

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATIONS OF: MR. ANTHONY J.  
TATA TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR  
PERSONNEL AND READINESS; AND MS. KATHERINE E.  
SUTTON TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR  
CYBER POLICY

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

Washington, D.C.

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1 TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATIONS OF: MR. ANTHONY J. TATA TO BE  
2 UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS; AND  
3 MS. KATHERINE E. SUTTON TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4 FOR CYBER POLICY

5  
6 Tuesday, May 6, 2025

7  
8 U.S. Senate

9 Committee on Armed Services

10 Washington, D.C.

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

15 Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker  
16 [presiding], Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan, Scott,  
17 Tuberville, Mullin, Budd, Schmitt, Banks, Sheehy, Reed,  
18 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,  
19 Warren, Peters, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, and Slotkin.

20 Also present: Senator Tillis.

1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER F. WICKER, U.S.  
2   SENATOR FROM MISSISSIPPI

3           Chairman Wicker: And the gavel goes down on our  
4   hearing to hear testimony from Anthony Tata, to be Under  
5   Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and  
6   Katherine Sutton to be Assistant Secretary of Defense ASD  
7   and Cyber.

8           And before I do my opening remarks, we are going to  
9   accommodate some Senators who are enthusiastic about these  
10   nominees, but also have other pressing activities in the  
11   other committees. I'll recognize Senator Rounds, Senator  
12   Tillis, and Senator Sullivan in that order.

13          Senator Rounds, I understand you'll be introducing Ms.  
14   Sutton this morning and you are now recognized for your  
15   comments.

1           STATEMENT OF SENATOR ROUNDS, A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE  
2   STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA

3           Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Chairman  
4   Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished colleagues of  
5   the Senate Armed Services Committee, it is my distinct honor  
6   to introduce my friend and former colleague, Ms. Katherine  
7   Sutton, nominee to be the Assistant Secretary of Defense for  
8   Cyber Policy.

9           This is a role for which she is imminently qualified,  
10   and I say without reservation, I can think of no one better  
11   suited for this position. Katie is joined today by her  
12   husband, Rob Mills, her parents, Steve and Stephanie Sutton,  
13   and her father-in-law and mother-in-law, Steve and Betsy  
14   Mills. Katie is a patriot who has spent her adult life  
15   working as a civil servant in the field of national  
16   security, and is one of our nation's foremost experts on  
17   cybersecurity.

18          A graduate of the University of Urbana-Champaign and  
19   Stanford University, she spent 15 years as an electrical  
20   engineer at Sandia National Laboratories, working on a  
21   variety of information assurance, cybersecurity, and non-  
22   proliferation projects.

23          She transitioned to the Cyber Information Technology  
24   and Cloud and NSA portfolios on the House Armed Services

1 Committee, before joining this committee. She worked as the  
2 professional staff member responsible for the cyber and  
3 emerging technology portfolio and staff lead for the  
4 cybersecurity subcommittee for over four years. She  
5 currently serves as chief technology advisor to the  
6 commander of the United States Cyber Command.

7 Katie has closely advised members as we drafted  
8 legislation that codified cyber effects operations as a  
9 traditional military activity, implemented dozens of cyber  
10 solarium commission recommendations, provided CYBERCOM  
11 critical budget and service like authorities, and  
12 established the principal cyber advisor positions for the  
13 services.

14 I urge you to support this supremely qualified nominee  
15 to be the next Assistant Secretary of Defense for cyber  
16 policy. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman Wicker: And thank you, Senator Rounds. Next  
2 I will recognize Senator Tillis, who will be introducing  
3 along with others Mr. Tata this morning. So Senator Tillis,  
4 you are recognized.

1           STATEMENT OF SENATOR TILLIS, A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE  
2     STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

3           Senator Tillis: Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed,  
4     and colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee, I  
5     miss a lot of you who I served with for eight great years on  
6     this committee. It's good to be back. It's an honor to  
7     introduce Tony Tata, President Trump's nominee for Under  
8     Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

9           Retired Army Brigadier General Tony Tata has had a  
10    strong and distinguished record of public service. His 28-  
11    year career in the Army included commanding 800 paratroopers  
12    in the 82nd airborne of Fort Bragg, 4,000 aerosol troops in  
13    the 101st Airborne, and thousands of service members in the  
14    10th Mountain Division Joint Task Force 76 in Afghanistan.

15          Following his military service, Tony made a quick  
16    transition to civilian leadership when he was named Chief  
17    Operating Officer of DC Public Schools in 2009, arguably one  
18    of the most political positions you could have. A year  
19    later, he returned to North Carolina to serve as the  
20    superintendent of Wake county public school system, the  
21    largest public school system in the state. Another highly  
22    political position.

23          Establishing himself as an effective manager in both  
24    military and civilian worlds, Tony was appointed by Governor

1 McCrory, my friend, in 2013 to serve as North Carolina  
2 Secretary of Transportation and lead it's 12,000 person  
3 workforce. That's the same time when I was North Carolina  
4 Speaker of the House, and I saw firsthand how he dedicated  
5 himself to working with legislators and business leaders to  
6 modernize our state's infrastructure and passed what seemed  
7 at the time, controversial policies that put North  
8 Carolina's infrastructure on the right track.

9 Tony's prior experience as senior Pentagon leader  
10 equips him to provide the steady leadership and strategic  
11 insight to advance the administration's defense priorities  
12 and initiatives. His proven track record of managing  
13 complex organizations will be invaluable to ensuring our  
14 military's readiness. Tony also brings unique experiences  
15 as a leader of two of the largest public school systems in  
16 the country, experience that many military families will  
17 greatly appreciate. And as someone who sat on the personnel  
18 and readiness subcommittee for eight years, it's insight  
19 that we need desperately.

20 I suspect some of you will have tough questions about  
21 Tony's past comments. The thing I've learned about Tony, is  
22 that he takes responsibility for his words and actions. He  
23 learns from his past mistakes, which is a testament of a  
24 good leader, and I think you'll see that on display today.



1 During his most recent service at the Pentagon, he showed a  
2 commitment to professionalism and impartiality, earning  
3 respect of his peers and colleagues. With global challenges  
4 on the rise, particularly from adversaries like China and  
5 Russia, Tony's strategic insight and operational experience  
6 will be crucial in shaping personnel policies that enhance  
7 our military's readiness and competitiveness.

8 Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, friends, and  
9 colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee,  
10 confirming Tony Tata means equipping our Pentagon with a  
11 leader who will prioritize readiness, support military  
12 families, and advance America security. He has my full  
13 support for his confirmation and I look forward to the  
14 opportunity to confirm him on the floor. Thank you, Mr.  
15 Chairman.

1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator Tillis.  
2 And I understand your schedule is clear for the rest of the  
3 day and that you'll be staying with us for the entire  
4 hearing, is it?

5 Senator Tillis: I got a tea time at 10 30.

6 Chairman Wicker: Oh, okay. I misunderstood there.  
7 Thank you very much and glad to have you back here, Senator.  
8 Senator Sullivan is now recognized to introduce and make  
9 comments in support of Mr. Tata.

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1           STATEMENT OF SENATOR SULLIVAN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE  
2   STATE OF ALASKA

3           Senator Sullivan: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much,  
4   Ranking Member Reed, and before Senator Tillis leaves, I  
5   just want to let him know how much we miss him on this  
6   committee, so we'd welcome you back anytime.

7           Chairman Wicker: Show of hands.

8           Senator Sullivan: Yes.

9           Chairman Wicker: Show of hands.

10          [Laughter.]

11          Senator Sullivan: We really love this guy. Well, I'm,  
12   I'm going to echo what Senator Tillis mentioned about  
13   General Tata, and I'm going to emphasize a few other  
14   elements and it's this: when you look at his distinguished  
15   record of service, it is rare that somebody covers so many  
16   different areas of service in America.

17          It's military command, as Senator Tillis mentioned,  
18   literally at all echelons of command up to one star General,  
19   including many combat tours. It's senior Pentagon policy  
20   making, it's state government administration, department of  
21   transportations are some of the most important areas of  
22   responsibility in our states. It's public education and  
23   innovation, and its private sector advisory roles.

24          And from my perspective colleagues, this epitomizes the

1 breadth of experience required to oversee the department's  
2 most important resource. And that, of course is its people.  
3 The Department of Defense's most important resource is its  
4 people, and that's what the undersecretary of Defense for  
5 Personnel and Readiness will be focused on, and that is what  
6 General Tata has the most experience in.

7 I want to mention also that his civilian leadership  
8 shows a pattern of success as Senator Tillis mentioned,  
9 whether it's leading the Wake County public school system --  
10 Senator Tillis didn't mention that's the nation's 15th  
11 largest school system in the country where he saw firsthand  
12 challenges in opportunities facing our military recruiters,  
13 which is a giant responsibility that he will have as  
14 undersecretary. And as I also mentioned, North Carolina's  
15 Secretary of Transportation, where he served as a leader on  
16 a very large, very important complex organization.

17 So in some colleagues, it's clear to me General Tata's  
18 comprehensive in military policy and civilian experience,  
19 and his unwavering commitment to service members and their  
20 families, which again, is going to be his primary  
21 responsibility as Under Secretary for Personnel in  
22 Readiness, makes him an exceptionally qualified candidate  
23 and nominee to advance the Department of Defense's,  
24 personnel readiness, retention, and recruiting objectives.

1 And I respectfully ask all of my colleagues to support his  
2 confirmation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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1 Chairman Wicker. Thank you so much, Senator Sullivan.

2 And we now proceed to opening statements. So once again,  
3 welcome to our guests and to our fellow citizens who are  
4 here for this hearing. Thank you for the families and  
5 friends of the witnesses for being here this morning.

6 The United States is up against the most dangerous  
7 threat environment we have faced since World War II. I say  
8 that at almost every hearing we have because it bears  
9 repeating and it's true, and I'm not sure that Americans  
10 realize this or frankly, that everyone in this town  
11 understands this.

12 In these challenging times, I'm grateful that these two  
13 individuals and others have stepped up. Mr. Tony Tata has  
14 been nominated to serve as Under Secretary of Defense for  
15 Personnel and Readiness. If confirmed, he would assume a  
16 critical role. He would oversee total force management,  
17 including policies governing personnel readiness, health  
18 affairs, training, and quality of life.

19 His nomination comes, as I say, at this pivotal time.  
20 The department is working to refocus on war fighting and  
21 readiness following years of misplaced emphasis on  
22 diversity, equity, and inclusion. Mr. Tata is a decorated  
23 combat veteran, as we've already heard, and a retired  
24 brigadier general. He'll bring a war fighter's perspective

1 to this position. I'm interested to learn how he plans to  
2 build on recent recruitment and retention successes, how he  
3 hopes to ensure high readiness standards grounded in  
4 operational realities and how he will work to enhance  
5 quality of life for service members and their families,  
6 particularly in healthcare and family support.

7 Ms. Sutton has been nominated to be Assistant Secretary  
8 of Defense for Cyber Policy. Ms. Sutton has over two  
9 decades of experience in cyber policy, technology  
10 development, and legislative oversight. Her experience in  
11 this domain has been helpful to this committee, especially  
12 during her tenure as professional staff member for the late  
13 chairman, Jim Inhofe.

14 If confirmed, Ms. Sutton will be only the second  
15 individual ever to hold this position, which was created  
16 formally in March, 2024, as directed by the fiscal year 2023  
17 National Defense Authorization Act.

18 Though the role is new, it's very important. Ms.  
19 Sutton would be the senior official responsible for cyber  
20 operation policies. If confirmed, she would be responsible  
21 for ensuring our cyber forces have what they need to stay  
22 ahead of threats such as Volt Typhoon, a series of Chinese  
23 cyber activities that create opportunities for future  
24 attacks on America's critical infrastructure.

1           Our nation needs the cyber mission force to be ready,  
2   trained, and equipped with state-of-the-art tools developed,  
3   used advanced technology such as artificial intelligence. I  
4   look forward to hearing her views on deterrence in  
5   cyberspace, how to bring technology to our cyber operators  
6   at a more rapid pace, and what additional resources and  
7   authorities she will need to build the capabilities needed.

8           And so thank you both for being here and I turn to my  
9   friend and Ranking Member, Senator Reed.



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

3           Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.  
4 And Mr. Tata, Ms. Sutton, welcome to you and to your  
5 families. I'd also like to thank Senator Tillis, Senator  
6 Rounds, and Senator Sullivan for their introductions. Thank  
7 you.

8           Mr. Tata, you have been nominated to be the Under  
9 Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. If  
10 confirmed, you would be responsible for all personnel  
11 matters in the Department of Defense, including military  
12 family and childcare programs, family and financial  
13 readiness, the DoD school system, and working with the  
14 military services to ensure the health and welfare of the  
15 force.

16          Mr. Tata, you were nominated five years ago for a  
17 position of similar importance in the Department of Defense.  
18 However, the committee considered your nomination carefully  
19 and a bipartisan basis declined to even bring your  
20 nomination to a vote in the committee. President Trump  
21 ultimately withdrew your nomination. And I fail to  
22 understand why you would now be qualified to oversee  
23 millions of service members and their families as the Under  
24 Secretary of Defense for personnel and Readiness.

1           As I told Secretary Hegseth and Mr. Lohmeier at their  
2 nomination hearings, I respect and appreciate your military  
3 service, but your record of public statements and behavior  
4 towards individuals with whom you disagree politically, is I  
5 believe, disqualifying for a position of this significance.  
6 Mr. Tata, your history of controversial and divisive  
7 statements is well documented. Prior to your last  
8 nomination, you publicly called President of Obama, the  
9 commander-in-chief, "A terrorist leader," and said that then  
10 CIA director John Brennan, "Deserved to be executed."

11           More recently, you claim that there are, "Mutinous  
12 discussions within the military ranks to sabotage President  
13 Trump," and you call for a complete purge of Pentagon  
14 leadership, including firing all four-star general officers  
15 and senior career civilian employees. This gives me concern  
16 that you have a misguided biased view of the military and  
17 civilian workforces you would oversee.

18           Our service members and their families and the civilian  
19 employees who support them come from all backgrounds and  
20 political persuasions. They come from every state and  
21 territory in the union. If confirmed, you would need to  
22 serve all members of the Department of Defense and their  
23 families, not just those who you agree with politically.  
24 Your public record and past performance at the Pentagon do

1 not inspire confidence in this regard. I would ask that you  
2 explain why service members and civilians who do not share  
3 your political opinions can trust that they will not be  
4 targeted under your tenure.

5 Similarly, after being pressured by Elon Musk and the  
6 so-called Department of Government Efficiency, Secretary  
7 Hegseth recently announced the plan to fire 8 percent of the  
8 entire defense workforce as many as 75,000 workers across  
9 the country. Mr. Tata, if confirmed, you'll be responsible  
10 for managing the fallout from these personnel cuts.

11 At a time when we face unprecedented threats from  
12 China, Russia, and other adversaries, you will need to find  
13 a way to balance these reductions while also ensuring the  
14 department has the resources it needs to adequately support  
15 service members and their families. I hope you can explain  
16 to this committee how you intend to resolve these  
17 contradictory demands while ensuring the Department of  
18 Defense accomplishes this mission.

19 Ms. Sutton, I welcome your nomination to be Assistant  
20 Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy. If confirmed, you  
21 would be the second individual to hold this position as it  
22 was created in the fiscal year 2023 National Defense  
23 Authorization Act. You are well qualified for the role  
24 given your extensive experience with U.S. Cyber Command, as

1 a professional staff member of this committee, and as an  
2 engineer at Sandia National Laboratories.

3 When the committee created the ASD for cyber policy, we  
4 intended for this position to provide service secretary-like  
5 functions for U.S. Cyber Command, mirroring the current  
6 relationship that exists between Special Operations Command  
7 and the ASD for special operations and low intensity  
8 conflict. If confirmed, it will be important for your  
9 office to not only support CYBERCOM's growth, but also to  
10 maintain strong civilian control and oversight of the  
11 command.

12 I would like to know how you plan to work with CYBERCOM  
13 and the Department of Defense broadly, to better support the  
14 cyber workforce and improve cyber acquisition functions,  
15 including your objectives following completion of the  
16 ongoing CYBERCOM 2.0 review. I would note that I'm  
17 extremely concerned by President Trump's recent dismissal of  
18 General Timothy Haugh, who served as the commander of  
19 CYBERCOM and director of the National Security Agency.

20 The administration has given no explanation for his  
21 firing, but press reports indicate that Laura Loomer a  
22 fringe conspiracy theorist, convinced the President to  
23 dismiss General Haugh and fire a slew of expert staff on the  
24 National Security Council for no discernible reason. The

1 administration has not selected a new CYBERCOM commander and  
2 it's unclear if there's any sense of urgency to fill this  
3 position.

4 Ms. Sutton, if confirmed, you'll need to be a strong  
5 partner for the new CYBERCOM commander, whomever they may  
6 be, and assist with improving their authority within the  
7 department, and I would like to know how you plan to address  
8 these challenges.

9 Thank you, again, to our nominees, and I look forward  
10 to your testimonies. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Thank you, Ranking Member  
12 Reed and now we'll move to the opening statements of our  
13 nominees. Mr. Tata, your opening statement first, sir.

1           STATEMENT OF MR. ANTHONY J. TATA NOMINATED TO BE UNDER  
2       SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS

3           General Tata: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking  
4       Member Reed, distinguished members of the committee. It's  
5       an honor and privilege to appear before you as the  
6       President's nominee for Under Secretary of Defense for  
7       Personnel and Readiness.

8           I want to thank the President and Secretary for this  
9       opportunity and for the confidence in me. I'm grateful for  
10      the time many of you have spent with me in recent weeks and  
11      thankful for the committee's attention to my nomination.  
12      And I want to thank Senator Tillis and Senator Sullivan for  
13      their kind introductions.

14          I'm privileged to have in attendance a large group  
15      consisting of my wife, Laura, my daughter, Dr. Brooke Tata,  
16      a proud civil servant with the Veterans Administration, and  
17      her husband, former Marine -- there may not be such a thing  
18      -- and Army National Guardsman, Sergeant Peter Dominicis.  
19      My Naval Academy graduate brother Bob Tata and his wife,  
20      Virginia State delegate, Anne Ferrell Tata, who is a Navy  
21      wife and mom. My niece, Peyton Tata Tackes, and her  
22      husband, Commander Rafe Tackes, and Tinsley, their daughter.  
23      And Rafe is an active duty E-2D Hawkeye pilot.

24          My niece Riley Tata and her husband Albert. My sister

1 Kendall, a Virginia school teacher of over 40 years. My  
2 mother-in-law, Helen Fahey, a former U.S. attorney for the  
3 Eastern District of Virginia for eight years. My father-in-  
4 law, Kevin Fahey, my brother-in-law, and his wife Jonathan  
5 Fahey and their son, Garrett, and my son, Zachary, and his  
6 eighth month pregnant wife, Lindsey, and my granddaughter,  
7 Allie Kate, are all watching from home, Chairman, in  
8 Hattiesburg, Mississippi, but represented here by Jamie  
9 Jones and McGee, and a host of West Point classmates, other  
10 family and friends from across the country.

11 It was my late father and mother, both career school  
12 teachers who instilled in me and my siblings a desire, even  
13 an obligation, to live a life of public service and to do so  
14 with honor and integrity. My father served 15 terms in the  
15 Virginia House of Delegates where he worked in bipartisan  
16 fashion to advance the best interest of his district in the  
17 old dominion.

18 If confirmed, I will work in the same spirit of  
19 relationship building and bipartisanship. My own life as a  
20 public servant began with a 28-year military career,  
21 including commands in the 82nd Airborne Division, where 2  
22 hour recall and 18 hours to wheels up were the readiness  
23 standard, the 101st Airborne Division, where in my  
24 formation, were over 80 helicopters and 4,000 aerosol troops

1 in the 10th Mountain Division, followed by four years as an  
2 education leader here in Washington, DC working for Michelle  
3 Rhee and then in Raleigh, North Carolina, and then as  
4 Secretary of Transportation for North Carolina.

5 Having participated as a soldier in planning and  
6 executing training operations, exercises and/or combat in  
7 the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Haiti, Panama,  
8 Bosnia, Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Iraq, and  
9 Afghanistan, my experience has well prepared me for  
10 continued service to our nation. Having commanded and led  
11 organizations, both military and civilian, consisting of 35  
12 men to 25,000 personnel, I understand the personnel and  
13 readiness requirements to defend our nation.

14 Having served in a governor's cabinet and as a  
15 superintendent of the 16th largest school system in the  
16 nation, I understand and respect the roles and  
17 responsibilities of executive branches and legislative  
18 bodies. As a leader across a vast array of critical  
19 government agencies and private businesses for the last 44  
20 years, I have participated in some fashion in the  
21 development, integration, and implementation of policies  
22 around recruiting, retention, and transition to civilian  
23 life, military health on and off the battlefield, K through  
24 12 education, unit readiness, reporting personnel and



1 equipment readiness, family readiness, training standards,  
2 safety standards, particularly with respect to blasts and  
3 aviation.

4 If confirmed, my initial goals will be to focus on  
5 these areas with an eye on aligning personnel policy with  
6 national security imperatives while increasing lethality in  
7 the Warrior Ethos. I will continue to listen, learn, and  
8 lead, as I build a team that allows me to make the best  
9 recommendations to the Secretary and the President. And I  
10 will always, as I've demonstrated over my decades of  
11 service, make my highest priority the health and welfare of  
12 our brave men and women in uniform, and our DoD civilians  
13 and contract force.

14 I'm grateful for your consideration of my nomination,  
15 and I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

16 [The prepared statement of General Tata follows:]

17 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Tata. Now, Ms.  
2 Sutton, your opening statement.

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1           STATEMENT OF MS. KATHERINE E. SUTTON NOMINATED TO BE  
2   ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR CYBER POLICY

3           Ms. Sutton:   Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and  
4   distinguished members of this committee, good morning.  I  
5   want to thank President Trump for nominating me for this  
6   position, and Secretary Hegseth and Deputy Secretary  
7   Feinberg for their support.

8           I'm honored to be here today.  Thank you also, Senator  
9   Rounds, for your kind introduction, and my sincere thanks to  
10   the committee members for taking the time to meet with me  
11   this week in preparation for this hearing.  I am deeply  
12   humbled to be nominated as the second Assistant Secretary of  
13   Defense for Cyber Policy.  President Trump's strategy of  
14   peace through strength requires a cyber force capable of  
15   defending the homeland, deterring China, and strengthening  
16   burden, sharing with our allies and partners.

17          For more than two decades, I've been focused on  
18   safeguarding our networks, protecting our information and  
19   data, and defending our nation.  Before I proceed, I would  
20   like to take a moment to recognize my family who is with me  
21   here today.

22          My in-laws, Steve and Betsy Mills traveled from St.  
23   Louis to be here and have always welcomed me as part of  
24   their family.  My parents, Steve and Stephanie Sutton, are

1 also here and have been my greatest supporters. I'm  
2 grateful for their unwavering love and their profound  
3 influence in shaping who I have become today. My husband,  
4 Rob Mills, who has been my steadfast partner through all of  
5 life's adventures, is also here by my side.

6 Rob is a hardware engineer who has spent his career  
7 also supporting national security programs and working to  
8 make our country more secure. I would not be where I am  
9 today without his constant support and partnership. And  
10 thank you to all of my friends and family watching virtually  
11 this morning. I'm grateful for all of your support.

12 While I began my career as an electrical engineer at  
13 Sandia National Labs, it was my parents, small business  
14 owners of a small cybersecurity company who inspired my  
15 passion for technology and instilled in me a sense of  
16 dedication, commitment, and service, and also the importance  
17 of secure computing and a strong password.

18 Over the last 20 years, I've held a variety of  
19 technical and leadership roles across high impact national  
20 security programs in nuclear weapons, space, and cyber that  
21 have prepared me well to execute the responsibilities of the  
22 Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy. I have  
23 successfully delivered programs, led multidisciplinary  
24 teams, and advised on key research and development programs.

1 Through these roles, I have developed a strong  
2 foundation and honed my abilities to manage complex  
3 government programs, engage stakeholders, and integrate  
4 strategic planning with technical innovation. The cyber  
5 domain is complex and fast developing, requiring us to stay  
6 ahead of our adversaries, especially when faced with the  
7 threats posed by nations like China.

8 China's growing cyber capabilities and its ongoing  
9 attempts to target our infrastructure, underscore the  
10 critical importance of bolstering our own cyber  
11 capabilities. Although the United States has made  
12 significant strides in cybersecurity, we must act with  
13 urgency to accelerate the development and integration of new  
14 technologies like AI that will ensure our continued cyber  
15 superiority.

16 Throughout my career, I've consistently prioritized the  
17 support of our war fighters, ensuring they have the  
18 technologies and the resources needed to accomplish their  
19 missions. From my early work on critical nuclear weapons  
20 and satellite systems at Sandia, to the policy and  
21 legislation I shaped and championed as a professional staff  
22 member in both the House Army Services Committee and this  
23 committee, and most recently, as the chief technology  
24 advisor at U.S. Cyber Command, I've been committed to

1 providing our military with the best tools available.

2 I believe the key to success in the cyber domain is a  
3 combination of talent, technology, and agility. A lesson I  
4 learned throughout my professional career is that our  
5 talented civilians and uniform service members that have the  
6 right training and tools are able to accomplish great  
7 things. Secretary Hegseth has made it clear that the  
8 Department of Defense must act with confidence and decisive  
9 action to reestablish deterrence and defend our homeland.

10 I have taken that guidance to heart and if confirmed,  
11 will work across the department to eliminate barriers, and  
12 accelerate opportunities in cyberspace. As technology  
13 continues to evolve, we must remain agile and adapt to the  
14 changing environment. Our cyber forces must be well-  
15 trained, ready, and equipped to excel in this dynamic  
16 landscape.

17 In closing, if confirmed, I look forward to working  
18 with Congress and this committee to ensure the department  
19 remains supported and resourced to execute our strategies in  
20 cyberspace, deter our adversaries, and defend the homeland.  
21 I look forward to your questions.

22 [The prepared statement of Ms. Sutton follows:]

23 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

24

1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Ms. Sutton, and  
2 thank you both. I now will move to standard questions which  
3 are required of all civilian nominees. I ask that you keep  
4 your microphones on and answer either yes or no as I ask the  
5 questions. First, have you adhered to ethical laws and  
6 regulations governing conflicts of interest?

7 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

8 Chairman Wicker: Have you assumed any duties or taken  
9 any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the  
10 confirmation process?

11 [Both witnesses answered in the negative.]

12 Chairman Wicker: 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 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

1 or denial in providing such records?

2 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

8 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

9 Chairman Wicker: Will you cooperate in providing  
10 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional  
11 requests?

12 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

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

15 [Both witnesses answered in the affirmative.]

16 Chairman Wicker: Now we have completed the required  
17 questions, and now we will move to a series of questions and  
18 each Senator will be allotted five minutes.

19 Mr. Tata, let's talk about recruiting qualified  
20 candidates for the military when nearly one quarter of  
21 soldiers recruited in 2022 failed to complete their initial  
22 contracts. These were supposedly qualified. They came into  
23 the service and did not complete their contract. There is a  
24 program in the Army known as Future Soldier Preparatory



1 Course, FSPC, to help prepare people that are not qualified  
2 to come in and participate.

3 The data shows that fully one quarter of FSPC attendees  
4 don't make it the whole 24 months of service, they failed to  
5 complete their requirement. And that's compared to 17.5  
6 percent of recruits that do attend. So, this is of  
7 questionable success so far, shall we say? How are we going  
8 to mitigate this? Is it true that to your knowledge, we're  
9 doing a little better right now, but how can you answer the  
10 real concerns about the overall quality of recruits entering  
11 the service as well as their ability to meet their contract?

12 General Tata: Chairman, thank you for that question.  
13 Right now, recruiting and retention are surging. And so, I  
14 would like to lay that out. But to your point, we have one  
15 in four military aged men and women that are even eligible  
16 to join the service because of medical disqualification or  
17 other types of disqualifications.

18 And so to ameliorate that system or that issue, and to  
19 better get after and recruit young men and women, I think we  
20 need better access to high schools, and I think we need  
21 other programs like the one that you're talking about that  
22 can help onboard and train and get the ethos, the Warrior  
23 Ethos, the ethos of service penetrating down to the high  
24 school level.

1 I saw this as a school leader of 24 high schools in  
2 Raleigh, North Carolina, bringing in JROTC, which I know is  
3 not a recruiting tool, but also using other programs to help  
4 recruiters access high schools. I think it's one of the key  
5 elements.

6 Chairman Wicker: Let me interject there. It's not a  
7 recruiting tool, but it is a citizenship builder for sure,  
8 is it not?

9 General Tata: Absolutely. Creating citizens that  
10 understand the Constitution, that understand that that we  
11 are a proud nation, I think is part of building that ethos  
12 that is we are trying to capture in the department.

13 Chairman Wicker. Well, we may ask you to expand on  
14 that on the record, but let me say that this committee in  
15 recent NDAs has required the department to have more units  
16 of junior ROTC at high schools across the country. And we  
17 mean for that to be followed.

18 [The information appears in the appendix:]

19 / COMMITTEE INSERT  
20  
21  
22  
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24

1 Chairman Wicker: Now, Ms. Sutton, how do you think we  
2 stack up against the axis of aggressors that we face in  
3 terms of cyber superiority?

4 Ms. Sutton: Senator, as I have watched the domain  
5 evolve over the last decade, it is very clear that our  
6 adversaries are becoming not only increasingly capable, but  
7 also increasingly aggressive in the domain.

8 Chairman Wicker: With regard to China, how do we stack  
9 up? Ahead of them?

10 Ms. Sutton: The United States maintains the most  
11 capable cyber force in the world and continues to evolve the  
12 skill sets of our very talented men and women in uniform, as  
13 well as the civilians and contractors that support them.

14 Chairman Wicker: Who's gaining the fastest? Russia,  
15 Iran, North Korea, China?

16 Ms. Sutton: China has grown immensely in size and is  
17 aggressively looking at adoption of technologies like  
18 artificial intelligence to scale their capabilities.  
19 However, the United States has taken a lead and we still  
20 maintain some of the best technical talent in the world that  
21 are developing these technologies, and the talent within our  
22 workforce to rapidly adopt that.

23 If confirmed, I look forward to making sure that we  
24 have all the right policies in place and resources so that

1 we can continue this path of maintaining our superiority.

2 Chairman Wicker: All right well, thank you very much.

3 There'll be further questions from me. Senator Reed, you

4 are now recognized.

5 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

6 Thank you for your presence here today. Mr. Tata, following

7 President Trump's election, you called for a purge of

8 Pentagon leadership, including firing all four-star general

9 officers and senior career civilian employees. These are

10 traditionally apolitical positions and you seem to take a

11 very political approach.

12 In fact, significant firings did take place. The

13 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the lawyers in the

14 departments of the Navy, Air Force, and Army, the Inspector

15 General was fired. In fact, it's very disturbing because if

16 you want to disregard the law, the first thing you do is get

17 rid of the people who enforce the law and advise you on the

18 law.

19 These are firings, which you were prompted to

20 encourage. Have they caused us distrust in turmoil within

21 the department?

22 General Tata: Senator or Ranking Member, could you ask

23 that last question? I had a hard time hearing you.

24 Senator Reed: I apologize. Do you think this pattern

1 of firings and of talking about the loyalty at all to the  
2 President, not to the Constitution, causes problems within  
3 the military?

4 General Tata: Right. Ranking Member, thank you for  
5 the opportunity to have this conversation. Those remarks  
6 that I made were in direct response to a CNN report,  
7 credible report, that discussed several admirals and  
8 generals talking about how to resist President Trump and his  
9 civilian leadership.

10 So, I was actually talking about defending the  
11 Constitution. The admirals in generals don't get to choose  
12 which lawful orders that they follow. The admirals and  
13 generals work for the civilian leadership, and that civilian  
14 leadership is codified in Article II of our Constitution.  
15 And so I found it disturbing to say the least, that we had  
16 admirals and generals reported by CNN discussing, resisting  
17 the President, resisting the President's vision and  
18 directives, lawful orders.

19 And I also found it disturbing that the chairman and  
20 the Chiefs did not come out and say that this is  
21 unacceptable. This is not happening. We're going to have a  
22 review to find out if this CNN report is accurate, because  
23 we cannot have admirals and generals usurping the authority  
24 of the civilian leadership and certainly the President of

1 the United States.

2 Senator Reed: Mr. Tata, the key here is lawful order,  
3 and actually the CNN article, "Pentagon officials are  
4 holding informal discussions about how the Department of  
5 Defense would respond if Donald Trump issues orders to  
6 deploy active duty troops domestically, which raises  
7 significant questions of the legality of that and fire large  
8 swaths of apolitical staffers."

9 The situation here, and it's still very realistic, is  
10 whether the President will ask the military to follow  
11 unlawful orders. You have someone who's just said recently  
12 he may or may not use the due process, which is a  
13 constitutional right for every person in the United States.

14 So, if we're not having a serious discussion about  
15 whether officers will follow unlawful orders, I think we're  
16 failing ourselves. Let me quickly change the subject in  
17 that you are responsible for the department of Defense  
18 education activity. They have announced banning books  
19 throughout the DOD education system, including To Kill a  
20 Mockingbird.

21 Would you urge that To kill a Mockingbird be prevented  
22 from being used in a school?

23 General Tata: Ranking Member Reed, my experience as an  
24 education leader is that students need access to a full

1 range of viewpoints and opportunities to read and if  
2 confirmed, I look forward to getting into the DoDEA and  
3 understanding what the media centers have in there and what  
4 they don't have in there.

5 Senator Reed: You're probably aware of the fact that  
6 when Peter Hegseth was in Germany, there was a demonstration  
7 on post by parents objecting to these purges of books. In  
8 fact, I was astounded because that's a first. I would never  
9 conceive of a defense secretary being protested at all on a  
10 military post.

11 But the other thing too is I think, which is involved  
12 in this issue of To Kill a Mockingbird is, the only  
13 conceivable reason that I could think anyone suggest should  
14 be taken off the shelves, is that it does reveal aspects of  
15 racial discrimination in the United States. And this whole  
16 effort to erase our history is very disconcerting.

17 And I would hope as you suggest that you would go back  
18 and look very carefully at these banned books and banned  
19 programs and banned everything else. Because erasing  
20 history is not going to be a strength for our military  
21 services. Ms. Sutton, I have questions in writing for you.  
22 Thank you.

23 [The information appears in the appendix:]

24 / COMMITTEE INSERT

1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. And Senator Cotton, you  
2 are next.

3 Senator Cotton: Mr. Tata, you mentioned that the  
4 recruiting and retention crisis has improved somewhat over  
5 the first 100 days of the Trump administration, and that's a  
6 great credit to the President, to the Secretary of Defense.  
7 It's still not quite where we need it to get though, after  
8 years of decline under President Biden.

9 One thing that I think has been a challenge is that  
10 we're not fishing in a big enough pond. The military opt-in  
11 sites, the standards that exclude many, maybe most young  
12 Americans from service, like academic standards, health  
13 conditions, and other requirements. Obviously, some of  
14 those are serious. We can't have people with serious  
15 psychiatric illnesses or academic deficiencies in the  
16 military.

17 But I do think we've gotten a little bit too strict on  
18 these things, especially in certain anecdotes I've come  
19 across or members of this committee have as well. You know,  
20 a young man who was prescribed antidepressants when he was  
21 in his early teens because his parents were going through a  
22 divorce and hasn't been on them for six or seven years. Or  
23 someone who maybe injured a hip or a knee playing junior  
24 high sports and six years later is disqualified from the



1 military because of that, after which they continued to play  
2 sports at the high school level as well.

3 Do you agree that we should find ways to expand the  
4 eligibility pool so our recruiters can be fishing in a  
5 bigger pond?

6 General Tata: Senator, I do.

7 Senator Cotton: Thank you for that. One challenge  
8 here is the GENESIS program, which I know has done a lot to  
9 help our military get a better picture and catch all of the  
10 records that recruits have. But also, I do think by  
11 exposing some of these things that are fairly trivial or  
12 very old and haven't led young men and women from leading a  
13 full and complete life that take them in service, is that it  
14 makes it harder for them to get in, and waiver process is  
15 very complicated.

16 Do you think we need to take a look at, at pushing that  
17 waiver authority down, pushing it down into the chain of  
18 command and recruiting battalions to make it easier for  
19 people with these conditions that clearly don't impair their  
20 military service to get promptly onboarded into the  
21 recruiting process and then ultimately into basic training  
22 so they're not sitting on the sidelines for 60, 90, 120 days  
23 and finding other jobs elsewhere?

24 General Tata: Senator, I do. Anything we can do to

1 speed up that process is good.

2 Senator Cotton: And then finally, some of my old  
3 friends who have served in recruiting battalion headquarters  
4 speak of the doctors at the MEPS around the country as  
5 seemingly being paid on commission by how many recruits they  
6 can disqualify from serving.

7 Do you think we should take a look at, at the  
8 incentives that the doctors have at our MEPS stations, and  
9 also whether we have the right number of providers at all  
10 those stations to move all those recruits along. So when a  
11 young man or woman expresses interest in serving, we're  
12 getting them promptly through the process and hopefully  
13 getting them to their ship date?

14 General Tata: Senator, I agree with you.

15 Senator Cotton: Thank you. Ms. Sutton, 30 years ago  
16 at the dawn of the Internet there was lots of rosy  
17 optimistic thinking about how it was going to revolutionize  
18 the way human beings live, and we're going to connect the  
19 world, and there were going to be no borders or boundaries,  
20 and it was going to help us bridge our differences. And 30  
21 years later, it certainly has done a lot to improve the way  
22 we live.

23 It's kept families connected across long distances and  
24 help people reconnect with classmates and get telehealth

1 what they otherwise might not have been able to receive.  
2 But there's also a lot of things like sexual exploitation  
3 and money laundering and fraud on the Internet as well. So  
4 is, is it safe to say 30 years on that human nature is the  
5 same wherever we find it, and the greatness and the  
6 frailties in the real world, human virtue, and vice in the  
7 real world, we see reflected in the cyber world as well?

8 Ms. Sutton: Senator, I think that's a fair  
9 characterization.

10 Senator Cotton: I think so, too. So, isn't it  
11 probably fair to say that strategic concepts like deterrence  
12 and escalation that operate on the real-world battlefield  
13 also play out the same way in the cyber world?

14 Ms. Sutton: I couldn't agree with you more.

15 Senator Cotton: And do you think we've done enough  
16 over the last four years to deter our adversaries like China  
17 and Russia and Iran and North Korea by being essentially in  
18 a defensive crouch in the cyber world and not developing  
19 offensive plans and capabilities that can hold at risk the  
20 things that they hold most dear?

21 Ms. Sutton: Senator, when I led a red team at Sandia,  
22 we had a common phrase that said, "The defender has to be  
23 wrong every time. The adversary only has to be right once."  
24 I think that goes to show that while we need strong

1 defenses, we are not going to deter the adversary with  
2 defenses only. And that if confirmed, I will work to  
3 strengthen our offensive cyber capabilities to ensure the  
4 President has the options he needs to respond to this  
5 growing threat.

6 Senator Cotton: Thank you. I appreciate that. I  
7 couldn't agree more. And I think it's so vital that the  
8 world knows that whatever any country can do to us in the  
9 cyber world, we can do as much and more to them as well.  
10 Thank you.

11 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator  
12 Shaheen.

13 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Tata, I  
14 appreciate the service that you and your family have  
15 provided to this country. I think you are rightly proud of  
16 that. I'm proud of the service that I and my family, my  
17 father, my husband, my son-in-law have provided to the  
18 country, the service that we provided to our communities.

19 But while I appreciate your service, I don't appreciate  
20 your partisan tweets, your partisan statements on Fox News  
21 and other outlets. I don't think that's helpful to heal the  
22 divide in this country. I don't appreciate that because I'm  
23 a Democrat you say that I would support Hamas or Hezbollah  
24 or Iran. I've spent my whole career in the Senate doing

1 everything I can to fight Hezbollah and Hamas and Iran. And  
2 while we may disagree on how best to do that, I don't think  
3 we should question people's motives who are trying to serve  
4 this country.

5 So, I hope that Senator Tillis is correct, that you've  
6 learned from those past statements and how inappropriate and  
7 divisive they are, and that you're going to take a different  
8 approach if you're confirmed for this position.

9 General Tata: Senator, those were out of character  
10 comments. I regret making those comments. Five years ago,  
11 I submitted an apology letter to this committee about those  
12 comments. I have 45 years of solutions-oriented leadership.  
13 That was out of character. I regret it, and I can guarantee  
14 you that I will be, if confirmed, a political leader that is  
15 trying to take care of the men and women in uniform in their  
16 families and the DoD civilians.

17 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. In February, Secretary  
18 Hegseth announced a reduction in force at DoD to cut up to  
19 75,000 workers. And on March 18th, the acting Under  
20 Secretary of Defense for P and R issued guidance directing  
21 that, "Positions that depot, shipyards, arsenals, and  
22 maintenance facilities would be exempt from the current  
23 civilian hiring freeze."

24 I visited the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard along with

1 Senator King last month and with the new Secretary of the  
2 Navy, and we were informed that nearly 150 personnel have  
3 received initial job offers from the shipyard, but they  
4 haven't been able to begin their hirings because they've not  
5 been fully processed.

6 So, that means we have critical roles that are open.  
7 One of the suggestions for the delay was because of the work  
8 of OPM, the Office of Personnel Management. So, if  
9 confirmed, you will oversee civilian hiring for DoD. How  
10 will you work with your counterparts and other agencies to  
11 eliminate those kinds of bureaucratic holdups? How do we  
12 move those hires that are in the pipeline?

13 General Tata: Senator, I share your concern  
14 particularly when this body and the President have all said  
15 they want to build more ships. If we have welders, for  
16 example, off ramping through the deferred resignation  
17 program, we've got a hiring freeze, we've got other cuts of  
18 probationary personnel.

19 If confirmed and I get into the position, one of my  
20 priorities will be aligning national security and national  
21 defense priorities like ship building with personnel policy  
22 to see where the gaps are, how can we accelerate, for  
23 example, ship building if we don't have welders to weld the  
24 ships, to use a very simple example. But I imagine that

1 there's several different examples such as this and if  
2 confirmed, I look forward to immediately figuring out where  
3 those gaps are and aligning them with the national security  
4 priorities of this body and of the President.

5 Senator Shaheen: Well, I appreciate that, and I  
6 certainly agree that we need to look at all of our policies  
7 if we're going to address ship building. Our public  
8 shipyards, of course, do maintenance and repair on our ships  
9 as opposed to ship building. But it's the same challenge,  
10 and I think we need to better align what we're trying to  
11 accomplish with the policies that we put in place.

12 Ms. Sutton, thank you for being here and for your  
13 service to this committee. We've seen as other questioners  
14 have said an increase in cyber-attacks over the last few  
15 years. They've affected our infrastructure. Do you think  
16 it's important to maintain our forward posture and offensive  
17 cyber operations against Russia and among our other  
18 adversaries that, that's important to our national defense?

19 Ms. Sutton: Senator, I couldn't agree with you more.  
20 One of the unique challenges in the cyber domain, is the  
21 threats that we face every day. And it's not just from a  
22 single adversary. It ranges from highly capable nation  
23 states like China, Russia, and Iran, down to criminals  
24 engaging in ransomware for financial motives. And to be

1     successful, we're going to have to counter all of those and  
2     keep our focus on all of the threats that we face.

3             Senator Shaheen:   Thank you.

4             Chairman Wicker:   Thank you, Senator Shaheen.   Senator  
5     Rounds.

6             Senator Rounds:   Thank you, Mr. Chairman.   First of  
7     all, to both of you, thank you for your continued service to  
8     our country.   Ms. Sutton, look at air, land, sea, space,  
9     cyberspace, the next real conflicts that we're going to see  
10    will probably start with cyberspace activity.   If you are  
11    confirmed, what will your priorities be as the Assistant  
12    Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy?

13            Ms. Sutton:   Senator, thank you for the kind  
14    introduction this morning and for your leadership over the  
15    years on making sure that the department is appropriately  
16    postured for cyber and AI.   As you mentioned, the cyber  
17    domain is continuing to evolve, and the one constant that  
18    I've seen in being involved in this domain for over two  
19    decades, is that the rate of change is exponential.

20            My top priority if confirmed in this role, will be to  
21    address this change with speed and agility in the  
22    department.   As you're well aware in 2018, there was a  
23    series of activities that enabled the offensive posture that  
24    the department is undergoing today, both establishment by



1 President Trump of NSPM 13, the process to do cyber  
2 operations, as well as this committee's definition of  
3 traditional military authorities for cyber.

4 I believe we're at a point where we need to reevaluate  
5 those and make sure that we're postured to be able to  
6 respond to the increasing speed of cyber-attacks, and that  
7 we are able to address the incoming impacts of AI. To do  
8 that, my second and third priorities will be to make sure  
9 that we have the talent that we need to understand this  
10 dynamic environment, and that we have the technologies and  
11 we're leveraging them quickly to respond to challenges like  
12 AI.

13 Senator Rounds: After having worked with you directly  
14 for about four years, and the amount of knowledge that you  
15 have in this, I truly can't think of anyone who is more  
16 qualified for the position that you have been nominated for.  
17 And I look forward to not only supporting, but helping you  
18 to get in and to get to work as soon as possible. Clearly,  
19 we need to be moving forward as quickly as possible with  
20 regard to our cyber capabilities, both offensively and  
21 defensively. And I thank you for stepping forward once  
22 again. Thank you.

23 Mr. Tata, part of the opportunity that we have here is  
24 to ask questions regarding items of not only the regular

1 Army, but also the National Guard. And I want to ask you a  
2 question about that. But I also in listening to your  
3 comments earlier, I wanted to give you an opportunity to  
4 respond. I think the Ranking Member asked a very specific  
5 question regarding, whether or not you felt that it would be  
6 necessary, or would you consider banning To Kill a  
7 Mockingbird.

8 And I know that as we work our way through these  
9 processes, sometimes it catches a person off guard. I  
10 wanted to give you an opportunity. I think it was a pretty  
11 specific question by the Ranking Member, and I think if you  
12 are comfortable with your answer, that's fine, but I think  
13 that will become the headline of the day will be that you  
14 did not specifically respond to that.

15 I want to give you an opportunity to quell that if you  
16 would like. Would you like to --

17 General Tata: Senator, absolutely. I read To Kill a  
18 Mockingbird in high school, and I see no issue with To Kill  
19 a Mockingbird in schools. I'm not confirmed, I'm not in the  
20 position, I didn't make the decision. But, certainly, if  
21 confirmed, I look forward to reviewing that and making sure  
22 that our students have access to a wide variety of materials  
23 that inform their learning.

24 Senator Rounds: Thank you. I just wanted to give you

1 that opportunity to perhaps clarify that answer. So thank  
2 you.

3 General Tata: It's a classic and I read it and my  
4 belief is that we should have To Kill a Mockingbird in  
5 schools.

6 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Let me talk about the  
7 National Guard for just a second. Given the National  
8 Guard's increased activity for both domestic and overseas  
9 missions, would you commit to fully funding their annual  
10 training requirements, even if it means diverting some  
11 resources from other locations?

12 General Tata: Senator, I think Reserve and National  
13 Guard Training is paramount. I was executive officer, Vice  
14 Chief Dick Cody '04, '05, when we were deploying National  
15 Guard Reserve to and from operation Iraqi and Enduring  
16 Freedom. We were moving some 350,000 troops either into  
17 combat or out of combat or training them. So having trained  
18 and ready forces is paramount, and certainly fully funding  
19 that training is part of being ready.

20 Senator Rounds: Fair to say that right now, we really  
21 can't go to war unless we also enlist and engage our  
22 National Guard today?

23 General Tata: I think that's an absolutely accurate  
24 statement. National Guard provides the combat support

1 capability. The Reserve provides that critical logistic  
2 capability. The total force is what makes us so lethal.

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

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Rounds. Senator  
5 Hirono.

6 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to  
7 both of you and your families. To ensure the fitness to  
8 serve, I ask the following two initial questions of the  
9 nominees to any of the committees on which I sit. So I'll  
10 ask the two of you. We'll start with Mr. Tata, and then go  
11 to Ms. Sutton.

12 Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made  
13 unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal  
14 or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

15 [Both witnesses answered in the negative.]

16 Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or  
17 entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

18 [Both witnesses answered in the negative.]

19 Senator Hirono: Mr. Tata, the position you've been  
20 nominated for, Under Secretary of Defense or Personnel and  
21 Readiness is among the most consequential in the DoD, and  
22 you would be responsible for setting policies that affect  
23 the lives of more than 3 million uniformed and civilian  
24 members of our military community, from recruitment and

1 readiness to healthcare, family support for structure, and  
2 this position requires integrity, sound judgment, and an  
3 unwavering commitment to serving all who wear the uniform  
4 and those who support them.

5 Your record gives me pause and causes me to question  
6 whether you possess the necessary qualities for this role.  
7 You have made inflammatory and deeply offensive public  
8 statements, calling President Obama a terrorist leader,  
9 claiming that Islam is the most oppressive, violent  
10 religion, and promoting dangerous conspiracy theories. And  
11 these were slips of the tongue or out of character as you  
12 noted today. They were repeated, deliberate, and public.

13 Moreover, there were coupled with statements that  
14 disparage senior military leaders, suggested a politicized  
15 purge of the officer corps and supported unlawful use of  
16 force under a suspended Posse Comitatus Act. You have also  
17 been found by the Army Inspector General to have violated  
18 the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which raises  
19 additional concerns about your adherence to military  
20 standards of conduct.

21 And according to multiple reports and letters,  
22 including bipartisan opposition from military, former  
23 military leaders, your nomination is widely perceived as  
24 being driven by political loyalty rather than professional

1 qualifications. You'll be tasked with leading a diverse  
2 workforce, one that includes Muslim service members, women  
3 in combat roles, LGBTQ personnel, and senior leaders who you  
4 have attacked or proposed be fired.

5         Given this record, I question whether you would be able  
6 to lead with impartiality, dignity, and professionalism. I  
7 do have some questions for you. The military must remain a  
8 non-partisan institution guided by constitutional principles  
9 and civilian control. You previously endorsed using  
10 military forces, as I noted, in a domestic context, by  
11 suggesting congress suspend Posse Comitatus.

12         Under what circumstances do you believe such an action  
13 would be justified?

14         General Tata: Senator, I appreciate being able to have  
15 this conversation. Specifically, what I was referring to is  
16 the border where the military is supporting the Border  
17 Patrol, and whether or not that requires suspension of Posse  
18 Comitatus, I don't know. But the idea that we need better  
19 border security is really what I was saying in that remark.

20         Senator Hirono: Well, we do have military personnel at  
21 the border. In fact, last year, the former National Guard  
22 Bureau chief testified that the border security mission by  
23 the military provides no military training value to  
24 Guardsmen and does not prepare troops for great power

1 competition. A 2021 GAO report found multiple units lost  
2 critical training opportunities due to deployments to the  
3 border impairing operational readiness.

4 Wouldn't you agree, Mr. Tata, that sending thousands of  
5 troops to the border not to perform military functions,  
6 they're performing civilian functions, one we hope that  
7 Homeland Security would be able to do. But wouldn't you  
8 agree that this kind of deployment and use of troops  
9 negatively affects our military readiness?

10 General Tata: Senator, border security is national  
11 security and the inherently military functions that the  
12 Reserve and National Guard in particular perform  
13 logistically to support the operations at the border, I  
14 think are right in line with preparation for combat  
15 operations.

16 Senator Hirono: Obviously that we have a disagreement  
17 on that point because the Homeland security and others  
18 should be performing that function because we have had  
19 testimony that says that the military at the border is not  
20 performing the kind of functions that would really enhance  
21 their ability to serve there.

22 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

23 Senator Hirono: You testified that you would comply  
24 with lawful orders. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, I will submit

1 that I did have a question about whether or not President  
2 Trump at one point ordered protestors to be shot in the leg.  
3 And my question was whether you would comply with such an  
4 order.

5 Chairman Wicker: And he'll take that for the record.

6 [The information appears in the appendix:]

7 / COMMITTEE INSERT



1 Senator Hirono: Thank you.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator Hirono.  
3 Senator Tuberville.

4 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks  
5 for both of your willingness to serve. Ms. Sutton, the  
6 President released the top line of his Fiscal Year '26  
7 budget last week, and we look forward to learning all the  
8 details of the proposal in weeks ahead. We do know that  
9 this year's budget request for cyber operations with 14.5B  
10 and up 1B, and for the previous year. Given the rapid  
11 environment of the landscape in cyber, do you believe this  
12 funding level is sufficient to meet our security needs?

13 Ms. Sutton: Senator, I share your concern with making  
14 sure we are balancing the resources available with the  
15 growing threat as you indicated. One of the primary  
16 responsibilities if confirmed in this role, is to review the  
17 budget and to certify that to ensure it's necessary.

18 One of the things that is particularly unique about the  
19 cyber domain is that many of the capabilities are a software  
20 capability. And so, investments in this domain can have a  
21 very immediate response into providing options for the  
22 President and Secretary, and look forward to having the  
23 opportunity to highlight where we can better integrate this  
24 and perhaps shore up additional resources as needed.

1           Senator Tuberville: What role does cyber play in the  
2 future of possibly the Golden Dome?

3           Ms. Sutton: Senator, in my current role, I have not  
4 been involved in the specifics of that discussion, but I  
5 think that what we see with all of our weapons systems is  
6 the importance of building in cybersecurity from the  
7 beginning to make sure that as we put these capabilities  
8 out, that we're able to defend them, and that they're secure  
9 against what will be an attack surface that our adversaries  
10 will definitely look to exploit.

11          Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Mr. Tata, I reviewed  
12 your record, public Service, combat, veteran, school  
13 superintendent, secretary of transportation, leading tens of  
14 thousands of military members and civil servants conducting  
15 complex missions. Anything you hadn't done? My goodness.  
16 Now you want to do this?

17          General Tata: Senator, I appreciate that comment.

18          Senator Tuberville: Well, thank you for your service.  
19 But instead of exploring the experience, my colleagues seem  
20 to be focused on some things that you've said in the past,  
21 and I find this interesting given the last four years where  
22 a lot of the democratic party continue to call conservatives  
23 Nazis, fascist, threats to democracy. You know, it goes  
24 both ways here. You know, the previous administration fully

1    weaponized our justice department to attack, punish their  
2    political opposition, profile grandmothers thrown into  
3    prison for peaceful protests. Just goes on and on. Out of  
4    curiosity, Mr. Tata, have you labeled people you disagree  
5    with Nazis?

6            General Tata: Senator, I have not.

7            Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Have you ever  
8    weaponized your previous offices to punish your political  
9    opponent?

10           General Tata: Senator, I have not.

11           Senator Tuberville: I didn't think so. Yesterday  
12    Secretary Hegseth announced a two-phased approach to  
13    reducing our top-level military. Phase One is a 20 percent  
14    reduction of active four-star generals and flag officers, as  
15    well as a 20 percent from the National Guard Bureau. Phase  
16    two will be an additional 10 percent. The Under Secretary  
17    for Personnel and Readiness will be leading this initiative.  
18    I'm interested in your thoughts on this announcement.

19           General Tata: Senator, anytime that we're talking  
20    about tooth to tail ratio, I think it's a good conversation.  
21    You know, the Secretary's comment about the number of  
22    generals when we were in World War II versus the number we  
23    have today, I think is a stark reminder that perhaps we  
24    become a little bit of a bureaucracy. And so, he talked

1 about a methodical and measured way of going about finding  
2 the structural realignment that would allow for the  
3 reductions he's talking about.

4 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Can we expect a  
5 complimentary effort to reduce the real bloat at OSD and  
6 joint staff, which have increased by two to five times  
7 respectively over the last 25 years, while our total force  
8 numbers have decreased?

9 General Tata: Senator, if confirmed, I would work with  
10 you and the rest of this committee on optimizing the  
11 workforce and the military.

12 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Thank you, Mr.  
13 Chairman.

14 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.  
15 Senator King.

16 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Sutton,  
17 you have probably as much knowledge about the cyber  
18 landscape as anybody in this country. Give us just a few  
19 seconds about how bad is it? I don't think the public  
20 realizes the level of cyber threat that we're under right  
21 now, and the fact that it is happening right now in  
22 institutions across the government, but also in the private  
23 sector. I guess my question is, how bad is it?

24 Ms. Sutton: So, Senator, as our society has grown

1 increasingly dependent on internet connected items, if you  
2 think about the number of things in your home that are  
3 connected to the internet, if we think about across the  
4 military, how we're going to need data connectivity, that  
5 certainly poses a very large attack surface that the  
6 adversary can go after.

7 Senator King: And 85 percent of that attack surface is  
8 in the private sector. Is that correct?

9 Ms. Sutton: That is correct. Coupled with all of the  
10 technology that's available, like generative AI has made it  
11 very easy and a very low bar to be able to come in and  
12 exploit vulnerabilities in this system.

13 Senator King: Well, we worked together back three or  
14 four years ago in enacting the recommendations of the  
15 Cyberspace Solarium Commission, but the threat has evolved  
16 rapidly since then, and is in fact, even more serious today  
17 than it was just three years ago. Is that correct?

18 Ms. Sutton: I couldn't agree with you more. What I  
19 would also like to highlight, though, is that as the threat  
20 has evolved, so has the department and the federal  
21 government and how we respond, both from posture to be able  
22 to impose cost and defend forward, which is where we have  
23 grown increasingly capable over the last seven years, as  
24 well as working with private industry to take lessons that

1 we've learned from the Department of Defense, where we see  
2 malicious activity, where we see malware, to being able to  
3 share that with private industry so that it gets put into  
4 cybersecurity products that are used across the private  
5 industry to really leverage the knowledge that we gain from  
6 within the Department of Defense to make sure that we're  
7 protecting not only the Department of Defense, but also have  
8 that secondary effect across the nation.

9 Senator King: When we talk about the Department of  
10 Defense, we're also talking about the Defense Industrial  
11 Base, which includes thousands of supply chain contractors  
12 who are also vulnerable, and it creates a very serious  
13 problem in terms of our cyber defenses in a time of  
14 conflict. I would submit that the first three hours of a  
15 major conflict will be all about cyber. Would you agree?

16 Ms. Sutton: I believe that cyber is going to be  
17 fundamental as a domain of warfare in any future conflicts  
18 with adversaries. And one of the unique challenges about  
19 cyber is that much of this activity happens below the level  
20 of armed conflict. So even today, we have our cyber forces  
21 engaging with adversaries below the level of armed conflict  
22 on a daily basis, but will also play a key role in crisis  
23 and conflict going forward.

24 Senator King: Chairman Wicker and Senator Cotton all

1 mentioned deterrence, and I believe that's one of the most  
2 important factors. As I think Senator Cotton characterized  
3 it, we're not going to be able to defend ourselves if we're  
4 in a defensive crouch at all times. We need to have both  
5 the capability for offensive cyber, but also I believe we  
6 need a stated doctrine.

7 Everyone in the world knows our doctrine of deterrence  
8 in nuclear armaments, for example. People should also  
9 understand a doctrine of deterrence that if you attack us in  
10 cyberspace, there will be a response. It may not be cyber,  
11 it may be something else. But one of the problems, as I've  
12 looked back over the past 25 years, we still haven't  
13 responded to the Sony hack. We haven't responded to Volt  
14 Typhoon. There's no price to pay for our adversaries.

15 I hope in your counsels within the Defense department  
16 and the administration, you'll argue for a serious and  
17 substantial cyber deterrent stated policy. If it's not  
18 stated, a deterrent doesn't work.

19 Ms. Sutton: Senator, if confirmed, I look forward to  
20 working with you on the committee, on making sure that we  
21 have the right posture and it's well articulated so that our  
22 adversaries are understanding, but that also we can  
23 prioritize our resources so that we're supporting and well  
24 postured to execute that.

1           Senator King: Thank you very much. General Tata, we  
2       won't have time for extensive questions. This restructuring  
3       of the Pentagon, including an 8 percent reduction in staff,  
4       is something, if that's going to happen, my concern is that  
5       it happened in a more thoughtful and systematic way than  
6       what happened in some of the other areas of our government  
7       over the past two or three months. That kind of cut could  
8       either increase efficiency or destroy morale and undercut  
9       the mission of the department.

10          So that's going to be a major challenge, I think the  
11       major challenge that you face, should you be confirmed in  
12       this position.

13          General Tata: Senator, if confirmed, I look forward to  
14       working with you and this committee on that. And I agree.  
15       Aligning personnel policy with the national security and  
16       defense strategies will become paramount to make sure that  
17       we don't have personnel gaps where we actually need trained  
18       and ready personnel, whether it's in the workforce or on the  
19       front line.

20          Chairman Wicker: Thank you.

21          Senator King: Help the people making those decisions  
22       know what they're doing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23          Chairman Wicker: Senator Budd.

24          Senator Budd: Thank you, Chairman, and congrats to



1 both of you all for your nomination, your willingness to  
2 serve. And Ms. Sutton, I enjoyed our conversation in the  
3 office last week. And you know, we talked about the  
4 importance of attracting and retaining cyber professionals  
5 inside the Department of Defense. If confirmed, how will  
6 you ensure that our military maintains the most qualified  
7 cyber force? Talk about retention a little bit there, if  
8 you will.

9 Ms. Sutton: Senator, I also appreciated the  
10 opportunity to talk through some of these topics in your  
11 office last week, I appreciate you taking the time. My  
12 experience across the cyber domain is that while technology  
13 is incredibly important, it is not going to be effective  
14 without the best and the brightest available to utilize it.  
15 And I believe that the department faces two challenges.

16 The first is bringing them in, recruiting them, but as  
17 you mentioned, also retaining these talented individuals.  
18 And from my experience, some of our most talented operators  
19 and analysts at United States Cyber Command stay in the  
20 forces, not solely for financial incentives, which is  
21 something we certainly need to work through to make sure  
22 that we're compensating our workforce for their skillsets,  
23 but also giving them the ability to stay on mission, to  
24 execute mission, and to defend our nation.

1           That is what brings them into work every day. Many of  
2   them think about this, 24 hours a day work on hobbies at  
3   home, you know, securing their own networks. And those are  
4   the people we really need to focus on bringing in or those  
5   with that passion and just want to get on mission to help  
6   defending our networks.

7           So, if confirmed, I look forward to finding  
8   opportunities, whether it be finding training for them, or  
9   just continuing to keep them doing their jobs to build and  
10  maintain the best cyber force that we can have.

11          Senator Budd: Well, if confirmed, I look forward to  
12  having those ongoing conversations. You know, we've talked  
13  a lot about in this chamber, and I've heard some questions  
14  this morning about the growing cyber threat from adversaries  
15  like Iran, Russia, North Korea, and especially the PRC. So,  
16  Ms. Sutton, how does our military stay ahead?

17          And this may be a bit of a recap, and you may feel like  
18  you're answering these ad infinitum this morning, but if you  
19  would recap for us a little bit or anything new that may  
20  have just occurred to you in this discussion about how we  
21  stay ahead in both defensive and offensive, and especially  
22  the offensive side. I heard my colleague mention that  
23  offensive cyber operations. How do we stay ahead there?

24          Ms. Sutton: I think there's a couple things that are

1 going to be really important. Again, it goes back to  
2 talent, making sure that we have talented young individuals  
3 and empowering them to develop solutions against some of  
4 these challenging problems. But it's also going to be  
5 fundamental that we leverage the strength of the United  
6 States, which is our competitiveness and innovation in tools  
7 like artificial intelligence. And we make sure that we can  
8 bring those tools in and that our operators get a chance to  
9 use them.

10 We often hear the term Valley of Death. I know we  
11 talked about that in your office last week. That's  
12 something that as a committee member on the staff here, we  
13 heard that term on a daily basis. What I think is going to  
14 be important is figuring out how we actually solve that,  
15 which I believe is matching up the developers with the  
16 actual operators and analysts who will be using the tools to  
17 let them try it out before they bring the final product.

18 We've had success in that at Cyber Command through a  
19 program called Constellation in partnership with DARPA. And  
20 I look forward to using that model if confirmed, to be able  
21 to bring innovations from across industry and the rest of  
22 the innovation ecosystem.

23 Senator Budd: You mentioned DARPA. We talked a little  
24 bit about DARPA last week. You know, they've got a number

1 of projects designed to improve cyber resilience. How would  
2 you propose working to scale those across federal government  
3 and across the DoD moving from research projects to DoD wide  
4 programs?

5 Ms. Sutton: I think it's going to be important to  
6 ensure that they understand what the true needs are of our  
7 war fighters, and that we engage them in that process early,  
8 but also that we look at addressing some of the policy and  
9 the training that is going to be needed to allow our war  
10 fighters to adopt this technology correctly.

11 The speed of technology is often outpacing the policies  
12 we have in place to utilize that technology. So, for  
13 example, in the case of artificial intelligence, we need to  
14 make sure we have the right policies for data, and that it's  
15 responsibly used, but also that we are authorizing its use.

16 Senator Budd: So, I just got back from Taiwan and the  
17 Philippines. How would you work with our international  
18 partners and our allies to boost their own cyber  
19 capabilities?

20 Ms. Sutton: There is a tremendous opportunity in  
21 cyberspace for us to share the burden of defending against  
22 what is a common global adversary. And the Department of  
23 Defense has many tools that we use, including our hunt  
24 forward partnerships, where we partner with foreign nations

1 to identify malicious cyber activity on their networks and  
2 help them defend that, as well as defend the entire  
3 ecosystem.

4 If confirmed, I look forward to making sure that we're  
5 continuing those and that they're prioritized to the  
6 President and the Secretary's priorities going forward.

7 Senator Budd: Thank you both.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Budd. Senator  
9 Peters.

10 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General  
11 Tata, congratulations on your nomination and thank you  
12 certainly for your past service to our country and your  
13 willingness to serve again.

14 In February, President Trump fired General CQ Brown  
15 Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and replaced  
16 several top officers including the Chief of Naval  
17 Operations, the CYBERCOM commander, the NSA director, and  
18 the judge advocates generals of the Army, Navy, as well as  
19 the Air Force.

20 As a former service member myself, I'm deeply concerned  
21 about the impact of purging high level officers for  
22 basically simply following policies and legal orders that  
23 were put into place by prior department leadership,  
24 regardless of which party is in power. Since the founding

1 of our country, one of the bedrock principles has been the  
2 apolitical Department of Defense, as you well know.

3 I fear though that these actions set a dangerous  
4 precedent and creates an environment where military leaders  
5 may be afraid of dismissal for doing their duty and  
6 following legal orders. So, my question for you, sir, is  
7 how important do you view a military officer's obligation to  
8 provide their best military advice, even if that advice  
9 contradicts what a political appointee may want to hear?

10 General Tata: Senator, that's paramount as part of a  
11 military officer's duty.

12 Senator Peters: But how can a senior officer provide  
13 this advice when they fear that they may be subject to  
14 loyalty tests or purge boards despite following legal orders  
15 given to them by previous leadership?

16 General Tata: Senator, I wasn't there. I wasn't  
17 involved in any of those. If confirmed, what I can  
18 guarantee to this committee is that I will advise the chain  
19 of command, the Secretary, the President, on the hiring of  
20 personnel and the supportive personnel that are in these  
21 leadership positions in a very apolitical and objective way.

22 Senator Peters: Would you ever support purge boards to  
23 remove military officers from their positions?

24 General Tata: Can you ask that question again, sir?

1           Senator King:   Would you ever support a purge board  
2   that would remove officers that may have supported --

3           General Tata:   Senator, I would not support any kind of  
4   blatant purge.   If an officer is not following the  
5   Constitution, has committed some kind of breach of his or  
6   her duty, then that should be investigated and the  
7   investigations should tell us what to do.

8           Senator Peters:   The Under Secretary of Defense for  
9   Personnel and Readiness oversess, as you know, policies that  
10   shape every aspect of the service member's experience.   But  
11   unfortunately, though many of these basic services impacting  
12   our troops are either substandard or under threat of getting  
13   worse, including things like healthcare, housing, childcare  
14   for service members.

15           So, my question for you sir is, if confirmed, you'll be  
16   responsible not only for ensuring military personnel are  
17   supported on and off duty, but also protecting these vital  
18   benefits for their families each and every day.   So, my  
19   question for you is, if confirmed, how will you combat these  
20   ongoing challenges and advocate for the wellbeing of service  
21   members and DoD civilians as well?

22           General Tata:   Senator, I think this is where my  
23   experience as a combat leader, as a DOD leader, even as a  
24   school system leader with aging facilities really comes to

1 play. If confirmed, taking a look at the childcare centers,  
2 the demand, what we're paying our childcare providers, the  
3 defense commissary system, the post exchange system, all  
4 those things that provide benefits to our families and our  
5 soldiers are so critically important, because a focused  
6 soldier is one that doesn't have to worry about his child,  
7 and their childcare center, doesn't have to worry about his  
8 or her spouse and their job.

9 You're talking about job portability and licensure  
10 between states. All of those things become critical. And  
11 given my background and experience, I look forward to, if  
12 confirmed, being able to energize these programs and take  
13 care of our soldier, sailors, airmen, Marines, and  
14 guardians, and DoD civilians, so that they can be more  
15 lethal at the cutting edge of our fight.

16 Senator Peters: Well, given that experience if you  
17 could be a little bit more specific in this question. What  
18 accountability measures will you put in place to ensure that  
19 installation commanders are indeed improving the quality of  
20 life of the service members that serve their country?

21 General Tata: Senator, I think the accountability  
22 measures that we require are the feedback that we get from  
23 the families. You know, as a school superintendent, I  
24 learned that there's no better feedback mechanism than a mom



1 at a microphone, and going out and understanding what the  
2 service is like, and making sure that we are paying our  
3 childcare providers, for example sufficient wages to provide  
4 the kind of care our servicemen and women and their families  
5 deserve.

6 Senator King: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator Scott.

8 Senator Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, first  
9 off, both of you, congratulations on your nominations, and I  
10 wish you the best of luck. You both have great backgrounds,  
11 and I know you both do a great job.

12 So, Mr. Tata, you've got a great background and thank  
13 you for your military service. My dad was in the 82nd  
14 Airborne. He was one of 3,000 Americans that did all four  
15 combat jumps. So, he told me I should join the Navy  
16 instead. So, he said there's no Germans, no fox holes, and  
17 that food was better. So, you've got a great background  
18 with the school districts and then in private. Have you  
19 ever had to let somebody go because they didn't perform?

20 General Tata: I have had to let somebody go because of  
21 lack of performance, Senator.

22 Senator Scott: So, when I asked the Army, the Air  
23 Force, and the Navy in a recent subcommittee on personnel  
24 hearing, who to their knowledge was held accountable for

1 failing to do their job and recruit over the past four  
2 years, what'd they tell me? They couldn't tell me.

3 General Tata: Senator, can you ask that question  
4 again?

5 Senator Scott: We had a subcommittee hearing, and I  
6 asked the Air Force, the Army, and the Navy, who's  
7 responsible for them not meeting the recruitment numbers.  
8 They told me they couldn't tell me who was responsible.

9 General Tata: Well Senator, the chiefs of those  
10 services are responsible for infusing the Warrior Ethos all  
11 the way down and having the recruiting systems in place.  
12 The Marine Corps does it in an exceptional way because they  
13 actually have a recruiting MOS and a recruiting system that  
14 where they uphold the recruits. I can remember as  
15 superintendent, I had marine recruits all over my high  
16 schools.

17 Senator Scott: So, do you think that the individuals  
18 that were responsible should have been promoted?

19 General Tata: Senator, I think there are a lot of  
20 things that go into promotion or declination of promotion  
21 for an individual. Not having been there, I can't comment  
22 not knowing the individuals, but certainly it's a factor  
23 that should be considered.

24 Senator Scott: So, if you gave somebody a very

1 specific job and this job was to do recruitment and they  
2 didn't do it, if somebody worked for you at the school  
3 district or at a company and they had that specific job,  
4 that was their job, how many of those people did you  
5 promote?

6 General Tata: Senator, I hired every principal of my  
7 170 schools. I interviewed them all when I was  
8 superintendent, and I did not hire them if they had not been  
9 successful in their previous elementary school or middle  
10 school, if I was hiring for a high school.

11 Senator Scott: So, do you plan on making sure that if  
12 we don't meet the goals of our armed services, that people  
13 are going to be held accountable, whether they're a flag  
14 officer or whatever their title is. If they don't meet the  
15 goal, they shouldn't be there. Do you believe that?

16 General Tata: I do. I do believe that Senator,

17 Senator Scott: In the same subcommittee hearing, the  
18 chief of navy personnel testified the Navy's short 20,000  
19 sailors at sea. So, this is a pretty big problem because we  
20 are not manning our ships at 100 percent. Ships,  
21 submarines, and aircraft squadrons are at the forefront of  
22 our Navy readiness, and they should be manned at 100  
23 percent.

24 So, can you give me an idea how we're going to get to

1 100 percent readiness and get these ships manned and  
2 submarines manned?

3 General Tata: Senator, the manning of the submarine  
4 fleet, the ship fleet, how we're going to do that short,  
5 20,000 sailors, that's a tall order, and I understand that  
6 there was a throughput issue, getting them to basic  
7 training. And if confirmed, I look forward to working with  
8 the service to try to help them understand how to, a,  
9 recruit better, and, b, expand the aperture so they can  
10 scale to meet the demand, particularly if we're going to  
11 build more ships.

12 Senator Scott: Was your experience in the private  
13 sector when you held people accountable, everybody did  
14 better?

15 General Tata: No. Just the opposite. In the private  
16 sector it's rather ruthless and you either perform or you  
17 don't.

18 Senator Scott: So, did it get better, because you held  
19 people accountable?

20 General Tata: Roger that.

21 Senator Scott: Thank you.

22 General Tata: Thank you, Senator.

23 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Warren.

24 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our military

1 is strong because each member pledges loyalty to the  
2 Constitution, not to a specific President or a political  
3 party. And in return, military service and promotion are  
4 not tied to a political party or personal loyalty.  
5 President Trump threatens that political neutrality with no  
6 explanation, he has fired the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs  
7 of Staff, and the Chief of Naval Operations. Secretary  
8 Hegseth has purged top military lawyers and called for  
9 removing "woke" generals. Former defense secretaries have  
10 called this a "New political standard for military service."

11 So, Mr. Tata, if confirmed, you would be the defense  
12 secretary's principal advisor on personnel matters. You've  
13 already made your views clear. On November, 2024, you  
14 posted on X, that a "Must do," for the Trump administration  
15 will be to "Review every four-star appointed by Biden and  
16 thank many for their service before firing them."

17 Mr. Tata, what evaluations did you do for each of the  
18 dozens of four-star generals and admirals to convince you  
19 that each of them needed to be fired?

20 General Tata: Senator, that comment was in response to  
21 a CNN article that had credible sources that several  
22 admirals and generals were having discussions on how to  
23 resist lawful orders from the President usurping his Article  
24 II, constitutional authority as Commander-in-Chief, which I

1 find unacceptable.

2 I think we can all agree that the Constitution of the  
3 United States that we swear an oath of office to, that I  
4 have done for many times in my career, is the ultimate --  
5 penultimate document that we support and that we swear an  
6 allegiance to. And so, if there were people that were  
7 having those conversations, if there were admirals and  
8 generals, that were having those conversations --

9 Senator Warren: Sorry, Mr. Tata, I have your tweet  
10 here, and your tweet doesn't say, "I want to investigate  
11 person by person and see what they've done." I also want to  
12 make clear that when generals are having conversations about  
13 what to do if they receive illegal orders so that they can  
14 still follow their obligations under the Constitution of the  
15 United States, then they are following the law. They are  
16 not breaking the law. But let's go on to what else you say.

17 General Tata: Senator, if I might, the article said  
18 controversial, did not say illegal. And so controversial is  
19 very subject to interpretation.

20 Senator Warren: So, I just want to clarify here. You  
21 want to say you want to fire everybody? I've got your tweet  
22 here.

23 General Tata: I don't want to fire anybody, Senator.

24 Senator Warren: You think they gave controversial

1 statements? I'm sorry. It says before firing them. Mr.  
2 Chairman, could I enter this into the record, please? Mr.  
3 Tata's tweet.

4 Chairman Wicker: Is there objection? There being no  
5 objection, it is so admitted.

6 [The information appears in the appendix:]

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1 Senator Warren: Let me try another one. On November,  
2 2024, you posted on X that the Trump administration should  
3 choose only leaders who are "All oars in the water to  
4 achieve Trump Agenda 47." That suggests that you believe  
5 that generals should be picked for loyalty to Donald Trump.  
6 Is that right? Is that what you believe?

7 General Tata: That is not what I believe, Senator.

8 Senator Warren: And why did you post this?

9 General Tata: Well, I was a private citizen when I  
10 posted that. And the --

11 Senator Warren: So when you are a private citizen, you  
12 said things you didn't believe?

13 General Tata: Agenda 47 --

14 Senator Warren: You still are a private citizen right  
15 now, Mr. Tata.

16 Chairman Wicker: Senator, let him answer the question.

17 General Tata: Senator, I'm respectfully trying to  
18 answer your question. Agenda 47 talks about ship building.  
19 It talks about the reducing the wars that we engage in. And  
20 so as a leader I support the idea. I support the  
21 President's vision that he had in Agenda 47, though from a  
22 foreign policy perspective, and that's what I was referring  
23 to.

24 Senator Warren: That's not what this tweet says. Mr.



1 Chairman, may I enter this tweet into the record?

2 Chairman Wicker: Without objection.

3 [The information appears in the appendix:]

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1           Senator Warren: In January, 2025, just four months  
2 ago, Mr. Tata, you posted on X that planning for President  
3 Trump's inauguration should, your word, assume, that the  
4 National Guard and DoD are "Compromised at a minimum by  
5 hatred of the incoming administration." What information  
6 did you have about each member of the Guard and DoD that  
7 caused you not only to draw this conclusion, but to put it  
8 out there in public?

9           General Tata: Senator, I had no information that  
10 informed --

11          Senator Warren: So, you just said it about our Guard.  
12 You know, competence is based on the experience and  
13 performance of a military leader. Evidently, you have no  
14 information individually about the generals, the admirals,  
15 and the members of our National Guard and DoD who serve this  
16 country. And yet, you are willing to say that they all need  
17 to be fired or treated as traitors.

18          You seem to think that if a general or admiral was  
19 promoted during a Democratic administration, that person  
20 should be automatically fired. That's just a political  
21 purge and a pretty standard move for a dictatorship. I  
22 think it disqualifies you for this office.

23          Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Thank you, Senator.  
24 Senator Kelly.

1           Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Tata,  
2   thank you for being here and also meeting with me in my  
3   office in March. I want to get right to it here.

4           In a since deleted tweet published on November 8th,  
5   2024, you tweeted, "The Pentagon is hyper politicized and  
6   needs a thorough vetting to include senior active duty  
7   military personnel who are participating in these  
8   discussions." You went on to tweet, "Loyalty to the  
9   Constitution is the only test," and then outlined six must  
10   do actions including two. This is number five, "Review  
11   every SES appointment and find a path to off ramping many.  
12   They are a large part of the resistance in DoD and will lead  
13   the underground efforts to undermine the administration as  
14   they did in 2016 to 2020."

15          And then number six, so that was five, this is six.  
16   "Appoint strong leaders who are aligned with POTUS's vision,  
17   no independent agendas, all oars in the water to achieve  
18   Trump Agenda 47." Mr. Tata, what did you mean by the fact  
19   that leaders should be, "Aligned with POTUS's vision to  
20   achieve Trump Agenda 47?"

21          General Tata: Senator, thank you for the opportunity  
22   of this conversation. The Trump Agenda 47 is one, peace  
23   through strength. Strengthening, rebuilding our military,  
24   focusing on not engaging in needless wars. And that tweet

1 was in direct response to a CNN article that discussed  
2 credible sources of generals and admirals having  
3 conversations about how to resist lawful orders from the  
4 commander-in-chief who's appointed under Article II of the  
5 Constitution as the commander-in-chief.

6 And so, I found it quite unacceptable that admirals in  
7 generals, as reported by CNN, were having conversations  
8 about how to resist our President and for lawful orders.  
9 And in so doing, I was also shocked that General Brown had  
10 never acknowledged this report, said it was bogus, or --

11 Senator Kelly: Who was the report by?

12 General Tata: CNN.

13 Senator Kelly: I see.

14 General Tata: It was an article by CNN that cited  
15 credible sources that said that admirals and generals are  
16 having conversations about how to resist lawful orders from  
17 the President, lawful orders they didn't like.

18 Senator Kelly: Let me ask you this. So, which is more  
19 important, loyalty to the Constitution, or loyalty to the  
20 administration's agenda or to the President?

21 General Tata: We all raise our right hand, Senator, to  
22 uphold and defend the Constitution. And it's also very  
23 important that we accomplish the President's vision of no  
24 unnecessary wars, rebuilding the military, taking care of

1 our men and women in uniform. Those are all the goals that  
2 I'm talking about. And I found it reprehensible that  
3 admirals and generals in the Pentagon were having  
4 conversations about how to usurp the commander-in-chief's  
5 authority that's given to him by our Constitution, Article  
6 II, and disobey lawful orders. How were they going to  
7 resist? And that's what I found offensive Senator.

8 Senator Kelly: Well, I think it's interesting that  
9 folks who often don't give a lot of credence to what comes  
10 from CNN, are now quoting CNN as a reliable source, when it  
11 is convenient in a political argument. So I think you're  
12 saying that loyalty to the Constitution comes above loyalty  
13 to any individual, including the President. Is that  
14 correct?

15 General Tata: I've raised my right hand for 44 years  
16 to support and defend our Constitution, Senator. And I also  
17 believe it's important as a political appointee have  
18 confirmed that all the vision of the President and the  
19 administration gets implemented appropriately.

20 Senator Kelly: So, if you're confirmed and sworn into  
21 this position, who will you be swearing an oath to?

22 General Tata: I will swear note to the Constitution,  
23 Senator.

24 Senator Kelly: And are you willing to get fired from

1 this job to do --

2 General Tata: Absolutely.

3 Senator Kelly: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator. I recognize the  
5 ranking member for motion.

6 Senator Reed: Well Mr. Chairman, the general has been  
7 making references to a CNN article, which I think he did not  
8 fully read.

9 The opening sentence is, "Pentagon officials are  
10 holding informal discussions about how the Department of  
11 Defense would respond if Donald Trump issued orders to  
12 deploy active duty troops domestically, and fir large swaths  
13 of apolitical staffers, Defense officials told CNN."

14 First, the deployment domestically of United States  
15 military forces raises the issue of Posse Comitatus and the  
16 legality of the law. Further, "Trump's election has also  
17 raised questions inside the Pentagon about what would happen  
18 if the President issued an unlawful order, particularly if  
19 his political appointees inside the department didn't push  
20 back. Troops are compelled by law to disobey unlawful  
21 order, said another defense official. But the question is,  
22 what happens then? Do we see resignations from senior  
23 military leaders, or would they view this as abandoning  
24 their people?"

1           So, contrary to being an article directed at thwarting  
2   the President, this is an article realistically raising  
3   questions, which are still present here today. What if the  
4   President who has said due process is not really something  
5   he has to enforce in the Constitution, what about a  
6   President who's talking about his third term? Will he use  
7   the military forces to help secure his third term?

8           The comment about thwarting came from a Republican  
9   commentator, Mr. Jennings with Wolf Blitzer. What he said  
10   is he said, "They're already having talks about how to  
11   countermand the commander-in-chief." That does not comport  
12   to this article that you referred to. And then, "They're  
13   having meetings with each other about the thwart the duly  
14   elected President." That's not the CNN article. That's a  
15   Republican commentator on CNN.

16          Here's what Blitzer did in follow up, "But let me  
17   follow-up, Scott, let me follow-up with you, because Trump,  
18   as President will be the commander-in-chief, but what these  
19   Pentagon officials are considering right now in discussing  
20   among themselves, what if he gives the Pentagon, the U.S.  
21   military, illegal orders to do certain things, what do they  
22   do then?" That's the essence of the article, General Tata.

23          I would request unanimous consent to submit the article  
24   for the record and also the commentary on the Blitzer.

Chairman Wicker: Without objection, so ordered.

[The information appears in the appendix:]

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1 Senator Reed: And I give back my time.

2 Chairman Wicker: And Mr. Tata, would you like to  
3 respond?

4 General Tata: Chairman, I would. Thank you for that  
5 opportunity. Just for the avoidance of doubt, I want to  
6 make it clear that my commentary is precisely focused on  
7 loyalty to the Constitution and the oath that we take. And  
8 admirals in generals in the Pentagon should not, as was  
9 indicated in this article, be having conversations about how  
10 to resist the commander-in-chief providing lawful orders.  
11 And controversial orders may be lawful.

12 And so, I want to be crystal clear, Chairman and  
13 Ranking Member, that I've upheld the Constitution in every  
14 job that I've had, and I take it very seriously that Article  
15 II appoints the commander-in-chief -- the President as  
16 commander-in-chief, and no uniformed officer has the right  
17 to supersede the commander-in-chief's authority of a lawful  
18 order. And that is the point that I am trying to get  
19 across.

20 Senator Reed: Well, I think you're missing the point.  
21 Because the point is illegal orders, and that's exactly what  
22 the CNN report was talking about. And you say here, I will  
23 follow every legal order, but never an illegal order. If  
24 you are ordered or the Department of Secretary Defense is

1 ordered to use military forces to go into the city in the  
2 United States to pick up illegals or legal citizens, would  
3 you have a discussion whether or not this is appropriate  
4 under the Constitution of the United States?

5 General Tata: Senator, if confirmed, I'd be the  
6 personnel and readiness Under Secretary, and I wouldn't have  
7 any role in that function. The conversation around the use  
8 of the Insurrection Act and the, you know individuals have  
9 been deployed throughout history by President HW Bush, by  
10 President Johnson to help preserve peace and integrate  
11 schools, for example.

12 So of course, there would be conversations, Ranking  
13 Member.

14 Senator Reed: Exactly the conversations that you are  
15 criticizing. Thank you.

16 Chairman Wicker: Yes, the Chair gave the Ranking  
17 Member --

18 Senator Reed: Thank you.

19 Chairman Wicker: -- quite a bit of leeway there. I  
20 thought we were going to enter a statement in the record.  
21 It seems that Senator Rosen is next.

22 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Chairman Wicker,  
23 Ranking Member Reed for holding this hearing. Thank you to  
24 the witnesses for your willingness to serve, your families I

1 know are here today.

2 I'm going to switch up a little bit, we'll give you a  
3 little bit of a break, Mr. Tata, because I want to focus on  
4 cyber intel capability with Ms. Sutton. And so the Fiscal  
5 Year '25 NDAA included a provision I helped champion to have  
6 the department establish a cyber intelligence capability to  
7 provide foundational, scientific, and technical intelligence  
8 support for CYBERCOM and the rest of the joint force.

9 So, Ms. Sutton, can you discuss how it confirmed you  
10 will address that requirement? And what is your  
11 understanding of the department's current approach to  
12 standing this up, including the lessons learned from the  
13 recently completed cyber intelligence pilot with the Defense  
14 Intelligence Agency?

15 Ms. Sutton: Senator, I appreciate the question and  
16 also appreciate the attention that you've put on this issue.  
17 In all domains of warfare, intelligence is critical to being  
18 able to conduct our operations, but it is particularly  
19 critical in the cyber domain for a range of applications to  
20 develop capabilities, to build the accesses that we needed,  
21 to execute the operations, and to understand situational  
22 awareness of the battle space.

23 As the demand for our cyber operations has grown  
24 considerably in response to the threat of malicious cyber

1 actors, so has that need for intelligence. And  
2 unfortunately, we have not kept pace in the workforce needed  
3 to be able to support the growing intelligence need.

4 As you mentioned, it is my understanding that there's  
5 been a recent pilot that has been completed with the command  
6 and the intelligence community. And if confirmed, I look  
7 forward to understanding the specific gaps that they were  
8 identified, as well as ensuring that we have the right  
9 organizational structure in place to be able to move out on  
10 those recommendations.

11 And also, to make sure that we can bring in the highly  
12 technical and deeply skilled talent that you're aware is  
13 necessary to be successful in this technical intelligence.

14 Senator Rosen: Well, as a cyber threat evolves that  
15 means the evolution of our cyber forces as well. So that  
16 brings me to my next question about cyber workforce. Well  
17 actually recruiting and retention. But the DoD continues to  
18 struggle with recruiting and retaining cyber talent,  
19 particularly against us really highly competitive private  
20 sector.

21 The issue undermines our readiness across all of our  
22 domains, and it is really a priority of mine to fix this  
23 issue as ranking member of the cybersecurity subcommittee.  
24 So, if confirmed, what specific actions would you take to

1 attract and retain the skilled cyber professionals,  
2 especially when you're competing with the private sector and  
3 what barriers, cultural, structural, policy based, do you  
4 believe are preventing DOD from doing this? How can we work  
5 together to help you in this capacity?

6 Ms. Sutton: I share your concern about the importance  
7 of making sure that we have the best and brightest on our  
8 team. That is the only way we're going to be successful  
9 against the adversary. I believe that this is going to be a  
10 variety of approaches. There's not going to be one simple  
11 step we can take in the department. We're going to have to  
12 look at making sure we're bringing in the right talent, that  
13 we're incentivizing it appropriately, and that we're keeping  
14 it on mission.

15 One key area that I think we have underutilized in the  
16 past is looking at how we leverage our Reserve and National  
17 Guard and bring in the talent that they have in private  
18 industry and apply it to our mission space. I've seen many  
19 examples in my time at the command where we will bring in an  
20 Air Force reservist who has an advanced degree in data  
21 science, works in private industry, and they come in and  
22 advise on our AI strategy and our AI roadmap.

23 Or where we have an army reservist who spent almost a  
24 decade as one of our most capable operators in the force,

1 became a reservist, is now in private industry and has been  
2 fundamental in advising our new force generation model. I  
3 think that that is a pillar that have confirmed, I look  
4 forward to being able to support further.

5 Senator Rosen: Well, that's why we have the pilot  
6 program on my civilian cybersecurity reserve to really give  
7 us this capacity. I look forward to working with you on  
8 that. And I know you're working, thinking about the  
9 partnerships we have issues like rotational programs with  
10 the private sector, pay flexibility, expedited clearing  
11 process, some of those things to improve workforce  
12 readiness.

13 But we also have our academia, like my home state of  
14 Nevada, we have UNLV, UNR, and Desert Research Institute.  
15 They're exploring innovative ways to grow our cyber talent  
16 locally. So how will you partner with our universities, if  
17 you will?

18 Ms. Sutton: Absolutely. We need to look across the  
19 nation's talent for how we can leverage it. If confirmed, I  
20 would look to further leverage the Cyber Center of  
21 Excellence Program that today has been very focused on  
22 bringing a talented pipeline of students into government,  
23 and particularly the Department of Defense, but looking at  
24 how we could further leverage that to help us solve some of

1 the hardest problems that our force faces.

2 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I look forward to working  
3 with you on all of this. Thank you.

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Senator  
5 Kaine, it appears that you are finally recognized.

6 Senator Kaine: I've been enlightened by the questions  
7 that have come before me. I'm glad that I heard my  
8 colleagues.

9 Ms. Sutton, in your testimony and response, I think to  
10 a question of Senator Budd's, you talked a little bit about  
11 our allies and partners and how cybersecurity is something  
12 where there should be burden sharing. And there should be,  
13 but there's also real opportunities and work with allies and  
14 partners, not just to share the burden, but to take  
15 advantage of the expertise of other nations.

16 I've been particularly involved in this committee and  
17 in the Foreign Relations Committee on the AUKUS framework.  
18 Could you talk a little bit about your view about the  
19 upsides, not just in the sense of sharing the burden, but  
20 the capacities of some of our allies and how sometimes the  
21 whole is greater than the sum of the parts. If we work with  
22 allies on cyber issues, we can be stronger.

23 Ms. Sutton: Senator, I appreciate that question. The  
24 United States has a strong, innovative advantage with the

1 talent that we have, but we certainly do not have a monopoly  
2 on that talent. And I think partnerships with some of our  
3 close partners and allies, particularly the Australians  
4 through the AUKUS Pillar 2, which allows us to do  
5 cooperative research and development agreements, is going to  
6 be really important, so that we can ensure that we're able  
7 to share the latest and greatest technology, but also that  
8 we're able to prioritize our investments where that we're  
9 not duplicating efforts.

10 And so working closely with all of our partners, but in  
11 particularly utilizing the AUKUS agreement will be critical  
12 in bringing the technology we need to our war fighters.

13 Senator Kaine: Thank you. I'm really glad that you  
14 brought up AUKUS Pillar 2. Pillar 1 is, you know, fairly  
15 discreet. It's about the production of Virginia Class subs,  
16 training the Aussies about how to operate and maintain them,  
17 and eventually working with the Aussies so that they can  
18 develop their own capacity to build nuclear subs of their  
19 own design, which would include a lot of U.S. technology.

20 Obviously, Pillar 2 is a little more open-ended, which  
21 is good, but it also means we have to, you know, kind of  
22 define what are going to be some of the deliverables in  
23 Pillar 2. And I do think cyber cooperation is one of the  
24 areas that is probably the most fertile for Pillar 2 work,



1 both with the Aussies with the UK. And I'm encouraged to  
2 hear you bring that up.

3 I want to follow up too, on a discussion that Senator  
4 King and you had that I have heard many, many times in this  
5 committee, and I'm not really sure that we're as far down  
6 the road as we need to be, and that is the offensive nature  
7 of our cyber capacity. You used the phrase, we have the  
8 capacity to impose costs. But I often wonder if we are  
9 imposing costs. Your point that the defender has to be  
10 right every time, the attacker only has to be right once, we  
11 do have a good cyber defense. We're not perfect. We have a  
12 good cyber defense.

13 And the fact that we're not perfect means a couple  
14 times a year, there's a story about some cyber hacker  
15 getting into some part of the U.S. government or some  
16 critical infrastructure in the United States. And those  
17 stories are very public, and the public hears them, and the  
18 public's worried about cyber. We talk about offensive  
19 operations and other military domains. You know, the number  
20 of sorties we were flying against ISIL. We know when  
21 there's a U.S. bombing in Yemen against Houthis.

22 We're aware of it, but we don't talk about what we do  
23 offensively in cyber very much. I think there's some  
24 reasons for that, but it ends up making the public very

1 aware that we're under attack because the news stories a  
2 couple times a year about successful cyber-attacks. But the  
3 public never hears about our use of the offensive cyber  
4 capacity to impose costs on those who are attacking us.

5 Why can't we be a little more candid with the American  
6 public about our offensive use of cyber so that they're  
7 aware that we're not just playing defense all the time, but  
8 that we actually have an offensive capacity that we use?

9 Ms. Sutton: Senator, that's a great question. I  
10 appreciate the opportunity to address it today. As you  
11 mentioned, we have decades of experience talking about  
12 things like nuclear deterrence and in the area of cyber, we  
13 are still going down that path of evolution. And I think  
14 there's a lot of work still to be done.

15 A decade ago, we barely even mentioned the word  
16 offensive cyber. Today, many discussions, as you mentioned  
17 in this area, are held in classified settings. I believe  
18 that we're at the point where it's appropriate for us to  
19 start having the right discussions to ensure that we're  
20 understanding and that we set the right posture and look  
21 forward to being able to continue that dialogue.

22 I think there's a bit of a culture change, just as  
23 we've seen a culture change when we used to see threats in  
24 the cyberspace, we just kept them. Through establishment of

1 things like the NSA Cyber Collaboration Center, we now work  
2 very hard to take what we see in the cyber domain and share  
3 it with industries so that they can defend. I think that  
4 same culture change needs to happen in how we discuss cyber  
5 deterrence.

6 Senator Kaine: I look forward to working with you on  
7 this. Deterrence only works if it's public. That's part of  
8 what deters. People are aware they're going to be  
9 consequences and they believe it. And our public needs to  
10 understand as well, that we're not just the victims of  
11 cyber-attacks, but that we have a well-developed capacity to  
12 impose costs. I look forward to working with you on that,  
13 and I yield back.

14 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Kaine. Senator  
15 Schmitt.

16 Senator Schmitt: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
17 And Ms. Sutton, I want to follow up on that and I don't  
18 know, because we go in and out of these things. I don't  
19 know if you've been asked something like that a bunch of  
20 times today or not, but that was the focus of my question.

21 I think there's been a lot of -- maybe, I don't know  
22 what the right word is -- frustration, but that we have to,  
23 I think we have to start talking about this and acting in a  
24 way that it deters our enemies on the cyber front. And I'm

1 talking specifically about China. I think they've gotten so  
2 emboldened and so brazen. You just look at the most recent  
3 examples of that, whether it's hacking into, you know, phone  
4 calls of government officials or just so there's a lot of  
5 things that they're doing that I think it's important for us  
6 to expose.

7 It's also for our allies to understand that they're a  
8 nefarious actor willing to do this. And so if you sign up  
9 for the One Belt One Road Initiative not only can they turn  
10 the lights on and turn the lights off, they can make  
11 airlines come or stop if you're critical of the CCP. But  
12 just the stuff that people don't see on the cyber front, I  
13 think that's just their tools that they're willing to use.

14 And I guess this is more of a monologue than it is a  
15 question, but I just think that we have to -- because, you  
16 know, we admit these things and we bring them out in the  
17 open when they happen. I think for them, they don't want to  
18 admit any vulnerabilities. And so I just hope that in your  
19 role taking, probably you've heard on a bipartisan basis  
20 here, we need to be more aggressive offensively, because if  
21 they don't feel the pain, they're just going to keep doing  
22 it.

23 And I think they've gotten more emboldened to do it.  
24 And I don't think that a lot of Americans understand

1 probably how vulnerable our critical infrastructure is to  
2 what the Chinese are already probably embedded in what  
3 they're willing to do. It certainly would reach a critical  
4 mass if they moved on Taiwan. I think that that's sort of  
5 probably where they go first and try to destroy any resolve  
6 that we might have in this country for some response.

7 But anyway, on the cyber front, I just think that we  
8 need to be more aggressive. And, your view of this, I've  
9 heard just a snippet from Senator Kaine, but how do you view  
10 that public and being more aggressive?

11 Ms. Sutton: Senator, I share your concerns with the  
12 aggression that we're seeing from Chinese malicious cyber  
13 activity. I think there's a couple priorities I'd have in  
14 addressing this issue. The first, as you mentioned, is the  
15 importance of calling it out. And that's something that the  
16 United States can't do alone. It's going to be important  
17 for all of our close partners and allies to share the burden  
18 in this space. And when we see activity that is  
19 unacceptable and what violates the norms of cyberspace, that  
20 we all call that out and call out China's targeting of our  
21 infrastructure that threatens our American interests.

22 I also believe it's important that we make sure that  
23 the Department of Defense has a robust, effective, second to  
24 none capability in both offensive and defensive

1 capabilities. And that those options are presented to the  
2 President and the Secretary so that they have a range of  
3 tools available to respond and to deter this activity. And  
4 then the third priority I'd have is to consider that cyber  
5 is but one tool in our toolbox. And how can we as a  
6 department be best postured to support other levers of  
7 national power, whether it be economic or diplomatic  
8 sanctions, to be able to impose further costs based on what  
9 we see in cyberspace.

10 Senator Schmitt: And in general, and this is kind of a  
11 question that's related to both of your roles or hopefully  
12 your roles moving forward is, do you feel like you're able  
13 to recruit and you feel like we've got access to the best  
14 talent to actually engage in this effort?

15 Ms. Sutton: Senator, one of the most effective  
16 recruiting tools we have in the Department of Defense is our  
17 mission, and the ability to be able to bring the best and  
18 brightest from our country and let them work on hard  
19 problems and defend the country every day. If confirmed,  
20 one of my priorities will be to make sure that we keep them  
21 on mission and keep them focused on doing the work that is  
22 what brings them here, while making sure we have the right  
23 compensation in place to make sure they're incentivized for  
24 that work.

1           Senator Schmitt: Thanks. And with the limited time I  
2 have General, the Senator to my right has focused on a lot  
3 of this too. In the first two years, the criticism that I  
4 had of the previous administration was just this obsession  
5 with DEI and it's just obsession with this cultural Marxism  
6 that really, I think hurt recruiting. It hurt morale, it's  
7 discriminatory. And I know that this administration and the  
8 Secretary of Defense have made a point to root that out.

9           But I will say that even in the preparation for those  
10 hearings as we were trying to find examples of this, you  
11 know, this ideology you could tell it started to go  
12 underground a little bit more. That the previous  
13 administration didn't want to talk about it as much openly,  
14 but there'd still be slide decks that you might find that  
15 had just some crazy stuff in it.

16           So I just, you know, ask for your commitment. It just  
17 has no place in our military. And I think that the American  
18 people have come around to this thing too. I'm glad the  
19 administration has made it a focus and they'll be part of  
20 your role too, I think. And just knowing that you're on  
21 board with making sure that this isn't going to be part of  
22 what we do anymore, will be good.

23           General Tata: Senator, you have my absolute commitment  
24 to focus on those things that unify us to be a cohesive,

1 lethal fighting force and not those things that divide us.

2 Senator Schmitt: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Schmidt. Senator  
4 Duckworth.

5 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, one  
6 thing that has no place in our military is the promotion of  
7 people and the firing of people based on perceived political  
8 loyalty. And I know we've talked about this at length  
9 already during this hearing, but in light of the Secretary  
10 of Defense statement yesterday where he plans on firing 20  
11 percent of the general officer, the flag officer ranks, and  
12 since you're going to be, if confirmed, in the role to  
13 advise on this, I think it's important that we revisit this.

14 In fact, the Trump administration has shown a troubling  
15 pattern of not only suddenly purging highly qualified  
16 general officers, but also of advancing other officers based  
17 solely on perceived political loyalty, despite those  
18 officers lacking the qualifications for the jobs to which  
19 they're being promoted. Choosing military leadership based  
20 on partisan criteria is un-American, and it puts our  
21 military readiness and public trust at risk. It's an  
22 affront to the great meritocracy that our military has  
23 represented until this administration.

24 Mr. Tata, if confirm, you would carry the solemn



1 responsibility of safeguarding their readiness, talent, and  
2 professionalism of our men and women in uniform, including  
3 the very important role of overseeing the conditions and  
4 standards under which service members can advance in their  
5 careers. But I have concerns that you support the removal  
6 of senior military leaders that you consider, you consider  
7 to be woke or politically misguided. Officers who by all  
8 accounts were carrying out lawful orders and policies of a  
9 past administration.

10 Would you have supported firing General Timothy Haugh  
11 CYBERCOM commander, and NSA director who had over 33 years  
12 of experience in the Air Force?

13 General Tata: Senator, I don't know the individual. I  
14 wasn't involved in the firing, and I really have no comment  
15 on that.

16 Senator Duckworth: Well, yes or no? I mean, there was  
17 no investigation into him. There was no wrongdoing accused.  
18 He was just simply fired by this President.

19 General Tata: Senator, I have no ability to comment on  
20 it because I don't know the individual. I don't know the  
21 circumstances involved, but I didn't know if there was an  
22 investigation or not.

23 Senator Duckworth: Would you have supported firing  
24 Admiral Lisa Franchetti, former chief of Naval operations

1 with over 40 years of decorated service in the United States  
2 Navy, and no investigation on any wrongdoing on her part?

3 General Tata: Senator, I have no information on that  
4 firing and I simply cannot comment on that.

5 Senator Duckworth: Okay. You just under oath  
6 confirmed that you support the Trump Administration's  
7 reckless purges. I mean, you're saying you have no  
8 comments, but these are two examples of the Trump  
9 administration's disturbing pattern of suddenly firing  
10 expert warriors at the top of their game, disrupting our  
11 national security for political gain.

12 Trump has not justified these sudden vacancies in  
13 mission critical roles. Were they fired simply because they  
14 followed their oath and executed a previous civilian leaders  
15 policy? Do I have your commitment that you will not support  
16 firing general officers simply for executing lawful policies  
17 of a past administration? That should be an easy one, yes  
18 or no?

19 General Tata: Senator, you have my commitment that we  
20 will have a, if confirmed, meritocracy that focused on  
21 promoting based on high standards.

22 Senator Duckworth: Do I have your commitment that you  
23 will not support firing general officers simply for  
24 executing lawful policies of a past administration?

1           General Tata:   Senator, you're asking me a hypothetical  
2 where there could be other extenuating --

3           Senator Duckworth:   You just gave me a hypothetical.

4           General Tata:   -- other extenuating circumstances.

5           Senator Duckworth:   I said simply for executing lawful  
6 policies.   If there was nothing else, would you fire  
7 somebody because they --

8           General Tata:   Senator, that there would be no reason  
9 to fire anyone if they're simply following lawful orders.

10          Senator Duckworth:   Do I have your commitment that  
11 you'll not use officer's record of executing policies or  
12 their personal beliefs as promotion criteria either formally  
13 or informally?

14          General Tata:   Senator, again it's a hypothetical  
15 situation you're presenting to me.   The focus of the  
16 department if confirmed, will be on meritocracy and  
17 promoting those that are most lethal, that provides us the  
18 greatest war fighting force that our young men and women  
19 deserve.

20          Senator Duckworth:   So their record of executing  
21 policies that this administration may not agree to, but were  
22 legal, lawful policies from a previous administration, or a  
23 person's personal beliefs will not be used as criteria to  
24 either promote or not promote them?

1           General Tata:   Senator, I would see no reason to have  
2   any of that play into the promotion.   The system that the  
3   Secretary is attempting to implement is one based on  
4   meritocracy and, and high standards.   And if confirmed, I  
5   look forward to working with this body and the Secretary on  
6   ensuring that we have the most capable leaders that our  
7   young men and women deserve.

8           Senator Duckworth:   I hope you live up to that, because  
9   practices like firing officers for following lawful orders  
10   put service members in an impossible position, fearful that  
11   they'll be punished whether they do or do not fulfill their  
12   professional obligations.   And more importantly,  
13   politicizing promotions and firings have a corrosive effect  
14   on our military and on our ability to deter and prepare for  
15   conflict.   So I hope that you will live by that statement.

16          Chairman Wicker:   Thank you, Senator Duckworth.  
17   Senator Banks.

18          Senator Banks:   Thank you, Mr. Chairman.   Thank you to  
19   both of you for being here.   Congratulations on your  
20   nomination to play very important roles at the Pentagon.  
21   General Tata, last year, Congress passed several reforms in  
22   the NDAA to roll back DEI and instead of the Pentagon doing  
23   that bureaucrats and the department simply rebranded it,  
24   they called it something different.   And then they used

1 contractors to implement DEI training when we eliminated  
2 full-time employees in language that we fought for in the  
3 NDAA and the House and the Senate to eliminate that.

4 Can you talk about, if you're confirmed, how will you  
5 altogether eliminate it and fulfill the executive order by  
6 President Trump and Secretary Hegseth to do that?

7 General Tata: Senator, thank you for the opportunity  
8 to have this conversation. Very important that we focus on  
9 those things that unify us as a people, as a force. Our  
10 young men and women that join are just cut from the cloth of  
11 our society. The job of basic training, the job of the unit  
12 leaders from platoon leader up to a core commander are to  
13 unify those people in a common purpose and a common focus.

14 And there is no room for anything that divides us as a  
15 people. So if confirmed in this position, I will help  
16 implement the laws and I will follow the laws to make sure  
17 that we are focused on lethality, meritocracy, and war  
18 fighting, so that we can have the most unified force that  
19 can go out and close with and destroy our enemies.

20 Senator Banks: Really important and I totally agree  
21 with you. As I said that the bureaucrats at the Pentagon --  
22 because so much of this stuff is deeply embedded in  
23 different programs and in different ways, and, you know,  
24 instead of following the intent of the NDAA, they just

1 reinvented it, called it something different. So have you  
2 thought about what can what else Congress can do to support  
3 you in that, to completely wipe it out?

4 General Tata: Senator, if confirmed, I look forward to  
5 working with this committee and the full Congress on how to  
6 create the most lethal fighting force that we can. And  
7 that's by focusing on those things that unify us. And if  
8 confirmed, I will go out into the field and I will bring  
9 back reports, I will report out. I committed to reporting  
10 out to this committee if confirmed. And being able to tell  
11 you what I am seeing. I am a lead from the front type of  
12 leader. That's been my ethos since I put on my second  
13 lieutenant bar.

14 Senator Banks: Well, let us know how we can help you  
15 and support you in that. In January, the President also  
16 issued another executive order that I think is really  
17 important. And he told the DoD to review, "All available  
18 mechanisms under which military connected families could use  
19 DoD funds to attend schools of their choice, including  
20 private, faith-based, or public charter schools."

21 We know that the single biggest reason that our  
22 military personnel leave the military is because of their  
23 kids' education and the schools that their kids go to. So  
24 this is a national security issue related to retention.

1 You're a former school superintendent yourself. Do you  
2 think that service member parents should have all of the  
3 educational choices for their children that civilian parents  
4 already have? And by the way, State Department families  
5 have school choice when they go abroad. They have choices  
6 on where to send their kids to schools that best fit their  
7 needs. Why can't the military do it too?

8 General Tata: Senator, thank you. The parents in the  
9 military should have the option to send their children where  
10 they want to send their children to, to get the best  
11 education for their children. The Quadrennial Review that  
12 just came out determined that joint earners make joint  
13 decisions, and they're making joint decisions, as you  
14 alluded to about their children and where they can best  
15 raise their children in the best school system or school  
16 environment.

17 And as the former superintendent to compete with the  
18 charter schools, I created boutique charter schools within  
19 my system, which have done very well in Raleigh, North  
20 Carolina, two of the best performing system schools in the  
21 state today, or to the leadership academies for young men  
22 and women that we created in Raleigh. So, I think that  
23 providing all these options to parents is critical.

24 Senator Banks: I want to work with you on that. I'm

1 almost out time, but as you know, school districts around  
2 the country are banning cell phones from the classroom  
3 during the school day. Do you think that that would improve  
4 student performance at DoDEA schools and would you support  
5 making that change?

6 General Tata: Senator, anything that reduces  
7 distractions in the classroom helps.

8 Senator Banks: Thank you. I yield back.

9 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Banks.  
10 Senator Slotkin.

11 Senator Slotkin: Thank you. Thanks for being here.  
12 Couple of questions, Mr. Tata, that we talked about when you  
13 came and visited my office. You are going to be, if sworn  
14 in or if confirmed, sworn into an office where you are in  
15 control of the entirety of the data of everyone in uniform,  
16 in the whole massive Department of Defense Enterprise. That  
17 is a huge responsibility. Separate from our policy  
18 differences, you control the data of every serviceman,  
19 sailor, Marine and what happens with that data.

20 Secretary Hegseth has said he welcomes DOGE into the  
21 Pentagon. Red carpet for them. Most recently, we heard  
22 from the media about a case of DOGE going into the NLRB and  
23 getting access to all the data of the individuals there.  
24 Within moments of them getting that access, they were



1 targeted by a Russian IP address to try and take some of  
2 that data.

3 There's some people who think that literally the bad  
4 guys are following around the DOGE guys to say, "Oh, this is  
5 great. This is where we can get a bunch of data." Not only  
6 is it sensitive information, it's national security worthy  
7 information: our bases, our sensitive sites, our locations,  
8 the vulnerabilities in the force, deployment schedules,  
9 everything.

10 Assuming that the Secretary continues to allow DOGE in,  
11 it will be you in that seat who decides to give over  
12 millions of pieces of information or not. So, will you  
13 provide the people of DOGE access to the complete file of  
14 our uniform military personnel records?

15 General Tata: Senator, thank you for meeting with me  
16 in your office and you bring up a critical point. Not only  
17 all the personnel records, but all the military health  
18 records as well. It's a massive amount of data. And what I  
19 committed to you in your office, and I'll commit to you  
20 publicly today, is that before DOGE, if I'm confirmed,  
21 before DOGE is able to access anything with regard to  
22 personnel and personal protected information, there will be  
23 some kind of contract that prevents them from doing certain  
24 things.

1 I'm not in there yet. I haven't worked with DOGE, I  
2 don't know DOGE. But what I do know is men and women in the  
3 military and their families deserve to have their privacy  
4 protected. And I will commit to them and I will commit to  
5 you to doing everything possible to get between anyone that  
6 wants to get their data and use it for any other reason.

7 Senator Slotkin: So, you're saying you would give over  
8 the data if you signed a contract ahead of time. Some sort  
9 of contract, which we really haven't seen at these other  
10 departments and agencies?

11 General Tata: Senator, the point you make is so  
12 important and so paramount that it can't be overstated. The  
13 military health data, the military personnel data, all the  
14 records are so critical that we have to have some kind of  
15 guardrail in place that helps us prevent improper access to  
16 personnel data. And if confirmed, I can commit that I will  
17 do my very best to put guardrails in place.

18 And by the way, I don't suspect that DOGE would try to  
19 do anything improper with this information, but sometimes  
20 accidents happen and so we would need some kind of guardrail  
21 in place to be able to protect military members' personal  
22 data and their medical data.

23 Senator Slotkin: And can I just ask our other nominee  
24 here today you know, you're going to be in charge of

1 cybersecurity and cyber policy. Do you believe that Signal  
2 or TeleMessage are appropriate means of communication for  
3 anyone at the Department of Defense on sensitive,  
4 classified, or operational information?

5 Ms. Sutton: Senator, the Department of Defense has a  
6 clear set of policies for protecting information and  
7 allowable information technology applications. And if  
8 confirmed will work with a --

9 Senator Slotkin: Is Signal on an allowed or  
10 TeleMessage -- you're up for confirmation. It's a big job.  
11 Are Signal or TeleMessage allowed instruments to use at the  
12 Department of Defense today?

13 Ms. Sutton: Senator, it depends on the level of  
14 classification.

15 Senator Slotkin: So, operational information that's  
16 not classified is allowed on Signal today?

17 Ms. Sutton: Senator, with regard to the matter that  
18 you're discussing --

19 Senator Slotkin: I'm not discussing anything, I'm just  
20 asking you to restate the policy for the job you are hoping  
21 to get. Is Signal or TeleMessage allowed for -- if a rank-  
22 and-file soldier uses Signal to communicate not classified,  
23 but operational details to another soldier, would that  
24 person be using a permissible app system?

1           Ms. Sutton: Senator, there is a wide variety of  
2 applications that vary per instance that would need to be  
3 consulted.

4           Senator Slotkin: I'm glad you've got your talking  
5 point message. I think you and I both know that if the  
6 average person -- I was a young CIA officer -- if I ever put  
7 operational details on Signal, TeleMessage, text, anything  
8 that would endanger the lives of people on the ground, that  
9 would communicate the time, and method, and hour, and  
10 technique that we were going to use in an operation, I'd be  
11 removed from my job immediately, put on administrative  
12 leave.

13           If I put people in danger, I'd be referred to the  
14 Department of Justice for a criminal investigation. So for  
15 you to be here -- I understand you've gotten very reasonable  
16 questions today, but we just got to call balls and strikes.  
17 If the average soldier wouldn't be allowed to use those  
18 systems, the Secretary of Defense and everyone else around  
19 him shouldn't be using it. That should be an easy thing to  
20 take accountability for.

21           And it's concerning to me that in going into this job,  
22 you can't just give a straight balls and strike answer. I  
23 yield back.

24           Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. And this

1 concludes our testimony. For the information of members,  
2 questions for the record will be due to the committee within  
3 two business days of the conclusion of the hearing. Is  
4 there anything further, Mr. Ranking Member?

5 Senator Reed: No, sir.

6 Chairman Wicker: With that, we are adjourned.

7 [Whereupon, at 11:50 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]  
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