deploy integrated and synchronized non-kinetic effects.

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.

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

I am confident in the Navy's ability to meet US Cyber Command readiness requirements. We will drive continued improvement by delivering highly realistic training and exercises that accurately replicate the contested, high-stress environments of modern conflict. We must also support our personnel holistically, addressing their physical, mental, and spiritual resilience to sustain them through intense operational tempos and build warrior ethos. By leveraging superintelligence to automate mundane and time-consuming tasks, we can alleviate burnout and free our Sailors and Marines to focus on what they do best: making critical, decisive warfighting decisions.

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

I believe we must leverage our Navy's unique global maritime reach to deliver tactical cyber effects directly at the operational edge. We should deploy agile cyber teams, pushing cyber power forward and providing Fleet and Joint Force Commanders with critical, non-kinetic options to degrade adversary capabilities and project power in highly contested environments.

The Department recently released the implementation plan for CYBERCOM 2.0, an initiative to resolve systemic readiness issues for the Cyber Mission Force. It relies significantly on the efforts of the military departments to be successful.

134. If confirmed, how do you view your role within CYBERCOM 2.0?

I will ensure the Department of the Navy's efforts are fully aligned throughout the Department and with USCYBERCOM's initiative to fundamentally transform how we generate and prepare cyber forces to achieve mastery across the joint cyber forces, while ensuring our Service-unique needs are adequately represented.

135. If confirmed, how will you work with OSD and the Navy and Marine Corps cyber leaders to ensure CYBERCOM 2.0 is a success?

If confirmed, I will ensure leaders from the highest echelons of the Navy and Marine Corps down to the lowest tactical units are aware, engaged, and personally invested in this effort. By using the Principal Cyber Advisor to drive this Department-wide initiative, we will institutionalize CYBERCOM 2.0 standards and build a fundamentally ready and resilient force.

Navy-related Defense Industrial Base

The Navy faces significant challenges related to workforce availability, supplier capacity, manufacturing capability, supply-chain resilience, and the ability of the defense industrial base to support increased production and sustainment requirements.

136. What is your assessment of the systems and processes for identifying, evaluating, and managing risk among the entities that form the Navy's defense industrial base and supply chains?

Our risk management systems have improved, however, visibility into Tier-3 and Tier-4 sub-tier suppliers remains an ongoing vulnerability. We must proactively identify single-source dependencies, financial distress, and foreign sourcing risks before they cause shipyard work stoppages.

137. What is your assessment of the current health and capacity of the industrial base supporting Navy acquisition, shipbuilding, aviation, weapons production, and sustainment?

The defense industrial base is stressed after decades of consolidation and underinvestment. Public and private yards face critical shortages of skilled trades, sub-tier vendor fragility, and capacity bottlenecks. Rebuilding this base is a national security emergency that requires sustained capital investment, steady multi-year demand signals, and workforce development.

138. How should Navy acquisition leaders account for the impact of acquisition decisions on the defense industrial base when addressing requirements for recapitalization or modernization of aircraft, ships, weapons, engines, components, repair parts, and other major systems?

Acquisition decisions must evaluate the second- and third-order impacts on the industrial base. Unstable procurement quantities hollow out specialized suppliers. Acquisition executives must prioritize multi-year procurement strategies, support dual-sourcing for critical sub-components, and structure contracts to incentivize long-term private capital investments.

139. If confirmed, what changes, if any, would you pursue to improve identification, monitoring, and management of risk in Navy-relevant sectors of the defense 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 Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for the Defense Industrial Base which reports to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition (ASN(RD&A)) is responsible for overseeing the strategic integration, health, and expansion of the Department’s industrial supply chain to support naval readiness and modernization. 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.

140. What actions should the Navy take to maintain access to critical suppliers, manufacturing capabilities, specialized skills, and workforce resources necessary to meet future requirements?

The Navy must treat the industrial base as a core element of national readiness, not simply a vendor network. If confirmed I would work to provide stable demand signals to industry through a consistent budget, strengthening critical supplier resilience, growing the skilled workforce through partnerships and improving contracting and production speed.

141. How should the Navy address single points of failure, fragile supplier networks, foreign dependencies, long-lead materials, and other industrial base vulnerabilities?

The Navy should address industrial base vulnerabilities with the same seriousness it applies to operational risk: identify them early, prioritize them by mission impact, and build resilience before a crisis. If confirmed, my focus would be on mapping critical supply chains down to key lower-tier suppliers, developing qualified alternate sources, using stable, multiyear demand signals, establishing risk-based reserves and strengthening coordination across the DoW, industry, and allies and partners. The goal is not to eliminate all risk. It is to ensure that no single supplier, material, facility, or adversarial foreign dependency can stop the Navy from building, repairing, sustaining, and employing the fleet when the nation needs it most.

142. If confirmed, what would you see as your office's role in working with or supporting the Navy Office of Small Business Programs?

The Navy should identify critical single points of failure, qualify alternate suppliers, reduce adversarial foreign dependencies, and use stable demand signals to strengthen domestic and allied production capacity. If confirmed, my office would set priorities and hold the enterprise accountable for industrial base resilience. The Navy Office of Small Business Programs would be a key partner in expanding the supplier base, improving small-business access to requirements, and reducing unnecessary barriers to qualified firms.

143. What should be the relationship between your office and the Defense Innovation Unit in identifying and transitioning commercially available technologies into Navy programs?

If confirmed, my office would work closely with the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) to identify commercially available technologies that can solve Navy and Marine Corps problems faster and at lower risk. DIU and the DONRCO already work closely to identify commercial solutions for Navy problems.

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.

144. 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?

Innovative operational energy solutions are essential to warfighting and resilience in a contested logistics environment. If confirmed, I would direct Navy and Marine Corps to integrate operational energy considerations early in force design, requirements, acquisition, exercises and campaign planning. I would ensure these efforts are linked to joint operating concepts and we identify opportunities for more mobile, less vulnerable logistics nodes that support the joint community and combatant commanders. In pursuing energy innovations, my priority would be reducing unnecessary demand while increasing energy supply. These innovations ensure delivery of the right type of energy, to the right weapons systems, at the right time, through innovations in both electrical and traditional bulk fuel distribution and transport.

145. 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 strengthen the integration of energy into Navy strategic planning by incorporating energy supply vulnerabilities into operational planning and wargaming, assessing the impacts of energy constraints on readiness and mission effectiveness, and reducing dependence on vulnerable commercial grids through secure, resilient, and diversified energy solutions.

146. 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 establish measurable energy performance and supportability requirements within DON's new requirements development and acquisition processes, accounting for operational risks associated with contested fuel logistics and ensuring sufficient electrical power to support current and emerging mission systems. Energy considerations must inform acquisition decisions from the outset, rather than being addressed as an afterthought.

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

147. 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?

The Department of the Navy must ensure that mission-critical functions have reliable, secure, and sustained power under routine conditions, severe weather, cyber disruption, and contested operations regardless of the generation source. I will also incorporate agile acquisition pathways and public-private partnerships, while maintaining our strong partnership with the government of Guam and Guam Power Authority to harden our shared critical infrastructure.

148. 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?

Energy security and resilience must be baseline requirements in MILCON project planning, programming, and design. If confirmed, I will prioritize investments based on mission criticality and ensure key operational nodes incorporate proven security and resiliency features. Furthermore, I will emphasize total lifecycle value over upfront procurement costs.

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.

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

Navy shore installations are the essential platform that launches, sustains, and regenerates naval combat power. Resilient infrastructure provides the maintenance, munitions, fuel, logistics, training, command and control, force protection, and support required for ships, submarines, aircraft, and networks to operate at full capability. Ready installations enable faster force generation, higher operational tempo, and rapid recovery; degraded shore infrastructure reduces fleet availability, endurance, and lethality.

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

Current funding levels do not fully meet the Department's Base Operations Support, sustainment, and modernization requirements without difficult tradeoffs. In FY26, those tradeoffs deferred critical work and increased future readiness risk. My priority will be to protect essential installation services, improve execution, and clearly communicate the resource risks to Congress.

151. 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?

I am committed to taking care of our Sailors, Marines, and their families. The Department will continue to build on existing Navy and Marine Corps efforts and the Barracks Task Force to improve barracks, by leveraging authorities such as Other Transaction Authorities, Repair-by-Replacement, Privatization, and Inter-Governmental Support Agreements to move faster and with purpose to improve barracks conditions. We continue to fully fund unaccompanied housing sustainment at 100 percent of the Department model to address overdue repairs and invest in quality-of-life improvements that directly affect warfighter readiness.

Science, Technology, and Innovation

The Navy's science and technology accounts provide the seed corn necessary for developing Navy and Marine Corps capabilities of the future that can't be leveraged from the commercial sector. However, the Navy has a reputation for raiding those accounts to pay for nearer term modernization bills.

152. How would you assess whether the Navy is investing enough in basic and applied science and technology to create capabilities beyond today's requirements, and how would you protect such investments during difficult budget negotiations?

If confirmed, I will continue to assess whether the Department of the Navy is maintaining a balanced, connected portfolio across three distinct layers: discovery research, technology-push prototype maturation, and capability-pull transition. Basic and applied research should be evaluated for scientific understanding, use-inspired relevance, option value, learning, and adversary-relative significance—not solely by near-term transition prospects. Mature efforts should be evaluated against validated warfighter gaps, sponsor demand, integration feasibility, affordability, and a credible acquisition or fielding path.

If confirmed, I would protect foundational Science & Technology through separate resource envelopes and disciplined portfolio reviews, rather than allowing immediate modernization pressures to consume long-horizon investments. I would also ensure we prioritize transformational work with unique naval applicability where commercial incentives are insufficient, make informed investment choices, and divest lower-value efforts quickly when evidence warrants. I would ensure that every dollar is purposefully aligned with our most urgent naval priorities and communicated to Congress.

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

The Navy should focus its investments through a disciplined, enduring technical framework. The 2026 Office of Naval Research S&T Strategy's 11 Focus Areas and 63 Research Areas provide that framework, connecting investments from basic research through applied research, technology maturation, Future Naval Capabilities, and Innovative Naval Prototypes. The Department should prioritize transformational potential, unique naval applicability, operational relevance, and the ability to create a durable advantage for the Fleet and Marine Corps.

154. 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 Naval Research and Development Enterprise—particularly ONR, the Naval Research Laboratory, and the Naval Warfare Centers—is the Department's technical bench. These organizations provide the scientific depth, engineering rigor, test capability, and operational understanding needed to solve naval problems that may not attract sufficient commercial investment or that require integration into uniquely demanding maritime environments. Their role is to connect Sailors and Marines, program offices, academia, small businesses, industry, and other government partners around validated operational needs. They sustain discovery, mature promising technologies, reduce technical and integration risk, and provide independent technical support to acquisition programs and the Fleet.

155. How do you see the international S&T elements, such as the Office of Naval Research (ONR)- Global, fitting into that picture?

Based on the transition plan provided, I understand that ONR will centralize responsibility for international science collaboration at ONR Headquarters beginning in FY28, while closing the current ONR Global International Science Program and associated overseas offices. This will include a disciplined transfer of active grants, institutional knowledge, research relationships, and budget responsibilities to the appropriate ONR program offices in FY27.

International S&T engagement remains important because allied, partner, academic, and industrial research communities can provide access to relevant expertise, emerging technical opportunities, and collaborative pathways that strengthen naval capability. If confirmed, I would ensure that any organizational transition preserves mission-relevant partnerships, maintains appropriate stewardship of ongoing research, and aligns international engagement with Department priorities and applicable authorities.

156. 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?

Yes, the Navy must sustain investment in enduring technical areas that are fundamental to maritime operations and often receive inadequate commercial attention. Examples include energetics, corrosion control, materials in extreme environments, power and energy, propulsion, signatures, sensors, communications, navigation, reliability, maintainability, undersea systems, and manufacturing and repair technologies.

These areas are not alternatives to modernization priorities. They are the technical foundation that enables modern systems to operate reliably at sea, undersea, in contested electromagnetic environments, and across long deployments. The Department should manage them within the same strategic taxonomy as emerging technologies, using enduring naval relevance and operational impact—in addition to emerging technologies —as the basis for investment.

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

If confirmed, I will ensure the Navy manages emerging and enduring technologies as a balanced portfolio, not as competing categories. Discovery research creates scientific understanding and future options; technology-push investments mature high-potential concepts into credible prototypes; and capability-pull investments connect mature technologies to validated operational gaps and credible transition paths. Each layer requires different evidence, time horizons, and risk tolerance.

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

If confirmed, I would support the Naval Research and Development Enterprise by protecting its role as the Department's technical bench; strengthening recruitment, retention, and development of its scientific, engineering, technical, and business workforce; and modernizing laboratories, test infrastructure, digital tools, and other enabling facilities. The Department needs in-house expertise capable of conducting independent technical assessment, solving hard naval problems, supporting acquisition programs, and sustaining Fleet and Marine Corps capabilities.

I would also reinforce collaboration across ONR, the Naval Research Laboratory, Warfare Centers, program offices, operational commands, academia, industry, and small businesses. The objective should be an enterprise that connects discovery to operational outcomes at speed while retaining the capacity to pursue naval S&T problems requiring unique naval expertise and long-term stewardship.

159. 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 objective is not simply to transition more projects; it is to transition the right technologies into fielded capability. For mature efforts, I would require early identification of a validated warfighter gap, a committed sponsor and requirements pathway, practical integration and test plans, affordability, a plausible schedule, and a credible acquisition or fielding route. A technically successful demonstration without these elements is not a complete transition strategy.

I would strengthen early collaboration among laboratories, Warfare Centers, program executive offices, resource sponsors, operational users, and industry. Operational experimentation should produce decision-relevant evidence on performance, integration, sustainment, training, and employment. The Department should use that evidence to accelerate promising efforts, address barriers early, and redirect resources when a transition path is not credible.

160. 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 should systematically engage commercial innovators, nontraditional defense companies, small businesses, academia, and traditional industry to identify technologies with potential naval application. ONR, the Warfare Centers, SBIR/STTR programs, and Department-level innovation organizations can help lower barriers to entry, expose commercial solutions to real naval problems, and connect promising firms to test, integration, and transition opportunities.

Commercial technology should be evaluated against mission need, security, resilience, interoperability, sustainment, and integration requirements. The Department's greatest value is often in adapting commercial innovation to contested, maritime, and military-unique operating environments, while concentrating government S&T resources on "Only ONR" problems where commercial markets are unlikely to deliver timely solutions.

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

The Navy should pursue a balanced approach that preserves the rigor, discipline, and accountability of traditional acquisition processes while creating faster pathways to test and integrate mature commercial technologies. Commercial solutions should be evaluated early and often with operational users in realistic conditions, using experimentation to determine whether a capability addresses a validated warfighting problem, can integrate with Navy and Marine Corps systems, and can be sustained, secured, and scaled.

If confirmed, I would encourage the Department to use iterative experimentation, rapid prototyping, and operational feedback to inform investment decisions and reduce the time between identifying a promising technology and placing it in the hands of Sailors and Marines. At the same time, I would ensure that expedited processes do not bypass necessary cybersecurity, safety, interoperability, test and evaluation, sustainment, or oversight requirements. The objective should be to create deliberate transition pathways so that successful commercial technologies do not remain isolated demonstrations, but can move efficiently into programs of record, operational units, or other enduring capability portfolios as appropriate.

Military Health System (MHS) Reform

162. Do you support the implementation of the MHS reforms mandated by the NDAAs for FYs 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2022, which places former Navy Military Treatment Facilities under the Defense Health Agency to improve quality of care and readiness?

Yes, the MHS is vital to the Navy's force-generation mission and our ability to maintain medically ready operational forces. We remain fully committed to stabilizing the MHS by fielding a fully staffed and capable medical force.

163. Will you ensure that the Navy continues to provide the military medical personnel needed to provide care in these facilities and the appropriate end strength is restored for Navy medical providers?

Yes. I know the Department is working diligently to restore medical end strength and ensure predictable military staffing across military treatment facilities. We are addressing personnel shortages through enhanced recruiting and retention initiatives to ensure our Sailors, Marines, and families have reliable access to healthcare, while we simultaneously train and modernize our medical forces to support operational readiness.

164. 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?

If confirmed, I commit to reviewing our medical headquarters to ensure they are structured for mission success.

165. As the Department of Navy prepares for large-scale combat operations, the Military Health System must simultaneously sustain a medically ready force, preserve critical wartime medical capabilities, and provide timely, high-quality care to service members and their families. How is the Department of the Navy aligning its medical force structure, operational medical requirements, clinical readiness standards, and resourcing priorities with the Defense Health Agency to ensure the Military Health System can support Navy and Marine Corps warfighting requirements without compromising beneficiary access, patient safety, or the long-term viability of military treatment facilities?

Our Sailors and Marines in contested waters must know that the world's finest medical care is ready to bring them home. If confirmed, I will work to transform our shore facilities into true combat-readiness platforms to keep our trauma and surgical skills razor-sharp. We will field an agile, layered care network across the theater -- from frontline resuscitation to hospital ships. By partnering with the Defense Health Agency, we will align operational medical billets to protect this lifesaving combat pipeline while ensuring our servicemembers and families receive the exceptional care they deserve.

End Strength

The Navy's active-duty end strength was 344,600 in FY 2026 and is growing to a requested average end strength of 356,600 in FY 2027. The Marine Corps' active duty end strength is also growing from 172,300 in FY 2026 to 173,700 requested in FY 2027.

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

Yes. The Navy and Marine Corps end strengths are focused on meeting our immediate national defense objectives prescribed by the President and require that we focus on maximizing operational readiness and personnel utilization. To maintain this sufficiency

going forward, we must ensure our existing forces are fully manned, highly trained, and properly equipped. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to monitor the balance between our global operational tempo and our manpower levels, ensuring our end strength remains aligned with the evolving requirements of the National Defense Strategy.

167. 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?

Over the last two years, the Navy made tremendous strides in closing gaps at sea, which have largely been driven by high operational requirements and years of recruiting challenges. Two years of sustained recruiting and record-breaking enlisted retention have contributed to reducing shipboard gaps to less than 10%. If confirmed, I will continue this progress through a continued commitment to recruiting, retention, and force shaping initiatives that match the right Sailor to the right job at the right time.

Navy and Marine Corps Reserves

168. 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?

My vision for the Navy Reserve is to transition the force from an administrative mobilization reservoir into an operationalized, warfighting-ready extension of the Fleet. In today's environment, our Reserve Sailors must provide immediate added value directly aligned with warfighting commanders. If confirmed, my primary organizational objective will be to streamline administrative layers and reduce bureaucracy, shifting resources directly toward Units of Action and Supported Command focuses.

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

Yes, both the Navy and Marine Corps Reserves expect to meet their prior service accession goals for this fiscal year. The Marine Corps Reserve continues to see strong success via direct affiliation, and I will continue to support these highly effective, direct-transition pipelines to preserve vital operational experience as the force continues its strategic pivot to the Pacific. The Navy Reserve is also projected to meet its accession goals by leveraging targeted affiliation bonuses and streamlining the prior-service onboarding process. We will continue to aggressively recruit departing active duty Sailors with high-demand skillsets.

Recruiting and Retention

The Fourteenth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation concluded that the military compensation package is "strongly competitive with [the] civilian labor market."

The review found that Regular Military Compensation for enlisted servicemembers was approximately at the 83rd percentile of comparable civilian wages, while compensation for officers was approximately at the 76th percentile. Notably, this analysis predated the significant pay increases enacted in the FY25 NDAA, including a 14.5 percent total increase in basic pay for junior enlisted servicemembers.

In recent years, the Navy expanded eligibility for Category IV recruits, who score between the 10th and 30th percentiles on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. The Navy has also expanded the use of certain accession waivers and other eligibility policies to increase the pool of potential recruits.

171. Given that military compensation already compares favorably to civilian compensation, in your view, to what extent are current recruiting challenges attributable to compensation versus broader issues of eligibility, propensity to serve, and public awareness of military service?

While competitive compensation is an essential foundation, our primary recruiting challenge lies in a shrinking pool of eligible youth and a declining propensity to serve. Currently, only 23% of young Americans are eligible for military service, and an even smaller fraction are interested in serving. The Department of the Navy has proven that we do not need to lower standards to solve this. The Marine Corps continues its legacy of uncompromising and unapologetic standards. Through the Future Sailor Preparatory Course (FSPC), the Navy is helping highly motivated patriotic young Americans qualify, physically and academically – those who do not meet our standards are sent home.

Rather than relying solely on base pay increases, we are overcoming civilian market competition by leveraging targeted enlistment bonuses, modernized digital marketing, and demonstrating the unmatched personal and professional development that military service provides.

172. What are the risks associated with increasing reliance on Category IV recruits, and what data should the Department use to evaluate whether these recruits experience different rates of attrition, disciplinary action, training failure, or long-term career success?

We empirically know that Category IV recruits pose risks of higher first-term attrition, elevated academic failure rates in technical training ("A" schools), slower career progression, and potential increases in administrative or disciplinary actions. When employing these types of recruiting levers, we must monitor downstream performance along these outcomes and adjust accordingly.

To proactively mitigate these risks, the Navy utilizes the Future Sailor Preparatory Course (FSPC) to academically prepare candidates *before* basic training, allowing them

to improve their scores and enter as Category I–III recruits. This successful pipeline enabled us to limit Category IV recruits to well under DoW thresholds in FY26 without sacrificing quality or readiness. If confirmed, I will ensure the Navy continues to monitor the FSPC outcomes, and update the course as necessary, to ensure that recruits are ready for the Navy's challenges.

173. In your view, where is the appropriate balance between expanding the pool of eligible recruits through waivers or changes to accession standards and maintaining the quality standards necessary to sustain a capable force?

Recruit quality is essential to building a capable and effective force and I will not compromise on maintaining the highest standards. Growth must not be obtained through lowered standards or excessive high-risk waivers. Adjudicating individual waivers, rather than wholesale changes to eligibility, allows us to consider the full history of that future Sailor or Marine and what they have to offer.

If confirmed, I will ensure we continuously monitor first-term attrition and performance data to guarantee that any adjusted eligibility criteria never degrade our lethality or readiness.

174. What initiatives would you pursue, if confirmed, to increase the number of Americans who are both qualified and inclined to serve, particularly by addressing educational attainment, physical fitness, medical eligibility, aptitude, and propensity to serve?

Rather than lowering our entry gates, we must focus our efforts on promoting the profound value of military service and rebuilding public awareness across the nation to expand our pool of motivated, high-quality recruits. We must actively showcase how military service fosters elite leadership, provides opportunities for education and advanced technical training, and serves as a powerful catalyst for personal and professional growth. By expanding our outreach and modernizing our digital marketing, we can directly connect with today's youth and share the inspiring story of naval service.

By focusing on public inspiration, community engagement, and pre-entry development, we will successfully build a strong, capable, and lethal force while keeping our elite entry standards intact.

175. How is the Navy recruiting and retaining highly skilled personnel whose expertise makes them particularly marketable in the civilian sector, including cyber professionals, medical providers, aviators, and other critical specialties?

To recruit and retain personnel with highly marketable critical skills, we utilize targeted special and incentive pays and retention bonuses to invest in the critical skills these

personnel bring to the Navy and Marine Corps. For example, we recently launched a DoW-wide Cyber Mastery Incentive Pay program which recognizes some of our most highly skilled cyber professionals.

In addition to compensation, we must support these highly skilled individuals along multiple lines of effort. For example, I recently directed the Navy to address aviator retention through four key lines of effort: quality of service, leadership, compensation, and manning. If confirmed, I will direct the Navy and Marine Corps to pursue its ongoing comprehensive approach toward investing in, supporting, and retaining our highly skilled Sailors and Marines.

176. For these high-demand career fields, where are targeted tools such as special and incentive pays, bonuses, or other retention incentives necessary to remain competitive, and what additional authorities, if any, does the Navy need?

To remain competitive and protect these critical warfare inventories, special and incentive pays and bonuses are paramount. Increased caps for these pays and bonuses would allow us to adjust to evolving market and economic factors; this challenge is most prevalent within the aviation community today. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps leadership to better understand the range of factors that affect these high-demand career fields and what would be needed to attract and retain high-demand talent.

The GI Bill, Voluntary Education, and Credentialing Programs

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

Yes. I firmly believe that developing our people is fundamental to developing our warfighting capabilities. Our Sailors and Marines are our greatest asset, and investing in their education and professional development strengthens both the individual and the operational force. The complexity of today's operational environment requires a highly skilled, adaptable, and technically proficient workforce. As technology, weapons systems and mission requirements continue to evolve, we must ensure our people have the knowledge, critical-thinking skills, and technical expertise necessary to operate, maintain, and advance our capabilities. Voluntary Education Programs complement military training and provide opportunities for Sailors and Marines to learn throughout their careers. If confirmed, my priority would be to ensure these programs remain accessible and aligned with Fleet and Fleet Marine Force requirements. We must evaluate their effectiveness not simply by participation or dollars executed, but by how well they develop our Service Members and contribute to readiness.

178. 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?

The Navy and Marine Corps have well-established credentialing programs that help Sailors and Marines translate their military training, education, and occupational experience into nationally recognized civilian credentials. These programs recognize the skills and expertise our Service members develop through military service, reinforce professional proficiency, and provide qualifications that can support meaningful civilian employment following separation. Programs such as Navy and Marine Corps Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL), the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), and Department of War career planning tools provide Service members with resources to identify relevant industry certifications, licenses, apprenticeships, and career pathways aligned with their military occupations and future professional goals. These programs help validate the knowledge and skills gained through military training and experience while connecting those capabilities to recognized civilian workforce standards. If confirmed, I would support continued efforts to improve access to credentialing opportunities, strengthen partnerships with industry and credentialing organizations, and better align military training and experience with nationally recognized qualifications.

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

My vision for the United States Naval Community College is to directly sharpen our competitive warfighting edge by delivering world-class, naval-relevant education to our globally deployed enlisted force. By pairing a specialized naval core with high-impact technical degrees delivered through cost-effective civilian academic partnerships, the USNCC serves as a critical engine for readiness and lethality. This model equips our Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen with the intellectual acumen, advanced cognitive skills, and problem-solving maturity required to operate effectively in a complex Joint warfighting environment. Ultimately, the USNCC builds a more agile maritime force capable of thinking strategically and leading decisively under the pressure of modern conflict, while acting as a powerful incentive to recruit and retain top-tier talent to deter aggression and win America's wars.

Non-Deployable Service members

180. 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?

I support the readiness objective of current policy. Sailors and Marines who remain non-deployable for more than 12 consecutive months must be reviewed individually to determine whether continued service is appropriate. Passing that threshold does not require automatic separation. Members who meet criteria for disability evaluation must be referred through the applicable process. In other cases, administrative separation or retention under an authorized exception may be appropriate. I expect these decisions to be timely, informed by medical judgment, and consistent with law and policy. We must preserve the force's deployability while treating each Sailor and Marine fairly.

181. 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"?

Retention beyond 12 months should be decided case by case and justified by the best interests of the Service. I would consider whether the member can perform duties appropriate to their rank and skills. The likelihood that the condition preventing deployment will resolve also matters. A credible recovery outlook and a demonstrated operational need, including a need for specialized skills, may support retention. Those considerations do not override applicable medical or disability evaluation requirements. I would ensure that combat wounded personnel and others in special categories receive the consideration required by policy. Retention decisions should be documented, limited in duration when required, and reviewed again as circumstances change.

182. 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. Deployability must reflect the specific mission, the duties required, the operating environment, and the medical support available at the destination. A Sailor or Marine may be able to perform one assignment safely but need additional screening or an approved waiver for another. Medical professionals should assess the member's condition and limitations. Responsible operational authorities should assess mission requirements and make the decisions assigned to them under policy. I would maintain consistent medical standards and ensure that decisions for a specific mission do not expose the individual or the force to unacceptable risk. A member listed as available must also be able to perform the mission.

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

Reserve Component members must meet applicable medical readiness standards. Access to assessments and follow-up care can be more difficult because of geographic dispersion, civilian employment, and limitations tied to duty status. I would work with Navy Reserve, Marine Forces Reserve, Navy Medicine, and the Defense Health Agency to identify barriers earlier and improve the timeliness and visibility of medical assessments. We should use available military, contracted, and virtual readiness services where authorized. We should also improve coordination of line-of-duty determinations, appropriate referrals, and disability evaluation processes so commanders can resolve cases without unnecessary delay. Any changes must respect the different authorities governing medical benefits and treatment for Reservists. The goal is to return qualified personnel to deployable status promptly and give commanders a reliable picture of readiness.

Military Family Readiness and Support

184. 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. Some of the most pressing issues facing our warriors and their dependents are increased access to health care and safe housing, spouse employment, and reliable quality and affordable childcare. When Sailors and Marines deploy far from home, they need reasonable assurances that their families will have the necessary resources and means to cope with extended periods without their active-duty spouse. Throughout my career, I observed fellow Service members address a range of family challenges during deployments, and I have personally experienced the pressures that a military family encounters during absences. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring our Navy and Marine Corps families have the critical support and resources that they need so that our Warfighters can focus on the mission when they are away from their families.

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

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to ensure family readiness programs are prioritized and resourced throughout the budget formulation process. I will ensure rigorous oversight and command accountability to direct resources toward our most acute challenges, specifically expanding childcare capacity, enforcing strict quality standards for military housing, improving healthcare access, and advancing military spouse employment opportunities. Additionally, I will maintain continuous dialogue with Navy and Marine Corps families, and with Congress, to ensure these vital quality-of-life and family readiness programs have sustained funding to support warfighter readiness.

186. 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?

My number one priority has been and will remain our people; they are our greatest capability, and ensuring they and their families have the support, resources, and environment needed to thrive is essential to sustaining a combat-ready force. If confirmed, I will build upon the findings of the Quality of Service review by maintaining focused leadership accountability on everyday conditions that affect Sailor well-being, morale, and resilience. I will support ongoing initiatives that remove barriers to care, improve unit climates, and empower commanders to foster high-trust environments centered on peer support and shared purpose. Moving forward, I will evaluate our support systems to ensure we are proactively investing in the foundational needs of our Sailors so they can maintain mission focus and remain warfighter ready.

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.

187. 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?

People are our greatest strength, and caring for them is my highest priority. The tragic loss of any Sailor, Marine, civilian, or family member to suicide is unacceptable, and safeguarding the overall health, safety, and resilience of our military community remains an enduring priority.

If confirmed, I will champion Department efforts that empower leaders to act, eliminate obstacles to care, encourage seeking support through behavioral health, and foster a culture where reaching out for support is recognized as a sign of strength.

Furthermore, I will prioritize data-informed prevention strategies while equipping leaders with the tools needed to build connected, high-trust command climates centered on unit cohesion, mutual trust, and peer support. Ensuring our personnel receive timely care that allows them to get back in the fight, maintain a strong sense of purpose, and stay fully prepared to defend the Nation.

Ultimately, our people are our greatest capability, and if confirmed, I will remain dedicated to providing our force and their families with the comprehensive support required to stay resilient and warfighter ready.

Reporting from U.S. Cyber Command indicate recent suicides amongst the Cyber Missions Forces (CMF) are a result of high operations tempo and limited behavioral health and occupational resiliency resources.

188. If confirmed, how would you propose the Navy address these challenges within Tenth Fleet and Fleet Cyber Command for Navy forces, as well as contribute to joint needs in this space?

High operational tempo places significant, cumulative demands on our service members—both within Tenth Fleet and across high-demand communities throughout the Fleet. We recognize these pressures, and if confirmed, I will ensure that all commands operating at high tempo receive the focus and resources required to build and sustain warfighter resilience. Specifically for Tenth Fleet and Fleet Cyber Command, I will closely evaluate our existing behavioral health and resiliency programs to ensure available support is robust, easily accessible, and fully adequate for the personnel currently carrying the mission. In parallel, I will work closely with U.S. Cyber Command and joint leadership to share best practices, identify systemic needs, and ensure our service investments reinforce the endurance and readiness of the joint cyber force.

Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention and Response Programs

189. 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?

Sexual assault and other harmful behaviors are antithetical to the warrior ethos and divide the force, and no one should have to fear retaliation for reporting these incidents. The FY25 Workplace Experiences Survey found that the estimated prevalence of unwanted sexual contact decreased between FY23 and FY25 among both women and men in the Navy and Marine Corps. Further, the FY25 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military also shows that the rate of Service member reporting of sexual assault incidents increased from 25% in FY23 to 33% in FY25. This indicates that one in three Service members impacted by sexual assault in FY25 made a report to a DoW authority— the highest in a decade. However, any incidence of sexual assault or retaliation is unacceptable. The Department must continue to take action to confront and counter harmful behaviors, provide victim assistance, and strengthen command climates, ensuring that Service members can operate with confidence and maintain absolute focus on the mission. We must sustain data-driven prevention efforts, ensure leaders intervene early and respond appropriately, and rigorously assess whether our actions are improving outcomes for Sailors and Marines. If confirmed, I will ensure these programs have the necessary support and resources to continue meaningful progress and improve support to victims.

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

If confirmed, I will prioritize the prevention of sexual assault through evidence-informed efforts supported by engaged leadership at every level. The Department of the Navy will continue strengthening infrastructure necessary to support prevention and response efforts while fostering collaboration between Navy and Marine Corps leaders, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Workforce, and the Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce. By leveraging their complimentary responsibilities and expertise, we will strengthen comprehensive prevention planning, implementation, and continuous evaluation to better protect our Sailors and Marines.

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

Offering multiple reporting options is essential to help sexual harassment victims come forward and build trust. Service members experiencing sexual harassment have the options of Formal and Informal and also an option to report without revealing his/her name to command. Over the years the Department of the Navy has evolved its reporting pathways to ensure victims have choices and immediate access to services, while

preserving our ability to hold offenders accountable. Offering multiple avenues breaks down barriers to reporting, protects our personnel, and reinforces accountability across the Navy and Marine Corps. If confirmed, I will continue to ensure Sailors and Marines have full access to these reporting pathways.

Domestic Violence and Child Abuse in Navy and Marine Corps Families

192. 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?

One instance of domestic violence or child abuse is too many. It is my understanding that the rates of abuse in the Department of Navy have not varied greatly over time. As leaders, it is our obligation to protect our Sailors, Marines, and their families. Abuse does not just devastate individuals; it directly degrades individual readiness, family resilience, and the overall lethality of our force. If confirmed, my priority will not just be responding to abuse but preventing it. I will actively support and expand evidence-informed programming that addresses the specific risk factors our families experience to stop the cycle of violence before it begins.

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

The Navy and Marine Corps must move beyond responding to incidents and place far greater emphasis on preventing child abuse and domestic and intimate partner violence. Expanding high-quality prevention and education programs that address risk factors and promote healthy communication, conflict resolution, and coping skills during high-stress periods will strengthen our military families. Our leaders must be equipped to recognize these risk factors early, and intervene proactively to protect their Sailors, Marines, and families. If confirmed, I will make prevention of these tragedies a top leadership priority to not only reduce instances of abuse but strengthen resiliency.

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.

194. 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?

If confirmed, I will uphold and enforce the laws protecting Sailors, Marines, and civilian employees who report fraud, waste, abuse, or gross mismanagement. No individual should fear reprisal for making a lawful, protected disclosure, regardless of the rank or position of those involved. I will encourage Sailors, Marines and civilians to report wrongdoing as proper disclosures promote accountability by illuminating problems.

I will ensure DON leadership understands and maintains compliance with 10 U.S.C. § 1034 and applicable federal civilian whistleblower protection laws, including the right to communicate with Congress, Inspectors General, and the Office of Special Counsel.

I will work with appropriate oversight authorities to ensure allegations of retaliation are independently investigated and addressed through appropriate corrective or disciplinary action when substantiated. These protections must apply consistently at every level of government, as no individual is above the law.

Joint Officer Management

195. What modifications, if any, would you recommend to Joint 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?

If confirmed, I will examine statutory and Department of War Joint Officer Management requirements that may create avoidable timing conflicts between Service-specific command development and joint qualification. Current policy requires Level III Joint Qualified Officer designation to include JPME Phase II, at least 24 joint-qualification points or full joint-duty credit, and at least 12 months of qualifying joint experience earned while serving as an O-4 or above. The statutory baseline for a joint duty assignment is generally two years, although policy provides limited exceptions and credit mechanisms.

I will work with Congress, the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness, and the Joint Staff to assess targeted reforms: whether statutory JPME Phase II waiver criteria remain appropriately tailored; whether the O-4 recency policy should better recognize qualifying earlier-career joint experience while preserving field-grade development; and whether the six-point ceiling on discretionary joint-training, exercise, and education credit should be adjusted. Any reform should preserve rigorous joint competence while reducing unnecessary conflicts with essential Navy and Marine Corps operational and command-development timelines.

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

If confirmed, I believe we must enhance the Joint Qualified Officer system so that it

accounts for the realities of a part-time force balancing civilian careers with military service, rather than forcing reservists into an Active Component template.

We should revisit governing policies to ensure parity in waiver eligibility between active and reserve officers. We also need to consider expanding capacity and modernizing delivery for hybrid and distance-learning joint education so that limited in-resident seat quotas and prolonged absences from civilian employment do not prevent top-tier RC talent from completing JPME Phase II. Finally, we should consider a formal mechanism to award experience-based points for short-notice mobilizations, crisis-response exercises, and qualifying civilian leadership in interagency, cyber, or defense-based roles.

Together, these improvements will eliminate structural bottlenecks and ensure the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve can build a deep bench of joint-qualified senior leaders without penalizing citizen-sailors and Marines for their dual-career service.

Officer Promotion Policies and Processes

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

The Navy and Marine Corps are highly effective at identifying and rewarding top performers, and we have accelerated our transition toward a modern meritocracy focused on joint warfighting and command readiness. By replacing rigid, legacy milestones with dynamic, merit-based advancement tracks and multi-source leadership reviews, we ensure that our most capable and ready leaders are systematically identified, promoted, and retained to maintain our global warfighting advantage.

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

While we are proud of our record retention rates, retention must be earned. The Navy and Marine Corps possess robust, structured mechanisms to identify and, when necessary, remove underperforming personnel to maintain our core standards of lethality, readiness, and accountability.

Underperforming individuals are systematically identified by their reporting seniors through the annual performance evaluation process, which serves as direct input to promotion selection boards and career continuation decisions.

Commanders utilize established administrative counseling, Non-Judicial Punishments (NJP), and formal administrative separation boards to expeditiously transition individuals who fail to meet our standards of conduct or performance.

In accordance with federal law and Department policy, the statutory promotion boards process rigorously review and consider all substantiated adverse and reportable information, ensuring that promotion and assignment decisions are strictly merit-based.

199. In your view, what should be done to improve Navy and Marine Corps talent

management, both in the Active and Reserve Components?

To build a modern, agile force capable of outpacing peer adversaries, the Department of the Navy must continue improving our capabilities-based talent management system that prioritizes merit, flexibility, and rapid mobilization across the Navy and Marine Corps.

We must continue to explore and expand flexible career pathways and incentives for critical technical specialties by leveraging targeted Special and Incentive pay, expanding spot promotions, and maximizing retention levers to retain vital mid-career experience. If confirmed, I will also work with the Navy and Marine Corps leadership to ensure that we are fully leveraging SI, modern technologies, and data analysis to improve talent management, and ensure that we have the right talent at the right place, at the right time.

200. 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?

If confirmed, I will ensure absolute compliance with all laws and regulations regarding the reporting, investigation, and promotion board consideration of adverse and reportable information

I will ensure that all statutory promotion selection boards continue to strictly adhere to Title 10 requirements and Department policies, ensuring that all substantiated adverse information is fully and transparently considered during the selection process.

I will consult directly with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps to review and strengthen mechanisms for holding leaders accountable. Under my leadership, there will be zero tolerance for administrative delays or omissions that compromise the integrity of our promotion systems.

Ensuring absolute transparency and accountability in our promotions is essential to restoring our warrior ethos and maintaining the trust and readiness of the entire Navy and Marine Corps team.

201. 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?

Yes. The Secretary of War prescribes the procedures and practice for reviewing and reporting on the records of officers selected for promotion. The Offices of the Secretary of the Navy, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of War are each briefed on officer selection results in accordance with the procedures and practices established throughout the Department. The existing procedures and practices for reviewing the records of officers pending nomination for promotion or assignment are highly robust, thorough, and sufficient to enable fully informed decision-making.

202. 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.

Yes. The Department of the Navy's promotion and assignment processes are fair, objective, and designed with the clear purpose of placing the right personnel in the right roles based entirely on individual merit and performance. The system relies on standardized performance metrics, regular evaluations, and objective statutory boards to ensure every officer receives a fair and balanced review. In addition, where review reveals adverse or reportable information, officers are provided notice and opportunity comment as part of the reviewing process.

By establishing clear, transparent criteria and adhering strictly to legal guidelines, the process protects individual officers while serving the broader needs of our national security. If confirmed, I will remain highly vigilant and work closely with the Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the Marine Corps to regularly review these processes, verify that they continue to operate in a fair, unbiased, and merit-based manner, and immediately identify any opportunities for systemic improvement.

Professional Military Education (PME)

203. 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?

The Marine Corps already has policy in place to evaluate Marines in academic and training assignments through academic-type fitness reports, rather than relying solely on non-observed reports when observation is feasible. These reports are intended to capture the Marine's course completion, class standing, performance, potential, and professional character. I support continued implementation of this approach. Documenting observed performance at professional schools provides promotion and assignment boards with more meaningful information than a non-observed report and helps distinguish Marines who demonstrate exceptional performance from those who simply meet course requirements.

204. 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?

If confirmed, I will evaluate our PME system to assess and prioritize necessary improvements that build on a system that already focuses on producing leaders who can think strategically and lead decisively under the pressure and complexity of future conflict. Aligned with the Department's guidance, I will ensure that PME aligns with the 2026 National Defense Strategy, and contributes directly to lethality, readiness, and

strategic victory. PME must include practical application and experiential learning opportunities to demonstrate understanding and competency, such as wargaming, decision exercises, and a range of integrated live and simulation technologies. I am confident that the existing system, with improvements where appropriate, will continue to ensure tomorrow's naval leaders develop intellectual acumen, problem-solving, proficiency, and maturity to operate effectively in a Joint warfighting environment, deter aggression, and win America's wars.

Department of the Navy Civilian Personnel Workforce

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

The preeminent challenge in managing our civilian workforce is the friction between legacy personnel systems and the unprecedented pace of technological innovation. To maintain our global competitive edge, the Department of the Navy must transition from rigid, slow-moving administrative frameworks to an agile, modern human capital enterprise. If confirmed, I will collaborate with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to streamline bureaucratic hiring processes, scale flexible personnel authorities, and cultivate a digital-first culture. By transforming the Department into a premier, forward-looking employer that can rapidly acquire and retain top talent, we will ensure our civilian workforce is fully equipped to meet the demands of the future fight.

206. 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?

Yes. Department of the Navy (DON) supervisors possess sufficient statutory and regulatory authorities to address misconduct, remediate unacceptable performance, and effect removal when warranted. Conduct-based actions are governed by 5 U.S.C. Chapter 75 (and 5 C.F.R. Part 752), which allows for disciplinary actions, up to and including removal, to promote the efficiency of the service. Performance-based actions are governed by 5 U.S.C. Chapter 43 (and 5 C.F.R. Part 432), which permits grade reductions or removal when an employee fails to meet critical performance standards after being provided a reasonable opportunity to improve. Focusing on optimizing internal Labor and Employee Relations (LER) workflows and enhancing supervisory training will ensure that operational leaders can navigate these existing legal and regulatory processes expeditiously, consistently, and in full alignment with Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Department guidelines.

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

Optimizing the management, agility, and readiness of this dedicated workforce demands a modern human capital strategy rooted in frontline leadership empowerment, localized

data-driven decision-making, and the disciplined alignment of workplace flexibilities with core mission requirements. The Department must strengthen frontline supervisory capability by treating supervision as a distinct professional discipline rather than an administrative collateral duty. Civilian supervisors directly shape workforce culture, productivity, and organizational climate. To support them effectively, the Department should expand mandatory, high-impact supervisory leadership training and ensure direct, responsive access to employee and labor relations subject matter experts. Equipping managers with practical coaching tools, clear procedural guidance, and dedicated advisory support empowers them to conduct proactive performance management, resolve workplace friction before it escalates, uphold operational standards, and cultivate high-performing teams across the enterprise.

The Department must prioritize continuous workforce development, technical upskilling, and dynamic talent mobility. As modern warfare becomes increasingly technological, the Department must cultivate deep expertise in critical disciplines, including super intelligence, cybersecurity, software engineering, and advanced manufacturing. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee to modernize civilian human capital systems and provide our civilian personnel with the tools and leadership necessary to defend the nation.

208. 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 Navy civilian workforce is a critical enabler of Navy and Department wide readiness. Civilians provide continuity, technical expertise, and institutional knowledge in shipyards, depots, aviation sustainment, acquisition, cyber, research and development, logistics, installation support, and headquarters operations. They also help sustain the industrial base and shore enterprise on which Navy and Marine Corps readiness depends.

The Department should assess civilian workforce health through mission-linked metrics and not headcount alone. Those metrics should include onboard strength against validated requirements; vacancies and time to hire; attrition, retirement eligibility, retention, and succession risk; proficiency and certification in critical skills; workload, overtime, and maintenance or program backlogs; contractor reliance; and the operational effects of shortfalls on readiness. Senior leaders should review those metrics regularly alongside validated manpower requirements so they can identify risk early and direct resources to the highest priority functions. The objective is to ensure the Department has the right civilian skills, in the right locations, at the right time to execute assigned missions.

209. 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 performs enduring shore-based, technical, industrial, administrative, and professional functions that would otherwise require military personnel or reduce the time they can devote to operational assignments, training, readiness, and warfighting development. Civilians support shipyard and depot maintenance, engineering, acquisition and contracting, cyber, logistics, installation management, research and development, financial management, personnel support, and other specialized functions that require technical continuity and institutional expertise.

An appropriately sized and skilled civilian workforce enables the Department to preserve uniformed personnel for missions requiring military authority, deployability, operational experience, sea-duty rotation, or direct support to combat formations. It also reduces unnecessary disruption to military assignment stability, training, and readiness cycles while providing technical continuity and institutional knowledge essential to the Navy, Marine Corps, industrial base and shore enterprise. This is a total-force issue: the Department should regularly assess which work requires a uniformed member, which is best performed by civilians, and where contracted support is appropriate. Properly aligning that mix strengthens Navy and Marine Corps readiness while sustaining the shore enterprise and industrial base.

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.

210. 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

211. 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

212. 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

213. 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

214. 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

215. 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

216. 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