

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATIONS OF: MR. MICHAEL A.
OBADAL TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF THE ARMY; AND
MR. SEAN D. O'KEEFE TO BE DEPUTY UNDER
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

Thursday, May 8, 2025

Washington, D.C.

ALDERSON COURT REPORTING
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WASHINGTON, DC 20005
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4 READINESS

5
6 Thursday, May 8, 2025

7
8 U.S. Senate
9 Committee on Armed Services,
10 Washington, D.C.
11

12 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m.,
13 in Room G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Joni
14 Ernst, member of the committee, presiding.

15 Committee Members Present: Senators Ernst
16 [presiding], Cotton, Rounds, Sullivan [presiding], Scott,
17 Tuberville [presiding], Sheehy, Reed, Gillibrand,
18 Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Peters, Duckworth, Kelly, and
19 Slotkin.
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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JONI ERNST, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM IOWA

3 Senator Ernst: I call this meeting of the Senate
4 Armed Services committee to order. And today, I welcome
5 our nominees and their families, and I would like to extend
6 my gratitude for their willingness to serve our nation.

7 Chairman Wicker is unable to attend today's hearing,
8 so I will be acting in his stead. At this time, I want to
9 offer his opening statement into the record. Without
10 objection, it is now entered.

11 [The information referred to follows:]

12 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

1 Senator Ernst: I now turn to Ranking Member Reed for
2 his opening remarks. Senator.

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

3 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Madam
4 Chairman. Mr. Obadal, Mr. O'Keefe, welcome to you and your
5 families.

6 Gentlemen, I would like to acknowledge and thank your
7 spouses who have both served as officers in the Army and
8 the Air Force. We appreciate your family's long records of
9 service. You certainly exemplify dedication to nation and
10 to the Constitution.

11 Thank you. Mr. Obadal, you have been nominated to be
12 the Under Secretary of the Army. Your long career as an
13 Army Aviator and Special Operations Officer should serve
14 you well in this role. If confirmed, one of your top
15 challenges will be helping the Army navigate the perpetual
16 tension between end strength, modernization, and readiness
17 from a budget standpoint.

18 The Army has been working to grow end strength and
19 pursue major modernization efforts for years, but it has
20 faced a multi-year trend series of flat budgets, which
21 appears to be the case again this year.

22 Last week, the Army announced broad initiatives that
23 reduce headquarters, consolidate commands, accelerate
24 emerging technologies, restructure infantry brigades,
25 reduce procurement of certain ground vehicles and aviation

1 systems, and other changes. The details of this plan are
2 so far limited, but I would ask for your thoughts on how to
3 balance these efforts against such budget priorities.

4 Mr. Obadal, I am also skeptical of the
5 Administration's deployment of 12,000 soldiers to the
6 Southern border, including elements of the 10th Mountain
7 Division and the expansion of Army installations to include
8 so-called national defense areas along the border. At a
9 time when border crossings are at the lowest level in
10 years, border security is indeed a National Security, but
11 immigration enforcement is a mission that must be carried
12 out by the Department of Homeland Security, not the
13 Department to Defense.

14 And in my personal engagement with commanders at all
15 levels, many of them have made clear that border missions
16 have a draining effect on their time, resources, and
17 readiness. Mr. Obadal, I would like to know how you would
18 plan to ensure soldiers' time, training, and capabilities
19 are not needlessly wasted as the Army works hard to meet
20 its existing demands and increasing threats.

21 Ultimately, the Army's success depends on the soldiers
22 and civilians. Over the past few years, the Army has made
23 significant progress in improving its recruiting activities
24 and has enjoyed success with programs like the Future
25 Soldier Preparatory Course. However, I am concerned that

1 the Administration's efforts to limit who serves and what
2 roles may have a chilling effect on recruitment and
3 retention.

4 There is room in the Army for all qualified
5 volunteers. I am interested in your thoughts on this issue
6 also. Mr. O'Keefe, I welcome your nomination to be Deputy
7 Under Secretary of Defense for Personal and Readiness. You
8 are well qualified for this role, having served as a
9 professional staff member on this committee for many years,
10 in addition to your work at the Bipartisan Policy Center
11 and service as an Air Force Officer.

12 If confirmed, you will assist the Under Secretary in
13 addressing many challenges for the Department, including
14 first and foremost ensuring that our military has adequate
15 numbers of ready and trained service members of
16 sufficiently high character and talent to meet our national
17 defense objectives.

18 You will be responsible for assisting the Under
19 Secretary in military and civilian personnel policy,
20 military family and childcare programs, the Defense
21 Department run school system and working with the military
22 services to ensure the health and welfare of the force. I
23 would ask that you share what military family issues you
24 believe need to be addressed most and what recommendations
25 you have to improve readiness.

1 Gentlemen, you would both be challenged to handle the
2 fallout from the purge of senior military officers and
3 defense civilians. The civilian workforce has been shaken
4 by the chaotic past few months at the Pentagon, especially
5 in light of the indiscriminate layoffs and an impending 8
6 percent reduction of the entire workforce.

7 And earlier this week, Secretary Hicks had issued
8 guidance to eliminate about 20 percent of the General and
9 flag officer positions in the U.S. Military. I have always
10 advocated for efficiency at the Department of Defense, but
11 tough personnel decisions should be based on facts and
12 analysis, not arbitrary percentages.

13 Eliminating the positions of many of our most skilled
14 and experienced officers without sound justification would
15 not create efficiency in the military. It indeed could
16 cripple it. I would like to know how you would both plan
17 to address these challenges.

18 Once again, thank you to the nominees, and I look
19 forward to your testimony. Thank you, Madam Chair.

20 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Ranking Member Reed. And
21 now we will start with our opening statements. Mr. Obadal,
22 we will start with your opening statement, please.

1 STATEMENT OF MICHAEL A. OBADAL TO BE UNDER SECRETARY
2 OF THE ARMY

3 Mr. Obadal: Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Reed,
4 distinguished members of the committee, I am honored by the
5 opportunity to appear here today. I thank the President
6 for his trust in my ability to return to public service by
7 nominating me for this position.

8 I am grateful for the love and support of my family
9 over our many years. My wife Christine is a West Point
10 graduate and former Army officer who raised our three boys
11 almost single-handedly because of my overseas commitments.

12 Our sons, Alex, Chris and John, were unwittingly
13 pressed into service as Army kids, moving schools and
14 dealing with the regular absence of their dad. Over the
15 course of 27 years of active duty, I led Soldiers, Sailors,
16 Airmen, Marines, and civilians at multiple levels. It is
17 the greatest professional privilege that one can
18 experience.

19 During this time, I managed large budgets and
20 workforces. I spent extensive time coordinating between
21 government agencies. I led multinational efforts requiring
22 diplomacy, collaboration, and complex negotiations.

23 My subsequent experience in industry was critical to
24 my understanding of the defense industrial base, the
25 challenges of the military acquisition process, and the

1 widening time gap between the commercial innovation cycle
2 and the military's adoption of emerging technology.

3 I believe the Under Secretary, as chief management
4 officer, should be focused on the business of our Army,
5 installations, budget, acquisitions, and manpower. These
6 areas are direct contributors to key priorities of mine if
7 confirmed -- readiness, transformation, and responsible
8 resource management.

9 These priorities are critical to National Security
10 because in a time of crisis, from large-scale combat
11 operations to disaster relief, our Army is the machine to
12 which the nation turns. It is the only arm of government
13 to address problems at scale. It is the final backstop of
14 organization material and human expertise to manage natural
15 disasters, pandemics, civil infrastructure, and most
16 importantly, to fight and win on the ground.

17 To complete these tasks, the Army must rapidly evolve
18 to meet today's challenges while simultaneously shaping
19 capabilities against tomorrow's threats and do so
20 deliberately instead of in response to the actions of
21 external forces. A transformed Army will be better
22 equipped to defend the homeland and maintain its
23 criticality to the Joint Force.

24 If confirmed, as Under Secretary, I commit to focusing
25 on today's readiness, transformation for tomorrow, and

1 disciplined resource management, all in order to ensure
2 that our soldiers never have to experience a fair fight.
3 Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

4 [The prepared statement of Mr. Obadal follows:]
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1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Obadal. Now, we will
2 move to Mr. O'Keefe for your opening statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF SEAN D. O'KEEFE TO BE DEPUTY UNDER
2 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS

3 Mr. O'Keefe: Good morning, Chairwoman Ernst, Ranking
4 Member Reed, and members of this distinguished committee.
5 It is an honor to sit before you today after sitting on the
6 other side of the dais behind you over the last eight
7 years. I have to say you all look very intimidating from
8 this vantage point.

9 As President Trump's nominee to be the Deputy Under
10 Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, I thank
11 the President for nominating me and Secretary Hegseth for
12 his support. With me this morning is my wife, Lindsay. We
13 met 14 years ago as Air Force officers stationed in
14 England. She was a Captain, and I was a Second Lieutenant
15 at the time.

16 Fortunately for me, Lindsay was somehow able to see
17 past my inferior rank, and I have been a better man for it
18 ever since. It seems appropriate with Mother's Day coming
19 up -- she is an excellent mother. We have three children
20 who are also here for now, ages six, five, and two.
21 Lindsay's continued sacrifice and support have enabled me
22 to pursue a career in public service.

23 When Senator McCain first hired me to join the SASC's
24 staff, I could not imagine the magnitude of the opportunity
25 that I had been given. Senator Inhofe and then Senator

1 Wicker graciously allowed me to remain on their staff and
2 entrusted me with additional responsibilities.

3 Working with these statesmen has been my great good
4 fortune. The Senate Armed Services committee is the
5 epitome of what our founders intended when they drafted
6 Article I of the Constitution.

7 The American people should know and be confident
8 without fail and on a bipartisan basis the leadership and
9 members of this committee take seriously their
10 responsibility to, as Article 1, Section 8 says, provide
11 for the common defense of the United States. It has been
12 the highlight of my professional life to have been able to
13 support all of you.

14 If confirmed, I will take the lessons I have learned
15 on this committee to the Department of Defense. In
16 addition to implementing swiftly the directives of the
17 President and the Secretary of Defense in a manner
18 consistent with the law, my priorities are, number one,
19 elevate the stature of military service.

20 Number two, improve military and civilian defense
21 talent management. And number three, provide the resources
22 and staffing necessary to stabilize the military health
23 system. I am happy to go into more details in the Q&A if
24 you would like.

25 In the meantime, I thank the committee for considering

1 my nomination, and I welcome your questions. Thank you.

2 [The prepared statement of Mr. O'Keefe follows:]

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1 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. O'Keefe. And now we
2 have a series of questions that we ask of our civilian
3 nominees. So, number one, have you adhered to applicable
4 laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?

5 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes, I have.

6 Mr. Obadal: Yes.

7 Senator Ernst: Have you assumed any duties or taken
8 any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the
9 confirmation process?

10 Mr. O'Keefe: No.

11 Mr. Obadal: No.

12 Senator Ernst: Exercising our Legislative and
13 oversight responsibilities makes it important that this
14 committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate
15 committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings,
16 reports, records, and other information from the Executive
17 Branch on a timely basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to
18 appear and testify before this committee when requested?

19 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes, I do.

20 Mr. Obadal: Yes.

21 Senator Ernst: Do you agree to provide records,
22 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner
23 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or
24 other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult
25 with the requester regarding the basis for any good faith

1 delay or denial in providing such records?

2 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes.

3 Mr. Obadal: Yes.

4 Senator Ernst: Will you ensure that your staff
5 complies with deadlines established by this committee for
6 the production of reports, records, and other information,
7 including timely responding to hearing questions for the
8 record?

9 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes.

10 Mr. Obadal: Yes.

11 Senator Ernst: Will you cooperate in providing
12 witnesses and briefers in response to Congressional
13 requests?

14 Mr. Obadal: Yes.

15 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes.

16 Senator Ernst: Will those witnesses and briefers be
17 protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

18 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes, they will.

19 Mr. Obadal: Yes.

20 Senator Ernst: Thank you very much. And now we will
21 start our rounds of questions. We will have five minutes
22 of time for each Senator. And I will start with my
23 questions, and then we will move to the Ranking Member.

24 So, thank you. Thank you. So, good morning, Mr.
25 Obadal and Mr. O'Keefe. It is good to have you in front of

1 the committee today and thank you for your testimony today
2 and the willingness to continue to serve in your various
3 capacities. I would like to start with discussion on the
4 Army Transformation Initiative.

5 So the ATI was just released last week, and it
6 outlines a bold structural and personnel reforms aimed at
7 enhancing combat power and modernization. It rightly
8 focuses on what matters most, which is restoring the
9 warrior ethos, investing and lethality and agility, and
10 ensuring our soldiers are prepared to deter conflict. I
11 appreciate the clear prioritization of combat power, and I
12 support your resolve in tackling inefficiencies head on.

13 So, Mr. Obadal, can you speak to how this
14 transformation will enhance the Army's ability to respond
15 to the pacing threat posed by China and project power more
16 effectively in the Indo-Pacific.

17 Mr. Obadal: Madam Chairwoman, thank you for the time
18 -- or thank you for opportunity to address that, and thank
19 you for the time that you spent with me last week to
20 discuss this and other issues.

21 I think that the Secretary and the Chief have been
22 fairly clear in their statements that the Army that has
23 carried us through the last four decades may not have the
24 ability to match the pacing threat with China.

25 And so, if we are to reform and transform the Army, we

1 have to start that process now and get ahead before we have
2 six months of combat that will point us to the direction
3 that we have to go.

4 The overall goals are to have it lighter, leaner, much
5 more technologically savvy, and to essentially from end to
6 end modernize, not just technology, but our processes, our
7 equipment, our organizations, and our doctrine.

8 So essentially, it is a fundamental transformation of
9 the Army so that we can meet China. And not only meet
10 China and succeed, but we can achieve overmatch.

11 Senator Ernst: Very good. And I do appreciate the
12 effort to align capability investments. So you talk about
13 technology. So, we have got unmanned systems, we have
14 counter-UAS, and there is of course artificial
15 intelligence-driven command and control.

16 So, Mr. Obadal, what will encourage you or does
17 encourage you the most about how these types of
18 technologies will give our soldiers the edge in tomorrow's
19 fight?

20 Mr. Obadal: Well, there is two things, Madam
21 Chairwoman. I believe that number one, the Army has
22 already started evolving its acquisition processes, thanks
23 to the authorities given to it by this -- by Congress. I
24 believe we need to continue to maximize those authorities
25 before we come back for more.

1 But the second is the generation of Americans that are
2 joining to become soldiers and officers are far more
3 technically savvy than many of us that joined in the 90s.
4 And so, their ability to adopt and innovate, and their
5 ability to understand the problem in front of them and how
6 technology can assist, I think, is a strong thing that we
7 have in our back pocket.

8 Senator Ernst: No, thank you. I appreciate that.
9 Now, I am going to now turn to you, Mr. O'Keefe. And a
10 topic that I have long prioritized is preventing sexual
11 assault in the ranks. And while the recent report showed
12 encouraging signs with a decline in reporting, we know
13 there is still a lot more work that needs to be done to
14 prevent assault and support our survivors.

15 So, Mr. O'Keefe, how do you plan to build on the
16 recent reforms and professionalization of the sexual
17 assault response workforce and ensure that we continue
18 moving towards a culture of accountability and trust?

19 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes, Senator, I completely agree and
20 appreciate your leadership on this over the years. This
21 has been a priority for this committee. It is a priority
22 of mine, if confirmed, to ensure that we do not backslide.

23 To your point, some recent optimism perhaps from the
24 most recent reporting on this. One report is one report,
25 though. We need to see a sustained trend. My goal is to,

1 if confirm, to go in, continue to keep the things that are
2 working, and look at where we can continue to improve.

3 But I sense no desire to deprioritize this. I think
4 all signs are that this department will take it seriously.

5 Senator Ernst: Okay. And most certainly, I will hold
6 you to that Mr. O'Keefe and look forward to working with
7 you. Ranking Member Reed.

8 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.
9 Mr. Obadal, in the Army plan, the Transformation
10 Initiative, they want to merge the Training and Doctrine
11 Command, TRADOC, with the Army Futures Command. And it is
12 sort of Deja Vu, because in 2018, they created the Army
13 Futures Command mostly out of TRADOC so that they could be
14 more effective in acquisition of new equipment, more
15 closely moving and fast moving with the high-tech
16 industries.

17 Coming together, these two agencies again, how would
18 you ensure the kind of oversight that gets the mission
19 done, i.e. that we are not just retreating, and we are
20 actually advancing?

21 Mr. O'Keefe: Ranking Member, I appreciate that
22 question because it has generated a lot of interest. And
23 thank you for the time earlier this week that we spent
24 talking about these things.

25 When we go back and we look at why Army Futures

1 Command was pulled out to streamline those requirements, I
2 think that the Army has learned quite a bit over those
3 eight years or seven years that that has occurred. We know
4 that we need to, you know, according to the statements of
5 the Secretary, we need to streamline our commands and our
6 organizations.

7 When I look at a merged TRADOC and AFC, I am confident
8 that the Army can utilize the lessons learned over the last
9 several years and apply them. But to specifically address
10 your question, I believe it is incumbent on the leadership
11 of the Army to give that merged command very specific
12 outcomes and milestones to meet and define how they are
13 going to streamline the requirements in the interest of the
14 soldiers and the defense industrial base.

15 Senator Reed: Thank you. Mr. Obadal, you are
16 superbly prepared to deal with the transition of the Army
17 aviation. As you know, the Army canceled the future attack
18 reconnaissance aircraft last year.

19 They have also announced the intent to cancel the
20 future tactical uncrewed aircraft system. And also, there
21 are significant needs to modernize our Black Hawk fleet and
22 our Apaches. What thoughts do you have on how we can best
23 organize the aircraft fleet?

24 Mr. O'Keefe: Well, Ranking Member, I appreciate it
25 because I am, as you know, emotionally tied to the AH-64 as

1 it was the first platform I got to fly in the Army.
2 Incredibly capable platform.

3 I know that by divesting of the AH-64 Deltas, the
4 leadership of the Army has said we are going to save money.
5 It is about twice the cost of flying an AH-64 Echo. But
6 that does not fix the fact that as we remove those, we have
7 to fill that that capability gap.

8 And that gap has to be with autonomous and unmanned
9 systems to perform those same duties in support of the
10 soldiers on the ground. So, if confirmed, it is something
11 that I would look at, obviously with the rest of the Army
12 leadership, and advise the Secretary on where I think we
13 should apply resources.

14 Senator Reed: Thank you very much. Mr. O'Keefe, in
15 the last three years, the services have been improving
16 their recruiting aspects. In fact, in last 18 months,
17 there has been really measurable progress.

18 2024 was a year where I hoped the recruiting turned
19 around and started heading in the right direction, but it
20 is premature to declared, that victory. There are so many
21 factors that require -- that encourage or discourage a
22 recruit from coming in. What are the few things you want
23 to do to set the military up for success in their
24 recruiting efforts?

25 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, yes. I believe this is going

1 to continue to be an emphasis area. It is not going to get
2 easier, just as a point of information. This is the peak
3 of high school graduation in terms of the high school
4 population.

5 Every year from now into the foreseeable future, the
6 high school graduation class is going to get smaller, so it is
7 going to be harder to recruit. We need to -- the department
8 needs to continue to apply the resources in advertising and
9 marketing, and influencing people, introducing military
10 service.

11 As I mentioned in my opening statement, what I mean by
12 improving the stature of military service, there is a
13 growing disconnect in the country between those who serve
14 and those who don't have any experience with it. And
15 oftentimes they have an inaccurate assessment of what
16 military service really means.

17 The data suggests that, for the most part, people who
18 serve their country in uniform come out much better for
19 having done so. I think the department needs to do a
20 better job of telling its story, of selling itself, and
21 appealing to the, as I say, the smaller cohort that is both
22 eligible and predisposed to serve.

23 Senator Reed: Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam
24 Chair.

25 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Ranking Member Reed.

1 Senator Rounds.

2 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of
3 all, let me just say thank you to both of you and your
4 families for allowing you to continue your service to our
5 country. Mr. Obadal, the Army has exhibited outstanding
6 leadership developing our nation's cyberwar fighters and
7 should be commended.

8 I was at Fort Eisenhower in July last year and I was
9 very impressed with the Cyber Center of Excellence and Army
10 Cyber Command. Dakota State University and Army Cyber
11 Command have a very special relationship. DSU provides
12 both professors and professional training for the Army's
13 Cyber Center of Excellence on Fort Eisenhower, and the Army
14 allows cyber operators to help teach classes and provide
15 training at DSU.

16 The Army has sponsored the DSU SCIF reaccreditation
17 for the mutual benefit of both organizations and our
18 nation. Unfortunately, the SCI reaccreditations has been
19 delayed by bureaucratic hurdles and inertia for months.
20 Although I do believe that we are on the verge of finally
21 completing this endeavor and getting that SCIF re-
22 accredited.

23 If confirmed, will you commit to expediting the re-
24 accreditation of the DSU SCIF in Madison, South Dakota, and
25 the accreditation of their new SCIF facility in Sioux

1 Falls?

2 Senator Rounds: Senator, I thank you for the question
3 and thank you for the time that we spent last week talking
4 about cyber in the Army. As I said then, I believe cyber
5 is ubiquitous. The operations are ubiquitous, both
6 protecting our own forces and being able to apply effects
7 on the adversary without use -- kinetic use of weapons.

8 Anything that advances that capability for Army Cyber
9 Command I would be wholeheartedly in support of, if
10 confirmed, and I would commit to trying to understand the
11 issue and why the SCIF accreditation for those two
12 facilities has taken so long.

13 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir. I will take that as
14 you will work with us and we will get to the bottom of
15 this, okay?

16 Mr. Obadal: Absolutely, Senator.

17 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Mr. O'Keefe, this
18 committee has historically been supportive of providing
19 special authority to the Department of Defense so that it
20 can better manage its military and civilian cyber
21 personnel.

22 You have worked on much of that legislation. In your
23 judgment, how useful are these authorities, and what more
24 could be done to improve talent management for military and
25 civilians cyber professionals?

1 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, this committee, as you
2 mentioned, has taken a keen interest in making sure that
3 the Department of Defense has the authorities necessary to
4 appeal to this highly technical workforce, both the
5 military and the civilian side.

6 In my judgment, I think the Cyber Excepted Service,
7 which is currently in place in CYBERCOM, is a good start.
8 I continue to hear stories that we are losing civilians out
9 of Cyber Command to other government agencies who have
10 perhaps more flexible authorities. I think that is an area
11 to take a look at working with the CIO and our friend, Ms.
12 Sutton. If confirmed, I think there is a good potential
13 there to come and work with the Congress to continue to
14 make Cyber Excepted Service more appealing and more
15 effective.

16 Certainly DOD has always, perhaps, may struggle
17 competing with the private sector. There are certain
18 things a private sector can do that DOD just won't be able
19 to do. But it shouldn't be the case that DOD is losing
20 talent to other government agencies. We should be on an
21 even footing there.

22 On the military side, I am quite encouraged by the
23 things I am seeing out of the Army. They have a pretty
24 robust talent management group that has, I think, taken the
25 lead in using many of the authorities that the Congress has

1 provided.

2 Things like accelerated promotions. Different ways to
3 more flexibly structure a career and that is encouraging as
4 well. On the military side, I do think there is more room
5 to better integrate the active and the reserve components
6 because in cyber that is perhaps a particularly useful
7 approach as the private sector tends to be where you get a
8 lot of the innovation.

9 So we want to make sure that the reserve components
10 are a place where we can bring talent back into the
11 government who have that very relevant and critical private
12 sector experience as well.

13 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Look, gentleman I just
14 think that your technical expertise, your capabilities, and
15 your background are both well-fitted for the positions that
16 you have been nominated for and look forward to supporting
17 your nominations in the in the next few days or as quickly
18 as possible. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

19 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Rounds. Senator
20 King.

21 Senator King: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I am
22 impressed by the upgrade in the chairmanship of this
23 committee overnight. That is between you and me and not
24 Senator Wicker. Mr. Obadal, one of the most difficult
25 things is to transform the culture and the organization of

1 a 200-year-old organization with a lot of inertia, if you
2 will.

3 And talk to me about how you plan to tackle that. It
4 is more than just changing boxes on an organizational
5 chart. We are talking about embedded culture. How do you
6 make a change of the level that is necessary in order to
7 ready the Army for the next conflict?

8 Mr. Obadal: Senator, thank you for the question,
9 because it goes to the very root of the Army, which is
10 culture. The Army is the service that is about human
11 beings, and the machines are there to only ensure that our
12 human beings are as effective as possible on the
13 battlefield.

14 When it comes to senior and executive level
15 leadership, I believe there is really two paths or two
16 tracks that you have to put attention to simultaneously.
17 One are the technical aspects of management. And that is
18 setting the course and resource management decisions that
19 have to be made. Setting milestones and clear objectives.
20 And the other side is leadership.

21 And that is a bit more difficult to define on paper,
22 and so it takes senior leaders and subordinate leaders,
23 down to the very squad and team level to ensure that we are
24 fostering the cultural -- the culture that the Secretary
25 and the Chief set for our uniformed and civilian personnel.

1 When it comes to changing that, as you acknowledged that --
2 as you said, it is incredibly difficult.

3 Senator King: You want to change the culture but not
4 destroy the positive aspects of the culture.

5 Mr. Obadal: Right. I think that you have to state
6 what the values are of our Army, and those need to be not
7 only reiterated so that soldiers understand them and
8 civilians understand them, but leaders need to engage in
9 their formations and have those discussions so there is
10 something behind it.

11 Senator King: Let's move for a minute to numbers and
12 staff. Everyone in this committee is in favor of
13 efficiency and spending our tax dollars as efficiently as
14 possible, avoiding unnecessary expenditures. What bothers
15 me about the approach that is being taken in the Pentagon,
16 and frankly in some other agencies, is that it starts with
17 a number and then works backward.

18 In other words, 8 percent reduction or 15 percent
19 reduction. To me, that almost guarantees a result that
20 won't be optimal. It should start with how are we doing
21 and where are the positions that we can consolidate or
22 eliminate, not working toward an arbitrary number. Do you
23 see what I am saying? I hope that you will resist in the
24 Army a mandate to say you have got to reduce by 8 percent.

25 That is almost by definition not a rational way to

1 approach the problem of increasing efficiency. You do that
2 by analyzing the organization, and the personnel, and the
3 jobs, and the demands, and the future demands.

4 Talk to me about whether you are willing to simply
5 say, okay, boss, if it is 8 percent, we are going to reduce
6 it 8 percent even though that may end up undermining the
7 capability of the Army.

8 Mr. Obadal: So Senator, I believe that reduction
9 drills or recapitalization drills regardless of the number
10 are actually a healthy thing for an organization on a
11 regular basis.

12 Senator King: I don't disagree. It is a question of
13 whether you start with an analysis of the organization or
14 you start an arbitrary number that will mandate changes
15 that may not be optimal.

16 Mr. Obadal: I believe that when you look at
17 restructuring or recapitalizing, the first thing that
18 should happen is you look what are the requirements from
19 the Combatant Commands on the service. Can we meet those
20 Combatant Command requirements and do so in a timely
21 manner? And I believe that is the foundation of what the
22 Army should do.

23 Senator King: I agree. I appreciate that answer.
24 Mr. O'Keefe, I am running out of time, but we had a tragedy
25 in Maine several years ago with a shooting -- 18 people

1 killed. It turned out the fellow had been a trainer
2 exposed to blast, blast over pressure. There was a lot of
3 work done at the time.

4 I hope that you will commit to maintaining that work
5 and to be sure that what was learned in those various
6 reports that were made gets down to the troop level so that
7 it is not just a report on the shelf in the Pentagon, but
8 it actually affects conduct because this is, as you know,
9 one of the most serious problems coming out of the Mid-East
10 wars is the effects of continuous exposure to blast
11 overpressure.

12 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes, Senator. You absolutely have my
13 commitment. We, as you know, we did quite a lot of work on
14 this in last year's NDAA. A lot of that legislation will
15 take effect over the next year or so.

16 If confirmed, I look forward to implementing that
17 legislation and working with this committee. We are
18 learning more and more about this area every day it seems,
19 and it is affecting more people than perhaps -- we first
20 thought. So, absolutely, you have my commitment that this
21 is a priority.

22 Senator King: Well, you used the magic word,
23 implementation. One of my mottos of life is implementation
24 can be as important as vision. We can have a good bill
25 coming out of here. If it is not implemented adequately,

1 it is not going to save lives. So, I accept your
2 commitment and look forward to working with you on that.
3 Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman -- Madam Chairman.

4 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator King, and I
5 appreciate your support. Next, we have Senator Tuberville.

6 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Good
7 morning. Mr. Obadal, thank you for your service, first of
8 all. You are coming from Anduril Industries, is that
9 correct? Is that how you pronounce that?

10 Mr. Obadal: Anduril, Senator. Yes.

11 Senator Tuberville: Yes. One of our new defense
12 contractors. Obviously has taken a novel approach to
13 supporting the warfighter. You know, newer companies like
14 this have become successful partly because newer defense
15 contracting authorities and organizations such as the
16 RCCTO, which is headquartered in Redstone Arsenal in my
17 State of Alabama, you know, we are making progress. So,
18 how can the Army continue to improve our acquisition system
19 based on the lessons learned from the RCCTO?

20 Mr. Obadal: Senator, thank you for the question, as
21 this is a critical part of Army transformation. And I
22 believe the RCCTO really showed us that we can rapidly
23 understand the problem, innovate solutions with industry,
24 and then field them rapidly in a number of different ways.

25 My experience in commercial industry, and specifically

1 in the defense technology industry, gave me wide exposure
2 to a number of different companies dealing with the
3 acquisition corps. And having been on both sides of the
4 table and having overseen acquisitions in my government
5 service, I came to the conclusion that the Army needs to be
6 a better customer.

7 And we need to do that through streamlining our
8 requirements, through predictability of requirements, and
9 not changing them and moving the goalpost on the defense
10 industry. With that said, we always have to have agile
11 requirements, which requires modularity, both software and
12 hardware.

13 So if confirmed, when I look at the entire acquisition
14 corps, I believe the people are -- we have fantastic people
15 in our acquisition corps who have given us the world's
16 strongest Army. It is our processes that we have to fix.
17 So if confirmed, Senator, I would work diligently on that.

18 Senator Tuberville: Yes. Thank you. You know, as
19 Senator Ernst said earlier, last week the Army announced
20 the ATI Initiative, headed in a different direction in some
21 areas. I understand that being an old football coach, you
22 can't keep doing the same thing over and over. You have
23 got to change along with your adversary, and we need to --
24 obviously need to do that.

25 You know, part of this change last week, canceling of

1 multiple programs -- you know, one of these contracts, the
2 future tactical uncrewed aircraft system was won by a small
3 family business in Alabama, my home State, named Griffin
4 Aerospace. On Friday they were notified that the thousands
5 of man hours and millions of dollars that they had spent
6 and invested in good faith were basically wasted. It is
7 hard to understand that, you know, from their perspective.

8 You know, I would like to suggest to you that the Army
9 restore faith with these types of businesses because we
10 need the smaller businesses. This is not Lockheed. This
11 is not Boeing who could really absorb this. This is going
12 to devastate this country. And at the end of the day, they
13 need more than an oops, you know, we want to change here.
14 Do you agree with that?

15 Mr. Obadal: Senator, I wholeheartedly agree that the
16 Army needs to take care of small business as best it can.
17 And I believe there are a number of different ways that we
18 can do that because small business, in my experience, is
19 where most of the innovation comes from.

20 And obviously large companies, like you mentioned,
21 build us exquisite weapon systems and we need them, but we
22 have to make sure that we are cultivating a robust, small
23 and medium-sized business ecosystem.

24 Senator Tuberville: Yes. Thank you. You know, in my
25 State, in Huntsville, we have 600 -- probably 600 to 800

1 small defense contractors. We can't lose them. You now,
2 they get bought out, obviously, regularly, but we need to
3 make sure that, you know, for future innovation, they are
4 as important as anybody.

5 So, thank you for that. Mr. O'Keefe, my role as
6 Chairman of the subcommittee on Personnel, we held our
7 first hearing, as you well know, with our supervisors of
8 our academies in 30 years. First one in 30 year. Not only
9 are you a graduate, but you were involved in that.

10 One of the things we eliminated during that hearing is
11 that permanent military professors at the academies require
12 Senate confirmation, which is very understandable, while
13 civilian tenured faculty are not. Making them, as far as I
14 can tell, the only lifetime government employee not subject
15 to advice and consent. How do you feel about that?

16 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, it is an interesting dynamic.
17 When the permanent professors were set up decades ago, they
18 were -- the majority of the faculty was all military at the
19 service academies. I suppose the concern any time you are
20 discussing whether to make more civilian positions Senate
21 confirmed is perhaps extended vacancies.

22 I do think that there is some room to evaluate the
23 administrative faculty authority. You know, they have a
24 slightly nuanced statutory scheme that applies to civilian
25 faculty. They didn't always have tenure, for instance.

1 So, I think that is something that should be
2 evaluated, which I think could improve the -- sort of the
3 effectiveness of the workforce, of the faculty mix there,
4 without perhaps causing some of the vacancies that I think
5 might result with Senate confirmation. But I do think that
6 is an area to take a look at. I know the Secretary has
7 mentioned that that is something he wants to take a look at
8 as well.

9 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. And when confirmed, I
10 have some suggestions, and as the supervisors do, about
11 transforming, you know, our military academies to make them
12 better. We don't want to do something just to do it, but
13 we need to make it better and grow with the times. And so,
14 look forward to visiting with you on that and working with
15 you.

16 Mr. O'Keefe: Absolutely, Senator. Thank you.

17 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Senator.

18 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Tuberville. And
19 next we have Senator Peters.

20 Senator Peters: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Obadal,
21 good to see you again. Congratulations on your nomination.
22 Certainly I enjoyed our conversation in my office prior to
23 today's hearing. And as we were sitting in the office, the
24 Army Transformation Initiative had just come out.

25 We had an opportunity to talk about that some in the

1 office. But I wanted to follow up, because I know you
2 needed more to take a look at that. We talked, if you
3 recall, about the Detroit Arsenal and the Ground Vehicle
4 System Center, which are really the center and the heart of
5 the Army's research and development, acquisition, and
6 supply chain issues.

7 So I am concerned about what this -- impact this could
8 have, and I want to just reach out to you again and ask if
9 you have had a chance to review it. And what sort of
10 impact do you think it will have on the Detroit Arsenal and
11 GVSC, and is it something we can certainly work on
12 together?

13 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, thank you for the time
14 that you spent with me in your office and the discussion on
15 this. And I think as we have seen the Secretary and the
16 Chief testify yesterday, a number of top-line issues that
17 now we need to get into the second level of detail on Army
18 transformation.

19 And this is the work over the next several months that
20 we have to do not only internal to the Army, but with the
21 other services, the Combatant Commands, and importantly,
22 with Congress, to understand what are the effects on the
23 facilities like what you mentioned because, you know,
24 especially in Michigan, right, as a vehicle hub for the
25 Army. The Army is and still will be a vehicle-centric

1 service.

2 And so, it is just a matter of what types of vehicles,
3 what are their capabilities. And I think these are the
4 things that over the course of the rest of this year, if
5 confirmed, I would look forward to working with you, your
6 office, and this committee on.

7 Senator Peters: Well, I appreciate it. I appreciate
8 that -- for that commitment, if confirmed. Certainly, we
9 will want to work very closely with you.

10 We think they provide a valuable product for the Army
11 and want to make sure that that continues and we look
12 forward to working with you. Also, we talked about the Army
13 shifting its focus to the Indo-Pacific and particularly, we
14 talk about multi-domain task forces and how those are the
15 centerpiece of the Army's efforts -- in the region,
16 allowing the Joint Force to operate freely within contested
17 environments with a five planned active-duty MDTFs right
18 now.

19 As we discussed in my office, I believe that the
20 National Guard could play a very important role, and I
21 would like you, if you would please, elaborate on our
22 discussion during our office about some of the potential
23 benefits you see of a National Guard multi-domain task
24 force.

25 Mr. Obadal: Well Senator, as we discussed, I see the

1 multi-domain task force as an area where almost all of
2 advanced warfighting systems are coming together in one
3 organization, space, cyber, long-range precision fires,
4 information operations, and others, under one command.

5 And I think that the Army as it advances, it is going
6 to continue to refine the tactics, techniques, procedures,
7 and resources that are required by the MDTFs. And then we
8 will have to have that very robust discussion about how do
9 we extend that into the reserve components because they are
10 our strategic depth, the National Guard and Reserve. So,
11 if confirmed, I look forward to continuing that
12 conversation.

13 Senator Peters: Great. Well, I look forward to that.
14 Mr. O'Keefe, congratulations as well on your nomination.
15 As you know, the National Guard not only supports domestic
16 emergencies like natural disasters, but also the DOD's
17 global military operations in a robust way.

18 If confirmed, you will be responsible for the
19 readiness of Guard units across the country, including
20 those in Michigan, Camp Grayling, as well as Selfridge Air
21 National Guard Base and others.

22 You must -- in your role, you are going to have to
23 balance the National Guard's readiness with active and
24 reserve components. But unfortunately, despite their
25 critical role, the National guard is often underfunded. It

1 is often understaffed in comparison to other components.

2 So my question for you is, if confirmed, how will you
3 address the persistent shortfalls in National Guard
4 resourcing, especially given their role as an operational
5 force for the past two decades, and not just strategic
6 reserves?

7 Mr. Obadal: Yes, Senator, I agree. I think we have -
8 - over the last two decades, the role of the reserve
9 component, the National Guard in particular, has changed
10 dramatically from the way it perhaps was set up as the Cold
11 War ended. I don't know that the Department has ever sort
12 of seriously considered the implications of that.

13 And I do think this is a unique time where, as we are
14 seeing transformation efforts in at least a few of the
15 services right now, this is a time where I think the
16 department can apply a little bit more rigor to figure out
17 what is the proper role of the reserve component, how do we
18 resource them, what are we going to use them for.

19 These are sort of classic force mix questions that, if
20 confirmed, Personnel and Readiness should be the lead for.
21 They are the subject matter experts across the department
22 on force mix allocation.

23 And I look forward, if confirmed, to working with the
24 Secretary and the military departments to them as they are
25 thinking their way through this in light of what we think

1 are the likely requirements facing the entire force.

2 Senator Peters: Right. Thank you. Thank you,
3 gentlemen.

4 Senator Tuberville: Senator Cotton.

5 Senator Cotton: Good morning, gentlemen. Mr. Obadal,
6 the Army has begun to modernize the organic industrial
7 base, but it is still not fully using arsenal and
8 ammunition plants. The arsenals such as the one in Pine
9 Bluff are struggling for modernization funds and additional
10 work.

11 This underutilization is particularly damaging during
12 ammunition shortage that could impact our ability to face
13 adversaries like China. Do you believe the Army should
14 utilize the resources it already owns to maximize
15 production for critical munitions?

16 Mr. Obadal: Senator, thank you for the question and
17 the attention to this because I believe that our almost two
18 dozen plants, arsenals, depots are our strategic depth to
19 be able to sustain combat and large-scale combat
20 operations. So, yes, I share your concern for the health
21 of the organic industrial base in the Army.

22 Senator Cotton: Thank you. Part of former Secretary
23 Wormuth's solution to the recruiting crisis that she helped
24 create was to cut 3,000 billets from Army Special
25 Operations Forces, a decision that both the SOCOM and the

1 PACOM Commanders advised against. Last year's National
2 Defense Authorization Act prohibits the Special Operations
3 Force's cuts until the Army Secretary completes an
4 additional assessment. Would you agree to taking a closer
5 look at reversing these cuts?

6 Mr. Obadal: Yes, Senator. I would commit to
7 continuing that evaluation as the Army is doing that right
8 now, I believe.

9 Senator Cotton: Okay. The Caisson Platoon at
10 Arlington National Cemetery was out of operation for much
11 of the Biden Administration, which was astonishing to me
12 since it is just horses pulling wagons, something human
13 beings have been doing since the dawn of time.

14 Secretary Driscoll and General George have done a good
15 job of getting the Caisson Platoon back to limited
16 operations. I am very keen to see it get back to full
17 operational capacity to make sure that our soldiers and
18 their families Promptly receive the honors they deserve at
19 Arlington National Cemetery.

20 Can you commit to working with the Secretary, General
21 George, and this committee to get the Caisson Platoon back
22 up to full operational capacity as soon as possible?

23 Mr. Obadal: Yes, Senator. I believe it to be a
24 critical part of Arlington National Cemetery, and I
25 understand that there have already been big strides made in

1 professionalizing this program. I would commit to
2 continuing to monitor that and advance it.

3 Senator Cotton: Thank you. Mr. O'Keefe, welcome to
4 you as well. Civil service reform is a clear priority for
5 the Administration. I think it is one that's long overdue.
6 While the Department of Defense has many dedicated civil
7 servant, it also has a lot of outdated bureaucratic
8 processes and inflexible performance management systems
9 that have too often not rewarded excellence and promoted
10 mediocrity.

11 In late January, the Administration issued guidance
12 for all agencies to conduct a 210 day review of which
13 positions could be reclassified as schedule-career policy
14 positions to give the President and the Secretary more
15 ability to manage the civilian workforce. What are your
16 thoughts about this review, and the possible
17 implementation, and what it could help bring to the
18 Department?

19 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, I do think it is overdue to
20 take a look at the authorities that apply to the National
21 Security and defense civilian workforce. I think this is a
22 useful exercise. And of course, the civilians will
23 continue to be a critical component of the DOD workforce,
24 and they have been for many years now.

25 If confirmed, I look forward to participating in that

1 review. I don't know the details of that exact efforts,
2 but I do think civil service reform for National Security
3 workers is critically important. The department has a
4 variety of authorities that the Congress has already
5 provided that, in my judgment, are being underutilized. I
6 mentioned Cyber Excepted Service earlier. There are many
7 others.

8 Direct hire authority has been provided many times
9 over the last decade, and yet it still takes almost three
10 months to hire somebody. So, I think some of these delays
11 and challenges are somewhat self-imposed. If confirmed, I
12 look forward to figuring out where the department is making
13 things harder for itself than it should be.

14 The Congress enacts these authorities for a reason,
15 that they be used effectively, and if confirmed, that is
16 sort of -- one of my goals as I mentioned in my opening
17 statement is taking advantage of the many authorities that
18 the Congress has provided, as well as implementing the
19 directives of the President in this area.

20 Senator Cotton: Thank you both.

21 Senator Tuberville: Senator Kelly.

22 Senator Kelly: Mr. Obadal, last week, Secretary
23 Driscoll and General George sent a letter to the Army on
24 the new Army Transformation Initiative to implement
25 Secretary Hegseth's directive. This directive emphasized

1 that the Army must prioritize investments and existing
2 resources to improve electronic warfare capabilities, among
3 other things.

4 And to this point at least I agree, we need to be
5 doing everything we can to our military for a potential
6 next fight, and electronic warfare is a critical part of
7 that. That is why I am concerned that the U.S. Army Test
8 and Evaluation Command, ATEC, may have a RIF plan that
9 would disproportionately impact certain critical test
10 centers and result in long-term consequences for testing
11 and evaluation and also readiness. ATEC provides critical
12 test and evaluation capabilities to the U.S. Army and plays
13 a crucial role in informing Army senior leaders.

14 Historically, ATEC has been committed to ensuring test
15 and evaluations occurs across varied climates and unique
16 geographies, from the Arctic region's Test Center to the
17 tropic region's test center, and the Yuma test center,
18 which provides extreme weather testing in a realistic
19 environment.

20 In addition, the Electronic Proving Ground at Fort
21 Huachuca provides an invaluable asset with its
22 interference-free environment and ability to execute
23 developmental testing due to its very unique geography. So
24 Mr. Obadal, if confirmed as the Under Secretary of the
25 Army, you will have a critical role in executing the new

1 Army Transformation Initiative. How will you ensure the
2 Army prepares for future advanced electronic warfare
3 threats?

4 Mr. Obadal: Senator, thank you for the question. And
5 I would like to acknowledge the critical services that ATEC
6 and the number of facilities around the country, including
7 Huachuca and Yuma, that it maintains.

8 I think, as we have seen now, we have the strategic
9 direction from the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary
10 the Army for the Army Transformation Initiative. And it is
11 the coming months and couple of years of the second level
12 of detail of how do we streamline our organizations to
13 ensure that we are providing the best equipment to our
14 soldiers.

15 Testing that equipment can take place in a number of
16 different ways. ATEC certainly is one of those, as well as
17 testing in the transformation and contact brigades that
18 have been by all accounts successful over the last couple
19 of years but --

20 Senator Kelly: Can you elaborate on that? Does -- is
21 the Army doing developmental testing in operational units?

22 Mr. Obadal: So, Senator, the transformation in
23 contact essentially is bringing capabilities at a smaller
24 scale to brigade and level -- or brigade and below level
25 organizations and allowing soldiers to experiment with this

1 on training centers and on maneuvers at their home bases.

2 And then giving that feedback and that cycle right
3 back to the innovators so they can go back and change these
4 capabilities. And give that feedback directly to the
5 senior leadership of the Army as they make decisions on
6 what to field.

7 Senator Kelly: Typically, in my experience in the
8 Navy, is that is sort of operational testing. You put it
9 out there to a, you know, real unit, but something that is
10 more further developed than a developmental test process,
11 which is what ATEC does.

12 So do you agree that disproportionately slashing our
13 electronic warfare test centers would harm the Army's
14 electronic warfare capabilities?

15 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, I don't have enough
16 information to make an assessment on that. If confirmed, I
17 would commit to pulling together the right data and the
18 right experts and be able to advise the Secretary.

19 Senator Kelly: Okay. So it is my view on this, this
20 is not an area where we can afford to make a mistake here.
21 So if the Army does make a decision to RIF a highly
22 specialized civilian workforce in remote locations, it is
23 not going to be easy to reverse course on this.

24 So if you are confirmed, I encourage you to take a
25 very close look and consider how this would ultimately or

1 could impact the warfighter and the kind of combat
2 equipment they get. And to make sure that we don't, you
3 know, make a mistake that is kind of hard to reverse.

4 Mr. Obadal: You have my absolute commitment to that,
5 Senator.

6 Senator Kelly: All right. Thank you.

7 Senator Tuberville: Senator Kaine.

8 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Senator Tuberville, and
9 congratulations to the witnesses. I had a good
10 conversation with General George and Secretary Driscoll.
11 They called about the Army Transformation Initiative, and I
12 applaud its boldness and being quick out of the box,
13 looking at the details.

14 I will tell both of you two sort of just cautions or
15 questions I raised in phone conversation. The first was
16 some of the discussions about reduction of personnel, kind
17 of at the top rank, you know, headquarters reduction, I
18 think probably need to be done.

19 But I just warned them in this committee a number of
20 years ago, Mr. O'Keefe you probably remember, reduction in
21 headquarter staff was sort of a driving theme of one year's
22 NDAA. And at the time, I warned against sort of across-
23 the-board reductions and argued that they should be done
24 based on performance and priorities. The mandate to reduce
25 headquarter staff went ahead.

1 A few years later, we had a huge crisis in military
2 housing, and what we realized is that that directive to
3 reduce headquarter staff had been implemented by reducing
4 massive swaths of people at the Pentagon who were working
5 on military housing.

6 And so, while not lifting blame off the shoulders of
7 the providers of housing, it really was a program that
8 wasn't being managed well in the Pentagon because we let
9 people go who were responsible for it.

10 So, I do think reductions are often important. I had
11 to do a lot of them when I was Governor. Just it should be
12 based on priorities and performance rather than trying to
13 hit some across the board number. I sort of echo what my
14 colleague, Senator King, said.

15 The second thing I asked, and questions have been asked
16 about this already, about the proposed re-merger of Army
17 Futures and TRADOC as Senator Reed mentioned. TRADOC was
18 established I think in 1972, and it oversees 32 schools
19 that train 750,000 members of Army. Army Futures was
20 pulled out of it about six years ago.

21 And Mr. Obadal, I credit what you said that hopefully
22 lessons have been learned in that time period to streamline
23 the way we do things so that when it is reassembled, those
24 lessons carry forward. There has been some discussion
25 about when it is reassembled, will TRADOC, the 50-year-old

1 organization, be put under the six-year old organization,
2 or vice versa, or is that not even the to look at it, or
3 are they just being merged?

4 I was assured by General George and Secretary Driscoll
5 that there was not going to be any significant change in
6 employment levels at Fort Eustis. I am obviously going to
7 following that closely, but I do hope you are right, and I
8 suspect that you will be really working to focus on this.
9 That those lessons learned during the six or seven years
10 that Army Futures stood alone can be reinserted back in the
11 merged organization in ways that help it be effective.

12 So those are the observations that I made to General
13 George and Secretary Driscoll. Again, I see much to like
14 in the broader initiative, and I would make those same
15 observations to. Some questions, one for each of you. Mr.
16 Obadal, the committee has been really focused upon
17 understanding drone incursions that occurred at Langley-
18 Eustis in December 2023, and then also in New York and New
19 Jersey at the end of last year.

20 The challenge is a whole of government, not just
21 military, but civilian, FAA, etcetera. But the Army is
22 DOD's executive agent for countering small UAS, and it is
23 charged with leading and directing the relevant doctrine,
24 requirements, material and training standards, and also the
25 capabilities to establish joint solutions for addressing

1 current and future small UAS threats.

2 Should you be confirmed, how will you ensure
3 coordination between the services in developing a joint
4 counter small UAS doctrine to help us solve this growing
5 threat?

6 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, thank you. It is an
7 important and topical issue, as we have seen growing over
8 the years. In my mind, as the executive agent, the Army
9 has to consider really two different buckets. One is the
10 technical aspects of how do you layer technical protection.

11 And also effectors, which are more complicated in the
12 United States than they are overseas because they have to
13 be less kinetic and more electronic. But also the layers
14 of authorities. And so, whether that is State, local, FAA,
15 and Department of Defense. And then of course, Department
16 of Justice comes in with, you know, enforcement of these
17 things. So, those are very difficult tasks.

18 If confirmed, there are things that I would look at
19 from that aspect is how do we layer not only our
20 capabilities, but then how do effectively layer our
21 authorities. The other problem that I think has been
22 addressed is there is no single end-to-end authority in the
23 Army for this, and that imparts risk.

24 Senator Kaine: Thank you. And Mr. O'Keefe,
25 congratulations. You and I had a good visit in my office.

1 I am going to ask you a question for the record about one
2 of your three stated priorities that we discussed in my
3 Office, which is working on sort of tri-care customer
4 satisfaction, the Defense Health Agency, and especially the
5 problem in getting providers compensated in a timely way.

6 Because if you don't do that, you end up with
7 providers who would like to serve military members and
8 families, but then they choose not to because they can't be
9 compensated. We have had a lot of complaints about that.

10 You and I had a good discussion about it in the
11 office. I will ask a question about that for the record
12 but appreciate your service and congratulations to both of
13 you. I yield back.

14 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Kaine. Senator
15 Blumenthal.

16 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Madam Chair.
17 Congratulations to both of you. Mr. O'Keefe, I led the
18 passage of a measure called the Xavier Sander Act, which is
19 named in honor of a young sailor from Connecticut who took
20 his own life while serving on the USS George Washington.
21 His ship was in maintenance. He was enduring unacceptably
22 poor living conditions while the ship was in for repair.

23 Too many junior enlisted service members have been
24 forced to live aboard vessels while they are under repair
25 without air conditioning, without meals, without rest

1 effectively, and with limited access to amenities and
2 mental health support.

3 So the Navy now has expanded authorities to provide
4 sailors with basic allowance for housing as a result of
5 this Act. They can live in commercial housing. They have
6 increased access to mental health support. No service
7 member should suffer as Xavier did.

8 I am still in touch with his father and his family and
9 other service members. I would like your commitment that
10 you will fully support implementation of the Xavier Sanders
11 Act.

12 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes, Senator, absolutely. And it was a
13 privilege to work on that legislation with you. I do think
14 it is a great case study. I know your office worked with
15 the Navy and working with that too.

16 It is a great case study and where the Congress and
17 the Department of Defense and the services when working
18 together on a problem can really come up with some very
19 effective solutions. So, thank you for working on that.

20 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. And I would like a
21 commitment, if you are confirmed, that you will send me a
22 report on the usage of these authorities say by the end of
23 the year.

24 Mr. O'Keefe: Absolutely. Yes, Senator.

25 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Mr. Obadal, I know

1 you have served in the Army for 30 years and then left for
2 the private sector. The company where you are now, Anduril
3 Industries, is a major defense firm with millions of
4 dollars of contracts with the DOD. Will you commit to sell
5 the stock that you own in that company?

6 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, I appreciate the
7 opportunity to address that. I believe in two things I
8 think that I share with members of this committee, and that
9 is transparency and very strong ethical guidelines.

10 And as with every potential senior government
11 official, I have gone through an exhaustive process with
12 the Office of Government Ethics, and they have done a
13 thorough review and presented me with the guidelines. I
14 will abide by all of those guidelines, and as I always
15 have, I will abide by the law.

16 Senator Blumenthal: Is that a yes or no?

17 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator my restrictions and my
18 recusals are laid out in my agreement with the OGE.

19 Senator Blumenthal: My understanding is that you are
20 not selling the stock. Is that correct?

21 Mr. Obadal: So that is detailed in my agreement that
22 I will retain that.

23 Senator Blumenthal: If you are not selling the stocks
24 doesn't that create an appearance of conflict of interest?

25 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, under Section 1117 of the

1 2022 NDAA, I am recused writ large from anything having to
2 do personally and substantially with my former employer.

3 Senator Blumenthal: Well, I am not asking you whether
4 you are recused.

5 I am asking you about the appearance of continuing to
6 own stock in a company that has major contracts with the
7 DOD where you are in charge of essentially administering
8 the Army and the interests of that company could be
9 affected. Whether or not you are recused from the specific
10 approval of the contract, it still is an appearance of
11 conflict of interest. I am not going to debate with you.

12 But, you know, in this Administration, it may seem
13 minor as a conflict of interest given that the President of
14 the United States is selling crypto and inviting people to
15 the White House who buy his meme coin and making hundreds
16 of millions of dollars from transactions in that coin. I
17 think he has lowered the bar irretrievably, but it still is
18 really regrettable. Let me go on to another topic.

19 I understand that there may be a parade on June 14th
20 to celebrate the President's birthday. Do you support that
21 use of \$30, \$50, perhaps \$60 million for a parade to
22 celebrate President's' birthday?

23 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, I can only comment on what
24 I have seen. I do not understand -- I don't know the costs
25 of a parade. What I do know is that the Army is

1 celebrating its 250th birthday on June 14 with a parade
2 that will showcase soldiers and provide a level of access -
3 -

4 Senator Blumenthal: What amount of expenditure would
5 be appropriate in your view?

6 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, I can't comment on that
7 because I am not in the department, and I can make an
8 assessment on the effects --

9 Senator Blumenthal: Let me ask you, hypothetically,
10 wouldn't it be a better use of Army funds for training, for
11 care of the troops, for housing, not to mention thousands
12 of veterans who have been fired from the VA supposedly to
13 save money. Wouldn't those be better uses of that money?

14 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, I am not going to engage
15 in a hypothetical. What I will say is that the military,
16 the DOD writ large, does a number of things like this to
17 increase awareness and to use as a recruiting and
18 appreciation tool for the citizens of the United States.
19 So air shows and parades --

20 Senator Blumenthal: I am not against celebrating the
21 Army's birthday. What I would ask you to oppose is the use
22 of anywhere from \$40 million to \$50 million -- has been
23 publicly reported. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal. Next
25 we have Senator Slotkin.

1 Senator Slotkin: Thank you for being here. A couple
2 of questions. Mr. Obadal, similar vein. So, you know, we
3 understand you are from Anduril, and no one quibbles with
4 that. It is a company that does a lot of good work with
5 the Defense Department.

6 But if I am hearing correctly, you are not going to
7 divest from all of your stock. And I know you have got a
8 deal, but you know, the average soldier as you know would
9 have to be open about what stock they have, what conflicts
10 of interest they may have, if they were a contracting
11 officer.

12 So you are keeping some of your Anduril stock and
13 selling others. Is that correct?

14 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, it is not stock. Anduril
15 is not a public company. It is equity --

16 Senator Slotkin: Equity.

17 Mr. Obadal: So I will always act in adherence with my
18 agreement with the Office of Government Ethics as they have
19 laid out the guidelines. And I will also act in accordance
20 with the law.

21 Senator Slotkin: And will that agreement be made
22 public so we can understand? Because it is true, you have
23 a perception problem, right. This Administration looks
24 around every corner like it is milking the cow of America
25 with conflicts of interests, doing things we have never

1 seen before, right.

2 Charging to get into the White House. Setting up, as
3 we heard, a cryptocurrency that the President of the United
4 States and his family are backing. We already have reports
5 of people buying that cryptocurrency so they can get some
6 relief on tariffs.

7 The perception problem is real. So we don't want you
8 to have that perception problem. You are leading an
9 incredibly -- or potentially leading an incredible
10 important institution in our country. Will you commit to
11 making that deal public at least to this committee?

12 Mr. Obadal: Without a doubt, Senator. I welcome the
13 transparency.

14 Senator Slotkin: Great. That would be great. Just I
15 think -- and then I understand -- I mean the concern is
16 just this past week the Army announced its transformation
17 initiative and a huge amount of that is geared towards
18 drones and other things that Anduril, your former company
19 or your current company, is neck deep in.

20 And again, we don't have a -- I don't have an inherent
21 problem with the transformation. I just a problem with the
22 idea, the perception to our troops that their leaders can
23 do things that they themselves cannot.

24 That their leaders might be able to enrich themselves
25 or get away with security clearance violations that they,

1 themselves cannot. And as a former CIA officer, and you
2 yourself as a soldier, you know that sense of injustice
3 when you are at the bottom of the food chain, and you see
4 bosses doing something differently.

5 So I am glad you are willing to make it public. But
6 given the amount of transformation Will potentially enrich
7 a place like Anduril, what else are you going to do, again,
8 to hivy yourself off so that there is not even a whiff that
9 you are making transformation decisions about the Army to
10 enrich yourself and others you work with?

11 Mr. Obadal: Well, Senator, I appreciate the
12 opportunity to address it more in depth. But it comes down
13 to, if confirmed, one of the first things to do is work
14 through with the Office of General Counsel the
15 implementation guidance of any recusal, the same that all
16 senior government officials do. And then make sure that
17 daily I am adhering to that and doing regular reviews with
18 OGC.

19 Senator Slotkin: So I think it would help us greatly
20 in our working relationship if you just provided that again
21 to the committee so that we understand. So that when we
22 are asked, we can say, yes, there is a major transformation
23 going on in the Army.

24 That is going to be difficult for a lot of us and a
25 lot our home States. But if you want us to be bought in,

1 as I know your leadership does because they called us this
2 week, then please make sure we understand that there is not
3 a milking of the cow going on for folks at the top for the
4 Army.

5 Mr. O'Keefe, I asked your potential future boss, Mr.
6 Tata, this past week about access to the data of every
7 single Soldier, Airman, Marine in the entire force, right.
8 You are the holder of everyone's personal information,
9 their health information, everything on their spouses,
10 everything on where they live, basing information.

11 Pete Hegseth has said he welcomes DOGE in. DOGE has
12 already shown that they cannot properly handle that data.
13 There has been an agency, the NLRB, where they got access
14 to the data. The Chinese just followed them and went after
15 it within like hours. I am not saying it is intentional.

16 But the idea of the sensitivity of this data
17 personally and as a National Security issue. Mr. Tata said
18 that he would "sign a contract with DOGE." Do you commit to
19 providing that contract on the sensitive control of data to
20 this committee?

21 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, absolutely. Whatever
22 agreements or the structure of the sort of access to any
23 sort of critical information, happy to work with the
24 committee and your office to make sure that you have
25 confidence in the department's ability to safeguard. As

1 you mentioned, this is critical, very sensitive
2 information, health records, addresses.

3 The department knows more about its workforce than
4 perhaps any other Federal agency for good reason, but that
5 comes with a lot of trust. And if confirmed, you have my
6 commitment that that trust is well placed.

7 Senator Slotkin: Great. We will look forward to that
8 contract with DOGE. I yield back.

9 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Slotkin. And just
10 for the committee's awareness, the committee has received
11 all of Mr. Obadal's information. We have that and it is
12 also all publicly available on the government website.
13 There is a government ethics website. We all have access
14 to that information.

15 So, Mr. Obadal has been completely transparent and has
16 been adhering to the rules of this committee. Next we have
17 Senator Duckworth.

18 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Madam Chair. First, I
19 want to thank you both for very productive conversations
20 you had with me prior to this hearing. Mr. Obadal, given
21 this week's announcements on Army transformation, I wanted
22 to start with you first. We had a great conversation.

23 It is no secret that I am deeply committed to our Army
24 and its future. I support Army modernization, but we must
25 balance modernization with readiness today. To be clear, I

1 am encouraged by parts of the Army's proposed reforms.

2 However, I am concerned about the impacts of some
3 proposed cuts to the Joint Force's sustainment and supply
4 enterprise. And we discussed this a little bit. For one,
5 I worry how the proposed integration of Joint Munitions
6 Command and Army Sustainment Command may impact their two
7 critical mission sets, including managing complex
8 ecosystems required to deliver munitions to warfighters,
9 both for the Army but also for the Joint Force.

10 And then also, as the Army considers replacing the
11 Humvee, I urge the Army to consider impacts to medical
12 evacuation capabilities because the Humvee is one of the --
13 it is really the main source of Army -- the Army's
14 ambulances platforms.

15 Mr. Obadal, will you commit to engaging with me and
16 this committee early before final decisions are made so
17 that we can fully communicate and help the Army address the
18 far-reaching impacts of cuts like these?

19 Mr. Obadal: Absolutely, Senator. And thank you for
20 the time that you spent with me on the phone.

21 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. I look forward to
22 working with you. Mr. O'Keefe, turning to you. If
23 confirmed, you will be a key advisor to Secretary Hegseth.
24 Under review, he directed to ensure physical standards
25 among the services are sex neutral -- his words.

1 As you know, every service members does take a
2 physical fitness test, at least annually. It is required
3 for your continued service and your promotion. I took one
4 every year for 23 years and some years more than once.

5 On top of that, specific combat military occupational
6 specialties like Army Rangers, for example, already have
7 added physical standards. The services have combat job-
8 specific physical testing, which is actually what makes our
9 forces capable of carrying out the full range of types of
10 combat roles.

11 Do you acknowledge that the military already has
12 uniform physical standards specific to occupational
13 specialties that is the same for both male and female
14 troops?

15 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, I don't know the details of
16 every physical fitness requirement for every occupational
17 specialty. I have been informed that many of them do at
18 least. So, I don' know every job.

19 Senator Duckworth: Understood. But the combat roles,
20 especially the rangers, COs, those all have one standard
21 that are not gender differentiated.

22 Mr. O'Keefe: Again, I don't know the details of every
23 position in those units. I do believe that many of them
24 do.

25 Senator Duckworth: Okay. Not all combat roles are

1 the same. The physical and mental requirements to operate
2 an attack helicopter like Mr. Obadal did, which makes Black
3 Hawk pilots like myself shudder, are different than the
4 strength needed to lift a motor tube or different than
5 endurance required of a scout sniper, for example.

6 The fact of the matter is that the services already
7 test to the most applicable physical requirements for a
8 specific combat role. For example, the Marines have
9 military occupational specialty-specific physical
10 standards, which are mission-specific, and both men and
11 women have to meet the same standard.

12 And the Army also has sex-neutral standards for every
13 occupational specialty. If combat jobs already have
14 gender-neutral physical qualifications, what change is
15 Secretary Hegseth actually making? He has his sights on
16 creating a -- and again, his words, gender- neutral combat
17 standard for the annual fitness assessments.

18 These are tests that were ensured to make sure that we
19 have a baseline physical fitness across the United States
20 military. They are not job specific. They are just making
21 sure that you can stay in the military, and those are
22 differentiated based on gender and age.

23 But if Secretary Hegseth's logic is to have one combat
24 fitness standard to rule them all, why would we stop at
25 gender? Mr. O'Keefe, would you support holding all service

1 members in combat roles, regardless of age, to the same
2 fitness standards, if you are going to get rid of the
3 gender-specific standards?

4 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, I think that the fitness
5 requirements for combat roles should be, whether it is the
6 fitness test -- and I appreciate the distinction between a
7 fitness test and the occupational requirements. I think
8 that is important to note. But certainly the occupational
9 standards I believe should be consistent, regardless of who
10 is performing the job.

11 Senator Duckworth: Okay. So would you agree with me
12 that if we are going to get rid of the gender
13 differentiation, we should also get rid the age
14 differentiation because it is supposed to be for the job?

15 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, as I say, I think any
16 requirement for a particular job should be agnostic about -
17 - as long as the requirements are set in a realistic way
18 and are determined to be relevant for the position, it is
19 my view that those should be consistent.

20 Senator Duckworth: So, both gender and age-neutral?

21 Mr. O'Keefe: Anyone performing the role, yes,
22 Senator.

23 Senator Duckworth: Okay. I think that Secretary
24 Hegseth should eliminate age-based scaling for annual
25 fitness test scoring and standards then, if he is going to

1 get rid of the gender scaling. Would you agree with that?

2 Mr. O'Keefe: Again, Senator, I think there is a --
3 and you noted the distinction between the fitness tests and
4 the occupational requirements. I think that those are
5 different conversations. They have been muddled somewhat
6 over the years I grant you. But I do think there is a
7 distinction there between the two.

8 Senator Duckworth: Well, he is bringing it up. He
9 wants to get rid of the gender differentiation for the
10 annual fitness test. If he is going to do that, would you
11 agree with me that he should -- that we should also then
12 get rid the age differentiation for annual fitness tests?
13 If you are going to get rid with the gender
14 differentiations, then you should get rid of the age
15 differentiation.

16 Mr. O'Keefe: Certainly Senator, if confirmed -- I
17 don't know the details of the -- I know there is an effort
18 in the department going through all of that right now. And
19 we just had a meeting with the Army about a week ago on
20 their test. But certainly if confirmed, that would be I
21 think an area where I would look forward to providing some
22 insight and advice to the Secretary on that one.

23 Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

24 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Duckworth. Senator
25 Sullivan.

1 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Gentlemen,
2 congratulations on your nomination. Thanks for your
3 service of you and your families.

4 So really appreciate it. Very important that we have
5 people with your caliber and qualifications to do this. I
6 would like first of all for you two to commit to coming to
7 Alaska with me, seeing our great Army, the 11th Airborne
8 Division, maybe better than the 82nd Airborne Division
9 already, a little competition there, and to see what
10 General Billy Mitchell called the most strategic place in
11 the world.

12 Have either of you been to Alaska, and will you commit
13 to coming to me -- coming to Alaska with me to see our fine
14 military forces there?

15 Mr. Obadal: Senator, my mother-in-law was a public
16 school teacher in Anchorage for 25 years.

17 Senator Sullivan: Excellent.

18 Mr. Obadal: She said that I can only go if it is cold
19 -- during the cold months.

20 Senator Sullivan: Okay. Well, I like that answer.
21 Good. Thank you to your mother-in-law, by the way.

22 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, I visited Alaska years ago as a
23 tourist, but I agree with my friend here, I would like to
24 go up in the winter. That is the time to go, so I would
25 like to go see it then.

1 Senator Sullivan: Great. Good. Well, we will do
2 that in the winter. I will take you to Eielson and Fort
3 Wainwright, Fort Greeley. It will be 30, 40, 50 below zero
4 where our tough Arctic warriors train in that kind of
5 temperature.

6 On an issue that actually has been a real troubling
7 one in Alaska. We have these great military members. Our
8 Army does such a great job. You know the 11th Airborne has
9 now stood up in Alaska. 49th Missile Defense Battalion of
10 Fort Greeley, that is an Alaska National Guard unit.

11 They literally protect the entire country. They have
12 this great motto, the 300 protecting the 300 million. That
13 is where all the ground-based missile interceptors that
14 shoot down any incoming missiles that would hit Washington,
15 D.C., New York City, Miami. It is all based in Alaska.

16 That is Army as well. A lot of people don't know
17 that. But we do have a -- we have had over the last
18 several years a very high rate of suicide among our active
19 duty forces in Alaska, particularly the Army.

20 Can I get your commitment, gentlemen, when -- even
21 before you get up to Alaska to continue to work -- I think
22 the Army's doing a good job. I think the top leadership at
23 OSD has done a good job. This is a tough issue, and it is
24 -- you know, it is kind of hard to get our arms around, but
25 of course it is heartbreaking.

1 Can I get your commitment to work with me and this
2 committee on this issue to keep -- the rates are starting
3 to come down, but you know, they were super, duper high
4 with regard to the active duty component of the Army in
5 Alaska, and we need to keep the trend going down. Can I
6 get your commitment to work with me on that?

7 Mr. Obadal: Absolutely, Senator. Suicide is
8 something that I think many of us in uniform have had
9 first-hand experience with, and I think that the Army and
10 the DOD writ large has done a great job with understanding
11 mental health is health care, the effects and the treatment
12 of PTSD, and then the mitigation of TBI.

13 Senator Sullivan: Good. Mr. O'Keefe.

14 Mr. O'Keefe: Absolutely, Senator. And I would
15 complement you. I have worked on legislation on your
16 behalf in this area. I know that this is a focus. And I
17 would complement the Army.

18 I agree with you, I think they have taken this very
19 seriously and have reacted appropriately. I would
20 highlight, I think one of perhaps the best things the Army
21 did is they started asking people who wanted to go to
22 Alaska to volunteer, as opposed to just sending people who
23 had no idea what they were in for. And that has been a
24 very effective thing I think.

25 Senator Sullivan: Yes, you are making a really good

1 point. The 11th Airborne, you know, they rebranded that.
2 That is an airborne unit. Like I said, it is always good
3 to have competition, right. 82nd Airborne maybe was
4 getting a little too -- well, they just didn't have enough
5 competition.

6 Now you have got the Arctic Angels, right. Great
7 storied history, by the way. A lot of people don't know
8 the 11th Airborne's history in World War II. Very
9 impressive. But I think you are right. You give a unit a
10 mission, high morale. It is starting, but we got to the
11 number -- we still have numbers that we don't want in terms
12 of suicide there.

13 Let me ask one final question. I just want both of
14 your views on recruiting, right. We went through this
15 really bad recruiting crisis, particularly for the Army
16 during the Biden years. Look, I have a whole host of
17 reasons I think that happened.

18 The Biden era Army leadership, DOD leadership took
19 their eye off the ball in terms of what it means to recruit
20 young men and women who want to go fight and deploy and
21 serve their country. They kind of turned it into this
22 social thing, ridiculous ads for recruiting. I won't
23 mention them here.

24 Give me your view very quickly on why you think it has
25 already started to turn around under the Trump

1 Administration, but what we need to do to make sure we
2 don't have that kind of crisis that the Army had two or
3 three years ago? We were, you know, we were off by like
4 tens of thousands of recruits.

5 And for an all-volunteer force, that is existential if
6 you can't get young Americans to join our military. What
7 do you think happened, and can you commit to me to continue
8 to work on the positive trend we have already seen during
9 the Trump Administration?

10 Mr. Obadal: Well Senator, I will be happy to
11 elaborate on the record, but what I believe our Army senior
12 leaders, and this is specific to the Army, have to be the
13 ones that go out and engage with local and State civic
14 leaders.

15 And that will make sure that our recruiters are a part
16 of the landscape and have the access that they need to
17 those high population areas. And I think that they can
18 then describe the opportunities and instill a sense of
19 pride and ownership in civil service and in military
20 service.

21 Senator Sullivan: Good. Mr. O'Keefe.

22 Mr. O'Keefe: Yes, Senator. Very quickly, I think the
23 best thing that the Army has done is they have started to
24 imitate the Marine Corps model on recruiting. They are
25 sending some --

1 Senator Sullivan: That is never -- by the way, in
2 this committee, that is never a bad answer.

3 Mr. O'Keefe: They are sending some of their sharpest
4 officers.

5 Senator Sullivan: Right, Senator Reed? I am sorry

6 Senator Ernst: I think you are way over time.

7 Senator Sullivan: I am not -- continue, Mr. O'Keefe.
8 That is the best damn answer I have heard in this committee
9 in a long time.

10 [Laughter.]

11 Mr. O'Keefe: It matters where you send your sharpest
12 people. And the Marine Corps has been sending some of
13 their sharpest officers and NCOs to recruiting for a long
14 time, and it shows in the numbers.

15 Senator Sullivan: Great. Good answer. Thank you,
16 Madam Chair. That was outstanding. That was outstanding.

17 Senator Ernst: Enough of that. Enough of that,
18 Colonel Sullivan. Okay. Thank you, Senator Sullivan.
19 Senator Gillibrand.

20 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.
21 Thank you both for your dedication and service. I am very
22 grateful that you are taking on these jobs at this time. I
23 want to continue the recruiting conversation that Senator
24 Sullivan started, Mr. O'Keefe.

25 So this committee has for a long time tried to enhance

1 getting the best and brightest that we possibly can in
2 certain mission areas where we fall short. One of those
3 mission areas has been cyber.

4 And I don't have to recite for you the litany of
5 cyber-attacks on this country over the last five years that
6 are devastating and ones that could easily undermine our
7 military readiness to the point that we can't fight a war
8 or respond effectively.

9 So, one of the goals of this committee is to create a
10 cyber academy where we can create a ROTC type program at
11 over 600 schools and universities across the country from
12 community colleges to elite universities. And that program
13 has been up and running now for a couple of years, and it
14 is working.

15 We are getting recruits from all across the country.
16 And these are for non-military jobs, because obviously in
17 the DOD, there is a great deal of non- military civilian
18 jobs who do cyber specifically. A cyber personnel behind a
19 computer screen, it doesn't necessarily have to be trained
20 like a Marine to be lethal outside of their lethality on a
21 keyboard, which is why we want to be able to recruit beyond
22 any personnel who would want to come and serve as an Army
23 officer or a Marine officer or any enlisted personnel.

24 So, the DOGE cuts are undermining this entire
25 ecosystem. And so, the reports we have heard is that these

1 kids are waiting to get jobs. They actually have done the
2 work we have asked them to do. They have done four years
3 or two years of training specifically on the mission set
4 that the DOD has given them for cyber, and they are waiting
5 to be employed. And so, the data is terrible.

6 We created this program to get more recruits, to
7 enhance our readiness, and DOGE cuts are impacting. Right
8 now, winter graduates have not been able to obtain jobs and
9 internships. We are limited to just 25 percent of eligible
10 students. Again, we are going backwards in a mission set
11 we have been desperate to meet.

12 So Mr. O'Keefe, can you commit to me that you will
13 work to strengthen the Cyber Academy, that we will work to
14 get the full complement of 1,000 students enrolled every
15 year, and that we will continue to work on campuses across
16 the country to increase the number of schools that have the
17 curriculum we need, and eventually to create a bricks and
18 mortar academy so we have the cyber personnel we actually
19 need?

20 Mr. O'Keefe: Senator, yes. I think this is a -- you
21 have hit on a number of really important topics. One is
22 military and civilians need to work together in this area.
23 Not everyone, to your point, needs to be military.

24 And the Department of Defense needs to a better
25 employer of civilians in this area. There is a number of

1 authorities there. But yes, I think this is a very useful
2 focus for the department, not just for CYBERCOM, but across
3 the board.

4 Senator Gillibrand: Mr. Obadal, thank you so much for
5 your decades of service and thank you for being committed
6 to this new mission.

7 Now, I want to talk about the drone incursions we have
8 seen over our military bases. I know you have expertise in
9 this area, and I would like you to talk about it because
10 the publicly available reports about the drone incursion
11 over Langley is shocking, concerning, and we can further
12 this conversation in a SCIF.

13 But in this open session, what are you going to do to
14 fight for the authorizations, for the technology
15 investments, for ability that when we have drone incursions
16 over highly sensitive military bases that arguably are
17 spying on us with no recourse from unknown origins, could
18 be any adversarial nation, what do you propose to the
19 Department of Defense, to the Secretary of Defense, to this
20 committee about enhancing authorities so we can take them
21 down over military bases and have the authority to do so.
22 That we can run missions if necessary to follow drone
23 incursions to their source to see if they are being
24 launched from ships nearby, seeing if they have been
25 launched from fields nearby owned by adversarial nations.

1 What is your plan?

2 Mr. Obadal: Senator, thank you for your attention to
3 it. It is a critical problem, as we have seen growing over
4 the years. And to me, from a strategic standpoint, I see
5 this as defense of the homeland. And so, there are a
6 number of -- well, I really put this in two buckets.

7 One is technical layering of capabilities, which would
8 be different in a place like Syria or Iraq than would be in
9 New York over a base because of the ability to use kinetics
10 or electronic means to affect incursions by drones. But
11 the other is the layering of authorities. And this is
12 where I think it gets really complicated.

13 The technical part, I am confident in the Army's
14 acquisition capabilities and industry to be able to bring
15 together solutions. The more difficult part is weaving
16 together the number of authorities. And you mentioned
17 this, right, because it goes to local and State
18 authorities, Department of Defense, Department of Justice
19 is involved, and Department of Homeland Defense in certain
20 areas.

21 This is probably the area that I would -- if
22 confirmed, that I will focus on the most is -- as far as
23 the acquisition community, let them work with industry to
24 figure out what the right solutions are.

25 But we have to turn the attention of Army leadership

1 to across the inter-agency and down into our local
2 governments to ensure that we are layering all of those
3 authorities to their maximum effect.

4 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. And I have a
5 bipartisan bill with Senator Cotton that I would like you
6 to review and give us comments on. Thank you.

7 Senator Sullivan: Well, thank you, Senator
8 Gillibrand. And thank you for your leadership on the cyber
9 issues, the Cyber Academy and everything. She has been the
10 leader on this committee on that, and it is really
11 important to follow through on the issue she raised. I
12 want to thank the nominees here for their testimony.

13 I think it is very apparent both are extremely
14 qualified, and I hope we can have a strong bipartisan vote
15 for both of them getting out of the committee and onto the
16 Senate floor here soon.

17 For the information of members, questions for the
18 record will be due to the committee within one business day
19 of the conclusion of this hearing. We are adjourned.

20 [Whereupon, at 11:03 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]
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