

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO CONDUCT A CONFIRMATION HEARING ON THE
EXPECTED NOMINATION OF MR. PETER B. HEGSETH TO BE
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Tuesday, January 14, 2025

Washington, D.C.

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WASHINGTON, DC 20005
(202) 289-2260
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5
6 U.S. Senate

7 Committee on Armed Services

8 Washington, D.C.
9

10 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in
11 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger
12 Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

13 Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker
14 [presiding], Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan,
15 Cramer, Scott, Tuberville, Mullin, Budd, Schmitt, Banks,
16 Sheehy, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono,
17 Kaine, King, Warren, Peters, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, and
18 Slotkin.
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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM MISSISSIPPI

3 Chairman Wicker: Good morning. The hearing will come
4 to order. The Committee on Armed Services has convened this
5 hearing to consider the pending nomination of Mr. Pete
6 Hegseth to be Secretary of Defense.

7 And at this point, in light of the continued suffering
8 and death in and around Los Angeles, California, I am going
9 to ask my colleagues and those in the audience to observe a
10 moment of silence.

11 [Moment of silence.]

12 Chairman Wicker: Amen. Thank you.

13 I also want to take this opportunity to thank my good
14 friend, Ranking Member Jack Reed. This is my first
15 opportunity to chair this committee in this Congress. I
16 want to thank Senator Reed. Under his chairmanship he
17 proved time after time that he cares deeply about national
18 security and about the United States of America, and
19 particularly the men and women who wear the uniform and
20 stand watch, both here and around the world, to protect the
21 United States. Senator Reed, I want to thank you for the
22 many courtesies that you have extended to me in the past,
23 and I look forward to working with you again in a bipartisan
24 fashion this Congress.

25 It is also appropriate to recognize and welcome three

1 Senators attending their very first Senate Armed Services
2 Committee hearing as members: Senator Banks of Indiana,
3 Senator Sheehy of Montana, and Senator Slotkin of Michigan.
4 We are excited to have you as committee colleagues and look
5 forward to many important contributions from each of you.
6 And Senator Slotkin, as I look down at the end of the dais
7 there, it seems that only a week or two ago I was sitting in
8 that very chair, being recognized by the chairman of the
9 committee, the distinguished Senator from Michigan. So time
10 flies.

11 Now let me say this. We had a very appropriate
12 expression of approval by the members of the audience as our
13 nominee and his family walked in. The distinguished ranking
14 member and I sincerely hope that that is the last signal of
15 approval or disapproval in today's hearing. People of the
16 public are here. They are welcome to observe today's
17 hearing, and Senator Reed and I agree, though, that no
18 disruptions will be allowed. Audience members may not
19 verbally or physically distract from the hearing, to include
20 shouting, standing, or raising signage or gestures that
21 block the view of the audience. And we are very serious
22 about this, aren't we, Mr. Reed?

23 Senator Reed: Absolutely, sir.

24 Chairman Wicker: Those who do so will be immediately
25 escorted from the room.

1 So again, welcome to the witnesses, to his friends, and
2 to interested members of the public.

3 If confirmed, Mr. Pete Hegseth would assume the role in
4 a moment of consequence. The United States faces the most
5 dangerous security environment since World War II. We are
6 witnessing the explosive growth and reach of China's hard
7 power. We are also observing the emergence of an axis of
8 aggressors. That coalition is characterized by broadening
9 and deepening military cooperation among the dictatorships
10 ruling China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

11 Terrorism remains a threat, as Israel wages war against
12 Hamas and Hezbollah, and as the Assad regime collapses in
13 Syria.

14 America has entered a window of maximum danger, and the
15 Department needs energetic and focused civilian leadership.
16 Those values begin at the top with the Secretary of Defense.

17 Many of my distinguished colleagues have served in a
18 significant tenure on this committee, and our meetings are
19 fairly long. We should reflect over previous Secretaries of
20 Defense and their hearings and ask ourselves a simple
21 question -- Has the civilian leadership of the Pentagon,
22 under the administration of both parties, proven up to the
23 challenge? Often the answer has been no. The civilian
24 leadership has not built the Department of Defense to meet
25 the moment, and this is our moment to correct that.

1 A few examples illustrate how leadership in the past
2 have fallen short. Most of the Department's signature
3 programs runs years behind schedule and billions of dollars
4 over cost. Vital initiatives have suffered, such as the F-
5 35, the new Sentinel ICBM, and the Navy's shipbuilding
6 program, including the Constellation-class frigate.

7 The Department of Defense desperately needs civilian
8 leadership who listen to the advice of combatant commanders,
9 many of whom would benefit from innovative systems. Yet, a
10 risk-averse DoD culture has kept too many promising
11 technologies on the wrong side of the so-called "Valley of
12 Death," that tenuous period between experimental prototypes
13 and production contracts. Defense companies, backed by
14 venture capital, receive less than 1 percent of defense
15 contracts.

16 As we all know, the Pentagon still cannot even pass an
17 audit. The Department must simplify and streamline its
18 bureaucracy so it can respond to innovation. Staffs have
19 ballooned. Organizations are top heavy. Civilian leaders
20 have promised time and again to slim down the bureaucracy,
21 and perhaps genuinely hoped to. Every day men and women in
22 uniform make tremendous contributions to U.S. security.
23 They and the American people deserve a Pentagon that does
24 the same.

25 Today's Department of Defense is no longer prepared for

1 great power competition. It is not a national defense
2 institution ready to achieve and sustain technological
3 supremacy across the range of operations.

4 Admittedly, this nomination is unconventional. The
5 nominee is unconventional, just like that New York developer
6 who rode down the escalator in 2015 to announce his
7 candidacy for President. That may be what makes Mr. Hegseth
8 an excellent choice to improve this unacceptable status quo
9 that I just described. He is a decorated post-9/11 combat
10 veteran. He will inject a new warrior ethos into the
11 Pentagon, a spirit that can cascade from the top down. Mr.
12 Hegseth will bring energy and fresh ideas to shake up the
13 bureaucracy. He will focus relentlessly on the warfighter
14 and the military's core missions, deterring wars, and
15 winning the ones we must fight. He will bring a swift end
16 to corrosive distraction such as DEI.

17 Today, many simply acknowledge and live with the
18 systemic problems I have mentioned earlier, in acquisition,
19 accountability, technology transition, and organizational
20 civil service reform. Mr. Hegseth will actually move to fix
21 these issues decisively. In short, I am confident that Mr.
22 Hegseth, supported by a team of experienced top officials,
23 will get the job done.

24 The Secretary of Defense is an incredibly important
25 position, but the Secretary's span of control is limited.

1 The Pentagon is vast, with 3 million-plus personnel,
2 uniformed, civilian, and contractors. A successful
3 Secretary understands that steering the ship means focusing
4 his attention on strategic-level priorities. The Secretary
5 must be supported with exceptional subordinates who will run
6 the day-to-day affairs of the Office of the Secretary of
7 Defense, the military services, and the other DoD
8 components.

9 I am also confident that as an infantryman Mr. Hegseth
10 understands the military principle of commander's intent --
11 communicate the clear objective, empower subordinates to use
12 initiative and judgment, and hold everybody accountable. We
13 must not underestimate the importance of having a top shelf
14 communicator as Secretary of Defense. Other than the
15 President, no official plays a larger role in telling the
16 men and women in uniform, the Congress, and the public about
17 the threats we face and the need for a peace through strict
18 defense policy.

19 I have no doubt Mr. Hegseth will excel in a skill in
20 which many of his predecessors have fallen short. Much has
21 been made of both Mr. Hegseth's personal life and some of
22 his policy pronouncements. Regarding his personal conduct,
23 Mr. Hegseth has admitted to falling short, as we all do from
24 time to time. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of
25 the accusations leveled at Mr. Hegseth have come from

1 anonymous sources.

2 Contrast these anonymous accusations with the many
3 public letters of support and commendation. We have seen
4 letters from people who have served with Mr. Hegseth. These
5 individuals have worked with him professionally. They
6 really know him and his character. These patriotic
7 Americans have been willing to put their names and
8 reputations on the line to support Mr. Hegseth. I look
9 forward to sharing these testimonials with the American
10 people.

11 Let me mention one right now. It comes from David
12 Bellavia, who earned the Medal of Honor for heroic actions
13 in combat in Fallujah, Iraq. David Bellavia writes the
14 following: "Pete is fearless, unflappable, and confronts
15 conflicts head-on. He is a leader to the core. When Pete
16 is confirmed as the next Secretary of Defense of the United
17 States of America this country will finally know the
18 privilege of having a true ambassador, able to speak on
19 behalf of this generation and its two-decade global war on
20 terror. Washington doesn't build men like Pete. Combat
21 builds men like Pete."

22 As I said, there are more letters expressing the same
23 endorsement. Today we will hear from the nominee directly.
24 I want to thank Mr. Hegseth, as well as his loved ones, for
25 being here today. I look forward to discussing his

1 nomination, and I look forward to hearing from Mr. Hegseth
2 about the ways he hopes to rebuild the American strength
3 that secures the peace.

4 And so now I turn to my friend and colleague, Ranking
5 Member Reed, for his opening remarks.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE
2 ISLAND

3 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I
4 would like to first congratulate you on your chairmanship.
5 I look forward to continuing our committee's strong
6 tradition of bipartisanship and collaboration, and thank you
7 for your thoughtful and conscientious service to the
8 committee over many years. Thank you very much, Mr.
9 Chairman.

10 I would also take a moment to join Chairman Wicker in
11 welcoming our new members. Senator Slotkin, Senator Banks,
12 and Senator Sheehy, welcome. We look forward to working
13 with you.

14 Mr. Hegseth, I welcome you and your family to today's
15 hearing. I am also glad to recognize my former colleague,
16 Norm Coleman, and Congressman Mike Waltz. Thank you,
17 Congressman.

18 Mr. Hegseth, I want to begin by saying that I respect
19 and appreciate your military service in the Army National
20 Guard. I know from experience that there is no greater
21 privilege than to lead American soldiers, and I thank you
22 for answering the call.

23 You have been nominated to be Secretary of Defense.
24 The Secretary is responsible for leading a Department of
25 three and a half million servicemembers and civilians, an

1 annual budget of nearly \$900 billion, and hundreds of
2 thousands of aircraft, ships, submarines, combat vehicles,
3 satellites, and the nuclear arsenal.

4 The Secretary also plays a powerful role with our
5 allies, partners, and adversaries abroad. As we speak,
6 China is seeking to undermine our interests, intimidate our
7 friends, and challenge our standing in world. Russia's
8 campaign against Ukraine threatens not only Europe, but the
9 entire global order. Ongoing violence in the Middle East
10 has teetered on edge of all-out war. And the ideologies and
11 actions of violent extremists endanger our citizens, even on
12 our own soil, as the recent tragedy in New Orleans painfully
13 reminds us.

14 These are perilous times, and the position of Secretary
15 of Defense demands a leader of unparalleled experience,
16 wisdom, and above all else, character. The Secretary is
17 expected to be a fair, nonpartisan, and responsible leader,
18 as well as a trustworthy advocate for men and women that he
19 leads.

20 Mr. Hegseth, I do not believe that you are qualified to
21 meet the overwhelming demands of this job.

22 We must acknowledge the concerning public reports
23 against you. A variety of sources, including your own
24 writings, implicate you with disregarding the laws of war,
25 financial mismanagement, racist and sexist remarks about men

1 and women in uniform, alcohol abuse, sexual assault, sexual
2 harassment, and other troubling issues. I have reviewed
3 many of these allegations, and find them extremely alarming.

4 Indeed, the totality of your own writings and alleged
5 conduct would disqualify any servicemember from holding any
6 leadership position in the military, much less being
7 confirmed as the Secretary of Defense.

8 Nonetheless, I understand that you reject many of these
9 reports as they involve whistleblowers, nondisclosure
10 agreements, and anonymous, although numerous, sources,
11 including those who have faced political intimidation for
12 sharing their experiences. I hope you will address each of
13 these allegations thoroughly and truthfully during your
14 testimony. Just as importantly, I hope you will pledge to
15 prevent any repercussions for whistleblowers, both civilian
16 and military, if confirmed.

17 Mr. Hegseth, during our meeting last week, you said
18 that, if confirmed, your top priority would be, quote,
19 "restoring a warrior culture" to the Department of Defense,
20 because you believe the U.S. military has been weakened by
21 "political correctness." Over the years, you have made
22 clear your opinion of the military's diversity initiatives.
23 As you have said, quote, "Diversity is not our strength.
24 Unity is." And on a recent podcast, you said, quote, "I'm
25 straight up just saying we should not have women in combat

1 roles."

2 When I joined the Army as a young officer in the 1970s,
3 the U.S. military was rife with racial tension, women were
4 prohibited from serving in most roles, gay servicemembers
5 were banned, and we relied on a national draft to fill our
6 ranks. The soldiers I served with were proud to do so, but
7 it was certainly not the nation's most capable military by
8 any standard.

9 We have made great progress since then. Today, the
10 Department of Defense is fully integrated, every race and
11 religion is accepted, women serve in all combat roles and
12 leadership positions, sexual orientation is irrelevant to
13 service, and the All-Volunteer Force visibly reflects the
14 nation it protects.

15 Our military is more diverse than it has ever been, but
16 more importantly, it is more lethal than it has ever been.
17 This is not a coincidence. Mr. Hegseth, I hope you will
18 explain why you believe such diversity is making the
19 military weak, and how you propose to "undo" that without
20 undermining military leadership and harming readiness,
21 recruitment, and retention.

22 Mr. Hegseth, another reason I am deeply concerned about
23 your nomination is your disregard for the law of armed
24 conflict and your support for servicemembers who have been
25 convicted of war crimes. You have championed the pardoning

1 of military members who were turned in by their fellow
2 soldiers and SEALs -- and let me emphasize that. They were
3 not discovered by reporters. They were turned in by fellow
4 soldiers and fellow SEALs -- and also the pardoning of
5 military contractors convicted of killing 14 Iraqi citizens
6 without cause.

7 You have also advocated for the reinstatement of
8 interrogation methods like waterboarding that have been
9 defined as torture, and you have belittled the advice and
10 counsel of the Judge Advocates General while on deployment.
11 In your book, "The War on Warriors," you write, quote,
12 "Should we follow the Geneva Convention?...If our warriors
13 are forced to follow rules arbitrarily and asked to
14 sacrifice more lives so that international tribunals feel
15 better about themselves, aren't we just better off in
16 winning our wars according to our own rules?"

17 Mr. Hegseth, I would ask that you explain how you, if
18 confirmed, would maintain good order and discipline within
19 our forces, and the support of our allies and partners by
20 rejecting international law and law of war.

21 I am also concerned about your abilities as a competent
22 manager of organizations far less complex than the
23 Department of Defense. From 2008 to 2010, you led the
24 organization Veterans for Freedom, which had an annual
25 budget of less than \$10 million. In each year you were in

1 charge, expenses far exceeded revenues, until the
2 organization teetered on bankruptcy and had to be merged
3 with another group.

4 In fact, according to public reporting, an independent
5 forensic accountant reviewed the organization's finances and
6 discovered evidence of gross financial mismanagement. I
7 would note that this report has not been made available to
8 any government agencies, which is, I think, alarming. But a
9 Republican advisor to you during your tenure at the
10 organization, who read the report, stated, and I quote, "I
11 watched him run an organization very poorly, lose the
12 confidence of donors. The organization ultimately folded
13 and was forced to merge with another organization who
14 individuals felt could run and manage funds on behalf of
15 donors more responsibly than he could...I don't know how
16 he's going to run an organization with an \$857 billion
17 budget and three million individuals." And that is the only
18 comment we have had, and the only access we have had to the
19 forensic report.

20 A similar thing happened with Concerned Veterans for
21 America, a second veterans' group that you led from 2011
22 until 2016. During those 5 years, tax records show that the
23 organization spent more than it raised. Just as troubling
24 are reports that a significant amount of debt was incurred
25 from social events and parties filled with excessive

1 drinking and questionable personal behavior. Mr. Hegseth, I
2 hope you will explain what actions you will take, if
3 confirmed, to be a better steward of the Defense
4 Department's large budget.

5 Finally, while I appreciate our meeting last week, it
6 is unacceptable that you did not meet with any other
7 Democratic members of this committee before this hearing, as
8 has been our bipartisan tradition.

9 During my time in the Senate, I have voted for, and
10 worked closely with, Secretaries of Defense appointed by
11 Republican Presidents. While we may disagree politically,
12 there was always an understanding that rank partisanship
13 should have no place when it comes to providing for the men
14 and women who serve in uniform.

15 And Mr. Hegseth, I am troubled by the many comments you
16 have made both as a commentator and in your published
17 writings. For example, in your book, "American Crusade,"
18 you wrote, quote, "Modern leftists, who represent the soul
19 of the modern Democrat Party, literally hate the
20 foundational ideas of America." You also wrote, "The other
21 side -- the Left -- is not our friend. We are not 'esteemed
22 colleagues,' nor mere political opponents. We are foes.
23 Either we win, or they win -- we agree on nothing else."

24 Mr. Hegseth, if confirmed as Secretary of Defense, you
25 would lead an organization that, like the country it

1 represents, is composed of Democrats and Republicans. Yet
2 your language suggests that you regard many of these men and
3 women as 'foes.' I would ask that you explain why
4 servicemembers and civilians who do not share your political
5 opinions can trust that they will not be targeted during
6 your tenure.

7 Indeed, the challenge of the Secretary of Defense is to
8 remove partisan politics from the military. You propose to
9 inject it. This would be an insult to the men and women who
10 have sworn to uphold their own apolitical duty to the
11 Constitution.

12 Mr. Hegseth, you are the ninth nominee for Secretary of
13 Defense that I have had the honor to consider as a member of
14 the Senate Armed Services Committee. I have voted in favor
15 of all your predecessors, including those in the first Trump
16 administration.

17 Unfortunately, you lack the character and composure and
18 competence to hold the position of Secretary of Defense.

19 Thank you.

20 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Reed. And now it
21 is my privilege and honor and pleasure to recognize two
22 witnesses who have come forward to introduce our nominee.
23 First I recognize my former colleague and former Senator,
24 Norm Coleman, of Minnesota, for the purpose of an
25 introduction. Norm, we are glad to see you and glad you

1 have you back, and you are recognized for an introduction.

2 Mr. Coleman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member
3 Reed, members of the committee, my former colleagues. I am
4 honored to introduce a son of Minnesota to you, Pete
5 Hegseth.

6 As a Senator from Minnesota, I spent many hours with
7 this young man as he walked the halls of Congress advocating
8 on behalf of America's veterans. And he is young in the
9 best sense of the word. He is strong, focused, intelligent,
10 incisive, a great listener, and is almost supernaturally
11 energetic, just what we need in a Secretary of Defense in
12 times of massive change. He is the real deal.

13 F. Scott Fitzgerald was a writer in my city of St.
14 Paul, and said the problem with America is that there are no
15 second acts. He was wrong. Pete was a brave soldier, has
16 been an able communicator, and I believe is about to begin a
17 great second act as our Secretary of Defense.

18 He has struggled and overcome great personal
19 challenges. Please don't give into the cynical notion that
20 people cannot change. We need the ones who can change to
21 lead us, to be beacons of hope, and to remind us that grace
22 can lead us home.

23 Four years ago, President Biden's nominee, Lloyd
24 Austin, a good and honorable man, received 97 votes on the
25 floor of the Senate, and we went through the debacle of the

1 Afghanistan withdrawal, Putin invaded Ukraine, the Houthis
2 endangered our shipping lanes. We witnessed Israeli
3 miracles against America's enemies in the Middle East, where
4 the United States was more of an impediment than a help.
5 Our recruitment numbers have sunk dramatically, and our
6 southern border has suffered a slow but dangerous invasion.

7 Yes, Pete Hegseth is an out-of-the-box nominee, and I
8 say it is high time to get out of the box.

9 One more thought. The country longs for a government
10 of less division and more respect and dignity. My hope is
11 that this committee hearing provides what they are asking
12 for. Disagree, yes, strongly if necessary. But then come
13 together to support the nominee, this nominee, Pete Hegseth,
14 of the one President we have at a time, laying aside
15 partisan politics with the essential mission of national
16 security, upon which everything else depends.

17 Mr. Chairman, I yield.

18 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Norm. I do appreciate
19 that and appreciate your presence today.

20 I now have the honor and pleasure of introducing
21 Congressman Waltz. I understand, Congressman, you are still
22 a member of the House for another day or two.

23 Mr. Waltz: Another day or two.

24 Chairman Wicker: Okay. And I now recognize
25 Congressman Waltz for whatever opening statement and

1 introduction he might make.

2 Mr. Waltz: Thank you, Chairman Wicker -- and
3 "chairman" has a very nice ring to it, so congratulations --
4 Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of this
5 committee, it is a privilege to appear before you today and
6 urge the members of this committee to confirm Pete Hegseth
7 as our next Secretary of Defense.

8 And I am not here today just to advocate on behalf of a
9 future colleague but to speak on behalf of someone I
10 consider a dear friend for over a decade now. Like Pete, I
11 served in the U.S. Army. Like Pete, I am a veteran. We
12 deployed to Afghanistan and all over the world at the height
13 of the war on terror, which is the war of our generation.

14 And like thousands of other warfighters, we have
15 witnessed the hardships of war. We have experienced the
16 loss of friends in combat. We have endured too much time
17 away from family and friends, and no one -- I can promise
18 you this -- no one hates war more than those who have had to
19 go fight it. No one does.

20 Pete's story, though, is not that much different from
21 the millions of other veterans, and they know it, and they
22 appreciate him for the experiences that he has gone through.
23 And after our country was brutally attacked on 9/11, Pete
24 Hegseth answered the call of duty, like so many others. He
25 put the interests of this country ahead of his own.

1 And I can tell you firsthand, as can the heroes sitting
2 in this audience behind me, Pete's character of country, his
3 selflessness, his duty, these are the key tenets that have
4 shaped him into the leader that he is today. These are the
5 traits that President Trump recognized when making the
6 decision to nominate Pete for this critical role.

7 He will bring the perspective of being the first
8 Secretary of Defense to have served as a junior officer on
9 the front line -- not in the headquarters -- on the front
10 line in the war on terror, and recognizes the human costs,
11 the financial costs, and the policy drift that was discussed
12 often in this very room, that led us to decades and decades
13 of war.

14 So not only does he understand the threats he faces,
15 but as the chairman mentioned, he is brilliant, in my mind,
16 at communicating those to the American people in a way that
17 is often not communicated in Washington, D.C., to reach out
18 to the American people so that they understand why the
19 military needs to do what it needs to do.

20 And look, I have no doubt that he is going to get the
21 Pentagon back to its primary mission -- lethal readiness.
22 That warrior ethos is what our economies will respect. That
23 warrior ethos is what our enemies will fear. And it is that
24 warrior ethos that will keep the peace.

25 And look, ladies and gentlemen, in my humble opinion,

1 our military deserves better than it is getting. Our
2 country faces a devastating recruitment crisis. Men and
3 women are not volunteering to serve at the levels required.
4 Our readiness is down. Our costs are up. And it seems like
5 nearly every major weapon system, again, often discussed in
6 this very room, is costing too much, delivering too little,
7 and taking way too long.

8 The bottom line is the status quo is unacceptable. It
9 is not working. And the members of this committee, you all
10 know it. You know it is not working. And the members of
11 the House Armed Services know it is not working. And we
12 have hearing after hearing, year after year, and here we
13 are, decades later, describing the same problems. The
14 Pentagon has continuously failed audits. The businesses
15 that want to do business with the Pentagon have to pass an
16 audit, but the entity itself fails an audit. Innovation is
17 stalled, morale is down, standards have been weakened, and
18 meritocracy is less valued. And as a result, our
19 adversaries have been emboldened all over the world.

20 Ladies and gentlemen, it is time for change. It is
21 time for change. You all have literally seen thousands of
22 veterans -- as the chairman cited one amazing Medal of Honor
23 recipient -- we have seen thousands of veterans expressing
24 their support for Pete. This is a man who can reinvigorate
25 that warrior ethos, and this is a man that will lead.

1 I cannot imagine having a more capable partner in my
2 position as National Security Advisor. Pete is a man of
3 family, of faith, and he is committed to making our country
4 strong again. And most importantly -- and brother, I know
5 this is my core -- he will always have, as a first
6 principle, the servicemembers that are out there on the
7 front line for all of us at the heart of every decision he
8 makes.

9 So Senators, I urge you to support this confirmation.
10 It is critical that President Trump has his national
11 security team in place for the challenges ahead. And I
12 thank you.

13 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Mike, for your testimony.
14 And I am guessing that each and every member of this
15 committee will want to have you on speed dial for the next
16 few years. So thank you both.

17 Our two guests may stay, or I know they have other
18 engagements and responsibilities also. But thank you both
19 for your testimony.

20 At this point, Mr. Hegseth, I am required to ask you,
21 as the nominee, a series of questions that the committee
22 asks all civilian nominees who appear before us. If you
23 would, please simply respond in the affirmative or negative
24 to each question.

25 Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations

1 governing conflicts of interest?

2 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

3 Chairman Wicker: Have you assumed any duties or taken
4 any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the
5 confirmation process?

6 Mr. Hegseth: No, sir.

7 Chairman Wicker: Exercising our legislative and
8 oversight responsibilities makes it important that this
9 committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate
10 committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings,
11 reports, records, and other information from the executive
12 branch on a timely basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to
13 appear and testify before this committee when requested?

14 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

15 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree to provide records,
16 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner
17 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or
18 other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult
19 with the requestor regarding the basis for any good faith
20 delay or denial in providing such records?

21 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

22 Chairman Wicker: Will you ensure that your staff
23 complies with deadlines established by this committee for
24 the production of reports, records, and other information,
25 including timely responding to hearing questions for the

1 record?

2 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

3 Chairman Wicker: Will you cooperate in providing
4 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional
5 requests?

6 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

7 Chairman Wicker: Will those witnesses and briefers be
8 protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

9 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

10 Chairman Wicker: All right. So at this point, Mr.
11 Hegseth, you are recognized for your opening statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF PETER B. HEGSETH, TO BE SECRETARY OF
2 DEFENSE

3 Mr. Hegseth: Well, thank you Chairman Wicker, Ranking
4 Member Reed, and all members of this committee for this
5 opportunity today. I am grateful for, and have learned a
6 great deal from, this "advise and consent" process. Our
7 founders knew what they were doing. Should I be confirmed,
8 I look forward to working with this committee, Senators from
9 both parties, to secure our nation.

10 I want to thank the former Senator from Minnesota, Norm
11 Coleman, for his mentorship and friendship in this process,
12 and the incoming National Security Advisor, Congressman, and
13 more importantly for our purposes, Colonel, Mike Waltz, for
14 his powerful words. I am grateful for them both.

15 Thank you to my incredible wife Jennifer, who has
16 changed my life and been with me throughout this entire
17 process. I love you sweetheart, and I thank God for you.
18 And as Jenny and I pray together every morning, all glory,
19 regardless of the outcome, belongs to our Lord and Savior
20 Jesus Christ. His grace and mercy abound each day. May His
21 will be done.

22 Thank you to my father Brian and mother Penny, as well
23 as my entire family, including our seven wonderful kids:
24 Gunner, Jackson, Peter Boone, Kensington, Luke, Rex --
25 sorry, it is a lot of them -- and Gwendolyn. Their future

1 safety and security is in all our hands.

2 And to all the troops and veterans watching, and here
3 in this room -- Navy SEALs, Green Berets, soldiers, pilots,
4 sailors, Marines, Gold Stars and more, too many friends to
5 name, officers and enlisted, Black and white, young and old,
6 men and women, all Americans, all warriors -- this hearing
7 is for you. Thank you for figuratively, and literally,
8 having my back.

9 [Disturbance in hearing room.]

10 Chairman Wicker: I want to thank the authorities for
11 their swift reaction to that outburst, and state that
12 similar interruptions will be treated in a like manner.

13 Mr. Hegseth, you may continue.

14 Mr. Hegseth: As I will say again, thank you for
15 figuratively, and literally, having my back. I pledge to do
16 the same for all of you. All of you.

17 It is an honor to come before this committee as
18 President Donald Trump's nominee for the office of Secretary
19 of Defense. Two months ago, 77 million Americans gave
20 President Trump a powerful mandate for change, to put
21 America First, at home and abroad. I want to thank
22 President Trump for his faith in me and his selfless
23 leadership of our Republic. The troops have no better
24 commander in chief than Donald Trump.

25 As I have said to many of you in our private meetings,

1 when President Trump chose me for this position, the primary
2 charge he gave me was to bring the warrior culture back to
3 the Department of Defense. He, like me, wants a Pentagon
4 laser-focused on lethality, meritocracy, warfighting,
5 accountability, and readiness.

6 [Disturbance in the hearing room.]

7 Chairman Wicker: You may continue, sir.

8 Mr. Hegseth: Returning the Pentagon back to
9 warfighting. That is it. That is my job.

10 Chairman Wicker: Mr. Hegseth. Suspend your remarks.

11 Let me just say this. The Capitol Police are going to
12 remove immediately individuals that are disrupting the
13 hearing. I see a pattern attempting to be inflicted on the
14 committee, and we are simply not going to tolerate that.

15 You may proceed.

16 Mr. Hegseth: To bring back warfighting, if confirmed,
17 I am going to work with President Trump, and this committee
18 to:

19 1. Restore the Warrior Ethos to the Pentagon and
20 throughout our fighting force. In doing so, we will
21 reestablish trust in our military, addressing the recruiting
22 crisis, the retention crisis, and readiness crisis in our
23 ranks.

24 [Disturbance in hearing room.]

25 Chairman Wicker: Members of the security force will

1 remove members.

2 Mr. Hegseth, you may --

3 Mr. Hegseth: The strength of our military is our unity
4 and our shared purpose, not our differences.

5 2. Rebuild our Military, always matching threats to
6 capabilities. This includes reviving our defense industrial
7 base, reforming the acquisition process -- as you mentioned,
8 Mr. Chairman, no more "Valley of Death" for new defense
9 companies -- modernizing our nuclear triad, ensuring the
10 Pentagon can pass an audit, and rapidly fielding emerging
11 technologies.

12 3. Re-establish Deterrence. First and foremost, we
13 will defend our homeland -- our borders and our skies.
14 Second, we will work with our partners and allies to deter
15 aggression in the Indo-Pacific from the communist Chinese.
16 Finally, we will responsibly end wars to ensure we can
17 prioritize our resources to reorient to larger threats. We
18 can no longer count on "reputational deterrence." We need
19 real deterrence.

20 The Department of Defense under Donald Trump will
21 achieve Peace Through Strength. And in pursuing these
22 America First national security goals, we will remain
23 patriotically apolitical and stridently constitutional.
24 Unlike the current Administration, politics should play no
25 part in military matters. We are not Republicans. We are

1 not Democrats. We are American warriors. Our standards
2 will be high, and they will be equal, not equitable. That
3 is a very different word.

4 We need to make sure every warrior is fully qualified
5 on their assigned weapon system, every pilot is fully
6 qualified and current on the aircraft they are flying, and
7 every general or flag officer is selected for leadership or
8 promotion based purely on performance, readiness, and merit.

9 Leaders -- at all levels -- will be held accountable,
10 and warfighting and lethality -- and the readiness of the
11 troops and their families -- will be our only focus.

12 That has been my focus ever since I first put on the
13 uniform as a young Army ROTC cadet at Princeton University
14 in 2001. I joined the military because I love my country
15 and felt an obligation to defend it. I served with
16 incredible Americans in Guantanamo Bay, in Iraq, in
17 Afghanistan, and on the streets of Washington, D.C., many of
18 which are here today. This includes enlisted soldiers I
19 helped become American citizens, and Muslim allies I helped
20 immigrate from Iraq and Afghanistan. Because when I took
21 off the uniform, my mission never stopped.

22 Now it is true, and it has been acknowledged, that I do
23 not have a similar biography to Defense Secretaries of the
24 last 30 years. But as President Trump also told me, we have
25 repeatedly placed people atop the Pentagon with supposedly

1 "the right credentials," whether they are retired generals,
2 academics, or defense contractor executives. And where has
3 it gotten us? He believes, and I humbly agree, that it is
4 time to give someone with dust on his boots the helm. A
5 change agent. Someone with no vested interest in certain
6 companies or specific programs or approved narrative.

7 My only special interest is the warfighter, deterring
8 wars, and if called upon, winning wars, by ensuring our
9 warriors never enter a fair fight. We let them win and we
10 bring them home. Like many of my generation, I have been
11 there. I have led troops in combat. I have been on patrol
12 for days. I have pulled a trigger downrange, heard bullets
13 whiz by, flex-cuffed insurgents, called in close air
14 support, led medevacs, dodged IEDs, pulled out dead bodies,
15 and knelt before a battlefield cross. This is not academic
16 for me; this is my life. I led then, and I will lead now.

17 Ask anyone who has ever worked for me, or with me. I
18 know what I don't know. My success as a leader, and I very
19 much look forward to discussing my organizations' successes
20 at Vets for Freedom and Concerned Veterans for America. I
21 am incredibly proud of the work that we have done. But my
22 success as a leader has always been setting a clear vision,
23 hiring people smarter and more capable than me, empowering
24 them to succeed, holding everyone accountable, and driving
25 toward clear metrics. Build the plan. Work the plan. And

1 then work harder than everyone around you.

2 I have sworn an oath to the Constitution before, and if
3 confirmed, will proudly do it again, this time, for the most
4 important deployment of my life.

5 I pledge to be a faithful partner to this committee,
6 taking input and respecting oversight. We share the same
7 goals: a ready, lethal military, the health and well-being
8 of our troops, and a strong and secure America.

9 Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your
10 questions.

11 [The prepared statement of Mr. Hegseth follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Mr. Hegseth.

2 Before we begin with member questions I would like to
3 remind my colleagues that consistent with the bipartisan
4 staff agreement from December, and in concert with exactly
5 how this committee dealt with the last Secretary of Defense
6 nominee, each member will be recognized for one round of 7
7 minutes to question the nominee. Out of respect for the
8 time of all members of this committee, the time limits will
9 be tightly enforced. We have now been here 45 minutes and I
10 think we have done very well with the time.

11 But at this point I will begin my questioning of the
12 nominee.

13 Mr. Hegseth, you and your family have endured criticism
14 of your nomination since it was announced in November.
15 Let's get into this allocation of about sexual assault,
16 inappropriate workplace behavior, alcohol abuse, and
17 financial mismanagement during your time has a nonprofit
18 executive. I should note that the majority of these have
19 come from anonymous sources in liberal media publications.

20 But I want to give you an opportunity to respond to
21 these allegations, sir.

22 Mr. Hegseth: Mr. Chairman, thank you for that
23 opportunity. You are correct. We undertook this
24 responsibility with an obligation to the troops, to do right
25 by them for our warfighters. And what became very evident

1 to us, from the beginning, there was a coordinated smear
2 campaign orchestrated in the media against us. That was
3 clear from moment one.

4 And what we knew is that it was not about me. Most of
5 it was about President Donald Trump, who has had to endure
6 the very same thing for much longer amounts of time, and he
7 endured it in incredibly strong ways. So we, in some ways,
8 knew it was coming. We did not understand the depth of the
9 dishonesty that would come with it.

10 So from story after story in the media, left-wing
11 media, we saw anonymous source after anonymous source, based
12 on second- or third-hand accounts. And time and time again,
13 stories would come out, and people would reach out to me and
14 say, "You know, I have spoken to this reporter about who you
15 really are, and I was willing to go on the record, but they
16 didn't print my quote. They didn't print any of my quotes."
17 Or, "I have worked with you for 10 years," or "I was your
18 accountant," or "I was your chief operating officer," or "I
19 was your board member," or "I was with you on 100 different
20 tour stops for Concerned Veterans for America. No one
21 called me. No one asked about your conduct, on the record
22 or off the record."

23 Instead, a small handful of anonymous sources were
24 allowed to drive a smear campaign and agenda about me,
25 because our left-wing media in America today, sadly, does

1 not care about the truth. All they were out to do, Mr.
2 Chairman, was to destroy me. And why do they want to
3 destroy me? Because I am change agent and a threat to them,
4 because Donald Trump was willing to choose me, to empower
5 me, to bring the Defense Department back to what it really
6 should be, which is warfighting.

7 So I am willing to endure these attacks. But what I
8 will do is stand up for the truth and for my reputation.
9 False attacks, anonymous attacks, repeated ad nauseum,
10 printed ad nauseum as facts. We have provided to the
11 committee, Mr. Chairman, and I know you are going to share,
12 on-the-record statement after on-the-record statement from
13 people who have served with me, worked with me, at Fox News,
14 Concerned Vets, Vets for Freedom. You name it, from the top
15 of the chain to the bottom, who will say I treat them with
16 respect, with kindness, with dignity. That's men. That's
17 women. That's Black. That's white. That's every
18 background. I have prided myself as a leader of respecting
19 people, being professional. That is the balance of my --

20 I am not a perfect person, as has been acknowledged.
21 Saved by the grace of God, by Jesus and Jenny. I am not a
22 perfect person, but redemption is real. And God forged me
23 in ways that I know I am prepared for. And I am honored by
24 the people standing and sitting behind me, and I look
25 forward to leading this Pentagon on behalf of the

1 warfighters.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Hegseth, and frankly,
3 I am sure there are millions of Americans watching who would
4 agree that they have experienced that same sort of
5 redemption. So I do appreciate that. I realize it involves
6 a little bearing of the soul, but thank you for that.

7 Now let's talk about top-line defense spending. I have
8 a plan, and I think you have read it. I issued another
9 plan, Freedom's Forge, which you have also had a chance to
10 look at. You have noted correctly that the current trim
11 line of defense spending falling below 3 percent of our GDP
12 is a threat to national security. You also said building
13 the strongest, most powerful military in the world must be
14 done responsibly, but it cannot be done on the cheap.

15 You still agree with that, do you not?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir, I do.

17 Chairman Wicker: So tell us what you think
18 particularly about my plan to make the Defense Department
19 less bureaucratic, less top heavy, to cut out some of the
20 bureaucracy in layers, make it more friendly to startups and
21 to new ideas, contained in my 20-or-so page white paper,
22 Defending Freedom's Forge.

23 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I have had a chance to review
24 the FORGED Act, that paper. Those are precisely the kinds
25 of ideas that need to be pursued. And I look forward to

1 working with this committee to ensure we cut the red tape,
2 we incentivize innovation, we rebuild the defense industrial
3 base, cut out the bureaucracy, all the things that are
4 preventing the platforms and the tools from getting rapidly
5 from our great defense companies here, and those that want
6 to compete, into the hands of warfighters.

7 But past is prologue on this, sir. And I would just
8 look at what President Trump did after the drawdowns of lead
9 from behind under President Obama. President Trump rebuilt
10 our military. He did not start wars. He ended them, and he
11 did not allow wars to start on his watch. We have had the
12 same kind of defense cuts under the Biden administration.

13 So I would present to the committee the reputation of
14 President Donald Trump and me coming alongside him to ensure
15 we have peace through strength by rebuilding our military,
16 investing as necessary. Going under 3 percent, Mr.
17 Chairman, is very dangerous.

18 Chairman Wicker: Okay. We have got 45 seconds. Tell
19 us, at that point, get us started, at least, talking about
20 deterring China and the Indo-Pacific.

21

22 Mr. Hegseth: It starts with priorities. The 2017
23 National Defense Strategy was the first step in reorienting
24 away from simply entanglement in the Middle East, which our
25 generation knows a lot about, and reorienting the behemoth

1 that is the Pentagon toward new priorities, specifically the
2 Indo-Pacific. That strategy started and was barely followed
3 through on under the Biden administration. So we are going
4 to start by ensuring the institution understands that as far
5 as threats abroad, the CCP is front and center, and also
6 obviously defending our homeland, as well.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator Reed,
8 you are recognized.

9 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
10 Before I begin my questioning I would like to make three
11 requests. First, many of my members would like a second
12 round. That has been the custom. Senator Hagel was
13 afforded three rounds, Ash Carter two rounds. And that was
14 done by a Republican chairman with the consent and
15 appropriate guidance of Democrats.

16 I must say, too, my recollection is I have never denied
17 anyone the opportunity to ask a second round of questions as
18 our chair. I would request a second round.

19 And my time is running. I think these are
20 administrative --

21 Chairman Wicker: Oh yeah, you are using your time.
22 No. If the timekeeper will pause the time.

23 I must say, I think we are going to have adequate time
24 for questioning. And I know Democratic members have
25 coordinated their questions, as much as we have.

1 We are following the same exact precedent on all things
2 that we did with Secretary Austin. So I am respectfully
3 understand what you are saying, but I think we have an
4 agreement. It has been known for quite some time. And I
5 intend to stick with that agreement which we made last
6 December.

7 What is your second request?

8 Senator Reed: Second, as has been publicly reported,
9 you and I have both seen the FBI background investigation of
10 Mr. Hegseth. And I want to say for the record, I believe
11 the investigation was insufficient, frankly. There are
12 still FBI obligations to talk to people. They have not had
13 access to the forensic audit, which I referenced, and the
14 person who had access to it was quite critical of Mr.
15 Hegseth.

16 I think people on both sides have suggested that they
17 get the report. I know your colleagues have asked for it.
18 Senator Thune assured me personally that he thought it was
19 an appropriate idea. So I would ask, and I would say, too,
20 as a precedent, one of President Trump's appointees has
21 similar, very complicated personal issues. The report was
22 made available to all the members of the committee. We
23 would be following precedent, and I ask that that be made
24 possible.

25 Chairman Wicker: Again, there has been much discussion

1 about this, and what I intend to do is follow the exact
2 precedent that we have had for the last two hearings with
3 regard to Secretaries of Defense, not only Secretary Austin
4 but Secretary Mattis 8 years ago. And that was for the
5 chair and the ranking member to see the report.

6 And so that is my intention as chair of this committee.

7 Senator Reed: Finally, Mr. Chairman, I have several
8 letters that I would include for the record, one from Count
9 Every Hero, which is an organization of retired four-star
10 generals and former Secretaries of Defense, that is critical
11 of the proposed search panels; one from an organization for
12 domestic violence; one, a Council on American Relations; and
13 also several letters that raise questions. I would ask that
14 they be submitted for the record.

15 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, they will be
16 submitted.

17 [The information follows:]

18 Chairman Wicker: And Mr. Reed, your time has now
19 expired. Just kidding.

20 [Laughter.]

21 Chairman Wicker: You are recognized for 7 minutes.

22 Senator Reed: Thank you. You are a very understanding
23 chairman. I like that. I like that.

24 Mr. Hegseth, you have written in this quote, "Oh yeah,
25 and firing any general who has carried water for Obama and

1 Biden's extraconstitutional and agenda-driven transformation
2 of our military. Clean house and start over."

3 It has come to my attention that current-serving
4 military personnel have received emails threatening them
5 with being fired for supporting the current DoD policies.

6 One mail that was sent to a military officer with the
7 subject line "Clean house," reminiscent of your specific
8 comment, states, and I quote, "With the incoming
9 administration looking to remove disloyal, corrupt,
10 traitorous, liberal officers such as yourself, we will
11 certainly be putting your name into the list of those
12 personnel to be removed. We know you support the woke DEI
13 policies, and will ensure you never again influence anyone
14 in the future. You and" -- redacted spouse's name -- "will
15 be lucky if you are able to collect your military
16 requirements," end quote.

17 Now I want to remind everyone that these policies that
18 are being referred to date back decades, to the 1940s and
19 '50s, with respect to racial discrimination particularly,
20 and administrations of both parties, including the Trump
21 administration and the first party, caused those policies to
22 be enforced.

23 Mr. Hegseth, are you aware of these emails being sent
24 to officers?

25 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, you mentioned the word

1 "accountability," which is something we have not had for the
2 last 4 years.

3 Senator Reed: Are you aware of these messages being
4 sent to officers?

5 Mr. Hegseth: Certainly I am not aware of that. It is
6 not one of my efforts. But there has been no accountability
7 --

8 Senator Reed: Excuse me.

9 Mr. Hegseth: -- for the disaster of the withdrawal in
10 Afghanistan, and that is precisely why we are here today --

11 Senator Reed: Excuse me.

12 Mr. Hegseth: -- is that leadership has been unwilling
13 to take accountability. It is the time to restore that to
14 our most senior ranks.

15 Senator Reed: You have written publicly that DEI
16 policy is a distraction and has military personnel walking
17 on eggshells. Do you believe that emails like that, that
18 are essentially threatening both a serving officer and a
19 spouse, and claiming that they will lose their pension, will
20 have a distraction and detract from the lethality?

21 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, you mentioned the '40s and '50s,
22 and you are precisely right. The military was a forerunning
23 in courageous racial integration, in ways no other
24 institutions are willing to do. I served with men and women
25 of all backgrounds. Because of the courage of people who --

1 Senator Reed: Mr. Hegseth, please.

2 Mr. Hegseth: -- incredibly important --

3 Senator Reed: Mr. Hegseth, please.

4 Mr. Hegseth: However --

5 Senator Reed: Please.

6 Mr. Hegseth: -- the DEI policies of today are not the
7 same as what happened back then. They are dividing troops
8 inside formations, causing commanders to walk on eggshells,
9 not putting meritocracy first. That is the indictment that
10 is made by those serving right now --

11 Senator Reed: Excuse me.

12 Mr. Hegseth: -- and why we are having this
13 conversation.

14 Senator Reed: Excuse me. All of your public comments
15 don't talk about meritocracy. They talk about liberal,
16 Democratic efforts that are destroying the military, that
17 those people are enemies. That is not meritocracy. That is
18 a political view. And your goal, as I see emerging, is to
19 politicize the military in favor of your particular
20 positions, which you have outlined extensively, which would
21 be the worst blow to the professionalism of the United
22 States military, and would undercut readiness, undercut
23 retention. Because I can see officers receiving these
24 emails, beginning to wonder very seriously if they should
25 continue.

1 Let me change subjects for a moment here. You have
2 been instrumental in securing pardons for several convicted
3 war criminals. In at least two of these cases, the military
4 personnel who served in combat with these convicted
5 servicemembers were not supportive of the pardons. They did
6 their duty as soldiers to report war crimes.

7 Your definition of lethality seems to embrace those
8 people who do commit war crimes rather than those who stand
9 up and say, "This is not right." So what is your response
10 to servicemembers who personally witnessed these and
11 courageously reported them to their superiors?

12 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, as someone who has led men in
13 combat directly and had to make very difficult decisions, I
14 have thought very deeply about the balance between legality
15 and lethality. Ensuring that the men and women on the front
16 lines have the opportunity to destroy with and close the
17 enemy, and that lawyers are not the ones getting in the way.
18 I am not talking about disavowing the laws of war or the
19 Geneva Convention or the Uniform Code of Military Justice.
20 Sir, I am talking about restrictive rules of engagement that
21 these men and women behind me understand, they have lived
22 with on the battlefield, which has made it more difficult to
23 defeat our enemies.

24 In many of the cases you are talking about in
25 particular, sir, there was evidence withheld. There was

1 prosecutorial misconduct. And as someone who looked case-
2 by-case and defaults to the warfighter, to the men and women
3 with dust on their boots, not the second-guessers in air-
4 conditioned offices in Washington, D.C.

5 Senator Reed: Excuse me.

6 Mr. Hegseth: I have looked case-by-case, and was proud
7 to work with President Trump to understand those cases and
8 ensure that our warriors are always looked out for.

9 Senator Reed: Those cases were adjudicated by who,
10 people in Washington or fellow noncommissioned officers who
11 had also served to sacrifice and believed in the ethic of
12 the military? Who were the court martial --

13 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, in multiple cases they were
14 actually acquitted.

15 Senator Reed: In some cases, yes.

16 Mr. Hegseth: Regardless of where those --

17 Senator Reed: Some were --

18 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

19 Senator Reed: Some were, but others were convicted,
20 and you asked for a pardon. That is the only reason you ask
21 for a pardon, because they were convicted.

22 But the other factor, too, is you have already
23 disparaged, in writing, the Geneva convention, the rules of
24 law, all of these things. How will you be able to
25 effectively lead a military in which one of the principal

1 elements is discipline, respect for lawful authority? You
2 have made statements to your platoon after being briefed by
3 a JAG officer -- oh, by the way, would you explain what a
4 JAG Off is?

5 Mr. Hegseth: I do not think I need to, sir.

6 Senator Reed: Why not?

7 Mr. Hegseth: Because the men and women in Washington
8 understand.

9 Senator Reed: Well, perhaps some of my colleagues do
10 not understand.

11 Mr. Hegseth: It would be a JAG Officer who puts his or
12 her own priorities in front of the warfighters -- their
13 promotions, their medals, in front of having the backs of
14 those who are making the tough calls on the front line.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Reed.

16 Senator Reed: Interesting.

17 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Reed. Senator
18 Fischer.

19 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome,
20 Mr. Hegseth, to you and to your family.

21 Thank you for the meeting that we had. We talked about
22 a number of things. First and foremost what that nuclear
23 weapons are foundational to our national defense, and having
24 a safe, effective, and credible nuclear deterrent underpins
25 our alliances, and as you know, it deters our adversaries.

1 Nuclear deterrence has been, and you and I, I believe,
2 agreed on this, it must continue to be unequivocally the
3 highest priority mission of the Department of Defense. But
4 deterrence only works if our adversaries believe our nuclear
5 forces are effective and credible. All three legs of our
6 triad are undergoing that generational recapitalization
7 program, and we cannot afford any more delays in those
8 programs.

9 Sir, do you believe and agree with President Trump's
10 2018 Nuclear Posture Review that preventing adversary
11 nuclear attacks is, quote, "the highest priority of the
12 United States"?

13 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, yes, I do.

14 Senator Fischer: If confirmed, will you commit to
15 supporting all three legs of the nuclear triad and to using
16 every tool available to deliver these systems on schedule?

17 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, yes, I do, because ultimately
18 our deterrence, our survival, is reliant upon the
19 capability, the perception, and the reality of the
20 capability of our nuclear triad. We have to invest in its
21 modernization for the defense of our nation.

22 Senator Fischer: While former Secretaries of Defense
23 have stated nuclear deterrence is the highest priority, we
24 have not really seen that translated into budget requests or
25 using the tools like the Defense Production Act. You have

1 spoken about increasing lethality. You have spoken about
2 getting programs done faster. How would you actually
3 implement a culture change so that we can see these delivery
4 schedules move forward, be rewarded? I can tell you, in
5 most every briefing we have, the schedules we are on are too
6 late. So what would you do?

7 Mr. Hegseth: Well, ultimately focus first on the
8 things that are most important, as we have discussed,
9 Senator, the nuclear triad, understanding whether it is the
10 B-21 or the Minuteman to the Sentinel, all aspects of the
11 Columbia-class submarines, ballistic missiles, what are the
12 priorities that need to be focused on and ensure that in
13 those particular cases -- you mentioned it, Senator, the
14 Defense Production Act, emergency powers.

15 If we are at a place where our nuclear capabilities are
16 perceived to not be what they are, that is an emergency.
17 And we have an ally in our incoming commander in chief, in
18 President Donald Trump, who has spoken about these things,
19 understands the power and strength of nuclear deterrence,
20 will not allow them --

21 Senator Fischer: It is the --

22 Mr. Hegseth: -- to be deprioritized.

23 Senator Fischer: -- existential threat. It is the
24 existential threat to this nation. How do you change the
25 culture? It is not just the Production Act that is going to

1 be able to do it. How are you going to move forward faster?

2 Mr. Hegseth: Competition, Senator, is important,
3 critically important. The death valley that was talked
4 about, leveraging the innovation of Silicon Valley, which
5 for the first time in generations has shown a willingness,
6 desire, and capability to bring its best technologies to
7 bear at the Pentagon, a Pentagon that has become too
8 insular, tries to block new technologies from coming in.

9 So we have to embrace that. There is some great Office
10 of Strategic Capital, DIU, initiatives that provide loans to
11 companies to participate. Because you have to invest in the
12 defense industrial base for the longer-term projects. We
13 have the capability, the missiles and the munitions. But
14 also to rapidly field emerging technologies that we need on
15 the battlefield right now.

16 So as we learn things, say, in the war in Ukraine,
17 those technologies, as we look at threats we are going to
18 face, find ways to rapidly field those, using off-the-shelf
19 technologies or standard designs, modular designs.

20 And another easy one, Senator, that became evident in
21 the process is digital design. The Pentagon often builds
22 entire systems without first using a digital design.

23 Senator Fischer: Okay.

24 Mr. Hegseth: Which means you build prototypes and then
25 scrap them and start over again. No private sector business

1 could survive doing business that way. So there is a lot of
2 innovation, and I am going to hire a lot of smart people we
3 already have to help with that.

4 Senator Fischer: Okay. In the 2025 NDAA, it
5 established a new position, Assistant Secretary of Defense
6 for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical, and Biological Defense
7 Policy and Programs. And that was established so we could
8 cut through a lot of the bureaucratic stovepipes that we see
9 in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

10 If confirmed, will you direct the Department of Defense
11 components to expeditiously implement this reform?

12 Mr. Hegseth: It sounds great. I would want to look
13 directly --

14 Senator Fischer: It is great.

15 Mr. Hegseth: -- at exactly what that reform is.

16 Senator Fischer: It is great.

17 Mr. Hegseth: I take your word that it is great,
18 Senator. I will review it robustly, and I look forward to
19 implementing it.

20 Senator Fischer: Okay. Thank you. During the first
21 Trump administration, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review
22 concluded that the U.S. needed to once again develop and
23 deploy a nuclear-armed sea-launch cruise missile, known as
24 SLCM-N, to offset significant Russian and Chinese advantages
25 in theater-range nuclear capabilities. Since then,

1 Congress, on a strong bipartisan basis, has directed the
2 Navy and the National Nuclear Security Administration to
3 continue this effort.

4 Do you support the SLCM-N program?

5 Mr. Hegseth: As of right now, Senator, based on what I
6 know, I do. But one of my answers I will have repeatedly
7 throughout this morning is getting an opportunity to look
8 under the hood at classified material, getting an
9 understanding of true capabilities, vis-à-vis enemy
10 capabilities. Because what we know right now, on the
11 nuclear -- sorry, Senator -- what I know on the nuclear side
12 is that Russia and China are rushing to modernize and build
13 arsenals larger than ours. We need to match threats to
14 capabilities, and the systems we elevate will be tied to
15 whether those capabilities are needed based on the
16 adversaries we face.

17 Senator Fischer: Would you ensure that this program is
18 executed according to law?

19 Mr. Hegseth: Absolutely. Absolutely, Senator.

20 Senator Fischer: Short here. What is your plan to
21 revitalize the industrial base in this country?

22 Chairman Wicker: It needs to be real short.

23 [Laughter.]

24 Mr. Hegseth: Serious investment targeted at systems
25 that we truly need, by also incentivizing competition, and

1 laser-focused from the OSD, from the Office of Secretary of
2 Defense, to all the particular strategic initiatives, to
3 revive them so it is not just one system. It is multiple
4 systems.

5 Chairman Wicker: You may want to expand on that on the
6 record.

7 At this point, my colleagues, I would ask unanimous
8 consent to enter into the record a letter organized by a
9 group called Flag Officers for America, which has 120
10 retired generals and admirals offering their support for Mr.
11 Hegseth's nomination. I ask unanimous consent. Without
12 objection, it is entered into the record.

13 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Senator Shaheen.

2 Senator Shaheen: Good morning, Mr. Hegseth.

3 Mr. Hegseth: Good morning, Senator.

4 Senator Shaheen: I was pleased when I was contacted on
5 your behalf about meeting before this hearing. I have been
6 on this committee since 2011, and during that time I voted
7 to confirm six nominees to be Secretary of Defense, from
8 three administrations, two Democratic and one Republican,
9 the first Trump administration. Every one of those nominees
10 met with me and my Democratic colleagues on this committee
11 before the hearing.

12 So as you can imagine, I was disappointed when no one
13 ever followed up. When we followed up with your office, you
14 were not able to meet. Do you understand that if you are
15 confirmed to be Secretary of Defense that you will have a
16 responsibility to meet with all members of this committee,
17 not just Republicans?

18 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I very much appreciate and
19 understand the traditionally bipartisan nature of this
20 committee. National defense is not partisan. It should not
21 be about Republicans or Democrats. So I look forward to
22 working together with you and your colleagues on priorities
23 facing this nation, yes.

24 Senator Shaheen: I think we would expect that. And
25 one reason that I wanted to meet with you was because I

1 thought it would be really helpful to better understand your
2 view on women in the military, because you have made a
3 number of surprising statements about women serving in the
4 military. As recently as November 7, 2024, on the Shawn
5 Ryan Show, you said, and I quote, "I am straight up saying
6 that we should not have women in combat roles. It hasn't
7 made us more effective." The quote went on a little longer,
8 but that was the gist of it. That was before you were
9 nominated to be Secretary of Defense.

10 Mr. Hegseth, do you know what percentage of our
11 military is comprised of women?

12 Mr. Hegseth: I believe it is 18 to 20 percent,
13 Senator.

14 Senator Shaheen: It is almost 18 percent, and in fact,
15 DoD's 2023 demographic report indicated that there are more
16 women serving now, and there are fewer separations. So they
17 make up a critical part of our military, wouldn't you agree?

18 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, ma'am. Women in our military, as I
19 have said publicly, have and continue to make amazing
20 contributions across all aspects of our battlefield.

21 Senator Shaheen: Well, you also write in your book,
22 "The War on Warriors," with the chapter, "The Deadly
23 Obsession with Women Warriors," that, quote, "Not only are
24 women comparatively less effective than men in combat roles
25 but they are more likely to be objectified by the enemy and

1 their own nation in the moral realms of war."

2 Mr. Hegseth, should we take it to believe that you
3 believe that the two women on this committee who have served
4 honorably and with distinction, made our military less
5 effective and less capable?

6 Mr. Hegseth: I am incredibly grateful for the two
7 women who have served our military in uniform, including in
8 the Central Intelligence Agency, contributions on the
9 battlefield, indispensable contributions. Senator, I would
10 like to clarify, when I am talking about that issue it is
11 not about the capabilities of men and women. It is about
12 standards. And this committee has talked a lot about
13 standards, standards that we, unfortunately, over time, have
14 seen eroded in certain duty positions, certain schools,
15 certain places, which affects readiness, which is what I
16 care about the most, readiness on the battlefield.

17 Senator Shaheen: I appreciate that, and --

18 Mr. Hegseth: So my comments --

19 Senator Shaheen: However --

20 Mr. Hegseth: -- refer time and time again to
21 standards.

22 Senator Shaheen: -- your statements publicly have not
23 been to that effect. After your nomination you did state to
24 a group of reporters that you, quote, "support all women
25 serving in our military today, who do a fantastic job across

1 the globe, including combat."

2 So what I am confused about, Mr. Hegseth, is which is
3 it? Why should women in our military, if you were the
4 Secretary of Defense, believe that they would have a fair
5 shot and an equal opportunity to rise through the ranks, if
6 on the one hand you say that women are not competent, they
7 make our military less effective, and on the other hand you
8 say, oh no, now that I have been nominated to be the
9 Secretary of Defense I have changed my view on women in the
10 military.

11 What do you have to say to the almost 400,000 women who
12 are serving today about your position on whether they should
13 be capable to rise through the highest ranks of our
14 military?

15 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I would say I would be honored
16 to have the opportunity to serve alongside you, shoulder to
17 shoulder, men and women, Black, white, all backgrounds, with
18 a shared purpose. Our differences are not what define us.
19 Our unity and our shared purpose is what define us. And you
20 will be treated fairly and with dignity, honor, and respect,
21 just like every man and woman in uniform, just like the men
22 and women that I have worked with in my veterans'
23 organizations, to include when I was at headquarters and
24 headquarters company commander in the Minnesota National
25 Guard.

1 Senator Shaheen: Well, I --

2 Mr. Hegseth: -- when we had women in our ranks, as
3 well.

4 Senator Shaheen: -- appreciate your 11th hour
5 conversion. But Mr. Chairman, for the record I would like
6 to submit Chapter 5, "The Deadly Obsession with Women
7 Warriors," for the record.

8 Chairman Wicker: Without objection it will be
9 submitted.

10 [The information follows:]

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1 Senator Shaheen: Mr. Hegseth, are you familiar with
2 the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda at the Department of
3 Defense?

4 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, ma'am, I am.

5 Senator Shaheen: This is a law that was signed during
6 President-Elect Trump's first term. It was legislation that
7 I sponsored with Republican Senator Capito of West Virginia.
8 It was co-sponsored by Marco Rubio, the nominee to be the
9 President-Elect's Secretary of State. It was led in the
10 House of Representatives by Kristi Noem, the President-
11 Elect's nominee to be the Secretary of Homeland Security.

12 It mandates that women be included in all aspects of
13 our national security, including conflict resolution and
14 peace negotiations. And at the Department of Defense it has
15 been the law for 8 years, under both the Trump and Biden
16 administrations. The DoD has incorporated women throughout
17 its decision-making as a result.

18 Every single combatant commander across two
19 administrations has told this committee that this law and
20 its implementation at the Department of Defense provides
21 them a strategic advantage operationally. Based on your
22 comments, it appears that the example that you would like to
23 set, not only for women in this country but for women across
24 the globe, 50 percent of the world's population, as the
25 prospective nominee to lead the most combat-credible

1 military in the entire world, is that women should not have
2 an equal opportunity in our military.

3 So will you commit to preserving the Women, Peace, and
4 Security law at DoD, and including in your budget the
5 requisite funding to continue to restore and resource these
6 programs throughout the DoD?

7 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I will commit to reviewing that
8 program and ensuring it aligns with America First national
9 security priorities, meritocracy, lethality, and readiness.
10 And if it advances American interests, it is something we
11 would advance. If it doesn't, it is something we will look
12 at.

13 Senator Shaheen: Since former President Trump signed
14 the law, I hope that he agrees with you.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. At this
16 point I would ask unanimous consent to enter into the record
17 five letters of support from female servicemembers and
18 combat veterans who support Mr. Hegseth's nomination. These
19 women represent diverse viewpoints, from a retired colonel
20 with over 25 years of service, to an active duty Navy
21 service warfare commander, to a senior airman. They support
22 Mr. Hegseth and comment on his focus on merit, warfighting,
23 readiness, military training status, and the warrior ethos.
24 So without objection, it will be entered into the record.

25 [The information follows:]

1 Chairman Wicker: And now I am honored to recognize
2 Senator Cotton for 7 minutes.

3 Senator Cotton: Mr. Hegseth, let's continue on this
4 line of questioning about what is sometimes referred to as
5 women in combat. I think that phrase is something of a
6 misnomer. Many members of this committee have served in
7 combat in the last 25 years, which include women and men. I
8 am sure all of those men served with women, whether they
9 were military police officers or they were pilots or whether
10 they were intelligence analysts or medics, or what have you.

11 You served. I assume you served with women who were on
12 the front lines, as well. Is that correct?

13 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

14 Senator Cotton: And were those women anything other
15 than skilled, brave, and honorable in their service?

16 Mr. Hegseth: They were some of the best soldiers I
17 worked with, sir.

18 Senator Cotton: Women have been serving in combat for
19 a long time. Women have even been serving in combat units,
20 like infantry battalions for a long time, in roles like
21 medics or mechanics, or what have you. So what we are
22 talking about here specifically is women in ground combat
23 roles, in jobs like infantrymen or artillerymen or special
24 forces. Until about 10 years ago, that was not the case.
25 Under Secretary Panetta, those roles were opened up to women

1 to serve in.

2 Has President Trump indicated at all that he plans to
3 rescind or alter that guidance?

4 Mr. Hegseth: You are correct to point out, Senator,
5 that these are decisions that the commander in chief will
6 have the prerogative to make. He has not indicated to me
7 that he has plans to change whether or not women would have
8 access to these roles.

9 However, I would point out, ensuring that standards are
10 equal and high is of importance to him and great importance
11 to me. Because in those ground combat roles, what is true
12 is that the weight of the ruck on your back does not change.
13 The weight of the 155 round that you have to carry does not
14 change. The weight of the 240-Bravo machine gun you might
15 have to carry does not change.

16 And so whether it is a man or a woman, they have to
17 meet the same high standards. And Senator, in any place
18 where those things have been eroded or in courses criteria
19 have been changed in order to meet quotas -- racial quotas
20 or gender quotas -- that is putting a focus on something
21 other than readiness, standards, meritocracy, and lethality.
22 So that is the kind of review I am talking about, not
23 whether women have access to ground combat roles.

24 Senator Cotton: Okay. Thank you. You expect no
25 change to that guidance, but as you point out, in these

1 specific jobs there are irreducible physical demands. We
2 expect our intelligence analysts and our mechanics to be
3 physically fit in the military, but it is different when you
4 are in the infantry or the artillery.

5 You just mentioned a few things. Let me point it out.
6 An artillery shell weighs almost 100 pounds. An Abrams tank
7 round weights around 50 pounds. The M-240 Bravo machine
8 guns, with its tripod, weighs almost 50 pounds. The average
9 weight of a full kit -- ammo, water, commo, body armor --
10 for a soldier is over 100 pounds. Nothing you can do to
11 change any of those things, right? That is physical
12 reality.

13 Mr. Hegseth: Go ahead. Yes, Senator. And I would say
14 the requirements to handle those things in a ground combat
15 unit as far as standards can look different than those of a
16 medic or a drone pilot. So it is not that it has to be the
17 same standard throughout. It is standards to maximize
18 efficacy of that particular position.

19 Senator Cotton: Let me read a quote here from one Army
20 officer. "While it may be difficult for a 120-pound woman
21 to lift or draft 250 pounds, the Army cannot artificially
22 absolve women of that responsibility. It may still exist on
23 the battlefield. The entire purpose of creating a gender-
24 neutral test was to acknowledge the reality that each job
25 has objective physical standards to which all soldiers

1 should be held, regardless of gender. The intend was not to
2 ensure that women and men will have an equal likelihood of
3 meeting those standards."

4 I assume, based on your testimony, you agree with that
5 Army officer?

6 Mr. Hegseth: Absolutely. The standards need to be the
7 same, and they need to be high. And they need to be set by
8 the people closest to the problem set, closest to the
9 understanding of what is required by that job. Commanders,
10 commanding officers, and co-COMs and elsewhere who
11 understand the reality of what face, that is the feedback we
12 should get. That is what should be enshrined and enforced.
13 And no other set of political prerogatives -- when I talk
14 about removing politics, ideological or political
15 prerogatives -- should contribute to those determinations.
16 Nothing other than the execution of the mission.

17 Senator Cotton: Thank you. For the record, that Army
18 officer was Captain Kristen Griest, the Army's first female
19 infantry officer and one of its first female Ranger School
20 graduates.

21 One final point. You said they need to be objective,
22 gender neutral, and high. That is because the demands are,
23 in fact, very high. The current physical fitness test for
24 the Army has a minimum two-mile run of 22 miles "run. And I
25 want the reporter to note that I am putting "run" in air

1 quotes, because 22 miles at two miles is not running. It
2 may be jogging. It is probably walking fast.

3 Let's move on. Twenty-two minutes.

4 We have got a big audience here. Many of them seem to
5 be patriotic supporters of you, Mr. Hegseth. Some of them
6 seem to be liberal critics of you. I would note that it is
7 only the liberal critics that have disrupted this hearing.
8 As was my custom, during the Biden administration, I want to
9 give you a chance to respond to what they said about you. I
10 think the first one accused you of being a Christian
11 Zionist. I am not really sure why that is a bad thing. I
12 am a Christian. I am a Zionist. Zionism is that the Jewish
13 people deserve a homeland in the ancient Holy Land where
14 they have lived since the dawn of history.

15 Do you consider yourself a Christian Zionist?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am a Christian, and I robustly
17 support the state of Israel and its existential defense and
18 the way American comes alongside them as a great ally.

19 Senator Cotton: Thank you. Because another protester,
20 and I think this one was a member of Code Pink, which, by
21 the way, is a Chinese Communist front group these days, said
22 that you support Israel's war in Gaza. I support Israel's
23 existential war in Gaza. I assume, like me and President
24 Trump, you support that war as well, don't you?

25 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I do. I support Israel

1 destroying and killing every last member of Hamas.

2 Senator Cotton: And the third protester said something
3 about 20 years of genocide. I assume that is our wars in
4 Iraq and Afghanistan. Do you think our troops are
5 committing genocide in Iraq and Afghanistan?

6 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I do not. I think our troops,
7 as you know, as so many on this committee know, did the best
8 they could with what they had. The outcomes, and tragically
9 the outcome we saw in Afghanistan under the Biden
10 administration, put a stain on that, but it does not put a
11 stain on what those men and women did in uniform, as you
12 know full well, Senator.

13 Senator Cotton: Thank you, Mr. Hegseth.

14 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Cotton. At this
15 point I ask unanimous consent to offer into the record a
16 letter submitted by Omar Abbasi, son of former city council
17 president of Samarra, Iraq, who worked with Mr. Hegseth in
18 Iraq. Without objection, that will be entered.

19 [The information follows:]

20 Chairman Wicker: Senator Gillibrand.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank
22 you, Mr. Hegseth. I do want to thank you for your service,
23 and I want to thank you for your willingness to serve in
24 this capacity.

25 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you, Senator.

1 Senator Gillibrand: I have many concerns about your
2 record, and particularly your public statements, because
3 they are so hurtful to the men and women who are currently
4 serving in the U.S. military, harmful to morale, harmful to
5 good order and discipline. If you are saying that women
6 should not be serving in the military -- and I am going to
7 read you your quotes, because the quotes themselves are
8 terrible -- you will have to change how you see women to do
9 this job well, and I do not know if you are capable of that.
10 So I want to press on these issues that my colleague, Jean
11 Shaheen, brought up, because she said it so well.

12 First of all, you answered your questionnaire, "Do you
13 believe that any American who wants to serve their country
14 in the military and can meet objective standards set by the
15 military, should be allowed to serve without limitation?"
16 You said yes to that question. But then in all of these
17 other circumstances you have denigrated active duty
18 servicemembers. We have hundreds -- hundreds -- of women
19 who are currently in the infantry, lethal members of our
20 military serving in the infantry, but you degrade them. You
21 say, "We need moms, but not in the military, especially in
22 combat units."

23 So specific to Senator Cotton's question, because
24 Senator Cotton was giving you layups to differentiate
25 between different types of combat, and specifically, as

1 Secretary, would you take any action to reinstitute the
2 combat arts exclusion for female servicemembers, knowing
3 full well you have hundreds of women doing that job right
4 now.

5 And the standards, your two-mile run, Tom, is about the
6 Army Combat Fitness Test. It is not the requirements to
7 have an MOS 11 Bravo, which is the infantry. These are the
8 requirements today for people serving in the infantry, men
9 and women. They are gender neutral, and they are very
10 difficult to meet. They have not been reduced in anyway,
11 and our combat units, our infantry, is lethal.

12 So please explain, specifically, because you will be in
13 charge of three million personnel. It is a big job. And
14 when you make these public statements -- and I get you were
15 not Secretary of Defense then. I get you were on TV. I get
16 you were helping veterans. I get it was a different job.
17 But most recently, you said this in November of 2024,
18 knowing full well you might have been named as Secretary of
19 Defense.

20 So please explain these types of statements, because
21 they are brutal, and they are mean, and they disrespect men
22 and women who are willing to die for this country.

23 Mr. Hegseth: Well, Senator, I appreciate your
24 comments, and I would point out I have never disparaged
25 women serving in the military. I respect every single

1 female servicemember that has put on the uniform, past and
2 present.

3 My critiques, Senator, recently and in the past, and
4 from personal experience, have been instances where I have
5 seen standards lowered -- and you mentioned 11 Alpha, 11
6 Bravo MOS -- places in units. The book that has been
7 referenced multiples times here, "The War on Warriors," I
8 spent months talking to active duty servicemembers, men and
9 women, low ranks, high ranks, combat arms and not combat
10 arms. And what each and every one of them told me, and with
11 personal instances have shown me, is that in ways direct,
12 indirect, overt, and subtle, standards have been changed
13 inside infantry training units, Ranger School, infantry
14 battalions, to ensure that commanders meet --

15 Senator Gillibrand: Give me one example -- please give
16 me an example. I get you are making these generalized
17 statements.

18 Mr. Hegseth: -- commanders meet quotas to have a
19 certain number of female infantry officers or infantry
20 enlisted. And that disparages those women who are
21 incredibly capable --

22 Senator Gillibrand: Commanders do not have to meet
23 quotas for the infantry.

24 Mr. Hegseth: -- of meeting that standard.

25 Senator Gillibrand: Commanders do not have to have a

1 quota for women in the infantry. That does not exist. It
2 does not exist. And your statements are creating the
3 impression that these exist, because they do not. There are
4 not quotas. We want the most lethal force.

5 But I am telling you, having been here for 15 years,
6 listening to testimony about men and women in combat, and
7 the type of operations that were successful, in Afghanistan
8 and in Iraq, women were essential for many of those units.
9 When Ranger units went in to find where the terrorists were
10 hiding in Afghanistan, or in Iraq, if they had a woman in
11 the unit, they could go in, talk to the women in a village,
12 say, "Where are the terrorists hiding? Where are the
13 weapons hiding?" and get crucial information to make sure
14 that we can win that battle.

15 So you cannot denigrate women, in general, and your
16 statements do that. "We don't want women in the military,
17 especially in combat." What a terrible statement. So
18 please, do not deny that you have made those statements.
19 You have. We take the responsibility of standards very
20 seriously, and we will work with you.

21 I am equally distressed you would not meet with me
22 before this hearing. We could have covered all of this
23 before you came here, so I could get to the 15 other
24 questions that I want to get to.

25 So women you have denigrated. You have also denigrated

1 members of the LGBTQ community. Did you know that when
2 Don't Ask, Don't Tell was in place, we lost so many crucial
3 personnel, over 1,000, in mission-critical areas. We lost
4 10 percent of all of our foreign language speakers, because
5 of a political policy.

6 You said in your statement you do not want politics in
7 the DoD. Everything you have said in these public
8 statements is politics. I don't want women. I don't want
9 moms. What is wrong with a mom, by the way? Once you have
10 babies you therefore are no longer able to be lethal? I
11 mean, you are basically saying women, after they have
12 children, cannot ever serve in the military in a combat
13 role. It is a silly thing to say. It is a silly thing to
14 say, beneath the position that you are aspiring to.

15 To denigrate LGBTQ servicemembers is a mistake. If you
16 are a sharpshooter, you are as lethal, regardless of what
17 your gender identity is, regardless of who you love. So
18 please know this to be a true statement.

19 So you say it was a political thing. You say it
20 undermined us, social engineering. I do not know why
21 someone having to publicly say, or not publicly say, who
22 they love is social engineering. I think having that policy
23 in the first place was highly problematic. And as you said
24 in your statement, do you agree anybody should be able to
25 serve in the military if they meet the standards?

1 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, as the President has stated, I
2 do not disagree with the overturn of Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

3 Senator Gillibrand: Great, because I don't want you
4 thinking, can't serve if you are a mom, can't serve if you
5 are LGBTQ. And then last, can't serve if you are a leftist.
6 The statements you said about people who have views
7 differently than you, that we are the enemy, are you saying
8 that 50 percent of the DoD, if they hold liberal views or
9 leftist views or are Democrats, are not welcome in the
10 military? Are you saying that?

11 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I volunteered to deploy to
12 Afghanistan under Democratic President Barack Obama. I also
13 volunteered to guard the inauguration of Joe Biden but was
14 denied the opportunity to serve because I was identified as
15 an extremist by my own unit for a Christian tattoo.

16 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator
17 Gillibrand, you held up a document and referred to it during
18 your questioning. Would you like that entered into the
19 record?

20 Senator Gillibrand: Yes. Maybe one without my marks.

21 Chairman Wicker: Okay.

22 Senator Gillibrand: We will submit a clean copy.

23 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, that will be
24 admitted at the point of your question.

25 And I would like to enter into the record at this point

1 a letter of support from retired Air Force Colonel Melissa
2 Cunningham. Colonel Cunningham supports Mr. Hegseth, and
3 mentions his warrior ethos, combat effectiveness, and
4 maintaining military training standards. So without
5 objection both of those will be admitted.

6 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: And I now recognize Senator Rounds.

2 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of
3 all, good morning. I would like to thank you for your
4 service to our nation in uniform and also your work on
5 behalf of your fellow veterans and for your willingness to
6 enter into this maelstrom of public service. I think the
7 presence of so many veterans who have showed up to support
8 you speaks volumes.

9 I also want to recognize your family's service and
10 sacrifice. You know, as well as anyone, that it is not just
11 the man that enters the arena but it is the entire family
12 who also works their way through this process, as well.

13 I appreciated our meeting with you and with your wife
14 Jennifer this last month. I thought that we had an
15 excellent conversation, and I appreciate your statement and
16 your answers to the Advanced Policy Questions, especially
17 your desire to bring a renewed focus on warfighting and
18 lethality back to the Pentagon.

19 I also respect and I appreciate my friend and
20 colleague, Senator Gillibrand, and some of her questions,
21 and I know that she had a number of them in there. You had
22 an opportunity to respond very briefly. Were there any
23 other responses that you would like to make or
24 clarifications that you would like to make before I move on
25 to my questions?

1 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, thank you very much for the
2 opportunity to meet and for the question. I would also
3 acknowledge, you were mentioning female engagement teams,
4 which have shown a great deal of success on the battlefield,
5 and universally acknowledged as such.

6 I have been in Iraqi homes where the language and
7 gender barrier was real, and the ability to have someone
8 there to help in that process would be a massive accelerant
9 in mission success. I recognize that reality.

10 I also recognize that female engagement teams assigned
11 to a SEAL team or a Green Beret team meet different
12 standards also, which is okay because of the duty positions
13 involved in that job.

14 As far as politics, Senator, it has been the joy of my
15 life to lead men and women in military outfits. When you
16 are in combat or in training, there are a lot of
17 conversations that happen, and you start to realize that a
18 lot of people you are serving with share your political
19 ideas or they do not. You find out there are Republicans,
20 there are Democrats, there are Libertarians, there are
21 independents, there are vegetarians, and everything in
22 between.

23 None of that matters. It never mattered in how I led
24 men and women, how I interacted with them, what missions we
25 undertook. Politics has nothing to do with the battlefield,

1 which is why President Trump has asked me to say let's make
2 sure all of that comes out. This is about warfighting
3 capability, setting standards high and making sure we give
4 our boys, our men and women, everything they need to be
5 successful on the battlefield.

6 So politics can play no part in that, and I look
7 forward to infusing that, as we always have, inside our
8 units.

9 Senator Rounds: I appreciate you making that very
10 clear. And one of the areas that we want to do our best is
11 to provide for the equipment and technical capabilities so
12 that no young man or woman enters into a battle has a fair
13 fight, and that they always have the advantages. Those are
14 the types of questions that I would like to get into right
15 now, and I want to start by talking about something that
16 sometimes gets a little bit into the weeds, but I think it
17 is critical.

18 Mr. Hegseth, from what I have heard from 24 senior DoD
19 officials in hearings over the last 2 years, including the
20 Secretary of Defense, every service chief, and eight
21 combatant commanders, is that sharing the portion of the
22 spectrum -- and this is in the weeds, I know, but I am going
23 to ask it to get it on the record -- the 3.1 to 3.5
24 gigahertz band, would have extremely serious consequences
25 and very costly consequences on our warfighting

1 capabilities. In fact, the Department of Navy alone has
2 estimated that relocating their systems to a different part
3 of the spectrum band would cost them \$250 billion. That is
4 just for the destroyers that defend our coasts, with the
5 radars that they have in them.

6 If confirmed, what will you do to make sure that the
7 Department of Defense can maintain its access and the use,
8 and to be able to maneuver within the electromagnetic
9 spectrum at home and abroad, and would you be willing to
10 literally go to the mat with the interagency to protect
11 warfighter requirements for the use of the spectrum?

12 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, thank you for the question. And
13 my job, in part, will be to go to the mat, when necessary,
14 for things I believe are an absolute requirement for the
15 Department of Defense and the men and women in uniform.
16 There is no doubt about that.

17 In this particular case, as far as spectrum, I look
18 forward, as I have said before, getting a full -- because
19 this issue has come up a number of times in meetings. It is
20 critically important with how our warfighters communicate
21 across all services. So I am going to get a classified
22 briefing immediately about how it would impact the spectrum,
23 if it were to allow other companies or other -- to be --

24 Senator Rounds: I am sure China would love to have our
25 ability to use that part of the spectrum restricted. They

1 would love that.

2 Mr. Hegseth: Absolutely right. And so I will go in
3 with eyes only toward ensuring we have the capabilities we
4 need and there is no disruption when I take that brief.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you. In your Advanced Policy
6 Questions you recognize a cooperative approach by China,
7 Russia, Iran, and North Korea to undermine U.S. influence
8 around the world. As you point out, aggression by any one
9 actor would be an opportunity for others to engage the U.S.
10 on multiple fronts along the continuum of the conflict.

11 As we discussed in my office, neither of us wants to
12 send our troops into a fair fight. We want to make sure
13 that they have every advantage that the United States can
14 give them, and that requires resources and reforms.

15 Given the growing potential of a multi-theater conflict
16 involving near-peer adversaries, what steps would you take
17 to prepare the Department of Defense to simultaneously
18 execute and sustain operations across multiple regions while
19 maintaining readiness and deterrence globally?

20 And I just have to make note, and I want to make it
21 clear. We have language in this year's fiscal year 2025
22 National Defense Authorization Act calling for a review of
23 the Department's operational plans. And I just want to make
24 sure that you are aware of that and that we will have -- if
25 we have a fight with one, chances are very good that we are

1 going to have two battles, or two different battlegrounds at
2 the same time.

3 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, which is why I believe our
4 country is incredibly fortunate to have a new commander in
5 chief in Donald Trump who, through the strategic approach he
6 has taken with allies and against foes, has prevented wars
7 and is determined to do the same. That is our chief job is
8 deter and prevent wars. My job, should I be confirmed as
9 the Secretary of Defense, is to ensure we have the right
10 prioritization of assets and strategy, and then the tools in
11 the toolbox necessary, the pointiest possible spear for
12 President Trump to wield, if necessary, as the last resort.

13 So with President Trump at the helm I think we will go
14 a long way in making sure our enemies know there is a new
15 sheriff in town.

16 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Wicker: And thank you very much. Senator
18 Blumenthal.

19 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank
20 you for having this hearing. Thank you for being here, Mr.
21 Hegseth. And I want to join in expressing appreciation and
22 respect for your service to our country and thanks to all
23 the veterans who are here today, and thank you for your
24 service. As the ranking member of the Veterans Affairs
25 Committee I hope we can focus on doing better for our

1 veterans, and doing better in management of the Department
2 of Defense. There is always room for improvement.

3 I think what we need in that position is not just
4 better but the best in financial management, because those
5 decisions are life-and-death decisions affecting the 3.4
6 million Americans who serve our national security and our
7 national defense, and put their lives on the line.

8 I want to talk about financial mismanagement at the two
9 organizations that you headed, which are the only tests of
10 your financial management that we have before this
11 committee, the Veterans for Freedom and Concerned Veterans
12 for America. You took over the Veterans for Freedom in
13 2007. In 2008, you raised \$8.7 million but spent more than
14 \$9 million, creating a deficit. By January 2009, you told
15 donors that the organization had less than \$1,000 in the
16 bank and debts of \$434,000. By 2010, revenue at the
17 Veterans for Freedom had dropped to about \$265,000. In the
18 next year it had dropped further, to \$22,000. You do not
19 dispute these numbers, do you?

20 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am extremely proud of the work
21 me and my fellow vets did at Veterans for Freedom. A bunch
22 of young vets with no political experience, a small group,
23 working hard every single day --

24 Senator Blumenthal: I apologize for interrupting.

25 Mr. Hegseth: -- we raised donor funds. And we have

1 letters submitted for the record from almost everyone that
2 worked with me, every single day, including our chief
3 operating officer, who will attest that every dollar we
4 raised was used intentionally toward the execution of our
5 mission, which was supporting the warfighters, exactly why
6 we are here today, the warfighters in the Iraq surge.

7 There was a campaign in 2008, Senator, Barack Obama
8 versus John McCain.

9 Senator Blumenthal: If I can just ask you another
10 question.

11 Mr. Hegseth: We believe John McCain would be the right
12 person to win --

13 Senator Blumenthal: I have --

14 Mr. Hegseth: -- and so we spent more --

15 Senator Blumenthal: -- the tax return from that
16 organization.

17 Mr. Hegseth: I am glad they are there for the record.

18 Senator Blumenthal: I am going to ask that it be
19 entered into the record, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman Wicker: Without objection.

21 [The information follows:]

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1 Senator Blumenthal: These tax returns are yours. They
2 have your signature. And I am going to ask that members of
3 the committee review them, because they are the only
4 documents -- I have asked for others. I have asked for the
5 FBI report -- that would presumably document, it should have
6 documented, this kind of financial mismanagement. And these
7 are the 990s from that organization.

8 By the year of 2011, donors had become so dissatisfied
9 with that mismanagement, they, in effect, ousted you. They
10 merged that organization with Military Families United, and
11 thereafter you joined a second organization as executive
12 director.

13 Mr. Hegseth: In between, Senator, I went to Harvard
14 University --

15 Senator Blumenthal: I want to ask you --

16 Mr. Hegseth: [Unclear.]

17 Senator Blumenthal: -- I want to ask you questions
18 about Concerned Veterans for America. Again, another set of
19 tax returns, the 990s from that organization. I ask that
20 they be made part of the record, Mr. Chairman.

21 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, both of those
22 returns are now part of the record.

23 [The information follows:]

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1 Senator Blumenthal: From 2011 to 2016, at the end of
2 2013, a shortfall of \$130,000. At the end of 2014, a
3 shortfall of \$428,000. You had a surplus the following
4 year, but then another deficit of \$437,000. By the time you
5 left, that organization had deep debt, including credit card
6 transaction debt of about \$75,000.

7 That is not the kind of fiscal management we want at
8 the Department of Defense. We cannot tolerate it at the
9 Department of Defense. That is an organization with a
10 budget of \$850 billion, not 10 or 15 million, which was the
11 case at those two organizations. And it has command
12 responsibility for 3.4 million Americans. The highest
13 number that you managed in those two organizations was maybe
14 50 people.

15 Let me ask you, how many men and women now serve in the
16 United States Army?

17 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I would like an opportunity to
18 respond to --

19 Senator Blumenthal: Well, I have asked you a question.

20 Mr. Hegseth: -- the impugning of my leadership of a
21 veterans organization --

22 Senator Blumenthal: How many men and women currently
23 serve --

24 Mr. Hegseth: -- Concerned Veterans for America. You
25 are on the VA Committee, sir, and I appreciate your service

1 there. The VA Accountability Act and the MISSION Act were
2 all brainchilds of Concerned Veterans for America. We used
3 our donor money very intentionally and focused to create
4 policy that bettered the lives of veterans.

5 Senator Blumenthal: Mr. Hegseth, I am asking you a
6 very simple question. How many men and women currently
7 serve in the United States Army?

8 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, the United States Army, 450,000
9 on active duty, sir.

10 Senator Blumenthal: And how many in the Navy?

11 Mr. Hegseth: In the Navy it is 425, sir.

12 Senator Blumenthal: Well, it is 337 this year. How
13 many in the Marine Corps?

14 Mr. Hegseth: 175,000, sir.

15 Senator Blumenthal: 172,300. Those numbers dwarf any
16 experience you had, by many multiples. I do not believe
17 that you can tell this committee, or the people of America,
18 that you are qualified to lead them. I would support you as
19 the spokesperson for the Pentagon. I do not dispute your
20 communication skills. But I believe that we are entitled to
21 the facts here. I have asked for more documents. I assume
22 you would be willing to submit to an expanded FBI background
23 check that interviews your colleagues, accountants, ex-
24 wives, former spouses, sexual assault survivors, and others,
25 and enable them to come forward.

1 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am not in charge of FBI
2 background checks.

3 Senator Blumenthal: But you would submit to it and
4 support it.

5 Mr. Hegseth: I am not in charge of FBI background
6 checks.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal. I, at
8 this point, want to submit a letter from Captain Wade
9 Zirkle, the founder of Vets for Freedom, and the person who
10 hired Pete Hegseth to run the organization. Although the
11 2008 financial crisis dried up fundraising for nonprofits,
12 Captain Zirkle says, and I quote, "Pete responded to this
13 crisis with decisive action by reducing staff and
14 renegotiating all debts with creditors until they were
15 fairly resolved, an impressive feat and a testament to
16 Pete's character. Pete departed VFF in 2010 to take on a
17 new role with Concerned Veterans for America. Pete departed
18 on good terms.

19 Without objection, that will be added to the record.

20 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Senator Ernst, you are recognized for
2 7 minutes.

3 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I ask
4 unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter
5 submitted by Mr. Mark Lucas, who is a fellow Iowan and Iowa
6 Army National Guard member. Mr. Lucas and I served together
7 in the Iowa Army National Guard. He succeeded Pete Hegseth
8 as executive director of Concerned Veterans for America.
9 And in his letter, Mr. Lucas says that Mr. Hegseth, quote,
10 "laid a strong foundation that postured CVA for long-term
11 success," end quote, and that Mr. Hegseth, quote, "continued
12 to be an invaluable asset to both me as a leader and the
13 organization," end quote.

14 So I would ask for unanimous consent to enter this
15 Washington Times article and a letter from Mr. Mark Lucas
16 into the record.

17 Chairman Wicker: Without objection.

18 [The information follows:]
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1 Senator Ernst: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good
2 morning, Mr. Hegseth --

3 Mr. Hegseth: Good morning, Senator.

4 Senator Ernst: -- and thank you very much. I
5 appreciate your service to our nation. It is something that
6 I know you are very proud of, and it is something that we
7 have in common and that we share.

8 You and I have had many productive conversations, and
9 just for our audience, we have had very frank conversations.
10 Is that correct, Mr. Hegseth?

11 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, that is a correct
12 characterization.

13 Senator Ernst: You know that I do not keep anything
14 hidden, pull no punches. My colleagues know that, as well.
15 So I do appreciate you sitting down and allowing me the
16 opportunity to question you thoroughly on those issues that
17 are of great importance to me.

18 Just to recap those issues, three that are very
19 important. One is the DoD, and making sure that we have a
20 clean audit. The second is women in combat, and we will
21 talk a little bit more about that in a moment. And the
22 third was maintaining high standards and making sure that we
23 are combatting sexual assault in the military.

24 So Mr. Hegseth, I am going to address the issue,
25 because this will tie into some of the financial concerns

1 that have been raised here, as well, and it is why I am
2 trusting my fellow Iowan, asked for unanimous consent of his
3 letter to go into the record. But like me, a lot of Iowans
4 are really, really concerned and upset about the wasteful
5 Washington spending and, of course, in our Pentagon. It is
6 an issue that I have been combating for years.

7 So there is significant room for greater efficiency and
8 cost-cutting within the Department, and the DoD is the only
9 Federal agency that has never passed an audit. As the
10 Senate DOGE Caucus chair and founder, that is unacceptable
11 to me, and it should be unacceptable to you, as well. So I
12 appreciate that you mentioned that in your opening
13 statement.

14 What are those steps that you will take to ensuring the
15 Pentagon has a clean audit by the year 2028?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I appreciate your work on this
17 topic, which you have been involved in for a long time. You
18 mentioned Concerned Veterans for America. I just want to
19 clarify. We have very generous donors who set a very clear
20 budget that we stuck to every single year. So the latitude
21 there was restricted, and we worked very hard and diligently
22 inside it.

23 You have also been a leader on the Pentagon audit for a
24 very long time. I think when we met, Senator, I said 2014
25 was the first year.

1 Senator Ernst: Mm-hmm.

2 Mr. Hegseth: We discovered a 2013 op-ed I wrote about
3 the need for a Pentagon audit, because an audit is an issue
4 of national security, and frankly, respect to American
5 taxpayers, who give \$850 billion over to the Defense
6 Department and expect that we know where that money goes.
7 And if that money is going somewhere that does not add to
8 tooth and instead goes to fat or tail, we need to know that.
9 Or if it is wasted, we need to know that.

10 So I think previous Secretaries of Defense, with all
11 due respect, have not necessarily emphasized the strategic
12 prerogative of an audit. And myself, my deputy SECDEF, and
13 others already know that a Pentagon audit will be, the
14 comptroller, others, central to ensuring we find those
15 dollars that can be used elsewhere, legally, under the law,
16 inside the Pentagon.

17 So you have my word it will be a priority.

18 Senator Ernst: Okay. Thank you. Moving on to women
19 in combat, I had the privilege of serving in uniform for
20 over 23 years, between our Army Reserves and our Iowa Army
21 National Guard. I did serve in Kuwait and missions in Iraq.
22 So it is incredibly important that I stress, and I hope
23 that, if confirmed, you continue to stress that every man
24 and woman has opportunity to serve their country in uniform,
25 and do so at any level, as long as they are meeting the

1 standards that are set forward. And we talked about that in
2 my office. I do believe in high standards.

3 Now I was denied the opportunity to serve in any combat
4 role because I have a lot of gray hair. And the policy has
5 changed since then, okay, so I have been around for quite a
6 while.

7 But for the young women that are out there now and can
8 meet those standards -- and again, I will emphasize they
9 should be very, very high standards. They must physically
10 be able to achieve those standards, so that they can
11 complete their mission. But I want to know -- again, let's
12 make it very clear for everyone here today -- as Secretary
13 of Defense, will you support women continuing to have the
14 opportunity to serve in combat roles?

15 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, first of all, thank you for your
16 service, as we discussed extensively, as well.

17 Senator Ernst: It was my privilege.

18 Mr. Hegseth: And my answer is, exactly the way that
19 you caveated it. Yes, women will have access to ground
20 combat roles, given the standards remain high. And we will
21 have a review to ensure the standards have not been eroded.
22 In any one of these cases that will be a part of one of the
23 first things we do at the Pentagon is reviewing that in a
24 gender-neutral way, the standards, ensuring readiness and
25 meritocracy is front and center. But absolutely, it would

1 be the privilege of a lifetime, if confirmed, to be the
2 Secretary of Defense for all men and women in uniform who
3 fight so heroic. They have so many other options. They
4 decide to put their right hand up for our country, and it
5 would be an honor to have a chance to lead them.

6 Senator Ernst: Thank you. And just very briefly, we
7 only have less than a minute left, but we have also
8 discussed this in my office. A priority of mine has been
9 combating sexual assault in the military, and making sure
10 that all of our servicemembers are treated with dignity and
11 respect.

12 This has been so important. Senator Gillibrand and I
13 have worked on this, and we were able to get changes made to
14 the Uniform Code of Military Justice, to make sure that we
15 have improvements on how we address the tragic and life-
16 altering issues of rape, sexual assault. It will demand
17 time and attention from the Pentagon, under your watch if
18 you are confirmed.

19 So as Secretary of Defense, will you appoint a senior-
20 level official dedicated to sexual assault prevention and
21 response?

22 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, as we have discussed, yes, I
23 will.

24 Senator Ernst: Okay. And my time has expired. Thank
25 you for your answers.

1 Chairman Wicker: Senator Hirono.

2 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Hegseth,
3 welcome.

4 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you.

5 Senator Hirono: I am focused on your fitness to serve,
6 including your character and temperament and your overall
7 qualifications to do the job. And I do appreciate the
8 comments of Ranking Member Reed with his concerns regarding
9 your nomination, because I share those concerns.

10 As part of my responsibility as a member of this
11 committee to ensure the fitness of all nominees who come
12 before any of the committees on which I sit, I ask the
13 following two initial questions.

14 First, since you became a legal adult, have you ever
15 made unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any
16 verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

17 Mr. Hegseth: No, Senator.

18 Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or
19 entered into a settlement relating to this kind of conduct?

20 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I was falsely accused in October
21 of 2017. It was fully investigated, and I was completely
22 cleared.

23 Senator Hirono: I do not think completely cleared is
24 accurate. The fact is that your own lawyer said that you
25 entered into an NDA and paid a person who accused you of

1 raping her a sum of money, to make sure that she did not
2 file a complaint.

3 Moving on, as Secretary you will be charge of
4 maintaining good order and discipline by enforcing the
5 Uniform Code of Military Justice, UCMJ. In addition to the
6 sexual assault allegations -- and by the way, the answer to
7 my second question should have been yes -- I have read
8 multiple reports of your regularly being drunk at work,
9 including by people who worked with you at Fox News. Do you
10 know that being drunk at work is prohibited for
11 servicemembers under the UCMJ?

12 Mr. Hegseth: Senator --

13 Senator Hirono: Yes or no.

14 Mr. Hegseth: -- there are multiple false, anonymous
15 reports peddled by NBC News --

16 Senator Hirono: Do you know that drinking on the job
17 is not --

18 Mr. Hegseth: -- that are directly contradictory to the
19 dozens of men and women at Fox News channel, who I worked
20 with --

21 Senator Hirono: I am not hearing the answer to my
22 question.

23 Mr. Hegseth: -- who came on the record, and said, they
24 have never seen that.

25 Senator Hirono: In your opening statement, Mr.

1 Hegseth, you commit to holding leaders accountable at all
2 levels. That includes you, of course.

3 Frankly, as Secretary, you will be on the job 24/7.
4 You recently promised some of my Republican colleagues that
5 you stopped drinking and will not drink if confirmed.
6 Correct?

7 Mr. Hegseth: Absolutely.

8 Senator Hirono: Will you resign as Secretary of
9 Defense if you drink on the job, which is a 24/7 position?

10 Mr. Hegseth: I have made this commitment on behalf of
11 the men and women I am serving.

12 Senator Hirono: Will you resign as Secretary of
13 Defense if you --

14 Mr. Hegseth: I have made this commitment --

15 Senator Hirono: -- drink on the job?

16 Mr. Hegseth: -- on behalf of the men and women I am
17 serving --

18 Senator Hirono: I am not hearing --

19 Mr. Hegseth: -- because it is the most important
20 deployment of my life.

21 Senator Hirono: I am not hearing an answer to my
22 question, so I am going to move on. While you have made
23 that commitment, you will not commit to resigning if you
24 drink on the job.

25 As Secretary of Defense, you will swear an oath to the

1 Constitution, and not an oath to any man, woman, or
2 President. Correct?

3 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, on multiple occasions, including
4 as a young second lieutenant, I have sworn an oath to the
5 Constitution --

6 Senator Hirono: Answer is yes.

7 Mr. Hegseth: -- and I am proud to do so. Yes, ma'am.

8 Senator Hirono: In June of 2020, then-President Trump
9 directed former Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, to shoot
10 protesters in the legs in downtown D.C., an order Secretary
11 Esper refused to comply with. Would you carry out such an
12 order from President Trump?

13 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I was in the Washington, D.C.,
14 National Guard unit that was in Lafayette Square during
15 those events, holding a riot shield --

16 Senator Hirono: Would you carry out an order to shoot
17 --

18 Mr. Hegseth: -- on behalf of my country.

19 Senator Hirono: -- protesters in the leg?

20 Mr. Hegseth: I saw 50 Secret Service agents get
21 injured by rioters trying to jump over the fence, set the
22 church on fire --

23 Senator Hirono: Again --

24 Mr. Hegseth: -- and destroy the statue.

25 Senator Hirono: -- it sounds to me that you will

1 comply with such an order. You will shoot protesters in the
2 leg.

3 Moving on, the President-Elect has attacked our allies
4 in recent weeks, refusing to rule out using military force
5 to take over Greenland and the Panama Canal, and threatening
6 to make Canada the 51st state. Would you carry out an order
7 from President Trump to seize Greenland, a territory of our
8 NATO ally, Denmark, by force, or would you comply with an
9 order to take over the Panama Canal?

10 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I will emphasize that President
11 Trump received 77 million votes, to be the lawful commander
12 in chief of this country.

13 Senator Hirono: We are not talking about the election.
14 My question is, would you use our military to take over
15 Greenland or an ally of Denmark?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, one of the things that President
17 Trump is so good at is never strategically tipping his hand.
18 And so I would never, in this public forum, give one way or
19 another, direct what orders the President --

20 Senator Hirono: That sounds to me --

21 Mr. Hegseth: -- would give to me any context.

22 Senator Hirono: -- that sounds to me that you would
23 contemplate carrying out such an order to basically invade
24 Greenland and take over the Panama Canal.

25 Current DoD policy allows servicemembers and eligible

1 dependents to be reimbursed for travel associated with non-
2 covered reproductive health care, including abortions. Will
3 you maintain this common-sense policy?

4 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I have always been personally
5 pro-life. I know President Trump has, as well. And we will
6 review all policies. But our standard is whatever the
7 President wants on this particular issue --

8 Senator Hirono: Okay. So --

9 Mr. Hegseth: -- and my advice, I will take a look at.

10 Senator Hirono: If the President tells you that this
11 common-sense policy --

12 Mr. Hegseth: I do not believe the Federal --

13 Senator Hirono: -- will not be maintained, you will
14 not enable our servicemembers to seek reproductive care.
15 That is what it sounds like to me.

16 Mr. Hegseth: I do not believe the Federal Government
17 should be funding --

18 Senator Hirono: I am not hearing answers to my
19 questions.

20 Mr. Hegseth: -- travel for abortions.

21 Senator Hirono: I just want to note that the other
22 area of serious concern to me is President Trump saying that
23 he wants to use the military to help with mass deportations,
24 which will cost billions of dollars, and what that will do
25 to readiness is very, very concerning.

1 Mr. Hegseth, I have noticed a disturbing pattern. You
2 previously have made a series of inflammatory statements
3 about women in combat, LGBTQ servicemembers, Muslim
4 Americans, and Democrats. Since your nomination, however,
5 you have walked those back on TV and interviews, and most
6 recently in your opening statement.

7 You are no longer on Fox & Friends, Mr. Hegseth. If
8 confirmed, your words, actions, and decisions will have real
9 impacts on national security and our servicemembers' lives.
10 There are close to three million personnel in the Department
11 of Defense, \$900 billion budget. I hardly think you are
12 prepared to do the job.

13 Mr. Hegseth: Senator --

14 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. That was not a question,
16 Mr. Hegseth. Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator Sullivan.

17 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr.
18 Hegseth, congratulations on your nomination, and thank you
19 and your family for your service and sacrifice.

20 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you, Senator.

21 Senator Sullivan: Now, for the most important question
22 you will receive all day. In 1935, before the Congress, the
23 father of the United States Air Force, General Billy
24 Mitchell, was testifying about a certain place in the world.
25 He said, quote, "I believe that in the future whoever holds

1 this place will control the world. This location is the
2 most strategic place in the world." What place was Billy
3 Mitchell talking about, and let me give you a hint -- it was
4 not Greenland.

5 Mr. Hegseth: I believe he was talking about the great
6 state of Alaska.

7 Senator Sullivan: He was talking about the great state
8 of Alaska. Great answer. If confirmed, will you commit to
9 come with me to the great state of Alaska and meet our
10 warriors who are on the front lines every day?

11 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I have, and as I mentioned to
12 you, in the past I did a brief training exercise up at Fort
13 Wainwright, at a previous part of my military life, and I
14 look forward to returning.

15 Senator Sullivan: Great. And I will say, we are on
16 the front lines with this new era of authoritarian
17 aggression. In Alaska, in the last 2 years, we have had
18 Chinese and Russian naval task forces, joint strategic
19 bomber task forces in our EEZ, in our ADIZ. And after his
20 election, President Trump put out an extensive statement on
21 Alaska, which included the following statement: "We will
22 ensure Alaska gets even more defense investments as we fully
23 rebuild our military, especially as Russia and China are
24 making menacing moves in the Pacific."

25 Mr. Hegseth, if confirmed, will you work with me, this

1 committee, and the incoming commander in chief on continuing
2 to build up our military assets and infrastructure in
3 Alaska, to reestablish deterrence in the Arctic and in the
4 Indo-Pacific?

5 Mr. Hegseth: If confirmed, Senator, it would be a
6 pleasure to work alongside you and this entire committee to
7 recognize the very real threat in the Indo-Pacific, the very
8 real ways even these past couple of weeks, that Russia has
9 attempted to probe and push in and around Alaska, and also
10 the very real strategic significance of Alaska, vis-à-vis
11 shipping lanes through the Arctic. There are many, many
12 ways in which Alaska is strategically significant, and with
13 a shift, a necessary shift, toward INDOPACOM, Alaska, by
14 necessity, will play an important role in that.

15 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Hegseth. I very much
16 appreciate your focus on lethality, in warfighting. We
17 desperately need it.

18 I want to provide a few examples of the Biden woke
19 military, which is not focused on readiness or lethality,
20 and I want to get your comments on it.

21 Nobody wants an extremist or racist in our military,
22 but one of the most disgraceful and shameful things I have
23 seen over the past 4 years, as a Senator on this committee
24 and as a Marine Corps reserve officer, was on day one the
25 Biden administration played up a false and insulting

1 narrative that our military was chock full of racists and
2 violent extremists. This reached a pinnacle in this
3 committee when Biden's Under Secretary of Policy, Colin
4 Kahl, the number three guy at the Pentagon, testified that
5 one of his top goals would be to, quote, "ending violent
6 extremism and systemic racism within the ranks of the
7 military." He had no data on this. The media loved it.
8 Fanned the flames, wrote baloney stories on this false
9 narrative.

10 Disappointingly, some of my colleagues on the other
11 side of the aisle here reinforced this ridiculous narrative,
12 one even suggesting that almost 10 percent of our uniformed
13 military was extremists, 200,000 members. Ridiculous, by
14 the way, from this committee, on the other side of the
15 aisle.

16 Mr. Hegseth, unlike Under Secretary Colin Kohl, you
17 have a lot of experience with our military. Do you believe
18 the military is a systemically racist organization, and if
19 confirmed, will you commit to defend, not denigrate, our
20 troops?

21 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I was also offended by those
22 comments because anyone who has been on active duty in the
23 National Guard, man, woman, in units, understands that it is
24 fundamentally false.

25 Senator Sullivan: By the way, there are three studies

1 -- to his credit, Secretary Austin put out one of them --
2 that said exactly what you just said. Fundamentally false.

3 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, they knew it. Anyone who had
4 been in a unit knew it. One could argue that if not the
5 least, one of the least racist institutions in our country
6 is the United States military.

7 Senator Sullivan: That is right.

8 Mr. Hegseth: To be a racist in our military has not
9 been tolerated for a very long time.

10 Senator Sullivan: One of the greatest civil rights
11 organizations --

12 Mr. Hegseth: -- my formation and other formations.

13 Senator Sullivan: -- would you agree, the U.S.
14 military is one of the most forward-leaning, probably one of
15 the greatest civil rights organizations in American history?

16 Mr. Hegseth: No doubt.

17 Senator Sullivan: Let me turn to another one. Last
18 year, at a hearing before this committee, I called on
19 Biden's Secretary of the Navy to resign because he is
20 failing in his ability to build ships. We are being
21 completely outbuilt in terms of ships, by the Chinese, and
22 yet this Secretary of the Navy has been focused on climate
23 change, not building ships and lethality.

24 Mr. Hegseth, if your Secretary of the Navy ends up
25 focusing on climate change more than shipbuilding and

1 lethality, will you commit to me to fire him?

2 Mr. Hegseth: My Secretary of the Navy, should I be
3 confirmed, sir, will not be focused on climate change in the
4 Navy, just like the Secretary of the Air Force will not be
5 focused on LG-powered fighter jets, or the Secretary of the
6 Army will not be focused on electric-powered tanks.

7 Senator Sullivan: Let me ask --

8 Mr. Hegseth: We will be focused on lethality and
9 defeating our enemy.

10 Senator Sullivan: I have one minute left -- and I
11 appreciate that. The other thing President Biden did, his
12 first executive order as President was to focus on
13 transgender surgeries for active duty troops. I am
14 describing the woke military here under Biden over the last
15 4 years.

16 If confirmed, and you issued an order saying we are
17 going to rip the Biden woke yoke off the neck of our
18 military and focus on lethality and warfighting, how do you
19 think the troops will react?

20 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I know the troops will rejoice.

21 Senator Sullivan: They will love it.

22 Mr. Hegseth: They will love it. And we have already
23 seen it in recruiting numbers. There has already been a
24 surge since President Trump won the election of recruiting.
25 The Army --

1 Senator Sullivan: Do you think our military will
2 follow that order?

3 Mr. Hegseth: Our military will follow that order,
4 Senator.

5 Senator Sullivan: Gladly.

6 Mr. Hegseth: Gladly, because they want to focus on
7 lethality and warfighting and get all the woke political
8 prerogative, politically correct social justice, political
9 stuff, out of the military.

10 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

11 Senator Sullivan: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Wicker: Senator Kaine.

13 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Hegseth. I am looking
14 forward to this opportunity to talk. I want to return to
15 the incident that you referenced a minute ago, that occurred
16 in Monterey, California, October 2017. At that time you
17 were still married to your second wife. Correct?

18 Mr. Hegseth: I believe so.

19 Senator Kaine: And you had just fathered a child by a
20 woman who would later become your third wife. Correct?

21 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I was falsely charged, fully
22 investigated, and completely cleared.

23 Senator Kaine: So you think you were completely
24 cleared because you committed no crime. That is your
25 definition of cleared? You had just fathered a child two

1 months before by a woman that was not your wife. I am
2 shocked that you would stand here and say you are completely
3 cleared, can you so casually cheat on a second wife, and
4 cheat on the mother of a child who had been born two months
5 before, and you tell us you are completely cleared. How was
6 that a complete clear?

7 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, her child's name is Gwendolyn
8 Hope Hegseth, and she is a child of God, and she is 7 years
9 old.

10 Senator Kaine: And you cheated on the mother of that
11 child less than two months after that daughter was born,
12 didn't you?

13 Mr. Hegseth: Those were false charges.

14 Senator Kaine: Well, no --

15 Mr. Hegseth: I was fully investigated, and I was
16 completely cleared. And I am so grateful --

17 Senator Kaine: You didn't --

18 Mr. Hegseth: -- for the marriage I have to this
19 amazing woman behind me.

20 Senator Kaine: No. You admitted that you had sex at
21 that hotel in October 2017. You said it was consensual.
22 Isn't that correct?

23 Mr. Hegseth: Anything --

24 Senator Kaine: You have admitted that it was
25 consensual, and you were still married, and you just had a

1 child by another woman.

2 Mr. Hegseth: Again --

3 Senator Kaine: How do you explain your judgment?

4 Mr. Hegseth: Completely false charges against me.

5 Senator Kaine: You --

6 Mr. Hegseth: Fully investigated, and I am completely
7 cleared.

8 Senator Kaine: -- you have admitted that you had sex
9 while you were married to Wife 2, after you just had
10 fathered a child by Wife 3. You have admitted that.

11 Now if it had been a sexual assault, that would be
12 disqualifying you being Secretary of Defense, wouldn't it?

13 Mr. Hegseth: It was a false claim then, and a false
14 claim now.

15 Senator Kaine: If it has been a sexual assault, that
16 would be disqualifying to be Secretary of Defense, wouldn't
17 it?

18 Mr. Hegseth: That was a false claim.

19 Senator Kaine: So you --

20 Mr. Hegseth: We are talking about a hypothetical.

21 Senator Kaine: -- so you cannot tell me whether
22 someone who has committed a sexual assault is disqualified
23 from being Secretary of Defense?

24 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I know in my instance, and I am
25 talking about my instance only, it was a false claim.

1 Senator Kaine: But you acknowledge --

2 Mr. Hegseth: And it was fully investigated --

3 Senator Kaine: But you acknowledge that you cheated on
4 your wife, and that you cheated on the woman by whom you had
5 just fathered a child. You have admitted that.

6 Mr. Hegseth: I will allow your words to speak for
7 themselves.

8 Senator Kaine: You are not retracting that today.
9 That is good. I assume that in each of your weddings you
10 have pledged to be faithful to your wife. You have taken an
11 oath to do that, haven't you?

12 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, as I have acknowledged to
13 everyone on this committee, I am not a perfect person. I am
14 not claiming to be.

15 Senator Kaine: No, I just asked a simple question.
16 You have taken an oath, like you would take an oath to be
17 Secretary of Defense, in all of your weddings, to be
18 faithful to your wife. Is that correct?

19 Mr. Hegseth: I have failed in things in my life, and
20 thankfully I am redeemed by Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

21 Senator Kaine: In finalizing divorces from your first
22 and second wives, were there nondisclosure agreements in
23 connection with those divorces?

24 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, not that I am aware of.

25 Senator Kaine: If there were, would you agree to

1 release those first and second wives from any
2 confidentiality agreement?

3 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, it is not something I am aware
4 of.

5 Senator Kaine: But if there were, you would agree to
6 release them from a confidentiality agreement.

7 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, that is not my responsibility.

8 Senator Kaine: Did you ever engage in any acts of
9 physical violence against any of your wives?

10 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, absolutely not.

11 Senator Kaine: But you would agree with me that if
12 someone had committed physical violence a spouse, that would
13 be disqualifying to serve as Secretary of Defense. Correct?

14 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, absolutely not have I ever done
15 that.

16 Senator Kaine: You would agree that that would be a
17 disqualifying offense, would you not?

18 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, you are talking about a
19 hypothetical.

20 Senator Kaine: I do not think it is a hypothetical.
21 Violence against spouses occurs every day. And if you, as a
22 leader, are not capable of saying that physical violence
23 against a spouse should be a disqualifying fact for being
24 Secretary of the most powerful nation in the world, you are
25 demonstrating an astonishing lack of judgment.

1 The incident in Monterey led to a criminal charge, a
2 criminal investigation, a private settlement, and a cash
3 payment to the woman who filed the complaint. And there was
4 also a nondisclosure agreement. Correct?

5 Mr. Hegseth: It was a confidential settlement
6 agreement off of a nuisance lawsuit.

7 Senator Kaine: Right. During an interview, you
8 claimed that you settled the matter because you were worried
9 that if it became public it might hurt your career. Do you
10 maintain that you were blackmailed?

11 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I maintain that false claims
12 were made against me, and ultimately --

13 Senator Kaine: Your attorney --

14 Mr. Hegseth: -- those false claims, I had the
15 opportunity to attest my innocence in those false claims.

16 Senator Kaine: But you did not reveal any of this to
17 President Trump or the transition team as they were
18 considering you to be nominated for Secretary of Defense.
19 You did not reveal the action. You did not reveal the
20 criminal complaint. You did not reveal the criminal
21 investigation. You did not reveal the settlement. You did
22 not reveal the cash payment. Why didn't you inform the
23 commander in chief or the transition team of this very
24 relevant event?

25 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I have appreciated every part of

1 the process of the transition team. They have been open and
2 honest with me. We have had great conversations between the
3 two of us. And I appreciate the opportunity that President-
4 Elect Trump has given me.

5 Senator Kaine: But you chose not to reveal this,
6 right? Because you knew it would hurt your chances. So you
7 chose not to reveal this really important thing to the
8 commander in chief and the transition team because you were
9 worried about your chances rather than trying to be candid
10 with the future President of the United States.

11 Are there any other important facts that you chose not
12 to reveal to the President-Elect and his team as they were
13 considering you to be Secretary of Defense?

14 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I sit here before you an open
15 book, as everyone who has watched this process.

16 Senator Kaine: With multiple nondisclosure and
17 confidentiality agreements tying the hands of many people
18 who would like to comment to us.

19 Much has been made of your workplace behavior as a
20 leader of nonprofit veterans organizations and as a Fox News
21 contributor. Were you fired from either of the leadership
22 positions with the nonprofits?

23 Mr. Hegseth: I was the leader -- I was the CEO of
24 Concerned Veterans for America --

25 Senator Kaine: I know --

1 Mr. Hegseth: -- and executive director of Vets for
2 Freedom.

3 Senator Kaine: Were you fired from either of those?

4 Mr. Hegseth: I was never fired from any of those
5 organizations.

6 Senator Kaine: Did you have nondisclosure agreements
7 with either of those organizations?

8 Mr. Hegseth: Not that I am aware of, Senator.

9 Senator Kaine: Many of your work colleagues have said
10 that you show up for work under the influence of alcohol, or
11 drunk. I know you have denied that, but you would agree
12 with me, right, that if that was the case, that would be
13 disqualifying for somebody to be Secretary of Defense.

14 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, those are all anonymous false
15 claims, and the totality --

16 Senator Kaine: They are not anonymous. The letters on
17 the record here, they are not anonymous.

18 Mr. Hegseth: The letters on the record here, are on
19 the record, people who have worked with me --

20 Senator Kaine: We have seen letters with names
21 attached to them.

22 Mr. Hegseth: -- at Veterans for Freedom, Concerned
23 Vets for America and Fox News --

24 Senator Kaine: One of your colleagues --

25 Mr. Hegseth: -- working hard every day on behalf --

1 Senator Kaine: -- one of your colleagues said that you
2 got drunk at an event, at a bar, and chanted, "Kill all
3 Muslims." Another colleague, not anonymous -- we have this
4 -- said that you took coworkers to a strip club. You were
5 drunk and you tried to dance with strippers. You had to be
6 held off the stage. And one of your employees in that event
7 filed a sexual harassment charge as a result of it.

8 Now I know you have denied these things, but isn't that
9 the kind of behavior that, if true, would be disqualifying
10 for somebody to be Secretary of Defense?

11 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, anonymous, false charges.

12 Senator Kaine: They are not anonymous. And I will
13 just conclude and say this to the chairman. You claim that
14 this was all anonymous. We have seen records with names
15 attached to all of these, including the name of your own
16 mother. So do not make this into some anonymous press
17 thing. We have seen multiple names of colleagues,
18 consistently throughout your career, that have talked about
19 your abusive action --

20 Senator Sullivan: Mr. Chairman, I think he is over his
21 time. He is way over his time.

22 Senator Kaine: I now yield.

23 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. I will now ask
24 unanimous consent to enter into the record a family court
25 order concerning the appointment of parenting time between

1 Mr. Hegseth and Mrs. Samatha Hegseth. It states that there
2 were no claims of domestic abuse or probably evidence of
3 abuse in the relationship. Without objection, that will be
4 added to the record.

5 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: And we now move to Senator Cramer.

2 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you,
3 Mr. Hegseth, for your service, for your willingness to
4 endure this. And I am sorry for what has been happening to
5 you, particularly the very idea that you should have to sit
6 there and answer hypothetical, potential in somebody's
7 imagination, crimes that may take place at some point, and
8 wouldn't that disqualify you if you were a murderer, or if
9 you were a rapist? Unfair, unfair, and I am embarrassed for
10 this behavior.

11 But first I want to say thank you for your strong
12 proclamation, unapologetic proclamation of your faith in
13 Jesus Christ. I sat here and listened to your opening
14 statement and thought, wow, this is a guy who, in today's
15 culture, is willing to stand up and say the first thing is
16 first, faith in Jesus Christ. And I was reminded of what
17 Christ said in Matthew, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God in
18 his righteousness, and these things shall be added unto
19 you." You are going to have a great future as our
20 Secretary, and I look forward to that day happening.

21 I just want to get back. You mentioned, and it got
22 rather dismissed quickly, pivoted, as a lot of things do,
23 you had mentioned that you were not able to serve with your
24 National Guard unit in the protection of the inauguration of
25 Joe Biden because of a tattoo, a Christian tattoo. Can you

1 elaborate just a little bit on what is this very offensive,
2 extremist, racist tattoo that you have?

3 Mr. Hegseth: It is a tattoo I have right here,
4 Senator. It is called the Jerusalem cross. It is a historic
5 Christian symbol. In fact, interestingly, recently I
6 attended briefly the memorial ceremony of former President
7 Jimmy Carter on the floor of our National Cathedral. On the
8 front page of his program was the very same Jerusalem cross.
9 It is a Christian religious symbol.

10 And when events happened preceding the Biden
11 inauguration, I was a part of the mobilization to defend
12 that inauguration. As someone who had been a proud
13 supporter of Donald Trump, but also a member of the
14 military, had orders to come to Washington, D.C., to guard
15 that inauguration. And at the last minute, those orders
16 were revoked. I never had orders revoked before. I had
17 been on orders to a lot of places, to do a lot of difficult
18 and dangerous things. They were revoked, and I was not told
19 why.

20 Later, when I wrote my book, I was able to get
21 information that it was because I had been identified.
22 Someone who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan, in
23 Guantanamo Bay, holding a riot shield outside the White
24 House, I had been identified as an extremist, as someone
25 unworthy of guarding the inauguration of an incoming

1 American President. And if that is happening to me,
2 Senator, how many other men and women, how many other
3 patriots, how many other people of conscience -- we have not
4 even talked about COVID, and the tens of thousands of
5 servicemembers who were kicked out because of an
6 experimental vaccine. In President Trump's Defense
7 Department, they will be apologized to. They will be
8 reinstated with pay and rank.

9 Things like focusing on extremism, Senator, have
10 created a climate inside our ranks that feel political, when
11 it has not ever been political. Those are the types of
12 things that are going to change. And Senator Sullivan, you
13 mentioned that study. After a whole study was held,
14 extremism working group study, 100 extremists were
15 identified in the ranks of 3 million, and most of those were
16 gang related. So it was a made-up, bogeyman to begin with.

17 Senator Cramer: You, Mr. Hegseth, are not the
18 extremist. The people who would deny you your expression of
19 faith are the extremists. They are the racists. They are
20 the bigots. You are the one that is protecting their right
21 to be one. Thank you for that.

22 I want to go to another point in your opening
23 statement, and it is summarized in this beautiful one-
24 sentence paragraph. You said, quote, "Leaders at all levels
25 will be held accountable, and warfighting and lethality and

1 the readiness of the troops and their families will be our
2 only focus." At that moment, in my mind's eye, I heard
3 soldiers, airmen, Marines, sailors, guardians, from the
4 Pentagon to the Pacific and everywhere in between, applaud,
5 applaud. And they are thinking, it is about time. I can
6 get on board with that idea.

7 And quite honestly -- and I want to get to this because
8 I think it is so important -- I would say, I don't know,
9 just about everyone, maybe everyone, I am trying to think of
10 an exception to this, that wears the uniform, that has ever
11 come before this committee or that I have met with
12 privately, publicly, that I have been on tours with, that I
13 have traveled with, that wears the uniforms, whether it is
14 with four stars or no stars, agrees with that statement.

15 And I just want to caution you, and I would be
16 interested in your feedback on this. You know, there has
17 been a lot of talk about firing woke generals, creating the
18 purge group, and all those things you and I have talked
19 about. I would say give those men and women a chance, under
20 new leadership.

21 You know, my favorite painting in the Rotunda is of
22 George Washington retiring his commission, establishing on
23 day one, a man who could have been king, chose to be a
24 civilian leader of this country. And I just would encourage
25 you to trust them first and look forward to them saluting

1 the civilian leadership of this country.

2 So just maybe if you could spend a minute just
3 elaborating a little bit about the wokeness, where it comes
4 from, and who will be held accountable.

5 Mr. Hegseth: The wokeness comes not from the uniformed
6 rank, Senator, but from the political class. On day one, on
7 January 20th, when President Trump is sworn in, he will
8 issue a new set of lawful orders, and the leadership of four
9 services will have an opportunity to follow those lawful
10 orders or not. Those lawful orders will not be based on
11 politics. They will be based on readiness, accountability,
12 standards, and lethality. That is the process by which
13 leaders will be judged.

14 And accountability is coming, because everybody in this
15 room knows, if you are a rifleman and you lose your rifle,
16 they are throwing the book at you. But if you are a general
17 who loses a war, you get a promotion. That is not going to
18 happen in Donald Trump's Pentagon. There will be real
19 standards for success. Everyone from the top, from the most
20 senior general to the most lowly private, we will ensure
21 that they are treated fairly, men and women, inside that
22 system.

23 Senator Cramer: I also just want to commend you for
24 your answers to Senator Fischer's questions about nuclear
25 deterrence. But I also appreciate the fact that you

1 emphasized reputational deterrence, because deterrence is
2 not a weapon system. It is an attitude. And you project an
3 attitude of deterrence. Thank you. Thank you, Mr.
4 Chairman.

5 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Cramer. Senator
6 King.

7 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Hegseth,
8 welcome to the committee.

9 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you, Senator.

10 Senator King: You have made several references to your
11 religion today. I share that devotion to Christianity. But
12 I must say, I have been reminded somewhat of Saul on his way
13 to Damascus. You seem to have been converted over the last
14 several weeks and several months. You wrote in your book,
15 just last year -- this is the book, "War on Warriors" --
16 "but if we are going to send our boys to fight, and it
17 should be boys, we need to unleash them to win." Later on,
18 "Our boys should not fight by rules written by dignified
19 men."

20 Which is it? Is it only boys can fight? I mean, you
21 have testified here today that you believe in women in
22 combat, but you did not just last year. How do you explain
23 your conversion?

24 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, my testimony is clear. Writing
25 a book is different than being Secretary of Defense, and I

1 look forward to leading the men and women of our military.
2 And my comment there, Senator, was about the burdensome
3 rules of engagement that members of our generation, men and
4 women, have seen on the battlefield, and one thing President
5 Trump changed in meaningful ways, that led to meaningful
6 developments on the battlefield. When President Trump took
7 control in the first term, ISIS was raging across Iraq. And
8 as someone who spent a lot of time there, with other men and
9 women who were invested in that mission, it was a very
10 difficult moment to see the black flag of ISIS fly. And
11 what President Trump did --

12 Senator King: I appreciate your position today --

13 Mr. Hegseth: -- was untie the hands of the
14 warfighters. He changed the rules of engagement, untied the
15 hands of warfighters, and allowed them to complete their
16 mission and crush ISIS. It had not just tactical
17 implications. Operational and strategic implications, how
18 you allow warfighters to go about winning and fighting their
19 wards. President Trump understands that, and within the
20 laws of war and Uniform Code of Military Justice, we are
21 going to unleash warfighters to win wars so that wars do not
22 drag on forever, as our generation has seen.

23 Senator King: So are you rejecting Title 18 and Title
24 42, I think, also has provisions that incorporate the Geneva
25 Convention and the laws of armed combat? Are you saying

1 that those laws should be repealed? That is the law of the
2 land right now.

3 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, we have laws on the books from
4 the Geneva Convention into the Uniform Code of Military
5 Justice, and then underneath that you have layers in which
6 standard or temporary rules of engagement are put into
7 place.

8 We fight enemies also, Senator, as our generation
9 understands, that play by no rules. They use civilians as
10 human shields.

11 Senator King: So are you saying --

12 Mr. Hegseth: They target women and children.

13 Senator King: -- the Geneva Convention --

14 Mr. Hegseth: We do not do that. We follow rules.

15 Senator King: -- should not be observed?

16 Mr. Hegseth: We follow rules, but we do not need
17 burdensome rules of engagement that make it impossible for
18 us to win these wars.

19 Senator King: You are saying two different things.

20 Mr. Hegseth: That is what President Trump understands.

21 Senator King: You are saying we follow rules, but we
22 do not have to follow the rules in all cases. Is that
23 correct? Burdensome rules.

24 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am making an important
25 tactical distinction that warfighters will understand, that

1 there are the rules we swear an oath to defend, which are
2 incredibly important, and this committee understands and
3 helps set them, and then there are those echelons above
4 reality, from, you know, core to division to brigade to
5 battalion. And by the time it trickles down to a company or
6 a platoon or a squad level, you have a rules of engagement
7 that nobody recognizes. And then it makes it incredibly
8 difficult to actually do your job on the battlefield. That
9 is the kind of assessment and look that any Army major will
10 give to this process, if I was confirmed to be the Secretary
11 of Defense. I have a true understanding of that.

12 Senator King: Your quote in 2024, "Our boys should not
13 fight by rules written by dignified men in mahogany rooms 80
14 years ago. That would be the Geneva Convention. America
15 should fight by its own rules, and we should fight to win,
16 or not go in at all." Are you saying that the Geneva
17 Convention provisions, which clearly outlaw torture of
18 prisoners, do not, should not apply in the future?

19 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, how we treat our wounded, how we
20 treat our prisoners, the applications of the Geneva
21 Convention, are incredibly important. But we would all have
22 to acknowledge that the way we fought our wars, back when
23 the Geneva Conventions were written, are a lot different
24 than the asymmetric, nonconventional environment of
25 counterinsurgency that I confronted in Iraq and Afghanistan.

1 I was the senior counterinsurgency instructor in
2 Afghanistan. My job was to understand how the Taliban and
3 al Qaeda operated so that units coming in could be informed
4 of what was happening.

5 They knew our rules of engagement, and when they were
6 more restrictive they took advantage of them, and it put our
7 men and women in a more dangerous and difficult place.

8 Senator King: But you believe that --

9 Mr. Hegseth: For future wars we fight, we need to have
10 someone atop the Pentagon, sir, who understands how those
11 ripple effects --

12 Senator King: Well, I just want to understand your
13 position. Your position is torture is okay. Is that
14 correct? Waterboarding torture is no longer prohibited,
15 given the circumstances of whatever war we are in. Is that
16 correct?

17 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, that is not what I said. I have
18 never been party to torture. We are a country that fights
19 by the rule of law, and our men and women always do. And
20 yet we have too many people here, in air-conditioned
21 offices, that like to point fingers at the guys in dark and
22 dangerous places --

23 Senator King: In --

24 Mr. Hegseth: -- in helicopters, in enemy territory,
25 who are doing things that people in Washington, D.C., would

1 never dare to do, or in many cases --

2 Senator King: In one of your interviews you said,
3 "They are willing to do this." You are talking about Donald
4 Trump and Senator Cruz. "They are willing to do something
5 like waterboarding if it is going to keep us safe." Are you
6 okay with waterboarding?

7 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, the law of the land is that
8 waterboarding is not legal.

9 Senator King: So the statement that you made, you now
10 recant. Is that correct? "They are willing to do something
11 like waterboard if it is going to keep us safe." You
12 expressed that with approval.

13 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am very familiar with that as
14 a concept, having spent a year at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba,
15 guarding 700 of those that attacked us on 9/11.

16 Senator King: I just want to be clear. Are we going
17 to abide by the Geneva Convention and the prohibitions on
18 torture, or are we not?

19 Mr. Hegseth: Senator --

20 Senator King: Is it going to have circumstances?

21 Mr. Hegseth: -- as I have stated multiple times, the
22 Geneva Conventions are what we base ours. What an America
23 First national security policy is not going to do is hand
24 its prerogatives over to international bodies that make
25 decisions about how our men and women make decisions on the

1 battlefield. America First understands we send Americans
2 for a clear mission and a clear objective. We equip them
3 properly for that objective.

4 Senator King: All right. I --

5 Mr. Hegseth: We give them everything we need. And
6 then we stand behind them with the rules of engagement that
7 allow them to fight decisively --

8 Senator King: I understand.

9 Mr. Hegseth: -- to defeat America's enemies.

10 Senator King: I just --

11 Mr. Hegseth: Which is why we say --

12 Senator King: -- I just have a few seconds left, Mr.
13 Hegseth. I was very disturbed in your opening statement
14 where you talked about the priorities that you have. "We
15 will work with our partners and allies to deter aggression
16 in the Indo-Pacific from the Communist Chinese." There is
17 not a single mention in this statement about Ukraine or
18 Russia. Is this code for we are going to abandon Ukraine?

19 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, that is a presidential-level
20 policy decision. He has made it very clear that he would
21 like to see an end to that conflict. We know who the
22 aggressor is. We know who the good guy is. We would like
23 to see it as advantageous with Ukrainians as possible. But
24 that war needs to come to an end.

25 Senator King: You talk a lot about deterrence of

1 China. I would submit that Xi Jinping is watching what we
2 do very carefully. If we abandon Ukraine, that would be the
3 strongest signal possible to Xi Jinping that he can take
4 Taiwan without significant resistance from this country.

5 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator King. Senator
6 Scott of Florida.

7 Senator Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like
8 to enter into the record two letters which testify to Mr.
9 Hegseth's leadership record, from Concerned Veterans for
10 America. The first letter, submitted by Mr. Darin Selnick, a
11 senior advisor to CVA, stated that "there has been no better
12 leader, policy champion, or fighter for the military and
13 veterans than Pete. He was instrumental in 2014 and in 2017
14 in ensuring that veterans had health care choice.

15 The second letter is submitted by Mr. Casin Spero,
16 digital media director of CVA from 2015 to 2017. He stated,
17 "Pete brought incredible energy, focus, and a clear vision
18 to the organization and showed everything that the team
19 accomplished together."

20 Chairman Wicker: And I, similarly, ask to submit to
21 the record a letter from Paul J. Roberts, retired colonel,
22 U.S. Army Special Forces, speaking to the unwavering
23 integrity of Mr. Hegseth.

24 Is there objection? Without objection, those three
25 will be admitted. Senator Scott.

[The information follows:]

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1 Senator Scott: First, congratulations on your
2 nomination.

3 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you, Senator.

4 Senator Scott: And thank you for being willing to
5 serve our nation.

6 I served in the Navy. I am really proud of my dad. He
7 was crazy. He did all four combat jumps with the 82nd
8 Airborne. He, after that, survived all that and fought in
9 the Battle of the Bulge, and what they went through, it was
10 hell. So I have a lot of respect for him and for everybody
11 that puts on the uniform and serves in battle, and has to
12 lead people in battle. I have been on a ship and it did not
13 happen to me, but I had a lot of friends it happened to, and
14 it clearly happened to my dad.

15 I have served on this committee for 6 years, 2 years
16 under President Trump and the past 4 under President Joe
17 Biden. I have seen how the Biden-Harris administration
18 pushed the DoD to prioritize wokeness over being the most
19 lethal military force in the world. It is our readiness,
20 our national security, and our ability to recruit people who
21 are willing to put their lives on the line for our country.

22 Can you talk about some of the changes we can make to
23 improve recruitment and rebuild our military into the most
24 lethal force in the world?

25 Mr. Hegseth: First of all, Senator, thank you for the

1 question. Thank you for your time. I think the first and
2 most important thing we could have done is elect Donald
3 Trump as the new commander in chief, because past is
4 prologue. Our warfighters understand what kind of commander
5 in chief they are going to get in President Donald Trump,
6 someone who stands behind them, someone who gives them clear
7 missions, someone who ends wars decisively -- and the issue
8 of Ukraine was mentioned -- and ensures new wars are not
9 started. There was a minor incursion under Barack Obama
10 into Crimea, followed by nothing under President Trump,
11 followed by an all-out assault by Vladimir Putin into
12 Ukraine under the Biden administration. That did not happen
13 under Donald Trump.

14 Donald Trump managed the Taliban. Under the Biden
15 administration Afghanistan collapsed tragically, ending in
16 the lives of 13 at Abbey Gate, who we remember every single
17 day, and no one was held accountable for that.

18 Chinese spy balloons were flying over the country.
19 None of that happened under Donald Trump, and our
20 warfighters understand that.

21 So there is no better recruiter, in my mind, for our
22 military, than President Donald Trump.

23 My job is to come alongside him, should I be confirmed,
24 and continue to emphasize his emphasis on warfighting, on
25 getting anything that does not contribute to meritocracy out

1 of how decisions are made inside the Pentagon. What gender
2 you are, what race you are, your views on climate change, or
3 whether you are a person of conscience and your faith should
4 have no bearing on whether you get promoted or whether you
5 are selected to go to West Point, or whether you graduate
6 from Ranger School. The only thing that should matter is
7 how capable are you at your job, how excellent are you at
8 your job.

9 I served in multiethnic units in every place that I
10 worked, every place that I served. None of that mattered.
11 But suddenly we reinject DEI and critical race theory,
12 dividing troops into different categories, oppressor and
13 oppressed, in ways that they otherwise just want to work
14 together.

15 That is why I have pointed out before, and I will say
16 it again, because I am sure it will be quoted to me at some
17 point, the dumbest phrase in military history is "Our unity
18 is our strength." No. Our shared purpose is our strength.
19 Our shared mission is our strength. We are one DoD
20 community, of all, committed to the same mission. It has
21 nothing to do with your background. It has to do with what
22 your commitment is to the country. And that is my solemn
23 pledge to every single person that would put the uniform on,
24 and reflect President Trump's priorities, as well, Senator.

25 Senator Scott: Thank you. You know, we talked a

1 little bit about the fact that the Pentagon cannot do an
2 audit. Can you talk about -- to me, I have run big
3 businesses. It is all about accountability. If you want to
4 get an audit done, you can get an audit done. You might get
5 a letter saying that there are things you have to fix, but
6 it all goes to accountability, and we have not had it.

7 So can you talk about how you bring accountability to
8 the table, what you have done in the past, and what you are
9 going to do with regard to bringing accountability to the
10 Pentagon.

11 Mr. Hegseth: I meant it when I said it in the opening
12 statement, Senator. I know what I don't know. I know I
13 have never run an organization of 3 million people with a
14 budget of \$850 billion. But what I do know is that I have
15 led men and women. I have led people. And it is leadership
16 of people and motivation of people and a clear vision of
17 people where you build a team, cast that vision, empower
18 people properly.

19 I want smarter and more capable people around me than
20 me. And you will get that at the Department. I cast a
21 clear vision. Build the plan. Work it. We set the
22 metrics, and everyone is held accountable. I know our
23 incoming businessman President believes in accountability
24 and holding people accountable. That will happen at the
25 Pentagon.

1 I mean, this has been a problem for a long time.
2 Secretary Rumsfeld gave a speech on September 10, 2001, that
3 is mostly forgotten. But it was about the need for
4 acquisition reform, cutting tail to give to teeth to
5 warfighters. And then 9/11 happened. These are problems
6 that have been persistent for a long time.

7 But now we have new threats, and we need the urgency of
8 this moment -- as you said, Mr. Chairman, the most dangerous
9 moment we have been since the end of the Cold War, and
10 possibly since World War II -- the urgency to do everything
11 possible to get the capabilities into the hands of
12 warfighters, Emergency Powers, Defense Production Act,
13 whatever it takes, and an audit is certainly part of it.

14 Senator Scott: Why do you want to do this? Why do you
15 want to do this job? What drives you?

16 Chairman Wicker: You have 30 seconds.

17 Mr. Hegseth: Because I love my country, Senator, and I
18 have dedicated my life to the warfighters. People see me as
19 someone who hosted a morning show on television, but people
20 that really know me know where my heart is at. It is with
21 the guys in this audience who had my back, and I have had
22 theirs. We have been in some of the darkest and most
23 difficult places you can ever be in. You come back a
24 different person. And only by the grace of God am I here
25 before you today.

1 I am doing this job for them, for all of them.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Hegseth. Senator
3 Warren.

4 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr.
5 Hegseth, thank you. Thank you for your service.

6 So if you are confirmed as Secretary of Defense you
7 will oversee our military, including about a quarter of a
8 million women who currently serve on active duty in the
9 Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Space Forces, and the
10 Marines. And I have serious concerns that your behavior
11 toward women disqualifies you from serving in this role.

12 Now I have been trying to get answers from you for
13 quite some time on this. You have not wanted to meet or to
14 answer any of my questions. So we will just have to do it
15 here and dive in.

16 I want to pick up on some of the questions asked by
17 Senators Shaheen and Gillibrand and Hirono, and I just want
18 to make sure we have a list of some of the facts that I
19 think are undisputed. I am not going to talk about
20 anonymous sources. I am just going to quote you directly.
21 We have got the video. We have got it in print.

22 So going back to January of 2013, you told a Fox News
23 interviewer that women in the military simply could not
24 measure up to men in the military, saying that allowing
25 women to serve in combat roles would force the military to

1 lower the bar.

2 You picked up on that same theme in 2015, making
3 remarks on Fox News, referring to women in combat as, quote,
4 "erode, it would erode standards."

5 June 2024, you said on Ben Shapiro's podcast, quote,
6 "Women shouldn't be in combat at all."

7 And then, of course, we have talked about in 2024. You
8 published a book. And you say on page 26 of your book, "We
9 need moms, but not in the military, especially in combat
10 units." Page 48 of your book you claim that women should
11 not be in combat roles because men are distracted by women.

12 And then 10 weeks ago you appeared on the Shawn Ryan
13 Show and said, "I'm straight up just saying we should not
14 have women in combat roles."

15 Now, I presume you recall making all these statements?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am not familiar with the
17 article you are pointing to in 2013, but it underscores my
18 argument completely, because in that 2013 argument I was
19 talking about standards.

20 Senator Warren: So I --

21 Mr. Hegseth: Standards are what it is always been
22 about, Senator.

23 Senator Warren: Please. Let's not have the same right
24 again.

25 Mr. Hegseth: It has always been about standards.

1 Senator Warren: I quoted you directly. We have got
2 the video. We are happy to show it.

3 But I want to be clear here. For 12 years you were
4 quite open about your views, and your views were
5 consistently the same -- women are inferior soldiers,
6 sailors, Marines, airmen, and guardians. And in case anyone
7 missed the point, and these are your words from 10 weeks
8 ago, women absolutely, straight up, should not be permitted
9 to serve in combat. And I notice on each of these quotes,
10 those are said without qualification. It is not by how much
11 you can lift or how fast you can run. They do not belong in
12 combat, period, or your words, straight up.

13 And then, on November 9, 2024, just 32 days after your
14 last public comment, saying that women absolutely should not
15 be in combat, you declared that, quote, "Some of our
16 greatest warriors are women," and you support having them
17 serve in combat.

18 Now that is a very, very big about face in a very, very
19 short period of time.

20 So help me understand, Mr. Hegseth. What extraordinary
21 event happened in that 32-day period that made you change
22 the core values you had expressed for the preceding 12
23 years?

24 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, again, I very much appreciate
25 you bringing up my comments from 2013, because for me this

1 issue has always been about standards. And unfortunately,
2 because of some of the people that have been in political
3 power --

4 Senator Warren: Excuse me, Mr. Hegseth --

5 Mr. Hegseth: -- for the last 4 years --

6 Senator Warren: Let's just stop. Let's just stop.

7 Mr. Hegseth: -- priorities other than lethality --

8 Senator Warren: Stop right there.

9 Mr. Hegseth: -- and meritocracy --

10 Senator Warren: Mr. Hegseth --

11 Mr. Hegseth: -- have driven decision-making.

12 Senator Warren: -- I am quoting you from the podcast.

13 "Women shouldn't be in combat at all." Where is the
14 reference to standards, that they should be there if they
15 can carry, if they can run? I do not see that at all, Mr.
16 Hegseth. What I see is there is a 32-day period in which
17 you suddenly have another description about your views of
18 women in the military. And I just want to know, what
19 changed in the 32 days, that the song you sang is not the
20 song you come in here today to sing?

21 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, the concerns I have and the
22 concerns that many have had, especially in ground combat
23 units, is that in pursuit of certain percentages or quotas,
24 standards have been changed. And that makes combat more
25 difficult --

1 Senator Warren: Let me make a suggestion --

2 Mr. Hegseth: -- for everybody involved.

3 Senator Warren: -- about what happened in that 32
4 days. You got a nomination from President Trump. Now, I
5 have heard of deathbed conversions, but this is the first
6 time I have heard of a nomination conversion. And I hope
7 you understand that many women serving in the military right
8 now might think that if you can convert so rapidly your
9 long-held and aggressively pursued views in just 32 days,
10 that 32 days after you get confirmed maybe you will just
11 reverse those views and go back to the old guy who said,
12 "Straight up, women do not belong in combat."

13 Now, Mr. Hegseth, you have written that after they
14 retired, generals should be banned from working for the
15 defense industry for 10 years. You and I agree on the
16 corrosive effect of the revolving door between the Pentagon
17 and defense contractors. It is something I would have liked
18 to talk with you about if you had been willing to visit with
19 me.

20 But the question I have for you on this is, will you
21 put your money where your mouth is and agree that when you
22 leave this job you will not work for the defense industry
23 for 10 years?

24 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, it is not even a question I have
25 thought about, because --

1 Senator Warren: You can think about it right now.

2 Mr. Hegseth: -- it is not one that -- my motivation
3 for this job --

4 Senator Warren: I understand that.

5 Mr. Hegseth: -- has never been about --

6 Senator Warren: I just need a yes or no --

7 Mr. Hegseth: -- what could conceivably come next.

8 Senator Warren: -- here. Time is short. I just need
9 a yes or no.

10 Mr. Hegseth: I would consult with the President about
11 what the policies would be at the Defense Department.

12 Senator Warren: In other words, you are quite sure
13 that every general who serves should not go directly into
14 the defense industry for 10 years, but you are not willing
15 to make that same pledge?

16 Mr. Hegseth: I am not a general, Senator.

17 [Laughter.]

18 Senator Warren: You will be the one -- let's just be
19 clear -- in charge of the generals. So you are saying sauce
20 for the goose but certainly not sauce for the gander?

21 Mr. Hegseth: I would want to see what the policies
22 were.

23 Senator Warren: Oh, I bet you would.

24 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Warren. Senator
25 Tuberville.

1 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank
2 you for your hard work and your committee's hard work, Mr.
3 Chairman. This has gone well.

4 I would like to submit this letter, topic, "Conduct at
5 Vets for Freedom for Hegseth." I would like to submit that
6 for the record, please.

7 Chairman Wicker: Without objection.

8 [The information follows:]

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1 Senator Tuberville: General Hegseth, I mean Mr.

2 Hegseth --

3 [Laughter.]

4 Senator Tuberville: -- thanks for being here today,
5 and with your family. I know this is tough. That is what
6 it is all about, though. You are a tough guy. Been here
7 for a while. Never seen this many people here for support
8 of a nominee. That is impressive. I met with a lot of them
9 yesterday, and they are very passionate. So thank you for
10 being willing to take this on, and congratulations on your
11 nomination.

12 I am worried about recruiting. I mean, we can look at
13 everything out there and talk about all these things, these
14 narratives, but at the end of the day, I came from a team
15 sport where the people, the players, actually won the games.
16 And that is what is going to happen here. You are not going
17 to win the game. You are going to set the precedent, and
18 you are going to get the blame or the credit. But there are
19 people that are going to be under you that are going to set
20 the precedent for the future of our country.

21 Now, the war games that we play on our computers with
22 our adversaries right now, for us it don't look good because
23 our military, we are in trouble. Our whole country is in
24 trouble. Thank God President Trump got elected November the
25 5th. We could not have kept down this same path. That

1 could not happen.

2 I met with a couple of generals this summer. Coach, we
3 are spending more money on transgender restrooms than we are
4 coverings for \$100 million airplanes. That is not
5 acceptable. We cannot do that. That is not what this is
6 about.

7 I met with a couple of Navy SEALs not too long ago.
8 They just got back from crawling around in the mud and the
9 muck overseas, unknown places. Couldn't tell you where they
10 have been, carrying a weapon, obviously protecting us and
11 our allies. And the first week they are back, what did they
12 do? They had to go through a week of DEI training. Both
13 are now out. They gave it up. It was embarrassing to them,
14 of what they had to do.

15 We have lost all sight of what we are doing in our
16 military. Lost all sight. It starts with leadership, and
17 it starts with recruiting. Why would a young man -- used
18 to, when I was growing up, if you could not afford to go to
19 college you had the opportunity to go to the military where
20 you could learn a trade. You could learn. You could make a
21 living for your family, and eventually possibly get an
22 education. That was a good alternative. We have forgotten
23 that. We have forgotten it.

24 We cannot give up on our young people. Young people
25 are our number one commodity in this country, and they are

1 the ones that are going to live and die for the freedom of
2 this country in the future.

3 So again, thank you for taking this on.

4 Recruiting. Our service academies are meant to serve
5 as our primary commissioning source of officers. It now
6 appears that they are a breeding ground for leftist
7 activists and champions of DEI and critical theory. Now,
8 not all, but some, and some is way too much.

9 How are we going to eliminate this, Mr. Hegseth? How
10 are we going to get this back on track to where we grow our
11 leaders?

12 I had a young man that forever he wanted to go to West
13 Point. I got him a nomination, I got him accepted, and he
14 turned it down. He says, "Coach, I am not getting involved
15 with that mess." How are we going to overcome this?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, thank you for the question, and
17 I think it comes down to leadership, clear leadership from
18 President Trump through me, should I be nominated. And that
19 is what soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and guardians
20 see is clear leadership, that says this is what we believe,
21 this is the mission we are going to give you, here is the
22 equipment we are going to give you, and here is how we are
23 going to support you.

24 Because the military, at a lot of levels, Senator, has
25 been, for generations, a family business. You know, my

1 grandfather served. My father served. I served. My
2 daughter served. That chain has started to break, with
3 generations of people my age and older, talking to their
4 kids and grandkids, wondering, pondering, do I want them to
5 serve? Will my country use them responsibly? When that
6 kind of doubt is cast, you get serious recruiting problems
7 like we do right now. You get questions about whether I
8 want my son or daughter to follow my path in West Point,
9 which I have heard multiple times.

10 And so you have to rip, root, and branch the politics
11 and divisive policies out of these institutions, and then
12 focus them on creating and preparing actual future military
13 leadership.

14 West Point traditionally was focused on engineering,
15 and rightfully so, because in our fighting forces across all
16 services we need the best and brightest minds in
17 engineering, in addition to military studies. That is what
18 I did at ROTC at Princeton, Military Science. And we need
19 more uniformed members going back into West Point, the Air
20 Force Academy, and the Naval Academy, as a tour-to-teach,
21 with their wisdom of what they have learned in uniform,
22 instead of just more civilian professors that came from the
23 same left-wing, woke universities that they left, and then
24 try to push that into service academies.

25 When that changes, Senator, I truly believe under

1 Donald Trump we will have a recruiting renaissance. That
2 sends signals to the world, to our enemies and allies alike,
3 that America is back, and thankfully then we have the men
4 and women of our country willing to want to serve.

5 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. And it is about
6 attitude, too, and I love your attitude. You have got to be
7 motivated. You have got to understand the people, they will
8 hook up with you. They will understand and learn under
9 their leaders.

10 Why would you fight for a country that you do not love?
11 That is what I keep hearing from a lot of our college kids,
12 that they are getting from these woke universities that they
13 go to. And I worked at a lot of them. That is one of the
14 excuses I get from our kids. We have got to break that.

15 Another one. According to the Pentagon, between 2001
16 and 2024, the number of civilian employees in the Office of
17 the Secretary of Defense had nearly doubled, from 1,500 to
18 3,000. Civilians on Joint Chiefs has increased from 191 to
19 almost 1,000. Our military end strength goes down. Our
20 staff numbers are exploding. What are you going to do about
21 that?

22 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, we are going to address that.
23 We won World War II with 7 four-star generals. Today we
24 have 44 four-star generals. There is an inverse
25 relationship between the size of staffs and victory on the

1 battlefield. We do not need more bureaucracy at the top.
2 We need more warfighters empowered at the bottom.

3 So it is going to be my job, working with those that we
4 hire and those inside the administration, to identify those
5 places where fat can be cut, so it can go toward lethality.

6 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.
7 Senator Peters.

8 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Hegseth,
9 welcome to this committee.

10 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you.

11 Senator Peters: You know, we have far too much
12 partisanship in our country right now, that gets eating away
13 at the fabric of what has always made this country great,
14 about bringing people together from all sorts of
15 backgrounds, all sorts of experiences. And we know that in
16 our motto, together as one, we are strong.

17 And so we on this committee, and certainly I speak for
18 myself, but I think I speak for many of my colleagues, want
19 to take partisanship out of this proceeding as much Special
20 Agent we can. I am not naïve. It is out there. I get it.
21 But we have got to try to take that out.

22 And I want you to know that as a member of this
23 committee I have voted in a bipartisan way for Secretaries
24 of Defense. I voted for two Secretaries of Defense when
25 Donald Trump was previously President. We had those two. I

1 think we had five total Secretaries of Defense during that
2 4-year period, so we want to keep that in mind as to what we
3 might see in this coming administration. But I voted, and
4 we voted by a big margin for those folks, as well.

5 But part of that was the process, and having an
6 opportunity to get to know the person, and to understand
7 their qualifications, and to understand the standards. I
8 made repeated requests to meet with you prior to this
9 meeting. I know many of my other colleagues also wanted to
10 meet with you. I did that with other nominees that I was
11 happy to vote for. I thought they were highly qualified
12 individuals and true professionals. And yet I could never
13 get a meeting with you. Was there a reason you were afraid
14 to have one-on-one meetings with some of my colleagues
15 before the hearing?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I know there was a great deal of
17 outreach to multiple offices, and schedules get full. There
18 is a lot going on.

19 Senator Peters: I was ready.

20 Mr. Hegseth: I welcome the opportunity to, pending my
21 schedule --

22 Senator Peters: I was ready.

23 Mr. Hegseth: -- to have an opportunity to sit down.

24 Senator Peters: I was ready. It would have been so
25 much better to have that opportunity to talk beforehand. I

1 think that is a big mistake, and it does not set us on a
2 good course when you refuse to meet with people and have a
3 professional conversation about the huge challenges that we
4 face at the Department of Defense.

5 My colleagues, the folks who introduced you, and
6 others, the chairman has mentioned about the management of
7 the DoD as a concern, cost overruns, delays on weapon
8 systems. We need strong management at the Department of
9 Defense, first and foremost. We have got to have someone
10 who is going to grab the reins and give the taxpayers value
11 for having the most lethal fighting force in the world that
12 defends freedoms, but we have got to do it in an efficient
13 way.

14 I have heard about the jobs you have had in the past.
15 Let's just talk about qualifications. I know you had two
16 previous positions. How many people reported to you in
17 those positions?

18 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, at Vets for Freedom we were a
19 small upstart. Our focus was --

20 Senator Peters: Just the number, please.

21 Mr. Hegseth: -- working on Capitol Hill, going back to
22 the battlefield for warfighters.

23 Senator Peters: Just the number. Just the number,
24 please.

25 Mr. Hegseth: We probably had 8 to 10 fulltime staff

1 and lots of volunteers.

2 Senator Peters: So you had 8. We have heard about the
3 two, and certainly there has been a lot of talk about the
4 mismanagement, et cetera, et cetera. I am just curious. I
5 will not go into that. I am just curious. So you had 8
6 there. What is the largest number of people you have ever
7 supervised or had in an organization, in your career?

8 Mr. Hegseth: Not three million.

9 Senator Peters: No, I do not expect that. Very few
10 people have ever had that experience. But how many? It is
11 a straight-up question.

12 Mr. Hegseth: I think we had over 100 full-time staff
13 at Concerns Vets for America, roughly, with thousands of
14 volunteers.

15 Senator Peters: So 100 people.

16 Mr. Hegseth: I was also a headquarters company
17 commander, which would have been --

18 Senator Peters: Yeah, that is fine.

19 Mr. Hegseth: -- a couple of hundred. Nothing remotely
20 near the size of the Defense Department. I would
21 acknowledge that.

22 Senator Peters: Actually, not remotely near even a
23 medium-sized company in America, let alone a big company in
24 America, especially a major corporation. And we are hiring
25 you to be the CEO of one of the most complex, largest

1 organizations in the world. We are the board of directors
2 here. I do not know of any corporate board of directors
3 that would hire a CEO for a major company if they came and
4 said, "You know, I supervised 100 people before." They
5 would ask you, "Well, what kind of experiences have you had?
6 We need innovation." Can you give me an experience or your
7 actual experience of driving innovation in an organization?
8 Give me an example of where you have done that.

9 Mr. Hegseth: Oh my goodness, Senator, absolutely. At
10 Concerned Veterans for America we created the Fixing
11 Veterans Health Care Task Force, a bipartisan task force
12 that had never been done before, to create policy, to drive
13 policy change on Capitol Hill, that organizations fought
14 ferociously against. We got the VA Accountability Act
15 passed and the MISSION Act passed in a way that nonprofit --

16 Senator Peters: Okay.

17 Mr. Hegseth: -- of our size of organization --

18 Senator Peters: We appreciate it.

19 Mr. Hegseth: -- has never done.

20 Senator Peters: Thank you.

21 Mr. Hegseth: I have testified in all the letters --

22 Senator Peters: Thank you.

23 Mr. Hegseth: -- we put forward to the committee, which
24 are on the record.

25 Senator Peters: Okay. I have limited time. Thank you

1 for that.

2 Give me an example of where you have driven down cost.
3 I have heard examples that Senator Blumenthal gave. The
4 cost was a real problem for you in your 50-person
5 organization, that you actually raised a lot less than what
6 you actually spent. Did you drive costs down in a 50-person
7 organization?

8 Let me tell you, we have got to drive costs down
9 dramatically in an organization of three million people and
10 hundreds of billions of dollars. You do not have that
11 experience that you can talk about.

12 Or acquisition reform. Acquisition reform, you bring
13 that up. Have you had experience in acquisition reform?

14 Mr. Hegseth: I have written about and studied on
15 acquisition reform.

16 Senator Peters: Have you actually done it?

17 Mr. Hegseth: Because what we need in the hands of our
18 warfighters better change because we are not doing it well
19 right now.

20 Senator Peters: It better, and we need people who have
21 experience actually doing that.

22 You know, you talk about standards. Again, I am going
23 to go back to a CEO of the most complex organization in the
24 world. I do not think there is a board of directors in
25 America that would hire you as a CEO with the kind of

1 experience you have on your resume.

2 You talk about standards. You talk about raising, or
3 we have a problem of standards at DoD and we have to raise
4 standards for the men and women who serve. Do you think
5 that the way to raise the minimum standards of the people
6 who serve us is to lower the standards for the Secretary of
7 Defense, that we have someone who has never managed an
8 organization of more than 100 people is going to come in and
9 manage this incredibly important organization, and do it
10 with the professionalism, and has no experience that they
11 can tell us that they have actually done that?

12 I have real problems with that. This is not about
13 other issues that have been brought up. They are all very
14 important. I am just about trying to get things done,
15 managing efficiently, and having the best people, who have
16 demonstrated that in a large organization. And I am sorry,
17 but I do not see that in your background. There are a lot
18 of other things you can do very well. You are a capable
19 person. But you have not convinced me that you are able to
20 take on this tremendous responsibility with a complex
21 organization, and having little or no significant management
22 experience.

23 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am grateful to be hired by one
24 of the most successful CEOs in American history, should I be
25 confirmed.

1 Chairman Wicker: Mr. Hegseth, it seems to me that you
2 have supervised far more people than the average United
3 States Senator supervises today.

4 [Laughter and applause.]

5 Senator King: Except for former governors, Mr.
6 Chairman.

7 Chairman Wicker: Senator Mullin, I understand you are
8 yielding back your time and do not wish to ask questions. I
9 was misinformed. Senator Mullin, you are recognized.

10 Senator Mullin: You caught me totally off-guard there.

11 I would like to submit for the record signatures by 32
12 members of the House of Representatives who are veterans.
13 The signatories call on the Senate to honor the
14 constitutional duty of advice and consent by conducting a
15 fair, thorough confirmation process that evaluates this
16 nomination solely on substance and merits, his distinguished
17 military service, academic credentials, and a bold vision
18 for revitalizing the national defense. I ask unanimous
19 consent to enter it into the record.

20 Chairman Wicker: Without objection.

21 [The information follows:]

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1 Senator Mullin: You know, there is a lot of talk going
2 about, talking about qualifications and then about us hiring
3 him, if we are the board. But there are a lot of Senators
4 here I would not have on my board, because there is no
5 qualifications except your age, and you have got to be
6 living in the state, and you are a citizen of the United
7 States, to be a Senator. Other than the fact that we have
8 got to convince a lot of people to vote for us.

9 And then when we start talking about qualifications, if
10 you are qualified for it, could the chairman tell me what
11 the qualifications are for the Secretary of Defense? Mr.
12 Chairman, could you tell me what the qualifications are for
13 the Secretary of Defense?

14 Chairman Wicker: I would be happy for --

15 Senator Mullin: I will read it.

16 Chairman Wicker: -- for you to do that.

17 Senator Mullin: Let me read it for you.

18 Chairman Wicker: I was getting some advice from my
19 second in command.

20 Senator Mullin: Yeah, I understand that. Yeah, but I
21 am just making a point, because there is a lot about
22 qualifications. And I think it is so hypocritical of
23 Senators, especially on the other side of the aisle, to be
24 talking about his qualifications, not being able to lead, or
25 to be the Secretary of Defense. And yet your qualifications

1 are not any better. You guys are not any more qualified to
2 be the Senator than I am qualified to be the Senator, except
3 we are lucky enough to be here.

4 But let me read you what the qualifications of the
5 Secretary of Defense is, because I googled it, and I googled
6 it and went through a lot of different sites. And really,
7 it is hard to see. But in general, the U.S. Secretary of
8 Defense position is filled by a civilian. That is it. If
9 you have served in the U.S. Army forces and have been in the
10 service for -- you have to retired for at least 7 years, and
11 Congress can weigh that.

12 And then there are questions that the Senator from
13 Massachusetts brought up about serving on a board inside the
14 military industry. And yet your own Secretary, that you all
15 voted for, Secretary Austin, we had to vote on a waiver
16 because he stepped off the board of Raytheon. But I guess
17 that is okay because that is a Democrat Secretary of
18 Defense. But we so quickly forget about that.

19 And then Senator Kaine, or I guess I better use the
20 Senator from Virginia, starts bringing up the fact that what
21 if you showed up drunk to your job? How many Senators have
22 showed up drunk to vote at night? Have any of you guys
23 asked them to step down and resign from their job? And
24 don't tell me you have not seen it, because I know you have.
25 And then how many Senators do you know have gotten a divorce

1 for cheating on their wives? Did you ask them to step down?

2 No.

3 But it is for show. You guys make sure you make a big
4 show and point out the hypocrisy because the man has made a
5 mistake. And you want to sit there and say that he is not
6 qualified. Give me a joke. I mean, it is so ridiculous
7 that you guys hold yourselves as this higher standard, and
8 you forget you have got a big plank in your eyes.

9 We have all made mistakes. I have made mistakes. And
10 Jennifer, thank you for loving him through that mistake.
11 Because the only reason why I am here and not in prison is
12 because my wife loved me too.

13 [Applause.]

14 Senator Mullin: I have changed, but I am not perfect.
15 But I found somebody that thought I was perfect. And for
16 whatever reason you love Pete, and I do not know why. But
17 just like our Lord and Savior forgave me, my wife has had to
18 forgive me more than once too, and I am sure you have had to
19 forgive him too. So thank you.

20 So before I go down this rabbit hole again, tell me
21 something about your wife that you love.

22 Mr. Hegseth: She is the smartest, most capable,
23 loving, humble, honest person I have ever met, in addition
24 to being incredibly beautiful.

25 Senator Mullin: Don't forget about your kids.

1 Mr. Hegseth: I am supposed to talk about my kids?

2 Senator Mullin: No, no. Well, she is also the mother

3 --

4 Mr. Hegseth: Oh, an amazing mother of our blended
5 family of seven kids.

6 Senator Mullin: I am pulling you along. I am trying
7 to help you here.

8 You know, do you believe that you are going to be
9 running the Department of Defense by yourself?

10 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, absolutely no. Just as
11 President Trump is assembling his Cabinet, I look forward,
12 and already am in the process of building one of the best
13 possible teams you could imagine, with decades and decades
14 of experience outside the Pentagon, driving innovation and
15 excellence, and also inside the building, knowing how to
16 make it happen. Yes, sir.

17 Senator Mullin: So in your organizations that you did
18 have the privilege of running, did you have a board?

19 Mr. Hegseth: In both organizations we had a board,
20 yes.

21 Senator Mullin: Okay. And what did you do with that
22 board? What kind of decisions did you make with them?

23 Mr. Hegseth: That boards provided oversight and
24 insight into decision-making.

25 Senator Mullin: They all have special, unique sets

1 that maybe filled gaps that you are not the expertise in?

2 Mr. Hegseth: Yes, sir.

3 Senator Mullin: So do you believe you are capable of
4 surrounding yourself with capable individuals, that you are
5 going to be able to run those same ideas by, and surround
6 yourself with people that are smarter and better equipped in
7 maybe areas that you do not necessarily carry those
8 expertise with?

9 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, the only reason I have had
10 success in life, to include my wonderful wife, is because of
11 people more capable around me, and having the self-
12 confidence to empower them and say, "Hey, run with the ball.
13 Run with the football. Take it down the field. We will do
14 this together. I don't care who gets the credit." And in
15 this case, that is how the Pentagon will be run.

16 Senator Mullin: Let's end with this, Mr. Chairman,
17 about the qualifications. You have got a man who has
18 literally put his butt on the line. He served 20 years in
19 the service, multiple deployments. He has heard the bullets
20 crack over the top of his head. He has been willing to go
21 into combat. He has been willing to see friends die for
22 this country. And he is willing to still put himself
23 through this. His wife is willing to still stand beside
24 him, knowing he was not perfect, knowing that all this was
25 going to be brought up. And he is still willing to serve

1 the country. What other qualifications does he need?

2 With that I yield back.

3 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Mullin. Senator
4 Duckworth. And again, we really are going to strictly
5 enforce the rule about no demonstrations or noise.

6 Distinguished ranking member.

7 Senator Reed: Just a point of personal privilege, to
8 make a correction. The reason that General Austin required
9 a waiver was not because of his participation in a corporate
10 enterprise. It was because he did not have 7 years of
11 interruption between his service and his appointment.

12 Second point is that if any of us were appointed as
13 Secretary of Defense we would be subject to the same types
14 of questions. And the case in point is Senator John Tower
15 was nominated for Secretary of Defense. It was discovered
16 by his colleagues that his behavior was not commensurate
17 with the responsibilities, despite his service, and he was
18 voted down. Thank you.

19 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman Wicker: Senator Duckworth, you are
21 recognized.

22 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and also
23 Secretary Mattis had to have the waiver, as well.

24 Mr. Hegseth, this hearing is about whether you are
25 qualified to be Secretary of Defense, and one of the

1 qualifications, to answer my colleague's question, is to
2 actually win the votes of every member of this committee and
3 to be confirmed by the United States Senate. And you need
4 to convince us that you are worthy of that vote, because the
5 people of the state of Illinois voted for me to be their
6 Senator so that I could cast that vote when it comes to
7 picking who is going to be the next Secretary of Defense.

8 This hearing now seems to be a hearing about whether or
9 not women are qualified to serve in combat and not about
10 whether or not you are qualified to be Secretary of Defense.
11 And let me just say that the American people need a SECDEF
12 who is ready to lead on day one. You are not that person.
13 Our adversaries watch closely during times of transition,
14 and any sense that the Department of Defense that keeps us
15 safe is being steered by someone who is wholly unprepared
16 for the job puts America at risk. And I am not willing to
17 do that.

18 With that in mind, Mr. Hegseth, I want you to try to
19 explain to the American people, this committee, who have to
20 vote for you, and to our troops who are deployed around the
21 world, why you are qualified to lead the Department of
22 Defense. We already know that you have only led, the
23 largest is a 200-person organization. We already know that
24 you so badly mangled a budget that after you left they had
25 to bring in a forensic accountant to figure out what went

1 wrong. And that the largest budget you ever managed was
2 about \$18 million. You know, that is about 51,560 times
3 fewer, lower, than the Department of Defense budget of \$825
4 billion. Sixteen million dollars is 51,560 times smaller
5 than the defense budget.

6 Please describe to me, Mr. Hegseth, you talk about DoD
7 passing an audit. Please describe to me a time or an
8 organization that you led that underwent an audit, because
9 you say you are going to hire smarter people than you to run
10 this audit. I am not asking you to be an accountant. I
11 want you to be able to tell me what kind of guidance will be
12 given to those employees, what will happen whether or not
13 you pass that audit. Have you led an audit of any
14 organization? Yes or no. I do not want a long answer. Yes
15 or no, have you led an audit of any organization of which
16 you were in charge?

17 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, in both of the organizations I
18 ran we were always completely fiscally responsible with the
19 money that we had.

20 Senator Duckworth: Yes or no, did you lead an audit?

21 Mr. Hegseth: And the way --

22 Senator Duckworth: Yes or no, did you lead an audit?

23 Mr. Hegseth: -- my leadership has been stated --

24 Senator Duckworth: Yes or no.

25 Mr. Hegseth: -- has been completely mischaracterized.

1 Senator Duckworth: What are you afraid of? You cannot
2 answer this question? Yes or no, did you lead an audit? Do
3 you not know this answer?

4 Mr. Hegseth: Senator --

5 Senator Duckworth: Yes or no.

6 Mr. Hegseth: -- every part of my leadership --

7 Senator Duckworth: Yes or no.

8 Mr. Hegseth: -- of these organizations --

9 Senator Duckworth: Yes or no.

10 Mr. Hegseth: -- has been misrepresented, from top to
11 bottom.

12 Senator Duckworth: I will take that as a no. What
13 were the findings? So there were no findings because you
14 have never led an audit.

15 What guidance did you give the auditors? None, because
16 you have never led an audit. Nobody expects you to be an
17 accountant, Mr. Hegseth. What we expect is for you to
18 understand the complexity of this Pentagon budget process
19 that is absolutely necessary to outfit our warfighters.

20 Look, the Secretary of Defense is required to make
21 quick decisions every single day, with vital information
22 that is being provided for them. A Secretary of Defense has
23 to have breadth and depth of knowledge. Right now I am
24 concerned that you have neither.

25 Mr. Hegseth, what is the highest level of international

1 negotiations that you have engaged in, that you have led?
2 Because the Secretary of Defense does lead international
3 security negotiations. There are three main ones that the
4 Secretary of Defense leads and signs. Can you name at least
5 one of them?

6 Mr. Hegseth: Could you repeat the question, Senator?

7 Senator Duckworth: Sure. What is the highest level of
8 international security agreement that you have led, and can
9 you name some that the Secretary of Defense would lead?
10 There are three main ones.

11 Mr. Hegseth: I have not been involved in international
12 security arrangements because I have not been in government
13 other than serving in the military. So my job has been --

14 Senator Duckworth: So no. The answer is no.

15 Mr. Hegseth: -- to lead men and women in combat.

16 Senator Duckworth: Can you name one of the three main
17 ones that the Secretary of Defense signs?

18 Mr. Hegseth: You are talking about defense
19 arrangements, I mean, NATO might be one that you are
20 referring to.

21 Senator Duckworth: Status of Forces Agreement might be
22 one of them.

23 Mr. Hegseth: Status of Forces Agreement? I have been
24 a part of teaching about Status of Forces Agreement inside
25 Afghanistan.

1 Senator Duckworth: But you do not remember to mention
2 it? You are not qualified, Mr. Hegseth. You are not
3 qualified. You talk about repairing our defense industrial
4 complex. You are not qualified to do that. You could do
5 acquisition and cost servicing agreements. It is
6 essentially security agreements. You cannot even mention
7 that. You have done none of those.

8 You talked about the Indo-Pacific a little bit, and I
9 am glad that you mentioned it. Can you name the importance
10 of at least one of the nations in the ASEAN, and what type
11 of agreement we have with at least one of those nations?
12 And how many nations are in ASEAN, by the way?

13 Mr. Hegseth: I could not tell you the exact amount of
14 nations in that --

15 Senator Duckworth: No, you could not, because you --

16 Mr. Hegseth: But I know we have allies in South Korea
17 and Japan and in AUKUS with Australia, trying to work on
18 submarines with them.

19 Senator Duckworth: Mr. Hegseth, none of those
20 countries are in ASEAN.

21 Mr. Hegseth: We have allies across.

22 Senator Duckworth: None of those three countries that
23 you mentioned are in ASEAN. I suggest you do a little
24 homework before you prepare for these types of negotiations.

25 Mr. Hegseth, we ask our troops to go into harm's way

1 all the time. We ask them to go into harm's way. And this,
2 behind me, is a copy of the Soldier's Creed, a copy that
3 usually hangs over my desk here in the Senate, and you
4 should be familiar with it. It is the same copy that hung
5 over my desk at Walter Reed. Every single day that I woke
6 up and fought my way back, because I wanted to go back and
7 serve next to my buddies who had saved my life.

8 This same copy, these words, I repeat it over and over
9 and over again. Let me read out two things to you, two
10 sentences. I will always place the mission first, and I am
11 disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and
12 proficient in my warrior tasks. Mr. Hegseth, our troops
13 follow these words every single day, and they man up, and
14 they pack their rucksacks, and they go to war. And they
15 deserve a leader who can lead them, not a leader who wants
16 to lower the standards for himself while raising the
17 standards for other people.

18 And by the way, our troops already meet the standards.
19 We ask troops to man that ship, fight that fire, fly that
20 helicopter, until their very last breath. And they do that
21 every single day. The cannot be led by someone who is not
22 competent to do the job.

23 How can we ask these warriors to train and perform to
24 absolute highest standards when you are asking us to lower
25 to standards to make you the Secretary of Defense, simply

1 because you are buddies with our President-Elect? And by
2 the way, he has filed for bankruptcy six times. I am not
3 quite sure he is the kind of CEO you want to refer to as a
4 successful businessman.

5 Let me make it clear. You cannot seem to grasp that
6 there is no U.S. military, as we know it, without the
7 incredible women that we serve, women who have earned their
8 place in their units. You have not earned your place as
9 Secretary of Defense. You say you care about keeping our
10 armed forces strong and that you like that our armed forces
11 is a meritocracy. That must not lower the standards for
12 you. You, sir, are a no-go at this station.

13 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

14 I would like to submit for the record a letter
15 submitted by Mr. Brian Marriott, that says, "Anyone who
16 would claim that Pete mismanaged funds at Vets for Freedom
17 is ignorant of the facts." Without objection, it will be
18 admitted to the record.

19 [The information follows:]
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1 Chairman Wicker: Senator Budd.

2 Senator Budd: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, and congrats
3 on your chairmanship of this committee. I want to thank you
4 for your leadership and your handling of this today. You
5 are doing a great job.

6 So I wanted to also submit for the record a letter
7 submitted by Mr. Daniel Catlin, the former operations
8 manager at Vets for Freedom. Mr. Catlin's letter states
9 that Mr. Hegseth and Mr. Catlin conducted weekly meetings to
10 meticulously review every dollar that the organization
11 spent. Pete's hands-on approach and dedication to financial
12 responsibility ensured that Vets for Freedom operated within
13 the budget.

14 Mr. Catlin's letter also states that Pete treated his
15 staff with the utmost respect, regardless of race or gender.

16 So I ask unanimous consent to enter this into the
17 record, Mr. Chairman.

18 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, so ordered.

19 [The information follows:]
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1 Senator Budd: Thank you.

2 Mr. Hegseth, congratulations on your nomination.

3 Thanks for appearing before the committee today. I enjoyed
4 meeting with you in my office before Christmas, and I have
5 enjoyed our friendship before that.

6 You know, you stated in your Advanced Policy Questions
7 that the American people need to be informed, engaged, and
8 inspired to join our military. I wholeheartedly agree with
9 that. And we also have a problem, though, with obesity and
10 falling academic standards. It is very concerning. And we
11 have talked about that before.

12 So if confirmed, how would you approach increasing the
13 number of Americans eligible to serve in the military, but
14 without lowering standards?

15 Mr. Hegseth: Well Senator, I think there are already,
16 to the credit of, I believe, the Army and other services
17 have now caught up to that, which have piloted programs that
18 have had some success, that have allowed young Americans who
19 want to serve in the military but cannot necessarily pass
20 the ASFAB or pass the APFT to get into basic training, an
21 opportunity to get caught up, a preparatory class.

22 Unfortunately, yes, we do have a problem of obesity in
23 our country, not necessarily something that, if I am
24 confirmed as Secretary of Defense, is able to address.

25 But I do think leading from the front matters. I do

1 think having a Secretary of Defense say we will go out and
2 do PT with the troops matters, that has been out there and
3 done that before. And hopefully that is a motivating factor
4 for young people.

5 But the reality of obesity and criminal backgrounds and
6 medical problems have long been an issue of recruitment in
7 America, unfortunately. What changed is the perception of
8 military service, because of the condition of the services,
9 and frankly, because of, in some ways, the way our schools
10 do not teach young people to love the country anymore, and
11 if you do not love the country, why do you want to serve
12 that country. That is a deeper problem. But all of those
13 things need to be addressed to revive recruiting, and
14 obesity is certainly a part of it.

15 Senator Budd: Thank you for that. I have had multiple
16 conversations with young folks back in North Carolina, young
17 men, young women, and we get to meet a lot of them. But,
18 you know, I hear from some of these folks who I encourage to
19 join the military. They say that they are concerned that is
20 has become politicized. And if confirmed, would you commit
21 to working with my office to address the military recruiting
22 crisis and ensuring the military is focused on warfighting?

23 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, absolutely. A number one, from
24 day one, with a mandate from the commander in chief, who
25 received that mandate when Americans spoke out loudly and

1 said we want peace through strength, we want America First
2 foreign policy, and we do not want political ideology
3 driving decisions inside our Defense Department. That was
4 clear. It is an infection that the American people are
5 acutely aware of, which the men and women in this room have
6 lived firsthand. I have lived it firsthand. And that is
7 why it will be a priority.

8 And I truly believe, and I am humbled by this, the
9 response we have already seen from young men and women, who
10 have decided to join the military, when they had said, "I
11 wasn't going to." But seeing a commander in chief Donald
12 Trump reassured them. Seeing the possibility, if confirmed,
13 of a Secretary of Defense that would have their back
14 reassured them.

15 And so in the first couple of months, after President
16 Trump's election, we have already seen the numbers are
17 there, a recruiting surge, in all the services, that I would
18 welcome the opportunity to continue. And it is humbling to
19 think that families across this country would have
20 confidence in us to deliver for their young men and women.
21 There is no more important task.

22 Senator Budd: Thank you for that. So shifting gears a
23 bit, I want to hear some of your thoughts on the growing
24 fighter aircraft capacity gap with China, and what this
25 means for a potential fight in the Indo-Pacific. So if

1 confirmed, what policy recommendations will you make to the
2 President on procurement and maintenance of fourth- and
3 fifth-generation fighters, while we continue to research and
4 develop sixth-generation and collaborative combat aircraft?

5 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, that is a very important
6 conversation, one that I have been looking at a great deal.
7 A lot of it, just to be clear, involves classification and
8 understanding precisely cost and capabilities, including
9 capabilities of enemy systems, both not just fourth and
10 fifth, but potential sixth-generation, which we have already
11 seen a prototype released from the Chinese. That is a
12 dangerous development considering at least the publicly
13 understood condition of NGAD, which I look forward to the
14 opportunity of looking underneath the hood on that.

15 But ensuring fourth and fifth are capable, and upgraded
16 as necessary, will be a part of our contingency. But when
17 you look at what is happening in the Indo-Pacific, say
18 operability, range is going to matter because it is such a
19 large battle space. That will all factor into decisions
20 that are made.

21 And that is where I feel, frankly, a little bit
22 liberated, is that I did not work at Lockheed or any number
23 of -- pick a defense contractor. I did not mean to point
24 one out in particular. Pick any. I have not. I do not
25 have a special interest in any particular system or any

1 particular company or any particular narrative.

2 I want to know what works. I want to know what defeats
3 our enemies, what keeps us safe, what deters them, what
4 keeps our enemies up at night. Whatever that is, I want
5 more of it, and I want to invest in it. And I know that is
6 the view that President Trump has, as well.

7 Senator Budd: Thank you. You know, some have
8 commented recently about the need to eliminate immediately a
9 manned aircraft. So I would say maybe one day, but that day
10 is not now, and certainly not before 2027, especially in the
11 Indo-Pacific. So if confirmed, will you commit to work with
12 my office and this committee to ensure the proper mix of
13 fighters, manned and unmanned?

14 Mr. Hegseth: I look forward to working with you on
15 that, Senator, because unmanned will be a very important
16 part of the way future wars are fought. Just the idea of
17 survivability for a human being drives cost and time in ways
18 that unmanned systems do not. But I look forward to that
19 conversation, Senator.

20

21 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Budd. I now
22 recognize Senator Reed for a unanimous consent request.

23 Senator Reed: Mr. Chairman, I would ask unanimous
24 consent that two letters be submitted for the record. One
25 letter is signed by numerous organizations, including the

1 Government Accountability Project, the other signed by
2 several organizations including the Truman National Security
3 Project.

4 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, so ordered.

5 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Now Senator Kelly, Senator Rosen got
2 here after the gavel went down. Do you really want to go
3 ahead of her?

4 Senator Kelly: I am going to defer to my good friend
5 and colleague, Senator Rosen, from the great state of
6 Nevada.

7 Chairman Wicker: That is a really good decision.
8 Senator Rosen, you are recognized.

9 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Senator Kelly. I owe you
10 one. Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, for
11 holding this hearing. And Mr. Hegseth, I appreciate your
12 service and your willingness to serve again. However, I am
13 deeply disappointed that you would not agree to meet with
14 me, as other members have said on this committee, prior to
15 this hearing, as is the precedent for this committee and
16 others.

17 So let me tell you a little bit about what I would have
18 talked about, had you made yourself available prior to the
19 hearing. Nevada is home to the premier aviation training
20 ranges for both the Air Force and the Navy, the largest
21 ammunition depot in the world, and the only place in the
22 country where we are able to verify the reliability of our
23 nuclear stockpile without the need for explosive testing.

24 The Nevada National Guard is one of the only few units
25 across the country with a mission of fighting wildfires --

1 that is for another hearing -- and currently activated to
2 fight the devastating fires around Los Angeles in support of
3 our neighbors. We, therefore, play a critical role in our
4 national security, and the person who holds the position of
5 Secretary of Defense matters greatly to Nevada
6 servicemembers and our military equities.

7 But every single person who serves in the military, we
8 have talked about, my colleagues, esteemed colleagues, have
9 talked about recruitment and retention. One day they will
10 become a veteran. So my veterans, and the folks who are
11 serving active duty now, are concerned about what you think.
12 DoD does not have jurisdiction over Nevada's 200,000-plus
13 veterans, but I am interested in your views about the
14 servicemembers once they have transitioned out of the
15 military, given the influence you would have while they are
16 in service, if confirmed.

17 In 2019, on a segment of Fox & Friends, you said that
18 veteran service organizations, VSOs, I am going to quote,
19 "encourage veterans to apply for every government benefit
20 they can ever get after they leave the service." You stated
21 you do not want to, quote, "be dependent on government
22 assistance from the VA, based on injuries or illnesses that
23 might have arisen from your military service."

24 So I am just going to ask you a few yes-or-no questions
25 about veterans, understanding you do not have jurisdiction.

1 This is important to our morale, it is important to our
2 recruitment, and it is important to our retention, and it is
3 important to how we respect others in this country.

4 So yes or no please. Do you believe that VSOs are
5 wrong to supports veterans in obtaining the benefits that
6 they have rightfully earned and deserve when they sign that
7 line, like you did, for your service? Yes or no, please.

8 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, veterans deserve the benefits
9 they have earned. I have been in many battles with
10 traditional veterans service organizations --

11 Senator Rosen: So you would agree --

12 Mr. Hegseth: -- over differences of opinion about how
13 to deliver those services --

14 Senator Rosen: So yes or no.

15 Mr. Hegseth: -- including veterans choice --

16 Senator Rosen: Do you believe VSOs are wrong?

17 Mr. Hegseth: VSO is a very broad term. We were a VSO
18 also, ma'am. But some of those services --

19 Senator Rosen: So should they be able to obtain --

20 Mr. Hegseth: -- took a traditionally --

21 Senator Rosen: -- should they be able to help the
22 veterans --

23 Mr. Hegseth: -- bureaucratic approach.

24 Senator Rosen: -- obtain the benefits that they have
25 earned? Yes or no. Should anyone be able to help --

1 Mr. Hegseth: Every veteran should have rapid access to
2 all the benefits that they have earned, absolutely.

3 Senator Rosen: Do you believe that veterans should be
4 ashamed for having sought and obtained the benefits that
5 they have earned? Do you think veterans should be ashamed
6 to seek out benefits? Yes or no.

7 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I think we should be ashamed as
8 a nation of the amount of veterans that commit suicide --

9 Senator Rosen: Do you think veterans --

10 Mr. Hegseth: -- because they hit a brick wall.

11 Senator Rosen: -- should be ashamed.

12 Mr. Hegseth: They commit suicide because they hit a
13 brick wall --

14 Senator Rosen: This is not the question, sir.

15 Mr. Hegseth: -- of the bureaucracy of the VA.

16 Senator Rosen: I am going to move on. I am going to
17 take that as a yes.

18 Mr. Hegseth: And the reformers are not courage enough
19 --

20 Senator Rosen: How about veterans who suffer lasting
21 injuries --

22 Mr. Hegseth: -- to take it on.

23 Senator Rosen: -- or illnesses due to their military
24 service? Do you think they deserve our support and
25 assistance? I mean, your answers to these, they are too

1 broad. People want to know, are you willing to support our
2 veterans organizations that will help our veterans get every
3 damn thing that they deserve, because they signed on the
4 dotted line, to keep us safe, just like you did. I respect
5 that. Will you?

6 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, with all due humility, I do not
7 know that there is anyone in this room, over the last 20
8 years, that has worked harder to ensure that our veterans
9 are taken care of. It has been a passion of my life --

10 Senator Rosen: So do you think veterans are dependent
11 on the --

12 Mr. Hegseth: -- alongside with so many on this dais,
13 to make sure that veterans receive -- and it is a recruiting
14 crisis.

15 Senator Rosen: But do you think that veterans --

16 Mr. Hegseth: When veterans are not treated well --

17 Senator Rosen: -- are dependent on the government?

18 Mr. Hegseth: -- they don't want --

19 Senator Rosen: You said veterans are dependent on the
20 government.

21 Mr. Hegseth: -- their sons and daughters to join.

22 Senator Rosen: Do you believe that veterans getting
23 these benefits are dependent on the government, or do you
24 believe it is a benefit they have earned and deserve through
25 their service?

1 Mr. Hegseth: It is a benefit they have earned and a
2 hand up to the next chapter of their lives.

3 Senator Rosen: But these are your words.

4 Mr. Hegseth: Absolutely.

5 Senator Rosen: So you have again changed your
6 position, where you believed the veterans were dependent.
7 Now you believe they have earned and deserved it.

8 I just think it is disrespectful to change that
9 position. These are benefits that people may need,
10 throughout their life, and may not know when they need them,
11 or how they are going to need them, and they need to be
12 there when they do.

13 Thank you. I will move on to my next question,
14 America's role in the world. Our alliances, the threats
15 America is facing, they are serious, they are wide-ranging,
16 from China to Russia to Iranian-backed terrorism. So do you
17 agree with the National Defense Strategy that the U.S.
18 cannot compete with China, Russia, and their partners alone,
19 and certainly cannot win a war that way? And this is a
20 quote from the National Defense Strategy. Is your
21 interpretation that America First foreign policy is America
22 alone? Does that include abandoning our allies and partners
23 such as NATO, Taiwan, Israel, and others? And if we cannot
24 win alone, and we do not strengthen our strategic
25 partnerships, I would say that position, your position,

1 places us on a strategic path to lose to our adversaries.

2 So maybe you are okay with choosing that path for
3 America. I want to know how you square that position with
4 the positions you articulated in your book, where you wrote
5 that NATO is a relic, at best a distraction, and it should
6 be scrapped and remade. Are you okay with sending us down a
7 path where we cannot win?

8 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, our friends in the world have
9 had no better ally. Our allies and partners have had no
10 better friend than President Donald Trump, who has
11 reinvigorated --

12 Senator Rosen: I am not talking about President Donald
13 Trump.

14 Mr. Hegseth: -- a NATO alliance, who has [unclear] --

15 Senator Rosen: I am talking about your worlds.

16 Mr. Hegseth: -- in every way, in ways this
17 administration has not. He has ensured that the NATO
18 alliance has become far more robust. He has worked with
19 allies --

20 Senator Rosen: Is Donald Trump going to stand behind
21 Ukraine?

22 Mr. Hegseth: -- in the Pacific, as well.

23 Senator Rosen: Is Donald Trump going to stand behind
24 Ukraine? Are you going to stand behind Ukraine? You say he
25 is the strongest President. President-Elect Trump said he

1 will end the war in Ukraine before he takes office. Okay,
2 so less than a week before he is inaugurated. To the best
3 of your knowledge, do you have knowledge of a plan that he
4 is going to use to rapidly end the war with Ukraine?

5 Do you believe it is feasible that he does not make
6 unacceptable concessions to Vladimir Putin, who is a brutal
7 dictator? And are you going to give President-Elect Trump
8 military advice that you have given others, to achieve the
9 objective of winning the war in Ukraine? How do you think a
10 rapid end of the war that Vladimir Putin started will affect
11 United States' standing across the world?

12 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I will always give clear
13 guidance, my clear guidance, best guidance, to the President
14 of the United States on matters like that.

15 Senator Rosen: Do you think that if we concede to
16 Vladimir Putin that that will hurt our credibility with our
17 allies and partners, and do you not believe that our
18 adversaries are watching?

19 Chairman Wicker: You can take that for the record, Mr.
20 Hegseth. Senator Schmitt.

21 Senator Schmitt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would
22 like to submit for the record a letter submitted by Mr.
23 Christopher Ahn, the former director of operations for Vets
24 for Freedom. Mr. Ahn, his letter states that, quote, "the
25 suggestion that funds were misused for personal gain, lavish

1 parties, or other improper purposes is categorically false.
2 Throughout my time working with Pete Hegseth he consistently
3 demonstrated exceptional integrity and leadership."

4 I ask unanimous consent to enter this letter into the
5 record.

6 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, so ordered.

7 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Senator Schmitt.

2 Senator Schmitt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr.
3 Hegseth, good to see you here today. Thank you for your
4 service --

5 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you, Senator.

6 Senator Schmitt: -- and your willingness to serve. I
7 also want to thank you for your clarity in articulating the
8 vision you have for the Department of Defense, in restoring
9 a warrior ethos, which was in stark contrast to the ethos we
10 have seen the last 4 years, which is of weakness and
11 wokeness.

12 And I want to drill down on a few things specifically
13 in exactly how we have gotten to where we have gotten with
14 recruiting and morale, DEI. There has been a little bit of
15 discussion about this. But for those watching at home, DEI
16 is not about giving everybody opportunity. It is rooted in
17 cultural Marxism, the idea that you pit the room, any room,
18 with oppressor versus oppressed. It is race essentialism,
19 and it is poison. It has not business whatsoever in our
20 military.

21 I think the American people have spoken loudly and
22 clearly about this. They are tired of this. They are tired
23 of woke ideology. And to my Democratic colleagues on the
24 other side, if you have not picked up on that, you missed
25 the plot, because that is what November 5th partially was

1 about.

2 And so let's talk specifically about some of these DEI
3 programs that have been funded. In our academies,
4 specifically the Air Force Academy, it was advised as
5 disfavored language to refer to your mom and dad as Mom and
6 Dad. Okay? "Dear Mom and Dad, I'm writing home." Don't
7 say that. That is insane.

8 We are all just people. You cannot say that either.
9 And in an effort to police this, in a 1984 Orwellian novel,
10 there was actually an eyes and ears program to rap on your
11 fellow students who might say Mom and Dad, or just say, in a
12 tough situation, "You know what? We are all just people."
13 Can't say that.

14 This was not limited, by the way, to our academies.
15 The Secretary of the Air Force, our current Secretary of the
16 Air Force, in a memo from August of 2022, thought we had too
17 many white officers, advocated for quotas. And if you
18 crunch the numbers, that meant that 5,800 white officers,
19 who have worked really hard, should be fired, in the United
20 States of America.

21 I do not know how we got here. And by the way, the Air
22 Force is not alone here. The Navy sort of touted a drag
23 queen influencer.

24 This stuff is insane, and people wonder why recruiting
25 has dropped off. And let me just through a few numbers, and

1 then I want to get your comments on how we fix this, because
2 it has gone completely off the rails.

3 In 2022, the Army missed a recruiting goal of 60,000
4 soldiers by over 15,000. In 2023, the Navy missed their
5 recruiting goals by over 7,000. In 2022, the Air Force
6 could not meet their standards, their numbers, even though
7 the lowered their standards. They have lowered their
8 standards to meet numbers they still cannot get to.

9 Mr. Hegseth, we have got to fix this. I think what you
10 have demonstrated today is that you have the talent and the
11 ability and the desire to fix it. How are you going to fix
12 it?

13 Mr. Hegseth: Well, Senator, thank you for the
14 question. First and foremost, up front, you have to tear
15 out DEI and CRT initiatives, root and branch, out of
16 institutions.

17 Senator Schmitt: One hundred percent.

18 Mr. Hegseth: And then you have to put in Army, Navy,
19 and Air Force Secretaries and others, civilian positions, at
20 the helm, who are committed to the same priorities that the
21 President of the United States is, and if confirmed, the
22 Secretary of Defense will be. Send a clear message that
23 this is not a time for equity. Equity is a very different
24 word than equality. Equality is the bedrock of our
25 military. Men and women, duty positions, in uniform, Black,

1 white, does not matter. We treat you equally, based on who
2 you are, in the image of God, as an individual. And we all
3 get the same bad haircut. You are not an individual. You
4 are part of a group.

5 Equity prescribes some sort of an outcome, based on
6 differing attributes that we have that divide us. What skin
7 color are you? What gender are you? And then infuse that
8 into institutions which manifest in things like quotas,
9 formal or informal, which does what to morale? Sends it in
10 the tubes. And it makes people feel like they are being
11 judged by something other than how good they are at their
12 job, which is poisonous inside institutions.

13 Senator Schmitt: So on top of this recruiting crisis,
14 that was not enough for this Administration. During the
15 COVID hysteria, and in their attempt to fire 100,000 people
16 who worked for bigger companies, because they did not get
17 the COVID shot, or to mask 5-year-olds, they decided also to
18 make this a central plank in their policy at the Pentagon.
19 So we have got a recruiting crisis. Eight thousand well-
20 trained men and women were fired, were fired.

21 Will you commit today, Mr. Hegseth, to recruit these
22 folks back, to give them back pay, and give them an apology
23 from the United States government for how they were
24 disrespected?

25 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I will commit to this because

1 the commander in chief has committed to this, that not only
2 will they be reinstated, they will receive an apology, back
3 pay, and rank, that they lost because they were forced out
4 due to an experimental vaccine.

5 Senator Schmitt: Thank you. And I have limited time,
6 but I just want to say, for all the talk of experience and
7 not coming from the same cocktail parties that permanent
8 Washington is used to, you are a breath of fresh air. And
9 again, if you were not paying attention to what this
10 election was all about, it was about the disrupters versus
11 the establishment. And the American people have had enough
12 of business as usual for the same people that we line up for
13 these same jobs, who give us the same results.

14 We need somebody who is going to go in there and fight
15 for innovation, fight for change. I think you are that
16 person, and I appreciate your willingness to sit here and
17 listen to some of these undignified attacks. It is
18 ridiculous. Thank you.

19 Chairman Wicker: Captain Mark Kelly, you are
20 recognized.

21 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
22 Congratulations on your chairmanship. I want to make a
23 request to the committee that we have a second round of
24 questions.

25 Chairman Wicker: Pursuant to the bipartisan staff

1 agreement that we reached late last year, this will be one
2 round of 7-minute questions.

3 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Chairman Wicker: I will be happy to recognize my
5 colleague, Mr. Reed.

6 Senator Reed: I think it is important to note for the
7 record that when Secretary Hagel was here we had three
8 rounds of questioning. When Secretary Carter was here we
9 had two rounds of questioning. And I cannot recall any time
10 where I have denied, as the chairman, a member to ask for a
11 second round and receive the second round.

12 So we are, I think, violating the principles of the
13 committee, and I just wanted that to go on the record.

14 Chairman Wicker: And your comment is noted.

15 Senator Reed: Thank you.

16 Senator Kelly: Mr. Hegseth, thank you for being here
17 today. Thank you for your service to this country.

18 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you, Senator.

19 Senator Kelly: Few nominees come into this room with
20 all of the necessary experience to do this job, to be
21 Secretary of Defense. We get that. It is a reflection on
22 just how big of a job this is.

23 What I want to understand is whether or not you bring
24 any of the necessary experience that this job requires. And
25 here is where I am concerned. Senator Coleman, in

1 introducing you, and this is a quote, he said, "He has
2 struggled and overcome great personal challenges," unquote.
3 You walk in here saying that you had personal and character
4 issues in your past, including heavy drinking, which you
5 wrote about. And you said, and this is a quote from you,
6 that you said, "I sit before you as an open book." Yet you
7 have not actually said what personal challenges it is that
8 you have overcome when you have been asked about them.

9 So I am going to give you an opportunity here to be as
10 forthright as you say you want to be.

11 So while leading Concerned Veterans of America there
12 were very specific cases cited by individuals about your
13 conduct. I am going to go through a few of them, and I just
14 want you to tell me if these are true or false. Very
15 simple.

16 On Memorial Day 2014, at a CVA event in Virginia, you
17 need to be carried out of the event for being intoxicated.

18 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, anonymous smears.

19 Senator Kelly: Just true or false. Very simple.

20 Summer of 2014, in Cleveland, drunk in public with the CVA
21 team.

22 Mr. Hegseth: Anonymous smears.

23 Senator Kelly: I am just asking for true or false
24 answers. An event in North Carolina, drunk in front of
25 three young female staff members are you had instituted a

1 no-alcohol policy and then reversed it. True or false?

2 Mr. Hegseth: Anonymous smears.

3 Senator Kelly: December of 2014, at the CVA Christmas
4 party at the Grand Hyatt at Washington, D.C., you were
5 noticeably intoxicated and had to be carried up to your
6 room. Is that true or false?

7 Mr. Hegseth: Anonymous smears.

8 Senator Kelly: Another time a CVA staffer stated that
9 you passed out in the back of a party bus. Is that true or
10 false?

11 Mr. Hegseth: Anonymous smears.

12 Senator Kelly: In 2014, while in Louisiana on official
13 business for CVA, did you take your staff, including young
14 female staff members, to a strip club?

15 Mr. Hegseth: Absolutely not. Anonymous smears.

16 Senator Kelly: So is it accurate that the organization
17 reached a financial settlement with a female staffer who
18 claimed to be at a strip club with you, and there was a
19 colleague who attempted to sexually assault her? Was there
20 a financial settlement?

21 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I was not involved in that. I
22 do not know the nature of how that played out.

23 Senator Kelly: But you understand there was a
24 financial settlement for a young female staffer who accused
25 another member of the organization -- not you -- of sexual

1 assault in a strip club?

2 Mr. Hegseth: We have multiple statements on the record
3 referring to that.

4 Senator Kelly: But you claimed you were not there when
5 that occurred.

6 Mr. Hegseth: Absolutely not.

7 Senator Kelly: Now, the behavior I cited, if true, do
8 you think that this behavior of intoxication, going into
9 these type of establishments, women on your staff being so
10 uncomfortable that they have to file these sort of
11 harassment claims, do you think this is appropriate behavior
12 for a leader?

13 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, the overwhelming majority of
14 anyone who has worked for me, including the on-the-record
15 statements that have been submitted, with their name on it,
16 on the record, men and women who worked with me every day,
17 are the overwhelming preponderance of evidence that testify
18 to my leadership and professionalism in leading Vets for
19 Freedom and Concerned Veterans for America. My leadership
20 has been completely impugned on these veterans
21 organizations, that did fantastic work --

22 Senator Kelly: Mr. Hegseth, I am not even going to go
23 to into the --

24 Mr. Hegseth: -- with men and women fighting overseas -
25 -

1 Senator Kelly: I am not even going to go into the
2 accusations --

3 Mr. Hegseth: -- how we managed our financial books
4 with integrity across the board. Everybody who runs a
5 campaign --

6 Senator Kelly: I have limited time. I am not going to
7 get into the accusations that come from Fox News. You may
8 have some of your Fox News colleagues here. There were
9 multiple instances of accusations against you about drinking
10 on the job --

11 Mr. Hegseth: All anonymous. All false. All refuted
12 by my colleagues, whom I worked with for 10 years, at 6 a.m.
13 to 9 p.m., and in between.

14 Senator Kelly: The challenge here for me, Mr. Hegseth
15 --

16 Mr. Hegseth: -- who said they had only seen me be
17 professional every single time.

18 Senator Kelly: -- is when there is discussion about
19 personal challenges, and you, admittedly, had issues with
20 heavy drinking, it is hard to kind of square this, to square
21 the circle here. It is kind of a difficult thing to do.

22 Let me ask you -- well, I have about 90 seconds left
23 here. If you had to answer these questions about sexual
24 assault against you and your drinking and your personal
25 conduct, would it have been different if you were under

1 oath?

2 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, all I am pointing out is the
3 false claims against me.

4 Senator Kelly: Okay. I take it you do not want to
5 answer that question.

6 I walked into this hearing this morning concerned that
7 you have not demonstrated adequate leadership in your
8 civilian roles, and this is a dangerous world we are living
9 in here. And American cannot afford a Secretary of Defense
10 who is unprepared for that mission.

11 I am going to leave with concerns about your
12 transparency. You say you have had personal issues in your
13 past. Yet when asked about those very issues, you blame an
14 anonymous smear campaign, even when many of these claims are
15 not anonymous. Which is it? Have you overcome personal
16 issues, or are you the target of a smear campaign? It
17 cannot be both.

18 It is clear to me that you are not being honest with us
19 or the American people because you know the truth would
20 disqualify you from getting the job. And just as concerning
21 as each of these specific disqualifying accusations are,
22 what concerns me just as much is the idea of having a
23 Secretary of Defense who is not transparent.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back my 2 seconds.

25 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Kelly. I would,

1 at this point, ask unanimous consent to introduce into the
2 record letters by Tina Kingston, Louisiana State Director of
3 Concerned Veterans for America, and Holly Talley, Louisiana
4 Local Director of Concerned Veterans for America, attesting
5 to the appropriateness of Mr. Hegseth's conduct with regard
6 to female staffers.

7 Without objection, that is added to the record.

8 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: And Senator Banks, you are now
2 recognized.

3 Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Mr.
4 Hegseth. You have conducted yourself very well today, in
5 fact, so well that I believe it is incumbent upon this
6 committee to confirm you ASAP, to get you on the job, to
7 clean up the mess that we have at the Pentagon ongoing at
8 this moment, because of the leadership there over the last 4
9 years that has failed us.

10 In President Biden's first year in office, the
11 Department of Defense spent over 5 million man hours on,
12 quote/unquote, "counter extremism and diversity training,"
13 what you and I might call woke training or DEI. The
14 Administration has refused to provide us any more recent
15 data than that first year, but we know that it is
16 exponentially more man hours wasted on DEI over the last 4
17 years.

18 And I wonder, what do you make of that? What could
19 those 5 million man hours in that first year of Secretary
20 Austin and President Biden's administration, what could
21 those 5 million man hours have been used for?

22 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, that is a lot of servicemembers
23 sitting in a lot of briefs, hearing about a lot of threats
24 or political perspectives that might be dangerous, that
25 comport to threats that actually exist inside the force, or

1 ideas that introduce critical race theory or DEI or climate
2 change initiatives that they and their commands have to
3 conform to. And every time one of those happens, it gets
4 pushed down the chain of command. That also includes new
5 layers of leadership that have been created under this
6 Administration, committed to enforcing those types of DEI
7 and CRT initiatives.

8 So we hear 5 million man hours, and that sounds like a
9 lot. The more troubling aspect is how many training hours
10 that takes away from a company commander or a battalion
11 commander or a wing commander, who is out there trying to
12 maintain their force, which is already constrained because
13 of what the Biden administration has done to the defense
14 budget and defense capabilities.

15 So they are having to choose between the political
16 prerogatives of the civilians, who are demanding more DEI
17 and CRT and gender quotas, and the readiness of their
18 forces. And I believe this Pentagon is prepared, because of
19 our commander in chief, for a Secretary of Defense, should I
20 be confirmed, that focuses, laser-focuses on these issues,
21 and they are ready to respond. They want to pack their
22 rucksacks and go train, because they understand we live in a
23 dangerous world.

24 Senator Banks: I think that is an important point, a
25 key point. Because months later, while the priority of the

1 Biden-Austin-led Pentagon was on DEI and woke training, one
2 of the biggest embarrassments in American history happened
3 when we lost 13 of our heroes in the botched withdrawal from
4 Afghanistan.

5 Secretary Austin testified before the House Armed
6 Services Committee a couple of years ago, and responding to
7 a question from me, said he had, quote, "no regrets" about
8 what happened in Afghanistan. I wonder, what do you make of
9 that?

10 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, it is shameful. They still tout
11 it as the most successful airlift in American history, when
12 what the rest of us all saw was true laid before our eyes.
13 Utter failure. A destruction of military legacy there.
14 Abandonment of our allies. Death of American troops.
15 Detriment to our reputation. And then no answers and no
16 accountability on the other side. And then what was
17 unleashed because of what happened in Afghanistan? The
18 October 7th attacks, an invasion into Ukraine. The world
19 recognized weakness for what it was, and who bore the brunt
20 for it? The troops on the front lines at Abbey Gate, doing
21 an impossible job, whose external security was the Taliban,
22 because there was no actual plan for this under the Biden
23 administration. And yet not a single person -- the only
24 person held accountable in those moments was a Marine Corps
25 lieutenant colonel, who had the courage to stand up and say,

1 "Someone should be held accountable for that." His name is
2 Stu Scheller. No one else involved has ever taken
3 accountability for it.

4 When that microcosm becomes the reality of the
5 perception of the American military or America's commitment
6 to victory and success and positive outcomes, the world
7 responds to that. President Trump is going to restore real
8 deterrent by bringing a real warrior culture back,
9 rebuilding our military, and ending wars properly. And if
10 we have to fight them, winning them decisively.

11 Senator Banks: I served in Afghanistan. You served in
12 Afghanistan. Seventy-five percent of our nation's veterans
13 disagree with how the withdrawal from Afghanistan was
14 handled, the embarrassment of it. What that has done, I
15 believe, has directly impacted our historic recruitment
16 crisis in this country, without a doubt. And you have
17 already talked about that. But how do we fix it? How do we
18 bring pride back to wearing the uniform for the next
19 generation, to inspire them to do what you and I did to
20 raise our right hand and take that oath and serve this great
21 country?

22 Mr. Hegseth: I really do think it comes back to
23 strong, clear leadership. Patriotic, pro-American
24 leadership, that says we are not going to focus on all the
25 other political prerogatives. We all have political

1 perspectives. I said this before and I will say it again.
2 In uniform, none of that matters. You wear green, you wear
3 blue, you bleed red. That is it. Who you vote for does not
4 matter.

5 But when the perception of that changes, then you do
6 not want people deciding whether to serve based on a
7 political party in power. That is dangerous thing for
8 continuity inside your military, and it is fragile right
9 now. President Trump, and if I am confirmed, with my
10 leadership, we are going to restore the continuity of an
11 apolitical military that acts decisively and only based on
12 merit.

13 Senator Banks: You and I --

14 Mr. Hegseth: They sound basic, but they are
15 fundamental.

16 Senator Banks: You and I agree that wokeness is
17 weakness. Mr. Hegseth, do you support racial quotas in
18 recruitment or promotions in the United States military?

19 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I do not support any form of
20 racial quota.

21 Senator Banks: Do you support affirmative action at
22 our nation's military academies?

23 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I only support hiring and
24 promoting and admitting the best and brightest, whatever
25 their background is.

1 Senator Banks: I think that is very important. Mr.
2 Hegseth, Lloyd Austin, the Secretary, later went AWOL. He
3 disappeared for days and never told the President. He did
4 not even inform the President's chief of staff that he was
5 going into the hospital. Would that ever occur on your
6 watch?

7 Mr. Hegseth: No, Senator. I know in any one of my
8 jobs, if I had decided to go AWOL for even a day or two, in
9 uniform or around that, that would have been a concern.

10 Senator Banks: I believe accountability matters. No
11 one, to this day, has ever, as you have said, been
12 accountable for what happened in Afghanistan. It was
13 embarrassing to this country. It has impacted this country
14 greatly. And I applaud you and President Trump for bringing
15 accountability back to our Pentagon.

16 With that I yield back.

17 Chairman Wicker: The chair recognizes the
18 distinguished ranking member for a unanimous consent
19 request.

20 Senator Reed: Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit an
21 article discussing some of the issues of readiness and DEI.
22 There has been a comment that 5.9 million man hours have
23 been used for DEI. General Meyer clarified that that is an
24 estimate out of more than 2 million man hours that the
25 Department of Defense invested during the time period.

1 Chairman Wicker: Where is this published, sir?

2 Senator Reed: This is published by Megan Myers, and I
3 will get the --

4 Chairman Wicker: Okay.

5 Senator Reed: Military.com. I am sorry.

6 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, it will be
7 admitted to the record.

8 Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: And Senator Slotkin, welcome to the
2 committee. You are recognized.

3 Senator Slotkin: Thank you. Thank you, Senator, and
4 thank you for referencing the great Carl Levin as you
5 introduced me. We miss him in Michigan.

6 For those who I have not met in my one week that I have
7 been sworn into the Senate, I am a CIA officer, recruited
8 after 9/11. I headed three tours armed in Iraq alongside
9 the military, and have worked for four different Secretaries
10 of Defense, both Democrat and Republican proudly, and
11 watched them make decisions that literally determined the
12 life and death of Americans in the dark of night.

13 I am also a Democrat, representing a state that Trump
14 won. We both won on the same ballot. So I understand that
15 President Trump has the right to nominate his people. We
16 are going to have policies that we disagree with. All of
17 that to me comes very standard.

18 What I think I am most concerned with is that no
19 President has the right to use the uniformed military in a
20 way that violates the U.S. Constitution and further taints
21 the military as that apolitical institution that we all
22 want. Right? And our founders designed the system so that,
23 you know, we had posse comitatus, that we were not going to
24 use active duty military inside the United States and make
25 American citizens potentially scared of their own military.

1 We went through our own experience with that with the
2 British.

3 As the Secretary of Defense, you will be the one man
4 standing in the breach should President Trump give an
5 illegal order. Right? I am not saying he will. But if he
6 does, you are going to be the guy that he calls to implement
7 this order.

8 Do you agree that there are some orders that can be
9 given by the commander in chief that would violate the U.S.
10 Constitution?

11 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, thank you for your service. But
12 I reject the premise that President Trump is going to be
13 giving illegal orders.

14 Senator Slotkin: No, I am not saying he will. But do
15 you believe there is such a thing as an illegal order, that
16 Joe Biden or any other President, Donald Trump, could give.
17 Is there anything that a commander in chief could ask you to
18 do with the uniformed military that would be in violation of
19 the U.S. Constitution?

20 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, anybody of any party could give
21 an order that is against the Constitution or against the
22 law.

23 Senator Slotkin: Right. Okay. And are you -- so are
24 you saying that you would stand in the breach and push back
25 if you were given an illegal order?

1 Mr. Hegseth: I start by saying I reject the premise
2 that President Trump --

3 Senator Slotkin: I understand.

4 Mr. Hegseth: -- will be giving --

5 Senator Slotkin: You have done your genuflecting.

6 Mr. Hegseth: -- any illegal orders at all.

7 Senator Slotkin: This is not a hypothetical, okay.
8 Your predecessor, in a Trump administration, Secretary
9 Esper, was asked, and did use uniformed military to clear
10 unarmed protesters. He was given the order to potentially
11 shoot at them. Helos flew low in Washington, D.C., as crowd
12 control. He later apologized publicly for those actions.
13 Was he right or wrong to apologize?

14 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I was there on the ground, and I
15 saw --

16 Senator Slotkin: I understand, and I respect that.

17 Mr. Hegseth: -- I saw the helos myself. I understand
18 the level of --

19 Senator Slotkin: But you are about to be the Secretary
20 of Defense --

21 Mr. Hegseth: -- of threat that was involved in that
22 moment. I also understand --

23 Senator Slotkin: Was he right to -- so was he --

24 Mr. Hegseth: -- legality and the Constitution --

25 Senator Slotkin: So was he right or wrong --

1 Mr. Hegseth: -- and the laws of what you have.

2 Senator Slotkin: -- to apologize?

3 Mr. Hegseth: I am not going to put words in the mouth
4 of Secretary Esper, or anybody else.

5 Senator Slotkin: No. He said them himself. You do
6 not have to. What are you scared of? Did he do the right
7 thing by apologizing?

8 Mr. Hegseth: I am not scared of anything, Senator.

9 Senator Slotkin: Then say yes or no. You can say no.

10 Mr. Hegseth: I am interested in upholding the laws and
11 the Constitution --

12 Senator Slotkin: Okay.

13 Mr. Hegseth: -- in any particular scenario.

14 Senator Slotkin: So Donald Trump asked for the active
15 duty 82nd Airborne to be deployed during that same time.
16 Secretary Esper has written that he convinced him against
17 that decision. If Donald Trump asked you to use the 82nd
18 Airborne in law enforcement roles in Washington, D.C., would
19 you also convince him otherwise?

20 Mr. Hegseth: I am not going to get ahead of
21 conversations I would have with the President. However,
22 there are laws and processes inside our Constitution that
23 would be followed.

24 Senator Slotkin: President Trump said in November that
25 he is willing to consider using the active duty military

1 against the, quote, "enemy within." Have you been
2 personally involved in discussions of using the U.S.
3 military active duty inside the United States?

4 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am glad we finally got to the
5 topic of border security equaling national security, because
6 it has been abdicated and ignored for the last 4 years.

7 Senator Slotkin: That was not my question. I am just
8 asking, have you been involved -- you are about to be the
9 Secretary of Defense, potentially -- have you been involved
10 in discussions about using the active duty military inside
11 the United States?

12 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I am not yet the Secretary of
13 Defense.

14 Senator Slotkin: Right. I am just asking.

15 Mr. Hegseth: If confirmed, I would be party to any
16 number of conversations --

17 Senator Slotkin: So you have not been in any of these
18 conversations.

19 Mr. Hegseth: -- which I would not reveal what I have
20 discussed with the President of the United States.

21 Senator Slotkin: No, no. Just have you been in
22 conversations. Again, you are going to be in charge of
23 three million people. The active duty that I know you care
24 about, I believe you care about. So have you been in
25 conversations about using the active duty in any way,

1 whether it is setting up detention camps, policing dangerous
2 cities. Have you been involved in any of those
3 conversations?

4 Mr. Hegseth: Certainly I have been involved in
5 conversations relating to doing things this Administration
6 has not, which is secure the southern border, and not allow
7 floods of illegals into our country --

8 Senator Slotkin: So are you --

9 Mr. Hegseth: -- through an invasion --

10 Senator Slotkin: Okay.

11 Mr. Hegseth: -- that threatens the American people.

12 Senator Slotkin: Okay. Okay. I got it.

13 Mr. Hegseth: And there are ways in which the military
14 is already playing a role in that, to include 5,000 National
15 Guardsmen from Indiana and Texas --

16 Senator Slotkin: Do you believe that the U.S. --

17 Mr. Hegseth: -- who are at the border right now,
18 allowing for border security.

19 Senator Slotkin: Will you ask the active duty --

20 Mr. Hegseth: So there is plenty of precedent --

21 Senator Slotkin: -- military to staff --

22 Mr. Hegseth: -- for military members --

23 Senator Slotkin: -- detention centers?

24 Mr. Hegseth: -- enforcing our southern border.

25 Senator Slotkin: Our U.S. military is not trained in

1 law enforcement roles. I think you know that, right. We
2 have seen how that mission is difficult for them in places
3 like Iraq and Afghanistan, because that is not the training
4 a uniformed military comes with. Do you support the use of
5 active duty military in supporting detention camps?

6 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, everything we will do would be
7 lawful and under the Constitution --

8 Senator Slotkin: Okay.

9 Mr. Hegseth: -- but I recognize that this
10 Administration has abdicated its responsibility. President
11 Trump is going to restore order at the border --

12 Senator Slotkin: Okay. In the spirit of preserving
13 the institution --

14 Mr. Hegseth: -- prevent our enemies from invading.
15 And yes, he has said mass deportations --

16 Senator Slotkin: Sir, I get you are filibustering. I
17 get it. I get it.

18 Mr. Hegseth: -- will be a part of what happens.

19 Senator Slotkin: In the spirit of preserving the
20 institution that I think we both care about, legitimately,
21 the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, I have heard a
22 couple of different things. One, you said you will not
23 change the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, which is what
24 governs justice system in the military. Yes or no? You
25 said that earlier. I am just confirming.

1 Mr. Hegseth: Those are laws, Senator, set by Congress.

2 Senator Slotkin: Okay. So you will not go to change
3 it. You will not attempt to change it.

4 You also said that JAG officers are potentially people
5 who put their own interests and their own medals and
6 promotions ahead of the troops. Senator Lindsey Graham was
7 a JAG officer for most of his life. Is that what you
8 believe about those who implement our justice system in the
9 U.S. military?

10 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, I was speaking about particular
11 JAG officers I have had to deal with in my military
12 experience, not about a member of the United States Senate.

13 Senator Slotkin: Are you, as Secretary of Defense,
14 going to get involved in the implementation of the U.S.
15 Military Code of Justice?

16 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, ultimately it will be a big part
17 of my job to evaluate decisions, vis-à-vis the Uniformed
18 Code of Military Justice.

19 Senator Slotkin: Okay. I will take that as yes. Is
20 CQ Brown on your list in the warrior boards to be removed
21 from his position?

22 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, every single senior officer will
23 be reviewed, based on meritocracy, standards, lethality, and
24 commitment to lawful orders they will be given.

25 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Slotkin. I now

1 recognize Senator Shaheen for a unanimous consent request.

2 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a
3 request from a former general who served 35 years, Dennis
4 Lake, who most recently was commander of the 94th Regional
5 Readiness Command at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, who has
6 asked that his letter opposing Mr. Hegseth's nomination be
7 entered into the record.

8 Chairman Wicker: Is there objection? Without
9 objection, it will be entered.

10 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Also, I present a host of letters and
2 op-eds from former coworkers at Vets for Freedom and
3 Concerned Vets for America, as well as Fox News channel. I
4 also have letters and op-eds from many veterans and Iraqis
5 and Afghanis who were helped by Mr. Hegseth. I ask
6 unanimous consent to introduce these letters and op-eds.

7 Without objection, it is so ordered.

8 [The information follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Senator Sheehy. You have been very
2 patient.

3 Senator Sheehy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Entering a
4 support letter in for Mr. Hegseth, submitted by nearly 94
5 former soldiers who served with Pete in combat. I would
6 like to submit a statement from 86 of them who support his
7 nomination, although they come from different units and
8 ranks. The signatories commend Mr. Hegseth for his selfless
9 leadership, love of his soldiers, and commitment to our
10 country.

11 Chairman Wicker: Two items?

12 Senator Sheehy: Sorry. One item. I ask unanimous
13 consent to enter this into the record.

14 Chairman Wicker: Without objection, it will be
15 entered.

16 [The information follows:]

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1 Senator Sheehy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Pete, I am
2 actually going to ask you questions, because I want to hear
3 your answer. How many genders are there? A tough one.

4 Mr. Hegseth: Senator, there are two genders.

5 Senator Sheehy: I know that well. I am "she-he," so I
6 am onboard.

7 [Laughter.]

8 Senator Sheehy: What is the diameter of the rifle
9 round fired out of an M4A1 rifle?

10 Mr. Hegseth: That is a 5.56.

11 Senator Sheehy: How many push-ups can you do?

12 Mr. Hegseth: I did five sets of 47 this morning.

13 Senator Sheehy: What do you think our most important
14 strategic base is in the Pacific?

15 Mr. Hegseth: In the Pacific? Guam is pretty
16 strategically significant.

17 Senator Sheehy: How many rounds of 5.56 can fit into
18 the magazine of an M4 rifle?

19 Mr. Hegseth: It depends on the magazine, but standard
20 issue is 30, Senator.

21 Senator Sheehy: And what size round does the M9
22 Beretta standard issue sidearm for the military fire?

23 Mr. Hegseth: A 9 millimeter, Senator.

24 Senator Sheehy: What kind of batteries do you put in
25 your night vision goggle?

1 Mr. Hegseth: Duracell?

2 [Laughter.]

3 Senator Sheehy: So right there you are representing
4 qualifications that show you understand what the warfighter
5 deals with every single day on the battlefield. You
6 understand what happens on the front line where our troops
7 will be. And what happens, unfortunately, in this country
8 is decisions made in rooms like this, bad decisions, end up
9 in dead 17-, 18-, 19-year-old Americans. And those
10 Americans rarely come from families that sit in rooms like
11 this. They come from lower, middle income families, who
12 sometimes the military is their only way out. And they join
13 because maybe they want to go to college. Maybe they had no
14 other choice. Maybe they love this country. But for
15 whatever reason they joined, and they signed on the dotted
16 line.

17 And when people like us screw up, they do not come
18 home. And that is the one thing that I care about. Because
19 you remember when I shut the door, when you came with your
20 entourage, Senator Coleman, who I have known for a long
21 time, and you and I sat together, and I asked you one
22 question. Do you remember what that question was?

23 Mr. Hegseth: Are you going to have the backs of the
24 warfighters.

25 Senator Sheehy: Exactly. What is going to be your

1 number one priority. And I do not care, frankly, what all
2 these letters and articles say. I have been part of a smear
3 campaign too. I get it. I care that you are going to have
4 one thing in mind when you sit in that chair on that five-
5 sided building, and you told me what that was.

6 So with that you have my support. I am sorry you have
7 to go through a process like this, but it is one of the most
8 important jobs in the world. We have got to make sure you
9 are ready for it. I thank you for your answers.

10 I have got one final question that is very important to
11 me. This is more of a technical question. To fix the Army
12 in this country is a 1- or 2-year problem. We can make
13 bullets. We can make rifles. To fix the Air Force might be
14 a 5-year problem. To fix our Navy is a decades-long
15 pursuit. How are you going to fix our national -- you do
16 not have all the power. We are not China, and unfortunately
17 you cannot snap your fingers. But how are you going to lead
18 an initiative within the DoD to reinvigorate our national
19 shipbuilding industry, so we are able to compete with China,
20 because freedom of navigation is critical to our economy and
21 the global economy. It is going to be a very important task
22 for you to complete.

23 Mr. Hegseth: It is a critical question, Senator, and
24 that is why I am grateful that President Trump has said
25 definitively, to me and publicly, that shipbuilding will be

1 one of his absolute top priorities of this administration.
2 So a lot of it does go into pulling things up into the OSD's
3 office, Secretary of Defense's office, to shine a spotlight
4 on it, to make sure the bureaucracy does not strangle
5 important initiative that need to happen. We need to
6 reinvigorate our defense industrial base in this country to
7 include our shipbuilding capacity. Some of it is on the
8 east. Some of it is on the west. Some of it is on the
9 Great Lakes.

10 The workforce problems that our shipyards are facing
11 are significant, and there has been a big investment from
12 this committee, I know, in a lot of those places, because of
13 the shortfalls, manpower issues, everything else.

14 But we also see adversaries that have been able to
15 innovate themselves in ways that their shipbuilding capacity
16 is -- I will not reveal it at this hearing -- multitudes and
17 multitudes beyond our capabilities. So it needs to be a
18 rapid investment, a rapid fielding, and then we need to
19 incentivize outside entities to fill the gap.

20 We talk a lot about UAVs. UAVs are very important, but
21 there is also a future of UUVs, unmanned underwater
22 vehicles, that will be a part of amplifying the impact of
23 our Navy. Because this Administration has allowed our
24 number of ships to drop below 300. It sets a projection of
25 340 or 350, but does not create the capacity actually

1 address it.

2 And so if we are going to defend our interests, our
3 allies, and put America first, we are going to have to be
4 able to project power. That means shipbuilding. It means
5 historic investments in our defense industrial base there.
6 And then also driving innovation and cost savings in ways
7 that only business leaders inside the Pentagon can do.

8 Senator Sheehy: When I would add, I do not think any
9 board in the world would have hired Steve Jobs or Elon Musk
10 or Mark Zuckerberg when they founded their companies either.
11 This country was founded by young people who had a great
12 vision. Thank you being willing to serve your country
13 again, and thanks for coming here today.

14 Mr. Hegseth: Thank you.

15 Senator Sheehy: I yield back, Chairman.

16 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Sheehy. You yield
17 back the balance of your time.

18 Mr. Ranking Member, can we agree that you and I will
19 notify members of a specific time until which the record
20 will remain open for submission of questions for the record?

21 Senator Reed: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

22 Chairman Wicker: That will be a day or two.

23 This concludes today's hearing. I want to thank the
24 witnesses and their families. And this hearing is
25 adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:45 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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