

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF ADMIRAL DARYL L.  
CAUDLE, USN, FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF  
ADMIRAL AND TO BE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

Thursday, July 24, 2025

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1 TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF ADMIRAL DARYL L. CAUDLE, USN,  
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4

5 Thursday, July 24, 2025  
6

7 U.S. Senate

8 Committee on Armed Services

9 Washington, D.C.  
10

11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:15 a.m.,  
12 in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger  
13 Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

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

3           Chairman Wicker: Good morning. We are starting 15  
4 minutes earlier than usual to accommodate a number of our  
5 members who are also due to participate in very important  
6 deliberations on another committee. So welcome very much  
7 to our hearing to consider the nomination of a very fine  
8 candidate for appointment to the grade of admiral and to be  
9 Chief of Naval Operations.

10          Admiral Daryl Caudle and his family are here. Thank  
11 you for being here today. As Commander of United States  
12 Fleet Forces Command for the past 4 years, Admiral Caudle  
13 has been responsible for the readiness, training, and  
14 deployment of naval forces. He is uniquely suited to guide  
15 the Navy through today's complex challenges.

16          The U.S. Navy handles critical maritime missions that  
17 no other nation could shoulder. Our Navy is unmatched in  
18 its capabilities. No other navy can operate complex naval  
19 exercises in the Pacific, defend Israel from Iranian  
20 ballistic missile attacks, and prosecute a campaign against  
21 the Houthi terrorists in Yemen, executing all of these  
22 missions nearly simultaneously.

23          Accomplishing all these objectives is no easy feat.  
24 Admiral Caudle has championed a ready fleet, targeting a  
25 goal of 80 percent surge combat readiness to ensure forces

1 are prepared for rapid deployment. He also started the  
2 important task of rethinking force generation models to  
3 consider how we can more efficiently generate combat power.  
4 We must start addressing the global demand for United  
5 States naval presence by increasing the supply of ready  
6 ships, personnel, and equipment.

7 Last week, this Committee released the text of the  
8 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026.  
9 In addition to reforms proposed by the FORGED Act, our bill  
10 seeks to address maintenance challenges faced by the Navy's  
11 surface fleet. The Senate's plan adjusts the contracting  
12 strategy for ship repair. We would like to see the Navy  
13 give a clear demand signal to each shipyard and bring them  
14 into the planning process much earlier. Additionally, we  
15 proposed authorities that are meant to reverse  
16 inefficiencies in current processes by empowering the fleet  
17 to oversee maintenance. I would like to hear from our  
18 witness about these reforms and his strategies for boosting  
19 readiness to meet global demands.

20 The Committee's NDAA would help correct serious  
21 deficiencies in the Navy's budget by proposing additional  
22 support for the service. Billions of dollars are  
23 misaligned between the Navy's budget request and the  
24 recently enacted reconciliation law. If confirmed, Admiral  
25 Caudle must navigate these fiscal realities in order to

1 keep readiness and modernization on track. I am hopeful  
2 that Congress will unite to raise the defense topline,  
3 closing these gaps to ensure our Navy remains the world's  
4 preeminent maritime force.

5 Fortunately, the reconciliation law gives the Navy a  
6 transformative opportunity. It includes \$18 billion for  
7 shipbuilding, \$5 billion for unmanned systems, \$5 billion  
8 for rebuilding the maritime industrial base, \$5 billion for  
9 munitions and missiles, and \$2 billion for ship spare  
10 parts.

11 These investments are necessary, but they are no  
12 substitute for good management, and we are going to be  
13 expecting that from our nominee. Leadership starts at the  
14 top, and I hope that our nominee and Secretary Phelan will  
15 build an immediate partnership. The next Chief of Naval  
16 Operations will lead our Navy into the most dangerous  
17 threat window our country has faced in generations.

18 Let me quote Admiral Hyman Rickover, "In everything we  
19 do, we must ask ourselves: Does this directly advance our  
20 preparation for war?" We all seek peace, but the surest  
21 path to preserving peace is by building unmatched strength.  
22 I look forward to hearing from our witness how he will  
23 strengthen our Navy to meet the challenges we need.

24 And with that I turn to my friend and teammate,  
25 Ranking Member Reed.

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

3           Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr.  
4 Chairman. Admiral Caudle, welcome, and congratulations on  
5 your nomination. It is well deserved. Thank you for  
6 stepping forward to continue a long career of service to  
7 the nation and the Navy. And let me extend my appreciation  
8 to your family too, because they have been with you every  
9 step of the way.

10          Admiral, you have been nominated to be Chief of Naval  
11 Operations, and I believe it is important to start by  
12 acknowledging the unusual conditions around your  
13 nomination. In February, President Trump abruptly  
14 dismissed Admiral Lisa Franchetti, who was not even halfway  
15 through her tenure as Chief of Naval Operations, and gave  
16 no stated reason for this dismissal. Let me take a moment  
17 to salute Admiral Franchetti, who served this nation with  
18 distinction and honor for more than 4 decades and led the  
19 Navy with great skill.

20          The Committee then waited 5 months for your nomination  
21 and this hearing, and during that time Admiral James Kilby  
22 worked tirelessly to cover the duties of both the Acting  
23 Chief of Naval Operations and the Vice Chief. And I want  
24 to commend Admiral Kilby for his commitment and admirable  
25 performance.

1 But the question remains as to whether the actions of  
2 the Administration had, and will continue to have, an  
3 effect of undermining the ability of naval leaders to do  
4 their jobs. I hope, in fact, that will be the case, they  
5 will do their jobs.

6 Admiral Caudle, I think we are all glad to consider  
7 your nomination today. You have a wealth of experience to  
8 bring to this role, including your current position as  
9 Commander of Fleet Forces Command and prior leadership  
10 assignments in Strategic Command and, importantly, as a  
11 submariner.

12 The U.S. Navy remains the finest maritime force in the  
13 world, but it has struggled to grow and maintain its fleet.  
14 For several years, the service has fallen well short of its  
15 shipbuilding and deployment plans. A number of vessels,  
16 including an aircraft carrier and multiple destroyers and  
17 frigates are behind schedule, in some cases by several  
18 years. And I would also note that the Virginia class fast-  
19 attack submarines and Columbia-class ballistic missile  
20 submarines, which are critical for maintaining our undersea  
21 advantage and nuclear deterrent against competitors like  
22 China, are both facing construction delays of over a year.

23 I am also concerned that deferred ship maintenance,  
24 reduced steaming and flying hours, and cancelled training  
25 may have created readiness problems within the Navy, and I

1 will ask, going forward, for your views on these  
2 challenges.

3 I would note that the United States' greatest  
4 comparative advantage over China is our global network of  
5 allies and partners. The agreement between Australia and  
6 the United Kingdom and the United States to collaborate on  
7 nuclear submarine production through the AUKUS partnership  
8 is a meaningful step forward. Successful implementation of  
9 this plan will require responsible oversight and a stable  
10 industrial base, and Admiral, I hope you will share your  
11 views on what we have, the capacity to produce now and in  
12 the future, and how we can provide the budget and resources  
13 to match the demand.

14 Finally, your highest priority must be ensuring the  
15 readiness of your sailors to perform their missions. In  
16 recent years, the Navy has struggled with quality of life  
17 and morale challenges within the force. If confirmed, you  
18 will be expected to support a culture of leadership, trust,  
19 and teamwork throughout the fleet, and to champion the care  
20 and well-being of our sailors and their families. And  
21 Admiral, I would ask that you share how you plan to carry  
22 out these responsibilities.

23 Thank you again for your willingness to step forward  
24 to lead the Navy at this important time, and I look forward  
25 to your testimony. And again, Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Ranking Member  
2 Reed. Now, Admiral Caudle, we ask you for your opening  
3 statement.

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1           STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL DARYL L. CAUDLE, USN, FOR  
2 REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF ADMIRAL AND TO BE CHIEF OF  
3 NAVAL OPERATIONS

4           Admiral Caudle: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking  
5 Member Reed, and distinguished members of the Committee.  
6 It is truly an honor to appear before you today.

7           I am deeply grateful for the confidence of the  
8 President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of  
9 the Navy in nominating me to be the next Chief of Naval  
10 Operations. I view this nomination as a solemn opportunity  
11 to ensure our nation's maritime dominance is never  
12 surpassed by competitors or adversaries.

13           I know full well the number of American families who  
14 depend on our nation's armed forces to keep them and our  
15 American way of life safe from harm. This knowledge comes  
16 firsthand from my own family. My parents, who are watching  
17 from heaven right now, imparted upon me the significance of  
18 service to our nation. My late father was an Army veteran  
19 from the Korean War. He knew what service and sacrifice to  
20 a higher calling meant firsthand. Like so many Americans  
21 who serve their country, his infectious pride from his time  
22 in service made clear the honor and fidelity that comes  
23 with wearing the cloth of our nation. My mother, who was  
24 so proud of my naval service, had a way to see the quality  
25 in a person, the qualities that can only be instilled and

1 honed by the American way of life that we can never lose or  
2 allow to be compromised.

3 I am forever proud and grateful for the unwavering  
4 love and support of my four daughters and their husbands:  
5 Gillian and Luke, a Marine Corps officer at Cherry Point,  
6 North Carolina; Morgan and Jordan, a Navy sailor onboard  
7 the USS Mason down in Mayport, Florida; Noel and Billy,  
8 down in Charleston, South Carolina; and, here with me  
9 today, Haley and her boyfriend, Grant, from Portsmouth, New  
10 Hampshire.

11 My wife Donna, who is also here today, has been by my  
12 side for the last 21 years, not only providing continual  
13 support to me and our own family, but also embodying a  
14 steadfast dedication for improving the quality of life,  
15 readiness, and resiliency for all Navy families. She  
16 knows, like me, that our sailors are the Navy's most  
17 enduring competitive advantage, and that a stronger Navy  
18 family means a more effective Navy fleet. We are both kept  
19 young and motivated by our incredible five grandchildren,  
20 who are truly the gamechangers in our life.

21 Our country and its citizens are in the midst of a  
22 crucial era, defined by global competition, technological  
23 saturation, and unpredictable threats that challenge our  
24 American dream. Within this context, our Navy finds itself  
25 central to what will likely be the most important chapter

1 in the 250-year history of the incredible story that  
2 defines American naval dominance.

3 Years of shrinking fleet size and diminished  
4 shipbuilding capacity and on-time repair delivery execution  
5 have manifested themselves as persistent challenges,  
6 previously masked by unquestioned naval supremacy  
7 throughout the last three decades.

8 As China continues to grow its naval strength and the  
9 potential for peer naval conflict grows at a steady pace  
10 each passing day, the veil is slowly lifting on the impacts  
11 of poor choices made decades ago, which leveraged a  
12 perceived myopic peace dividend, that now pressurizes and  
13 oversubscribes our decision space for choices we face  
14 today. These choices will similarly ripple into the  
15 future, with impacts that could, without intervention,  
16 shape the future design and overmatch of our great Navy.

17 Our maritime fighting forces must continue to be  
18 lethal, resilient, agile, and globally present, capable of  
19 deterring conflict and, when called upon, achieving  
20 decisive victory, delivering peace through the strength  
21 derived from our credible and persistent combat power from  
22 the sea. We must be on an enduring path to deter and  
23 defeat threats far into the future, but we must also be  
24 ready now -- to fight tonight if called upon.

25 This duality of urgency -- being ready both today and

1 tomorrow -- means we cannot choose one at the sacrifice of  
2 the other. The protection and prosperity owed to the  
3 American people demands both -- seamlessly integrated,  
4 realistically affordable, and highly effective.

5 To achieve this, if confirmed, I will relentlessly  
6 pursue full-spectrum readiness, modernizing our fleet's  
7 capabilities, scaling readiness capacity, and aggressively  
8 forging our resilient and resourceful sailors who bring all  
9 our combat power to life. I also plan to deepen  
10 integration across all domains, from sea, air, cyber,  
11 space, and the undersea like never before, massing effects  
12 from multiple vectors, platforms, and environments,  
13 seamlessly integrating these effects with the Joint Force  
14 along with our allies and partners.

15 To outpace our adversaries, we must lee-turn them with  
16 thoughtful approaches to warfare, harnessing innovation to  
17 take longer strides at a faster pace, relying on the  
18 ingenuity, skill, and brilliance of our American workforce  
19 and reimagined industrial base. By leveraging modern,  
20 modular, and scalable platforms, investing in human capital  
21 and warfighting excellence, and integrating capabilities  
22 across all domains, my sights are locked-in on a Navy that  
23 is not only lethal and survivable, but also adaptable and  
24 sustainable, ready to fight and win for decades to come,  
25 securing freedom of navigation and projecting power where

1 and when it matters most.

2 I am truly honored for the opportunity to continue to  
3 serve in the world's most powerful Navy. I look forward to  
4 the opportunity to work closely with this Committee and  
5 with our nation's elected congressional leadership.

6 I am grateful for your time today and your  
7 consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to your  
8 questions. Thank you.

9 [The prepared statement of Admiral Caudle follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Admiral Caudle.  
2 And let me just point out that a number of our members are  
3 being excused to go to an Appropriations Committee markup.  
4 So we will continue to work with them and get a number of  
5 questions in.

6 Thank you, Admiral, for your very powerful statement.  
7 I agree with it wholeheartedly.

8 We have some standard questions that we ask of all  
9 military nominees, and I will ask them now. Simply keep  
10 your microphone on and answer yes or no.

11 To exercise its legislative and oversight  
12 responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and  
13 other appropriate committees of the Congress be able to  
14 receive testimony, briefings, and other communications of  
15 information. Have you adhered to applicable laws and  
16 regulations governing conflicts of interest?

17 Admiral Caudle: Yes.

18 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree, when asked, to give  
19 your personal views, even if those views differ from the  
20 Administration in power?

21 Admiral Caudle: Yes.

22 Chairman Wicker: Have you assumed any duties or  
23 undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the  
24 outcome of the confirmation process?

25 Admiral Caudle: No.

1 Chairman Wicker: Will you ensure your staff complies  
2 with deadlines established for requested communications,  
3 including questions for the record in hearings?

4 Admiral Caudle: Yes.

5 Chairman Wicker: Even this hearing perhaps.

6 Will you cooperate in providing witnesses and briefers  
7 in response to congressional requests?

8 Admiral Caudle: Yes.

9 Chairman Wicker: Will those witnesses be protected  
10 from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

11 Admiral Caudle: Yes.

12 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree, if confirmed, to  
13 appear and testify, upon request, before this Committee?

14 Admiral Caudle: Yes.

15 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree to provide documents,  
16 including copies of electronic forms of communication, in a  
17 timely manner when requested by a duly constituted  
18 committee, or to consult with the committee regarding the  
19 basis for any good faith delay or denial in providing such  
20 documents?

21 Admiral Caudle: Yes, Chairman.

22 Chairman Wicker: And then let me ask a question which  
23 we have asked of all of our nominees this year. Much of  
24 the funding in the defense reconciliation bill is  
25 unspecific in the reconciliation bill, because of our



1 rules, and will technically be at the discretion of DoD,  
2 though we have provided recommendations for them. A quick  
3 yes or no, Admiral. Do you commit to follow the Congress'  
4 spending recommendations in defense reconciliation  
5 unequivocally?

6 Admiral Caudle: Yes.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. And I noticed  
8 you mentioned manpower, and I appreciate that. On  
9 recruiting, there is some talk that we might, in attempting  
10 to get our numbers up, we have lowered standards. How do  
11 you plan to ensure the service does not become reliant on  
12 permanently lowered standards?

13 Admiral Caudle: Senator, first let me just say thank  
14 you for the time we got to spend together in our various  
15 meetings recently, and that you quoted Hyman Rickover in  
16 your opening. And I think part of my goal is to carry his  
17 principles into this job, if confirmed. And so standards  
18 are at the heart of his philosophy, and of course mine, as  
19 a career-long submarine officer.

20 So in no way, shape, or form have we lowered any  
21 standards to what we deliver, which is our most precious  
22 resource, our sailors, to the fleet. And so to meet  
23 recruiting obligations there have been changes to policy in  
24 the last several years, that I would characterize as  
25 increasing access to our Navy and utilization of our future

1 sailor preparation course. And how we leverage that to  
2 ensure that they enter boot camp at the highest levels,  
3 coupled with their AFQT scores, I think has in no way  
4 lowered the standard. And at the end of the day, all  
5 sailors that graduate from boot camp meet the rigorous  
6 standards of that course to the letter. The A and C  
7 schools that they have to pass meet all those standards to  
8 the letter.

9 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Well, just be aware that  
10 there is that concern, and we wish you well on that. I  
11 have served as a junior member of this Committee for a long  
12 time, and then as Chair of Seapower and Ranking Member of  
13 Seapower. And in that connection, this Committee has  
14 become convinced, over time, that programs in high schools,  
15 like Junior ROTC, can build a long-term recruiting  
16 pipeline, and then we were sort of moving away from  
17 pretending like that is not a great recruiting tool. And  
18 as such, we have directed, not just a request or not just a  
19 suggestion, we have directed that we raise the number of  
20 Junior ROTC opportunities around the nation.

21 Will you commit to following the law as we put in  
22 NDAA's over the past, and maintaining and increasing  
23 investments in programs like Junior ROTC, that build long-  
24 term recruiting pipelines?

25 Admiral Caudle: Chairman, I would definitely commit

1 to that. I am a fan of that, and learned more about that  
2 in the preparation for this. And I would say we maybe have  
3 not gone deep enough, and we ought to also be reaching into  
4 the middle schools to make sure we are making people aware  
5 of the Navy and service to our nation.

6 Chairman Wicker: And, of course, they have the added  
7 benefit of building citizens, good citizenship, and an  
8 agreement to go extra steps in responsibility. We get  
9 better high school graduates. We get higher grades. We  
10 get better attendance, and better preparation in the  
11 civilian job market.

12 Okay. There is a Navigation Plan 2024. You are very  
13 familiar with that, are you not?

14 Admiral Caudle: Yes, Senator.

15 Chairman Wicker: Okay. With regard to integration of  
16 autonomous system, 80 percent surge, enhancing training  
17 through virtual environments and strengthening maritime  
18 operation centers, do you support that, and is there  
19 anything that needs to be substantially changed in that  
20 NAVPLAN '24?

21 Admiral Caudle: Well, Chairman, the Navigation Plan I  
22 think did a great job at identifying all the critical  
23 capabilities that we need to fight and win. And the  
24 prioritization of those has been heavily invested in our  
25 ability to deliver the capabilities, and particularly

1 against our most pacing threat of China. If confirmed as  
2 the next CNO, I will probably reemphasize my obligation to  
3 sailor quality of life, which I think is extremely  
4 important, and really quality of service, which is the  
5 combination of quality of life and quality of work. And  
6 what I term the foundry, from my time at Fleet Forces,  
7 which is the compilation of all the unaccompanied housing,  
8 school houses, peers, infrastructure, hangars. Really the  
9 bedrock by which we launch the Navy from I think needs  
10 additional attention.

11 So in addition to the capabilities that are chaptered  
12 in the Navigation Plan as it currently exists, my emphasis  
13 will definitely be on sailors and their ability to conduct  
14 business in a most effective way.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, and we may go  
16 into that further. Senator King, you are now recognized.

17 Senator King: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.  
18 Admiral, congratulations and thanks to you and your family  
19 for your commitment to this country and for your  
20 willingness to step into this very important role.

21 First, I want to convey some congratulations through  
22 you to your mates in the Navy for the incredible  
23 performance of the Navy in the Red Sea. I have to mention  
24 at least one of those vessels was a Bath-built destroyer.  
25 But the performance, I have had multiple briefings, was

1 really extraordinary, and reacted to a difficult situation  
2 extremely well. So if you would please convey the  
3 congratulations and thanks of this Committee and the  
4 Congress for that bit of bravery, courage, and military  
5 technology and manpower. It was a great effort. Thank  
6 you.

7 Admiral Caudle: Senator, I will pass that.

8 Senator King: I also, on a parenthetical, want to  
9 thank you and thank the Navy for sending ships to Maine,  
10 and I want to emphasize why that is important. We were  
11 talking about recruiting. One of the problems in our  
12 country today is that we have closed so many bases that  
13 young people do not see people in uniform anymore. So  
14 having a ship at the Rockland Lobster Festival, or at the  
15 Eastport Fourth of July Parade, or, I am sure, other  
16 coastal communities in this country, makes a difference in  
17 showing the flag, if you will. And I hope you will  
18 continue that practice, because again, I think it fits into  
19 the recruiting effort, but it also just notifies our  
20 citizens of the importance of the Navy and what you are  
21 able to project.

22 Admiral Caudle: Well, thank you, Senator. I  
23 completely agree with that. Thank you for the time we got  
24 to spend together. Thank you for what Maine gives the  
25 Navy, from the at Cutler and our fixed submarine broadcast

1 site all the way down to the bottom, to the disputed  
2 location of ports and naval shipyards.

3 Senator King: Aren't you a diplomat.

4 Admiral Caudle: Thank you, sir.

5 Senator King: Senator Shaheen is not here. You can  
6 say it is in Maine.

7 [Laughter.]

8 Senator King: Well, I really appreciate that. Now,  
9 one of your important roles, as CNO, is as a military  
10 advisor to the President. And it is critically important,  
11 throughout history, at this time as any other time in  
12 history, that you be willing to give your best military  
13 advice, regardless of the preferences of the President.  
14 This is a famously strong-willed President. Are you  
15 willing to give the President advice he may not want to  
16 hear, based upon your best military analysis?

17 Admiral Caudle: Senator, I am absolutely ready to do  
18 that. I think it is an obligation. I swore an oath to do  
19 that. And if confirmed, I will do that with my utmost  
20 ability.

21 Senator King: I appreciate that. You may be tested  
22 on that, but that is exactly the attitude. Otherwise, we  
23 are not serving the President well or the country well.

24 We talked about industrial base. It was touched upon.  
25 One of the things that is missing, and has been missing,

1 and this is not on your watch, is the 30-year shipbuilding  
2 plan. We always talk about the industrial base. One of  
3 the things the industrial base needs is a consistent demand  
4 signal, and part of that is a 30-year shipbuilding plan  
5 that says to the private sector, here are the ships we are  
6 planning to build, here is the schedule, here is what we  
7 are looking for in terms of the modern Navy. I hope that  
8 that can be one of the things you attend to on your watch  
9 is producing that overdue 30-year shipbuilding plan.

10 Admiral Caudle: Senator, I often joke in my office a  
11 bit that you cannot change a 30-year shipbuilding plan  
12 every year. That is called a 1-year shipbuilding plan.

13 Senator King: And that is what we have had.

14 Admiral Caudle: Yes, sir. So changing year 31 is  
15 okay, but not year 1. But, sir, you have my complete  
16 commitment on that. I am a big fan of multiyear  
17 procurement, incremental funding, multi-ship buy. Anything  
18 that can stabilize our precious private and public shipyard  
19 workforce with clear planning demand signal, I am an  
20 advocate for.

21 Senator King: Well, that is absolutely a very  
22 important observation, and it is, as you say, the  
23 consistent demand signal. It allows the shipbuilding  
24 community to hire and maintain their workforce. We cannot  
25 have troughs, in terms of the demand.

1           You and I talked in my office about the issue of  
2   availability, and my observation has been if Carnival  
3   Cruise Line had the same availability level as the U.S.  
4   Navy they would be out of business. Now, I know they are  
5   more complicated ships, but we can do better than 50 or 60  
6   percent availability. I hope you agree.

7           Admiral Caudle: Sir, I agree. When I was at Miami  
8   Fleet Week I had the opportunity, when I was there, to meet  
9   with the Norwegian Cruise Line executives. I know we are  
10   also working with Carnival. We need a better approach to  
11   how we are doing maintenance, and learning from the best in  
12   the world certainly should be on the table. So I am  
13   committed to learning from them. The ship classes are  
14   different, of course, but the practices of how they prepare  
15   for their availabilities I think is ripe for us to learn  
16   from.

17          Senator King: Thank you. Final question, and I am  
18   out of time, but I hope you will pay attention to the  
19   subject of directed energy, which I think is a very  
20   important capability. A directed energy shot is a lot  
21   cheaper than a \$4 million missile. So the budget, the  
22   prior administration grossly underfunded directed energy.  
23   I hope that is something you will look at carefully and  
24   support, because I think that is the future of naval  
25   warfare.



1           Admiral Caudle:   Senator, my master's degree from the  
2   Naval Postgraduate School, back in 1990 through 1992, was  
3   in directed energy.   My thesis is on high-powered lasers.  
4   I have not seen the Navy do an adequate amount of effort  
5   translating the research and development into shipboard  
6   use.   We have the one instantiation on Preble.   It is not  
7   enough.   And I can agree with you that if confirmed, I will  
8   make that a priority, because it is the infinite magazine,  
9   if you will, especially against certain targets.

10          Senator King:   Thank you, Admiral.   You just got my  
11   vote.   Thank you, sir.

12          Chairman Wicker:   I am sure all of us will be asking  
13   for copies of that thesis by noon today.   Senator Fischer.

14          Senator Fischer:   Thank you, Mr. Chairman.   Welcome,  
15   Admiral.   My thanks to you and your family for your many  
16   years of service and sacrifice to this country.

17          The Navy's recent operations in the Red Sea against  
18   the Houthis showed us just how fast munitions are expended  
19   in these modern conflicts.   It highlights the need that we  
20   have for, I believe, a more robust defense industrial base  
21   so that we can quickly replenish those munitions  
22   stockpiles.   Do you have any suggestions on steps that you  
23   would take to help increase that munitions productions  
24   capacity?

25          Admiral Caudle:   Well, Senator, thanks for the time we

1 got to spend together on a couple of occasions, and all the  
2 conversations we have got to have.

3 That is a large project, but I can tell you some  
4 priorities that I would look for. First of all, we have  
5 way too many sole-source vendors that are underproducing.  
6 So what happens is we try to hold our contracts accountable  
7 for the primes, but they are being held hostage by  
8 components they cannot get in time, which ends up delaying  
9 the overall delivery of the munitions. So we need to work  
10 through that.

11 There are some efficiency steps of where we move  
12 around our munitions to too many places before final  
13 assembly, you know, so those are just waste steps. So how  
14 we actually gear and tune our industrial base to streamline  
15 the production more efficiently has got to be part of that.  
16 I often tell my team that we roll a Ford F-150 off the  
17 assembly line every 20 hours, but it takes greater than a  
18 year to build an SM-6. It is just unacceptable.

19 So the defense industrial base, it has got to come  
20 along with the Navy and working with this Committee with  
21 some innovative ideas on how to streamline the process,  
22 where we translate the incredible R&D side of what we are  
23 able to do in the United States with more emphasis on the  
24 production side. And I do not know that the existing  
25 defense industrial base is geared as well as it should be

1 for the production side of all of our business.

2 Senator Fischer: Thank you. I hope you will be firm  
3 in your suggestions on how we can better approach that.

4 The Columbia-class submarine, it is delayed, I  
5 understand, by about 17 months. What more do you think we  
6 can do to get that back on schedule?

7 Admiral Caudle: Well, you know, we anticipated some  
8 delay, and if you go look historically on the first of  
9 class, the Navy routinely delivers the first one, from the  
10 initial concept to its first deployment, anywhere from  
11 about 15 years, at best, to up to 20, 22 years. And so  
12 that is obviously not good, but that is historically where  
13 we find ourselves.

14 Columbia is an incredible platform that is going to  
15 take us into the 2080s. The technology on board that is  
16 like no other ship ever built. So the program managers,  
17 the Navy, and Electric Boat, and Huntington Ingalls  
18 Newport, we are a team on this. So we are working hard to  
19 go try to pull that schedule left. You do have their time  
20 right. It is about 18 months behind. So we are working  
21 some things, making sure that we do not fall behind on  
22 advanced procurement of materials, and that we are turning  
23 anything we see that may be a stop to the component  
24 assembly of those production parts.

25 There is no good answer to that other than just kind

1 of some great project management and leadership at the  
2 worksite.

3 Senator Fischer: Okay. I am concerned about the  
4 current nuclear modernization programs of record. They are  
5 necessary but they are not sufficient, that we have. The  
6 force design structure we have today, it was decided back  
7 in 2010.

8 If confirmed, how would you work with STRATCOM to  
9 determine the force structure that we need, that is going  
10 to be sufficient to really be a credible deterrent to two  
11 nuclear peers that are threatening our homeland and  
12 threatening the world?

13 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, I am concerned about  
14 that too. It is a math problem, so we are going to from a  
15 force of a higher class that have 20 tubes that are out of  
16 commission due to New START, and a class that has 14 ships  
17 with 24 potential tubes, down to a class of 12 with 16  
18 tubes. So there is going to have to be some sophistication  
19 and thinking about how we do the operational plans at U.S.  
20 Strategic Command, because General Cotton bears the risk of  
21 that new force structure design.

22 So I have to work closely with Strategic Command to  
23 understand that, and how the peer competition is growing in  
24 the nuclear space, with China growing, is going to be  
25 handled with the new Columbia force structure.

1           Senator Fischer: And as you work with STRATCOM, as  
2 all of you work with STRATCOM, to meet these threats and be  
3 able to come up with a plan that is going to be sufficient,  
4 how important is it for this Committee to listen to you?

5           Admiral Caudle: Senator, I think it is very important  
6 for you to listen to me. I think, you know, we bring a lot  
7 of experience. Again, I am a 40-year veteran in this, so  
8 there are things that we can always learn. But we do have  
9 a lot of experience in this exact problem set.

10          Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir.

11          Admiral Caudle: Thank you, Senator.

12          Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Fischer, and best  
13 wishes in the Appropriations Committee markup. Senator  
14 Hirono.

15          Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
16 Congratulations, Admiral, and thank you and your family for  
17 your service to our country.

18          To ensure the fitness to serve of the nominees who  
19 come before any of my committees I ask the following two  
20 initial questions, which I will ask of you. Since you  
21 became a legal adult have you ever made unwanted requests  
22 for sexual favors or committed any verbal or physical  
23 harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

24          Admiral Caudle: No, Senator.

25          Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or

1 entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

2 Admiral Caudle: No, Senator.

3 Senator Hirono: Admiral, the Navy is currently  
4 building a new dry dock at Pearl Harbor to support the  
5 Virginia-class submarine maintenance. This construction  
6 project is the largest in DoD history, at nearly \$4.5  
7 billion, but has faced significant cost overruns including  
8 an \$834 million increase just last year. Additionally, the  
9 project is now about 4 months behind schedule.

10 Should you be confirmed, how do you plan to ensure the  
11 dry dock construction remains on budget and on time?

12 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, let me just say I am a  
13 Hawaii sailor. My wife and I love the islands, 7 years  
14 there. I look forward to getting out there with you and  
15 touring that dry dock. It is a national asset.

16 Senator Hirono: Yes.

17 Admiral Caudle: So I share your concerns. The Navy's  
18 ability, at Naval Facilities Command, has historically not  
19 been good at estimating the cost and schedule on our dry  
20 docks. We have improved in that area and worked hard to do  
21 that. Unfortunately, the Hawaii dry dock was subject to  
22 that. It is unfortunate that those cost overruns occurred.  
23 If I am confirmed at CNO I will work with the team to do  
24 the best I can to get that back on plan and back on  
25 schedule, ma'am.

1           Senator Hirono: This is such a massive project that I  
2 do think that it requires your personal attention, so I am  
3 glad that you intend to go to Hawaii, and when you do  
4 please let me know when that happens, because I would l  
5 like to join you in that visit.

6           Admiral Caudle: Yes, Senator.

7           Senator Hirono: Would you commit to being personally  
8 engaged in making sure that this project comes in on time  
9 and on budget?

10          Admiral Caudle: Absolutely, Senator.

11          Senator Hirono: Thank you. As you well know, in 2021  
12 there was a giant fuel spill at Red Hill that impacted some  
13 90,000-plus residents in Hawaii, and there are some ongoing  
14 resources that will need to go toward what is going on at  
15 Red Hill, including defueling and making sure that the  
16 environmental issues attendant to closing that facility is  
17 supported.

18          So how do you plan to prioritize the necessary long-  
19 term environmental remediation at Red Hill, also ensuring  
20 that the Navy provides a safe drinking water system to the  
21 military and the surrounding community? Because that was  
22 one of the major problems that there were wells that were  
23 contaminating potentially the water system that the people  
24 of Oahu rely upon.

25          Admiral Caudle: Senator, you have my absolute

1 commitment on this. We want to finish the Red Hill  
2 defueling and cleaning process on time and on schedule. I  
3 look forward to working with you personally, my  
4 environmental team, to make sure that all facets of the  
5 parts that the Navy is responsible for are completed on  
6 time and to the maximum extent possible.

7 Senator Hirono: And I think you probably understand  
8 that the DoD is engaged in very important lease  
9 negotiations in Hawaii, to enable mainly our Army and  
10 Marine forces to be able to train on the Big Island, and  
11 that the entire incident involving Red Hill led to a lot of  
12 uncertainty and questions from the people of Hawaii as to  
13 the military's engagement in Hawaii. So it is very  
14 important to engage with the community, and I would like to  
15 have your commitment that you will prioritize that kind of  
16 sensitivity toward making sure that the military does not  
17 continue to raise issues as to whether or not we can count  
18 on the military to do what is right.

19 Admiral Caudle: Senator, you have my commitment to  
20 that.

21 Senator Hirono: I have some other questions for the  
22 record, but let me get to one that I hope will be a very  
23 easy yes. As you know, the United States does not ratify  
24 our commitment or our participation in UNCLOS, and  
25 especially as what is going on with Russia, et cetera.



1 There have been your predecessors who have said that  
2 supporting U.S. accession to UNCLOS would be a good thing.  
3 Do you agree?

4 Admiral Caudle: Senator, I agree from the Navy  
5 perspective that the provisions in UNCLOS for a maritime  
6 piece, my equities are captured by that. It is my  
7 understanding, and I am not steeped in this, that the lack  
8 of ratification on that deals more with at-sea mining and  
9 some of the definitions and possible constraints that  
10 UNCLOS could have on our ability to do what we need as a  
11 nation. It is outside my lane.

12 Senator Hirono: I would say that it is about time  
13 that we ratified our participation in UNCLOS, especially  
14 with what is going on with, as I mentioned, Russia and  
15 China's activities.

16 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator  
18 Scott.

19 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman. Admiral, you  
20 have got the right background. You are going to do an  
21 outstanding job. And I want to thank you for your years of  
22 service, and I want to thank your family for their  
23 sacrifice and their commitment to you. I think you are  
24 going to do an outstanding job. You are doing a fixer-  
25 upper. You have got a lot of work to do.

1           As an enlisted guy that joined after high school I  
2   hope you remember all those young men and women that come  
3   right out of high school and have real core beliefs in our  
4   military and the opportunity that they have, and I hope you  
5   will treat them with respect and help them get the  
6   opportunities that I had when I was in the Navy.

7           Admiral Caudle: Yes, sir.

8           Senator Scott: So I have been up here 6 1/2 years.  
9   The Federal Government, in my opinion, has had unbelievable  
10  lack of accountability. I will just give you one for the  
11  Navy. The new destroyer, the DDG-125, was commissioned in  
12  October 2023, and yet cannot be deployed until at least  
13  2028, because it has radar that needs to be tested. That  
14  does not seem like it makes much sense.

15          So do you have any idea why the Navy would build a  
16  ship and not test the radar on the ship before  
17  commissioning it?

18          Admiral Caudle: Senator, I share your frustration  
19  with that trend. I have seen it far too often. We are in  
20  the shipyard for years and come out, and immediately have  
21  to go across the pier and get into a modernization period,  
22  to actually go get modernized before I actually deliver.

23          I want to work very closely, if I am confirmed, with  
24  our program offices on fixing that. The integration of all  
25  the systems, the timely delivery of all that, the turnkey

1 ability for that ship, once it is ready, to be handed over  
2 to me, needs to tighten up. And if I am confirmed, I will  
3 work hard to try to assuage the problem that you have just  
4 described with the Lucas.

5 Senator Scott: So do you think that you will have the  
6 authority to hold people accountable, both the people in  
7 the military, the civilian workforce, and our suppliers?  
8 Because it seems like it is all three. We have not held  
9 our military leaders accountable, the civilians, or the  
10 suppliers, I mean, give me a break. I am a business guy.  
11 If this happened to me, I mean, somebody would not be  
12 there. You know, you are really nice but you are not going  
13 to work here.

14 Admiral Caudle: Senator, as you and I discussed in  
15 our office call, you know, the holding of military program  
16 managers accountable, I have struggled with in my career.  
17 You know, we have a very clear mechanism for operational  
18 commanders. It is not so clear with program managers.  
19 These are complex programs, multi-billion dollar programs.  
20 I know the Secretary of the Navy and I have discussed  
21 better ways to actually ensure outcomes are happening in  
22 our programs, and accountability, and measuring the  
23 performance of people better that do that type of work.

24 On the industry side, it goes to my opening a bit  
25 about sole source. When I find myself in monopolistic type

1 of environments, the contracting strategy that I can  
2 utilize to do any type of accountability and incentives is  
3 challenging. But it is not insurmountable, and I do think  
4 we need to improve there, sir.

5 Senator Scott: Yeah. Well, this is what my goal was,  
6 don't deal with monopolists. I remember somebody told me I  
7 had to do business with them. I said, "Well, if I do, I  
8 will," but I figured out how not to do business with them.  
9 I saw them about 6 months later, and he told his wife,  
10 "He's why we didn't make our numbers last quarter, because  
11 we moved so much business."

12 So at the end of your time in this role, what will be  
13 your, you will say "I succeeded or failed." What is your  
14 True North?

15 Admiral Caudle: Well, I think you would see a Navy  
16 that has got a ship count that is climbing commensurate  
17 with a 4-year assignment, where we are on pace with the  
18 delivery, meeting the contraction delivery dates and not  
19 over by 1 or 2 years, as we currently experience. You  
20 would see the gaps at sea on our ships have gone to zero.  
21 You would see the munition floor requirements that we have  
22 completely met. You cannot win a war without munitions.  
23 You would see the backlog of supply parts that we use  
24 typically as a bill payer, frequently at the end of the  
25 year, re-zeroed out so the lockers on board our ships are

1 filled with the repair parts they need. And that the  
2 world-class training that our sailors deserve is just  
3 firing on all cylinders.

4 So if I can accomplish those things at the end of this  
5 assignment, if I am confirmed, I would be pretty happy.

6 Senator Scott: You are going to do a great job.

7 Congratulations.

8 Admiral Caudle: Thank you, sir.

9 Chairman Wicker: We would be exceedingly happy.

10 Senator Kaine.

11 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Admiral Caudle,  
12 good to see you again. Senator Scott talked about, at the  
13 beginning, about just please respect the sailors. And I  
14 just want to share with my colleagues, Admiral Caudle and I  
15 have worked pretty closely together on a very thorny  
16 problem, which is we had two clusters of suicides among  
17 sailors in Hampton Roads. A number of sailors connected  
18 with this long refueling of the GW, where they were, you  
19 know, in dock, in a kind of a pointless, Waiting for Godot  
20 situation. And then also a number of sailors who were  
21 assigned to limited duty status at the Mid-Atlantic  
22 Regional Maintenance Center.

23 And I just want to share with my colleagues, along  
24 with everything else he was doing to make sure we could win  
25 battles -- and I am going to ask about that in a second --

1 Admiral Caudle really, really took this very seriously and  
2 made a number of changes in both of these units, and more  
3 generally, throughout the Navy, that I think demonstrates a  
4 real focus on the success of each individual sailor. And I  
5 just want to thank you for that, Admiral Caudle.

6 Admiral Caudle: Thank you, sir.

7 Senator Kaine: With respect to winning battles, I do  
8 not think you have gotten enough credit. I do not think  
9 the Navy has gotten enough credit for the work in the Red  
10 Sea, and I know my colleague, Senator King, just brought  
11 that up. We have been getting a lot of briefings about the  
12 work in the Red Sea against the Houthis, keeping shipping  
13 lanes open for global commerce, et cetera. A lot of those  
14 briefings have been in classified settings. And I am not  
15 sure the public has fully understood the degree of danger  
16 that the Navy has been under, the daily assaults and  
17 attacks that the Navy has been under, and that essentially,  
18 you know, you have kind of been 1000 percent during this.

19 Talk a little bit about the success of the Navy in  
20 these operations and lessons learned going forward.

21 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, thanks for all the  
22 time you afford me, and our partnership in Hampton Roads  
23 area is crucial, as you know, that industrial base there  
24 and what it brings to Virginia. So thank you for that.  
25 And thank you for the acknowledgement of the sailors and

1 strike groups and destroyers and submarines that have been  
2 part of those operations.

3 Let me just highlight real quick just the importance  
4 of the heroes on board these ships. Those are the real  
5 weapon system, it is the sailors on board. Their training  
6 -- and you can go watch any of these crews that are in  
7 these combat centers and the way they are minding their  
8 panels in a very complex environment and defending the  
9 carrier strike group so it can conduct its operations.

10 The rate of learning and the turnaround between when  
11 we get an engagement dataset back to the community of  
12 practice, which is our Warfare Development Center, the team  
13 at Dahlgren, the surface commander in the Atlantic, to  
14 digest that, to make sure that shock doctrine, the weapons  
15 selection, the algorithm used by the Aegis Combat System is  
16 perfectly tuned, and made adaptations in real time is world  
17 class on that.

18 And then finally, just the evolution of actually  
19 attacking each attack with the right munitions, so using  
20 more air-to-air assets, which are cheaper than an SM-6 or  
21 an SM-2, and using electronic warfare to do that, when  
22 possible. So that learning curve has been great there.

23 And then the spectrum of care we have given those  
24 warriors that have operated in that engagement zone starts  
25 in the Red Sea, on the transit back. We give them a hero's

1 welcome when they return to the pier, and we continue to  
2 follow up with them afterwards, to make sure they get the  
3 care they need.

4 Senator Kaine: I really appreciate you sharing that.  
5 We have been very aware of the learning that we are all  
6 doing, based on watching evolution in the battlefield in  
7 Ukraine. But this battlefield in the Red Sea, where the  
8 Navy has performed so well, has created a lot of evolution  
9 of practice in ways that can bear fruit going forward.

10 My colleagues have heard me talk about this during the  
11 NDAA markup, but I want to just raise it again. By  
12 including defense spending in the reconciliation we had  
13 some strange issues arise as we assessed the Pentagon's  
14 budget requests. The example was the Pentagon made  
15 assumptions about how much money the reconciliation bill  
16 would have for Virginia-class subs, but that turned out to  
17 be off by \$2 billion. We fixed a significant portion of  
18 that deficit. The Chairman was key to that. There still  
19 remains a gap. So I am concerned that there could be a  
20 cascading effect over the next several years.

21 But one thing that could help give us some clarity on  
22 the issue, going forward, would be timely delivery of a 30-  
23 year shipbuilding plan. Should you be confirmed, do you  
24 commit to timely delivery of the 30-year shipbuilding plan  
25 with the President's budget request so that we can make



1    sure we are aligning our needs with our resource  
2    allocation?

3           Admiral Caudle:  Senator, I commit to that.  I will  
4    work diligently with the Secretary of the Navy to deliver  
5    that on time.

6           Senator Kaine:  Last question I will ask is this.  I  
7    am a big supporter of AUKUS.  What is your assessment of  
8    AUKUS's progress, and what might Congress do to help keep  
9    it on track?

10          Admiral Caudle:  Well, Senator, for everyone, there is  
11   no question that Australia fields incredible submariners.  
12   They have served on board U.S. submarines, and with me  
13   personally for decades.  I am personal friends of the Chief  
14   of Staff of the Navy there, Mark Hammond, and he and I are  
15   good friends for a long time.  So the question of  
16   Australia's ability to conduct undersea warfare is not in  
17   question by me, I think, or anyone.

18          As you know, the delivery pace is not where it needs  
19   to be to make good on the Pillar 1 of the AUKUS agreement,  
20   which is currently under review by our Defense Department.  
21   So I think, rightly so, we do have to understand whether or  
22   not the industrial base can produce the submarines required  
23   so that we can make good on the actual pact that we have  
24   made with the U.K. and Australia, which is around 2.2 to  
25   2.3 Virginia-class submarines per year.  That is going to

1 require a transformational improvement, not a 10 percent  
2 improvement, not a 20 percent, a 100 percent improvement.

3 Chairman Wicker: We need to do that, though, don't  
4 we, Admiral?

5 Admiral Caudle: To improve?

6 Chairman Wicker: We need that transformational  
7 improvement, do we not?

8 Admiral Caudle: Absolutely, Chairman. Absolutely.  
9 We need a transformational improvement and the ability to  
10 deliver twice the capacity that we are currently  
11 delivering.

12 Chairman Wicker: So if I can follow on what the  
13 Senator has asked, we need to quickly and resolutely get to  
14 where we need to be to fulfill our Pillar 1 obligations and  
15 move on to Pillar 2. Is that your assessment?

16 Admiral Caudle: Yes, Chairman. My assessment would  
17 be Pillar 2, we need to have that on steroids already. You  
18 know, the technology transfers and the things we are doing  
19 with artificial intelligence and cyber and undersea  
20 unmanned vehicles, all those types of things that we can  
21 collaborate with our great partners in the United Kingdom  
22 and Australia needs to be working in parallel. But in  
23 parallel, we need to transformationally improve the output  
24 of the two yards that are producing our Virginia-class  
25 submarines. There needs to be some creativity, some

1 ingenuity, some outsourcing improvements, stop the  
2 attrition levels that are currently there today, at those  
3 two yards. So we need an all-hands-on-deck approach to  
4 this to get to the 2.3 submarines per year.

5 Chairman Wicker: Do you commit to doing that?

6 Admiral Caudle: I do. I want to work closely with  
7 both of those companies, and our program offices, and the  
8 Secretary of the Navy, and your Committee, and the entire  
9 congressional team, to actually improve production.

10 Chairman Wicker: Well, I am glad Senator Kaine raised  
11 this. It was obvious that it needed to be raised. But I  
12 am glad we were able to nail that down in this year, so  
13 thank you, Senator Kaine.

14 Senator Budd.

15 Senator Budd: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, it  
16 is great to see you. I enjoyed our conversation a week or  
17 so ago. It is great to see a North Carolinian here. We  
18 have got 100 counties, but I think we even share roots in  
19 Forsyth County. So it is great to see you, and congrats on  
20 your nomination. Glad to see your family and supporters  
21 here, as well.

22 You have said, Admiral, that many other Navy leaders  
23 have talked about rebuilding and boosting production of our  
24 Navy fleet. You know, it is a decade-plus endeavor. My  
25 concern is that our adversaries, they are not going to wait

1 for that decade. They are going to try to outpace us. And  
2 I am also concerned that the next conflict is not going to  
3 look like what we are building towards. It might include  
4 it, but it is also more than that.

5 So, Admiral, what steps will you take to invest in  
6 unmanned systems, whether that is aerial, surface,  
7 underwater, and how do you see them used for projecting  
8 power?

9 Admiral Caudle: Senator, thanks, and it is a great to  
10 have a North Carolinian here with me, and I appreciate that  
11 time we got to spend in our office call.

12 There is no question that unmanned, robotic,  
13 autonomous systems will be part of any modern warfare going  
14 forward. You know, the learning that we have had from the  
15 Russia-Ukraine, we see it in spades, we see it from the  
16 Israel conflicts, we are all learning from this. Everyone  
17 is, including our adversaries, so we have to pace that.

18 So there has to be robust investments in robotic,  
19 autonomous, unmanned systems. There has to be good, clean  
20 command and control. And there has to be good concepts of  
21 operations. There has to be good ideas on how we are going  
22 to deliver those capabilities, so they are not just  
23 PowerPoint deep. There has got to be good sustainment.  
24 And if we are going to make things actually, call them  
25 attritable, they really need to be attritable. It is not

1 in our nature in the Navy to really treat things  
2 attritable. So we can spend money that maybe is not  
3 necessary in that area where we need to just be able to get  
4 a paradigm shift on how we treat those.

5 But I completely agree with you, and if confirmed, you  
6 have my commitment that this idea of a hybrid fleet will be  
7 part of my vision for the future of the Navy.

8 Senator Budd: Thank you, Admiral. You know, that was  
9 a question about how we play offense, but let's talk about  
10 how we play defense, as well. What would you do to protect  
11 our naval installations and assets from unmanned threats,  
12 and how would you work across the Federal agencies to make  
13 sure that we do not have a modern-day Pearl Harbor, with  
14 drone swarms or any other types of modern attacks?

15 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, my current position at  
16 Fleet Force is I am also the Naval Component Commander to  
17 NORTHCOM. So it is my responsibility for force protection  
18 of all CONUS bases. So this idea of having good counter,  
19 unmanned aerial systems at our installations is extremely  
20 important to me. It is something I have worked very  
21 closely with General Guillot, the NORTHCOM Commander, on.  
22 You know, it really got highlighted with the UAVs that were  
23 seen around Langley and around Earle, New Jersey, kind of  
24 put this on the map. But it is something we have been  
25 watching for several years, understanding we are not well-

1 equipped at all of our bases to handle that threat.

2       So this ties to Section 130i authorities for covering  
3 bases and assets, to make sure all bases have those  
4 authorities. These are best-of-breed practices, as a joint  
5 solution. Some of my sister services have better solutions  
6 than the Navy. I need to learn from that and field some of  
7 those capabilities.

8       But at the heart of that, sir, is good, common  
9 operational picture, so the base commander can see the  
10 environment, and a range of ways to actually approach  
11 countering attacks that they may encounter from UAVs. And  
12 that has to be non-lethal and lethal effects.

13       Senator Budd: Thank you. So if confirmed, Admiral,  
14 how would you direct the Navy's acquisition system, if it  
15 is buying systems you just talked about or anything else  
16 you have in mind or that we need? How would you do that  
17 to cut red tape, streamline contracting, and speed up  
18 delivery of these critical systems? I know we have talked  
19 about that, but drill down, if you would, to the first 90  
20 days, how you would want to get after this.

21       Admiral Caudle: Well, I need to get smarter on the  
22 impediments that currently exist in law. You know, as an  
23 operational commander for most of my career, I have been, I  
24 will call it somewhat of a victim of it and not necessarily  
25 a person that has, you know, been able to get take charge

1 on it. But now I find myself, if confirmed, being in a  
2 position to do that.

3 I know there is a lot of red tape. I know there are a  
4 lot of antiquated laws. I know there is a lot of  
5 acquisition process that needs to be streamlined. I know  
6 there are authorities that need to be pushed down, with  
7 better delegation, commercial solution offerings, and  
8 agreements that we need to leverage to actually get these  
9 capabilities faster and more effectively to our  
10 warfighters. And then a quick ability to actually test,  
11 field, experiment, and get this out in the actual  
12 deployment cycle, so we are actually getting the entire  
13 Navy's hands-on approach to actually operating these  
14 systems more effectively.

15 Senator Budd: Thank you. Any thoughts on working  
16 with international partners for maintenance and repair for  
17 our Navy fleet?

18 Admiral Caudle: Senator, I think the state of our  
19 maintenance and shipbuilding and other areas of the like is  
20 a 100 percent all-hands-on-deck. So I would be remiss if I  
21 did not consider partners that want to help me, until I get  
22 my ship industrial base in the United States, along with  
23 the Department of Defense and the interagency -- this is a  
24 whole-of-government approach -- up on step.

25 So I do agree that allies and partners can be crucial

1 in helping us in this interim time, while we are working to  
2 get our industrial capacity in the United States to the  
3 place it needs to be.

4 Senator Budd: Thank you, Admiral.

5 Chairman Wicker: Admiral, as you drill down on  
6 obstacles that may exist in law, do you think that you will  
7 be led to a number of FORGED Act provisions that exist in  
8 this Committee's NDAA?

9 Admiral Caudle: Well, Chairman, you know, looking at  
10 the FORGED Act from where I sit now, and I am not deep in  
11 it, I wholeheartedly agree that we need to streamline and  
12 make more efficient the acquisition process. We need  
13 better commercial solutions. We need better authorities,  
14 again, as I mentioned, to be push that down to a level that  
15 where decisions and the right dollar amount is tied with  
16 that decision delegation. We need to actually improve the  
17 efficiencies so that we are not drowning under the  
18 paperwork of getting these types of capabilities.

19 The devil is in the details, though, as you and I  
20 talked about. I do have Title 10 authorities, and so does  
21 the Secretary of the Navy. So any time you try to short-  
22 circuit, you know, make things quicker, I just want to make  
23 sure that the equities and the requirements that I am  
24 required to have to ensure these capabilities, that I can  
25 organize, train, and equip sailors to operate and sustain



1     them is not short-circuited.

2             So if that is the case, then yes, I am very much  
3     behind it, sir.

4             Chairman Wicker: Well, and it happens that we will  
5     not be able to put our NDAA on the floor next week, in all  
6     likelihood, so you have got 4 weeks to really drill down on  
7     some obstacles that we might be able to remove for you as  
8     we go to the floor. So thank you very much on that.

9             Senator Reed, you are back in the room, and we are  
10    glad to have you.

11            Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and  
12    welcome again, Admiral.

13            The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Smith,  
14    indicated that the need for three Marine Expeditionary  
15    Units, MEUs, is actually his north star, as he called it,  
16    essential to the Marine Corps. And in the fiscal year 2023  
17    NDAA, Congress amended Title 10 to require that the Navy  
18    maintain 31 amphibious ships. But with maintenance  
19    backlogs and other issues, we are now only able to deploy  
20    one MEU, and sometimes two MEUs.

21            Do you agree with the Commandant that we need three  
22    MEUs, and what can we do to get them?

23            Admiral Caudle: Ranking Member Reed, General Smith  
24    and I are partners. We are good friends, personally. I do  
25    understand what he views as a requirement to deliver three

1 ARG/MEUs. The last time we were able to do that was in the  
2 '90s. It took a force structure of 37 to 40 amphibious  
3 ships to do that. I am committed to making sure that I  
4 comply with the law with 31 amphib ships, so I just want to  
5 make sure that is clear.

6 So 31, with our model that we currently have, even if  
7 the maintenance challenges that I can discuss with our  
8 amphib readiness were not in play, 3.0 ARG/MEU presence  
9 would not be capable with a 31-ship force structure, with a  
10 4 to 5 to make one, 100 percent of the time.

11 So I do look at that as a goal, and I am committed to  
12 working with him to deliver the most combat power that  
13 force can deliver, while I am getting the readiness of  
14 those units improved, which it desperately needs, which  
15 means adopting a lot of the best practices that we do with  
16 other ships that, quite frankly, we have not applied to the  
17 amphibious force until late.

18 Senator Reed: Thank you, sir. One of the great  
19 challenges before us, particularly in the INDOPACOM area,  
20 is contested logistics. We have been operating, frankly,  
21 since World War II with air superiority and the ability to  
22 move supplies anywhere we want. We will not have that if  
23 there is a conflict in the Pacific. And as Napoleon  
24 reminded us, an army moves on its stomach, and I think the  
25 Navy moves a little bit on its stomach also.

1           What capabilities will you need and what can you do to  
2   ensure that we can get the ammo and the support we need to  
3   our troops?

4           Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, this is one of the, if  
5   not the most complex problems that the Indo-Pacific  
6   commander has and the PAC fleet commander has is to rearm,  
7   resupply, repair, replenish our units that are conducting  
8   high-end warfare in a very contested environment. A lot of  
9   energy and focus and experimentation and war gaming has  
10   gone to this. Command structures are being built to  
11   actually command and control it effectively.

12          At the heart of it is going to have to take a healthy  
13   combat logistics force, okay, so I have got work to do  
14   there, if confirmed as CNO, to deliver the combat logistics  
15   force that the Pacific Force commander needs.

16          Everyone is subject to targeting in a theater. And so  
17   all the efforts that we are doing for counter-targeting to  
18   make our units resilient, so that they are not under  
19   target, being examined and as a target, has got to be part  
20   of that. A moving target is hard to hit, so all the  
21   technologies that we are doing to be able to do things  
22   while underway improves resiliency and making us to be able  
23   to actually do those things we talked about.

24          The allies and partnerships that we are going to need  
25   for access facing and oversight are going to be crucial to

1 this, as well. So there has got to be a full spectrum  
2 approach to ensuring we are able to do this, sir, and I am  
3 committed to that, if confirmed.

4 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Admiral. I  
5 think one of the areas, too, is that we do not have a very  
6 robust Merchant Marine fleet, and we are either going to  
7 have to borrow it or somehow find it, and I think this is  
8 another one of the issues you must confront.

9 Just quickly a comment. Cyber, we are having a  
10 difficult time in every service to both train effective  
11 cyber operators and, more importantly, retain them. I hope  
12 that is something that you will into very closely and see  
13 if we can enhance both the training and the retention of  
14 these personnel.

15 Admiral Caudle: Ranking Member Reed, cyber is an  
16 incredible aspect of modern warfare. It is an incredible  
17 part of our own warfare structure and our ability to  
18 defend, conduct offensive operations, exploitation  
19 operations. These are critical skills. The teams that we  
20 build for U.S. Cyber Command, the Navy has not fielded all  
21 the requirement. We have definitely improved. We have  
22 created ratings, like our MOSs, essentially, for the Navy,  
23 and designators for officers to improve that.

24 But the attrition of those forces, because they are so  
25 highly trained, are in high demand, from everyone. And so

1    there is a model there that I need to understand better to  
2    make sure that I can actually pull this off, working with  
3    the Joint Force, to make sure that we can deliver what we  
4    need as a service in this critical domain. And I am  
5    committed, if confirmed, to doing that, sir.

6           Senator Reed: Thank you very much, sir. Thank you,  
7    Mr. Chairman.

8           Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Reed. Senator  
9    Rounds.

10          Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral,  
11   first of all, thank you for your service to our country.  
12   Thank you to your family for their sacrifice, as well.

13          Let's talk spectrum. We did in my office. I want to  
14   get it on the record. This Committee would be disappointed  
15   if I didn't follow this line at some point. I have heard  
16   from over 30 senior DoD officials in hearings over the last  
17   2 years, including every service chief and 8 combatant  
18   commanders that vacating the 3.1 to 3.45 GHz band of  
19   spectrum would have a significantly negative consequence  
20   for our warfighting capabilities.

21          In fact, the Department of the Navy previously  
22   estimated that relocating your systems to a different  
23   spectrum band would cost them \$250 billion. Both the Navy  
24   and the Marine Corps intend to make extensive use of  
25   capabilities which require the electromagnetic spectrum to

1 function in the Western Pacific against China.

2 Admiral, does the Navy have capabilities operating on  
3 the 3.1 to 3.45 GHz band and the 7 and 8 GHz bands of  
4 spectrum which would be used in a conflict with China?

5 Admiral Caudle: Senator Rounds, thank you for this  
6 and for championing this, for our time in the office. I  
7 appreciate you hammering it because it is so vital. All of  
8 my critical weapon systems, electronic warfare systems,  
9 communications systems, everything that I do pretty much,  
10 to conduct high-end warfare, operates in these bands.  
11 Asking me to maneuver outside of that, I am not sure how we  
12 came up with the number 260. I would have probably given  
13 you infinity.

14 This is a 100-year project to go retune the Navy's  
15 combat system to move outside that band. So I would  
16 implore anyone that is thinking about doing that to not do  
17 that, and allow the Navy to actually operate in the bands  
18 you described, Senator.

19 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir, and I think the other  
20 question that I would ask is some people think that there  
21 is an easy way to simply just share the bands with  
22 commercial operations. Would you care to comment on that,  
23 sir?

24 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, what I have found, and  
25 this is my experience in my current role in U.S. Fleet

1 Forces is there are strict rules that the FAA and the FCC  
2 and others actually have in the sharing. And just with our  
3 certification events, COMPTUEX we call it, Composite  
4 Training Exercise, to certify our strike groups for  
5 deployment, requires careful navigation in these frequency  
6 bands just to get the authority to do our training. So if  
7 I get constrained further to do that, I just think it would  
8 have detrimental effects to our Navy, our ability to  
9 delivery combat-ready forces.

10 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir. Sir, we discussed in  
11 my office the likelihood of being engaged with multiple  
12 adversaries in multiple theaters at some point in the  
13 future. Most observers assess that our adversaries will  
14 seek to press their advantage in the event we are committed  
15 in another area, particularly given the increasingly close  
16 coordination between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.  
17 How can the Navy be better postured to maintain deterrence  
18 in multiple theaters?

19 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, let me just say first  
20 we have only had regional conflicts since World War II  
21 because we have a nuclear deterrent, so there can be no  
22 chinks in that. So we want to make sure that if there is a  
23 conflict that it does not go global. So we must continue  
24 to refine all legs of the strategic triad. That just goes  
25 without saying.

1           The second part is that we need the Navy the nation  
2   needs from the amount and capacity so that the presence and  
3   posture into the critical areas to squelch any opportunism  
4   is put at bay right away. We are not going to be able to  
5   do that alone, Senator. That is going to have to be with  
6   allies and partners, partnerships, and making sure NATO  
7   carries their weight, making sure partners in the Western  
8   Pacific carry their weight and are with us on this, to give  
9   us the actual capacity we need if we are going to actually  
10   confront two peers. So I think the partnerships are  
11   crucial to that, as well.

12           Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir. Admiral, the Navy's  
13   shipbuilding plans and the SIOP call for long-term  
14   investments to modernize fleet and sustain undersea  
15   deterrence. We have talked a lot about that already today.

16           Let me ask you just a question. It is about time we  
17   start talking about how we fix the existing stuff we have  
18   got out there. Since 2017, I have asked about the USS  
19   Boise as an example, Los Angeles-class attack submarine.  
20   It has now been out of service, not even able to dive, I  
21   believe, since 2017 or 2018. Over 9, almost 10, years now,  
22   at least in that neighborhood, being out of service,  
23   sitting in dock, waiting for its half-life to be completed.

24           Is it time we just simply pull the plug on that one  
25   and start looking at other stuff?



1       Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, you know, it is like a  
2 dagger in the heart as a submarine officer when you bring  
3 up Boise to me because it is an unacceptable story. But it  
4 is a story of where we walked away from a private capacity,  
5 our private yards capacity to do in-service repair decades  
6 ago. And as a relief valve to an oversubscribed public  
7 yard, we decided to induct three ships into Huntington  
8 Ingalls and a couple in the last several years into  
9 Electric Boat.

10       Because of the lack of investment in those areas,  
11 because we did walk away from that, I think both of those  
12 yards had some learning to do before they were able to get  
13 up on the step. And that learning has not been quick, and  
14 it has not been effective. And without a clear demand  
15 signal of what unit is coming after Boise, I worry that  
16 that effort will not be applied to Boise to get her  
17 completed.

18       So working with the Secretary of the Navy, I want to  
19 take that on, if I am confirmed, and look at that hard.  
20 The decision whether or not to actually walk away from  
21 Boise is a big one, and I want to make sure I clearly  
22 understand the trajectory and trends. But I hear you loud  
23 and clear, Senator, on how unacceptable it is, how long she  
24 has been in the yards.

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

1 Chairman Wicker: Well, thank you, Senator Rounds, and  
2 Admiral, let's continue to have a dialogue about that, so  
3 we can move to a decision.

4 Senator Warren, I understand you are next, and you are  
5 willing to trade spaces with Senator Peters. Is that  
6 correct?

7 Senator Warren: Yes.

8 Chairman Wicker: Senator Peters, you are recognized.

9 Senator Peters: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and  
10 thank you, Senator Warren, for that, as well. Thank you.

11 Admiral Caudle, thank you for your service to our  
12 nation and certainly congratulations on your nomination.  
13 As we discussed during our meeting last week in my office,  
14 Constellation-class frigates will have versatile mission  
15 capabilities to conduct a variety of operations, including  
16 air, surface, and anti-submarine warfare. These frigates  
17 will be a key part of the U.S. Navy's surface fleet and  
18 support your critical missions in the Indo-Pacific as well  
19 as beyond. I am proud that Michigan workers, who aid these  
20 key missions, make up about 40 percent of the workforce  
21 building Constellation-class frigates.

22 So my question for you, sir, is what current  
23 capabilities gap will be filled by the Constellation-class  
24 frigates, and secondly, what additional missions are going  
25 to be enabled by these frigates in the Indo-Pacific in a

1 potential future conflict?

2 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, thanks for the time we  
3 got to spend together, and thank you for the workers from  
4 Michigan. We need them, and I appreciate their efforts on  
5 these critical roles for the Navy.

6 The frigate plays an important role. It fills a gap  
7 that allows me not to have destroyers conduct these  
8 operations where the frigate is more suited to conduct.  
9 They historically have been world class at undersea  
10 warfare. They are submarine hunters. So that is really  
11 the design of that, is to have exquisite sonar and  
12 capabilities to actually detect submarines and to do that  
13 mission most specifically.

14 But they also will have a great radar system, a combat  
15 system, and can actually be more vertical launched cells to  
16 add mass and effects to get after the very question that  
17 Senator Rounds asked about the actual capacity I need for  
18 multi-front conflicts going forward. So they add mass to  
19 the Navy in a very important way.

20 So the small combat ship, the frigate, is a vital role  
21 in the capability it brings.

22 Senator Peters: Well, wonderful. Admiral, the  
23 Virginia-class and Columbia-class submarines will be the  
24 cornerstone, as you well know, of our nation's deterrent  
25 efforts in the Indo-Pacific. In recognition of their

1 importance, since 2018, Congress has appropriated \$9  
2 billion to bolster the submarine industrial base. As we  
3 also discussed in my office, and I appreciate that  
4 conversation, the Navy continues to invest these funds.  
5 They also need to look beyond kind of the traditional areas  
6 that are close to shipyards in order to accelerate the  
7 manufacturing process and bring in a wide range of talent  
8 that exists all around the country.

9 For example, Michigan stands ready to support the  
10 Navy's efforts. We have very unique commercial automotive,  
11 aerospace, as well as exquisite, advanced manufacturing  
12 expertise.

13 So my question for you is, if confirmed, how are you  
14 going to harness the nationwide talent, in places like  
15 Michigan and other places around the country, that have  
16 this specialized talent that have not been tapped in the  
17 past and yet can do incredible work as we build these new  
18 submarines?

19 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, your question is so on  
20 point. My experience with shipyards is the recruiting  
21 radius and who we bring into these yards is generally close  
22 to the yard itself. And unlike other sectors, like my  
23 daughters are in, who recruit nationally, like a company  
24 would do, we tend to have a very localized approach.

25 So I think we need to open up the spigot a bit to a

1 campaign plan that -- buildsubmarines.com, I think a lot of  
2 you have probably seen that -- is where that is heading, is  
3 to get more folks educated and understanding that they can  
4 be part of serving their country at our major yards. So  
5 that has got to continue, and I think there is more that  
6 can be done there.

7 There is more outsourcing opportunity that we need to  
8 do even for our Virginia-class. The modular approach of  
9 how those ships are built, with the floating decks, and how  
10 they can be just better outsourced to different vendors,  
11 like we are doing in also shipbuilding, is one example of  
12 that. I think there can be more room for some of those  
13 ventures, as well.

14 So we have got to fundamentally, as we talked about,  
15 improve and increase the capacity. It cannot be business  
16 as usual. So this has got to be a country-level effect.

17 I guess I would end with, the thing is, I heard this  
18 quote recently, and it is probably as good a time to say it  
19 as ever, about additional shipyards. And the quote goes,  
20 "The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The  
21 second-best time to plant it is today." So whatever  
22 solution we have on going forward, if a new yard is what we  
23 need, if I start today then in 10 years it will be firing  
24 up on all cylinders. I think that has to be on the table,  
25 because I am worried that we just do not have the capacity,

1 with just efficiency increases alone, to deliver the 2.3  
2 that is needed by our nation.

3 Senator Peters: Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate it.  
4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Chairman Wicker: Let's do it. Senator Cotton.

6 Senator Cotton: Admiral, welcome. Congratulations,  
7 and thank you for your service, and thanks to your family  
8 for their service and sacrifices, as well.

9 As we discussed in our meeting, the United States is  
10 in a munitions crisis. We need more munitions of all  
11 kinds, faster. Do you believe the Navy needs to increase  
12 the number of missiles and other kinds of munitions it buys  
13 in order to effectively deter and, if necessary --  
14 hopefully not -- fight and win a war in the Pacific?

15 Admiral Caudle: Yes, Senator. Wars are won with  
16 munitions.

17 Senator Cotton: I certainly agree. To do that, would  
18 you say that we need to take an all-of-the-above approach  
19 of leveraging our organic industrial base as well as  
20 private industry to produce the munitions our warfighters  
21 need?

22 Admiral Caudle: Yes, sir.

23 Senator Cotton: Good. I am glad to hear it. What  
24 steps will you take, if confirmed as CNO, to ensure the  
25 Navy does, in fact, get those munitions that it needs?

1           Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, I think -- and first,  
2   thank you for our time together and the conversations we  
3   had on this topic. You know, this is, no question, an all-  
4   hands approach. It really easy, I think, to finger point  
5   in this world of constrain and oversubscription and  
6   underperformance. So I would like to break down that and  
7   really get to the brass tacks, and really get a clear  
8   mapping of each of the munition lines in my head, and with  
9   my team, to understand where the critical stoppage points  
10   are on the flow of these munitions, where the wait steps  
11   are, where the sole-source vendors are that are behind, and  
12   actually approach this from just a common-sense way of  
13   thinking about unleashing the logjam of places where we are  
14   turning these munitions at pace and meet our contractual  
15   deliveries on time. It will not do any good with the money  
16   that you like to budget for me if I cannot translate into  
17   the actual delivery.

18           So I need to work with the partners, make sure the  
19   Navy is clean on the way we do qualification and validation  
20   and certification steps, and I am doing my role, along with  
21   the industrial base, to deliver these critical munitions,  
22   sir.

23           Senator Cotton: Thank you. We have heard a lot of  
24   talk this morning about shipbuilding. You have spoken  
25   extensive already about the need to increase the readiness

1 of our naval fleet. Of course, readiness depends on having  
2 ships that are prepared to be at sea, and shipbuilding is  
3 only as good as our maintenance plan is for those ships  
4 once they are at sea.

5 What can we do to address the maintenance backlog that  
6 the Navy faces today, and get those ships out of dry dock  
7 and back in the sea faster?

8 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, you know, that is a  
9 massive venture that I want to spend, if confirmed, my  
10 heart and soul in to get turned around. But there are some  
11 things I can give you that all shipyards need to adhere to,  
12 and that is giving the shipyard a clear demand signal for  
13 when the unit is coming in for the maintenance period. So  
14 that is the maintenance plan. And that planning needs to  
15 be stood off with sufficient time, that the yard knows it  
16 is coming, has the funding and the workforce ready with a  
17 clear signal and a stable workforce. Long lead time  
18 material, we want the actual parts in the hands of the  
19 worker when it is ready to be assembled. So the technical  
20 work documentation is part of that, as well.

21 So the planning time horizon, the location of where  
22 the actual maintenance is going to take place, the  
23 readiness to start day one, solid project management, and  
24 workforce development and skills are all part of all  
25 solutions, to answer your question.



1           Senator Cotton: Thank you. Final question. I think  
2 China poses the most severe, long-term threat to our  
3 nation, and that is a primarily maritime domain, not  
4 exclusively but primarily. At the same time, the Navy has  
5 to be ready and postured to face threats around the world.  
6 The Navy was part of the outstanding operation, Midnight  
7 Hammer, that devastated Iran's nuclear programs, and also  
8 led the way in the fight against the Houthi rebels in Yemen  
9 earlier this year.

10           What do you see as the biggest challenges the Navy  
11 faces to being prepared, not just to deter the China threat  
12 but also to ensure American leadership around the world on  
13 the seas?

14           Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, I think overall the  
15 biggest challenge is a capacity problem, and so that makes  
16 us have to think. When you do not have enough stuff, you  
17 really have got to put your brain to your schemes of  
18 maneuver, your ability to counter targeting, counter ISR,  
19 to actually have synchronization. There is an old saying  
20 that precision beats power and timing beats speed every  
21 time. So we have to bring those types of thinking in.

22           But at the end of the day, mass will matter. It will.  
23 So that is why I need the munitions, I need the ships, and  
24 I need to posture them correctly, with great intelligence  
25 sources, to know when and where to do that best.

1           And I do want to thank you for calling out the Navy's  
2   role in Midnight Hammer. I know our Air Force partners get  
3   a lot of the credit, but there were a lot of TLAMs that  
4   were shot by the submarine force in that, as well. So I  
5   appreciate that, sir.

6           Senator Cotton: They all did a great job. Thank you.

7           Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Warren.

8           Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and  
9   congratulations, Admiral Caudle, on your nomination.

10          For years defense contractors have slipped fine print  
11   into contracts that limit the Department of Defense's  
12   ability to fix its own ships and fighter jets -- MRI  
13   machines, radar systems. Last month, Secretary Phelan told  
14   this Committee that he saw firsthand that sailors on the  
15   Gerald R. Ford carrier could not fix ovens or elevators  
16   themselves because they had to wait for contractors to come  
17   and do it.

18          The Government Accountability Office estimated that  
19   repair restrictions are costing the Navy billions of  
20   dollars, and also costing the Navy opportunities to train  
21   sailors to repair their own equipment in the field. In  
22   peacetime, that is expensive and inconvenient. In the  
23   middle of a conflict that actually puts our security at  
24   risk.

25          So Admiral Caudle, you have commanded sailors in the

1 Pacific. If their equipment breaks in a war zone, is it a  
2 problem if contractors are not able or not willing to come  
3 to the front lines to be able to fix it?

4 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator Warren, let me just say  
5 thank you for championing this right-to-repair initiative.  
6 It is so vital. It is so ridiculous that sailors cannot  
7 actually enter a piece of equipment because of a  
8 contractual reason, a warranty violation. It goes right to  
9 the heart of what we call self-sufficiency.

10 So I do not like it in peacetime, and I certainly do  
11 not want it in wartime. It is not sustainable. It is  
12 dangerous.

13 Senator Warren: Yeah.

14 Admiral Caudle: So I am 100 percent committed to  
15 understanding it more fully, I guess the language of the  
16 right-to-repair piece. But the idea of what you are  
17 describing I am fully committed to, Senator.

18 Senator Warren: That is right. And, you know, I  
19 really do want to hit the point, as well, that if sailors  
20 are not getting a chance to repair this equipment in  
21 peacetime, you cannot just say, "Okay, if war comes you go  
22 ahead and repair it now," because they do not get the  
23 opportunities to learn it and kind of know how all the  
24 pieces work. Is that a fair statement?

25 Admiral Caudle: Senator, it is 100 percent fair. It

1 ties to how we build our schoolhouses. So the curriculum  
2 will change when I have the right to repair equipment that  
3 I am not currently repairing. So it has these kinds of  
4 second- and third-order effects, as well.

5 Senator Warren: Well, I really appreciate your  
6 enthusiasm for making a change in this area. The Army has  
7 said that it will require contractors to provide the  
8 technical data and diagnostic tools necessary for the Army  
9 to be able to maintain weapon systems itself. It makes us  
10 more resilient, enhances competition, grows the industrial  
11 base, helps with the training of our people.

12 I worked with Senator Sheehy and the members of this  
13 Committee to secure a provision in the NDAA that you just  
14 referred to, that will provide a right-to-repair for all of  
15 the services, and the House bill now include similar  
16 language. Why are we still talking about this? Well,  
17 because the lobbyists for the defense industry are now  
18 pushing back. They like being able to get restrictions on  
19 your ability to repair because it means that they can not  
20 only charge you the initial price to sell you the piece of  
21 equipment, but they also can charge pretty much whatever  
22 they want, if they have a monopoly on this, to charge you  
23 for all of the repair and maintenance down the line.

24 So Admiral Caudle, as a commander, what difference  
25 will it make to the warfighter for the Navy to have broad

1 authority to secure the rights necessary to keep our  
2 fighter jets flying and our ships sailing wherever we need  
3 to keep Americans safe?

4 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, it is vital. There  
5 should be nothing on board a ship that a sailor cannot  
6 repair. It is just said that simply. And that is how we  
7 make sure that we are ready to fight. Things break all the  
8 time on our ships, and to keep them going and sustained --  
9 and that is why this is not just a wartime. I mean, it is  
10 dangerous where we operate now, even in peace. They are  
11 not there just sailing around. We are actually acting as a  
12 deterrent. We are a vital part of that, at the ready.

13 So when a piece of equipment is down and our readiness  
14 is not 100 percent, and it is because I cannot repair it,  
15 then that is unacceptable in my mind.

16 Senator Warren: Yeah. Well, I very much appreciate  
17 that. Thank you, and I appreciate your statements here,  
18 and look forward to working with you on this.

19 I also want to say, I appreciate the qualifications  
20 you bring to this role. But we have to acknowledge the  
21 circumstances surrounding your nomination. Admiral  
22 Franchetti, the first woman to serve as Chief of Naval  
23 Operations, was removed by the President without any  
24 explanation. That is not on you. But we need the best and  
25 the brightest in this country to serve in the military, and

1 we are not going to be able to compete with China or anyone  
2 else if women know that their talents and hard work are  
3 going to be tossed aside.

4 Everyone in this room needs to take a hard look at  
5 what is happening at the Pentagon right now. Firing good  
6 people who do their jobs does not make us safer.

7 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator. Senator  
9 Sullivan.

10 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral,  
11 good to see you again, sir, and thanks for your visit in my  
12 office last week. I really enjoyed our discussion, and I  
13 appreciate your service, your family's service, all the  
14 Navy team that you are part of. So thank you to everybody  
15 here.

16 I want to follow up on Senator Reed's discussion on 31  
17 amphibs and 3.0 MEU. I think it is an area where there is  
18 a little bit of a disconnect in this year's NDAA. We have  
19 conference report that tasks the Department of Defense,  
20 Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to work with you and the  
21 Marines on defining that requirement. In the amphibs that  
22 we talked about, you know, the law is 31 amphibs. I was  
23 very involved in writing that. The language about  
24 "temporarily unavailable," I think the Acting CNO, in his  
25 testimony here, a couple of weeks ago, stretched that

1 definition really, really far. We are tightening that  
2 definition up in the NDAA this year, to make sure you  
3 cannot have a temporarily unavailable ship that has been in  
4 dry dock for 14 years to qualify as one of the 31 amphibs.

5 You and I had a good discussion on that. Could you  
6 give me a little bit more of your thinking? I know you  
7 just talked about it with Senator Reed. But the combatant  
8 command demand signal on the MEUs is very high. We want  
9 the Marines to be out there deployed, forward deployed, as  
10 a really important force projection capability of the  
11 United States. Cannot do it without the amphibs, but we  
12 need time to get to a higher number. You and I talked  
13 about that. What are your thoughts on that, Admiral?

14 Admiral Caudle: Senator Sullivan, thank you for a  
15 couple of sessions we have gotten to have together. Sir, I  
16 have enjoyed our time.

17 I just want to way for the record here, that that is  
18 the law and I will comply with that, no question. And I am  
19 also committed to delivering the most combat power with my  
20 good friend, Eric Smith, that that 31 will deliver.

21 And we have had challenges in our amphibious  
22 readiness. I have been part of the comprehensive review of  
23 that with Admiral McLane as our Surface Force Commander.  
24 There are a lot of things that are in that report that we  
25 need to do to get that amphibious fleet healthy, and I am

1 committed to that, as well. Most of that deals with  
2 maintenance and parts support. And there is a bit of  
3 expertise that I need to improve on, as well.

4 So to the 3.0 part about that, I consider that to be a  
5 commitment that I have with Eric Smith. I cannot deliver  
6 that today with the readiness that I have. That is his  
7 requirement that he needs to build his force structure  
8 assumptions, and so I recognize that. And he and I have  
9 talked about that. And going forward it is my goal to  
10 actually put the effort and energy in to deliver the most  
11 our amphibious force can do. It is an important role, and  
12 I am committed to it, if confirmed, sir.

13 Senator Sullivan: Great. Thank you on that.

14 A couple of weeks ago the SecDef was testifying here.  
15 He received an inspired question by our Chairman about the  
16 Department of Defense meeting congressional intent when it  
17 comes to spending, particularly on the \$150 billion in  
18 budget reconciliation, where this Committee very much  
19 focused on a lot of things relating to the Navy, a massive  
20 \$29 billion expenditure for shipbuilding, in the maritime  
21 industrial base. We also provided the Navy billions in  
22 other expenditures, munitions. We have talked about  
23 support infrastructure upgrades, including in places like  
24 the Arctic and North Pacific.

25 By the way, I showed you that chart in my office, the



1 Russian and Chinese incursions in the North Pacific and the  
2 Arctic. We have got to update that chart. Last night the  
3 Russians were again in the Alaska ADIZ. Our military did a  
4 great job intercepting them.

5 But will you commit, like the Secretary of Defense  
6 did, to fully understand the congressional intent behind  
7 these budget reconciliation expenditures for the Navy and  
8 following our congressional intent on the spending of the  
9 very significant funds that we just passed in the Congress?

10 Admiral Caudle: Senator, I not only commit to it but  
11 if confirmed, I will advocate that it is spent in that way.

12 Senator Sullivan: Great. Thank you. Finally, back  
13 to shipbuilding. I again want to compliment the Chairman  
14 here on his leadership. CRS put out a report,  
15 Congressional Research Service, called the Navy is in the  
16 biggest shipbuilding crisis, building, maintaining, and  
17 manning ships in almost a half a century. That will be a  
18 huge priority of yours, I know. The fleet this year, with  
19 regard to China, is surpassing 400 ships. That is 120  
20 ships bigger than our fleet.

21 I recently saw the 1984 through 1988 Reagan, 600 ship  
22 build-up. I would like to submit this for the record, Mr.  
23 Chairman.

24 Chairman Wicker: Without objection.

25 [The information follows:]

1           Senator Sullivan: It is remarkable what our country  
2 did, with a much smaller workforce, a much smaller economy,  
3 to get to essentially a 600-ship Navy. It is amazing --  
4 124 new construction ships, new ships completed, from 1984  
5 to '88.

6           Can you just give us again, I know we focused on it a  
7 lot today, but it is so important, what you think the  
8 shipyard of the future looks like? One of the provisions  
9 in the NDAA that I got in this year talked about the Navy  
10 looking at a West Coast shipyard and the need for that. I  
11 know a lot of leadership in the Navy thinks we need that.  
12 A quick answer on that, the shipyard of the future, and  
13 what that might look like, to catch up and get out of this  
14 crisis, catch up with the Chinese but get out of this  
15 crisis that we are in right now.

16          Chairman Wicker: You may want to give a brief answer  
17 and supplement that on the record.

18          Admiral Caudle: Okay. Well, I can tell you it is  
19 going to take a world-class workforce, one that is not  
20 attriting in double digits, and it is going to take more  
21 robotic, autonomous systems to get the production and  
22 quality done on time. It is going to take more  
23 competition, so less single-source vendors, and it is going  
24 to just take an all-hands-on-deck approach to the project  
25 management. The actual workforce management, that you

1 referenced, back in the '80s was able to do it, so why  
2 can't I do it today? That turns into people. That is a  
3 people problem, and I need to get my hands around that so  
4 we are actually delivering these on time, sir.

5 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Admiral. Thank you, Mr.  
6 Chairman.

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

8 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral,  
9 congratulations on your nomination for this very important  
10 role. As you know, I spent 25 years in the Navy. It is  
11 very important to me. We have got a great Navy. There are  
12 always opportunities to improve it.

13 I want to follow up Senator Sullivan's questions about  
14 shipyards, but also from the angle of our merchant fleet  
15 and our ability to move combat power across the ocean,  
16 especially the Pacific Ocean.

17 The Chinese can build about 1,200 -- I think between  
18 2020 and 2022 -- about 1,200 commercial ships. In that  
19 time period we built 6. So 1,200 versus 6. And the reason  
20 I bring this up is obviously we have a military sealift  
21 command that can move weapons and people, and we have  
22 prepositioned ships in Diego Garcia and other places around  
23 the world. That helps a lot at the beginning of a  
24 conflict.

25 You know, we are better than any other country in

1 contested logistics, logistics in general. But when you  
2 get further into a conflict with some attrition we could  
3 find ourselves in a very challenging spot, and I am very,  
4 very concerned about this.

5 I have introduced, along with Senator Young and some  
6 colleagues in the House, a bipartisan, bicameral bill  
7 called the Ships for America Act, to rebuild our commercial  
8 shipbuilding and our entire maritime industry, including  
9 the workforce, which is also a challenge. Right now, just  
10 to man merchant ships that we have, the 80 ocean-going  
11 merchant vessels, international trade, we are sometimes at  
12 a loss for finding crews.

13 So Admiral, if confirmed, what steps will you take to  
14 ensure that our industrial shipbuilding base is ready for  
15 competition in crisis and conflict?

16 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, thanks for that, and  
17 for championing this, quite frankly. It is an important  
18 issue. Our combat logistics force, our oilers and T-AKES,  
19 and pretty much all of our ships with a "T" at the  
20 beginning, we are not in a good place. And predominantly  
21 that comes from a couple of challenges that we face,  
22 challenges with having the right number of masters, first  
23 mates, chief engineers, and some of the able-bodied seamen,  
24 as well. So we have a crewing problem that we are  
25 addressing, so we are after that -- a campaign plan,

1 working with legislative propositions on making sure  
2 compensation is adequate, leave accrual, rotation in a  
3 timely manner so we are not holding those mariners on  
4 station without know where their relief is coming from. We  
5 are working all that.

6 We do have some delivery of our new class problems.  
7 We get the ships late, and when we do sometimes they  
8 require additional work before we can put them in the  
9 field. So that is something we need to work on, as well.

10 I think all the shipbuilding act and all the emphasis  
11 that the Administration, Department of Defense is putting  
12 on that will be a tide that raises all boats, if you will.  
13 It is going to help me with my civilian mariner problem.  
14 The myriad problem of accountability after a degree, and me  
15 getting my fair share of those mariners is something I am  
16 also working on.

17 So it is a lot to your question, but if am confirmed,  
18 sir, you have my commitment I will work and focus on it.

19 Senator Kelly: I am a graduate of the U.S. Merchant  
20 Marine Academy, 1986. I left there with a third assistant  
21 and a third mate's license, third assistant engineer. And  
22 the Merchant Marine Academy puts out more mariners that  
23 actually go to sea than I think the state schools combined.  
24 And all these schools do a fine job educating mariners that  
25 we need for our national security.

1 I was meeting with Sean Duffy, Secretary of  
2 Transportation, about this and some other things about a  
3 week ago, and one of the things he stressed was the  
4 infrastructure problem at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.  
5 And he has committed to work with me, and we are reviewing  
6 our legislation again to make sure that we have the  
7 necessary resources and to try to get the Administration to  
8 get behind this. Because if we properly fund the U.S.  
9 Merchant Marine Academy and the state schools, and provide  
10 the training vessels we need to educate this workforce,  
11 that will better position the United States Navy to have  
12 the mariners it needs to man those oilers and supply ships  
13 and others.

14 So thank you, Admiral, for your continued service to  
15 this nation.

16 Admiral Caudle: Thank you, Senator.

17 Chairman Wicker: Let me give a hearty bipartisan  
18 endorsement to Senator Kelly's remarks about the Merchant  
19 Marine Academy.

20 Senator Tuberville.

21 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
22 Admiral, congratulations.

23 Admiral Caudle: Thank you.

24 Senator Tuberville: You have earned this. I am  
25 looking forward to working with you.

1           You know, we talk about shipbuilding, and we do a lot  
2   of that in my state of Alabama. Now we are in the  
3   submarine business. But I was also in the education  
4   business. We are 500,000 electricians short in this  
5   country, and in my and your lifetime we cannot catch up.  
6   We are going to have to use our allies to help build some  
7   things. What are your thoughts about that? For instance,  
8   Korea, they build 5 to our 1 keels. What are your thoughts  
9   on helping and working with our allies to help build ships  
10  in the future?

11          Admiral Caudle: Senator, thanks for meeting with me.  
12  I enjoyed our time in your office. I want to work with the  
13  Secretary of the Navy and the Department of Defense on  
14  looking at this hard. Again, I have said this is an all-  
15  hands-on-deck. I do not know how we do what we need to do  
16  without bringing international partners into the capacity  
17  problem that we have, while we build up our capacity,  
18  because we need ships today. There are no magic beans to  
19  that. There is nothing that is going to just make that  
20  happen.

21          So the solution space has got to open up, and I think  
22  part of that has to look at international partnerships to  
23  give us a little bit of a relief valve while we work on our  
24  own organic industrial capacity.

25          Senator Tuberville: Yeah. As you said, we need them

1 yesterday. And again, this education problem is not going  
2 away. Our workforce problem is not going away. We have  
3 got to use the best that we know how, and we have got to  
4 build ships, and we have got to build them fast. But they  
5 have got to be good ships, and I think working with our  
6 allies is going to be one way for us to address this  
7 problem.

8 What are your thoughts on unmanned vessels, like cell  
9 drones, that we make in our state of Alabama? Are you  
10 familiar with those?

11 Admiral Caudle: Senator, I am familiar with them.  
12 Those a type of technologies that are crucial. Cell drones  
13 are a part of the fabric of how we improve our maritime  
14 domain awareness. You, I am sure, have heard of the  
15 instantiations we have had with our Task Force 59 in the  
16 Arabian Gulf using those types of technologies. We have  
17 had them in the Gulf of America with our southern border  
18 watch. We are using them there with Fourth Fleet and other  
19 places.

20 So yes, that is exactly what we need to network  
21 persistent capabilities where I do not want manned vessels  
22 spending time just collecting things that unmanned can do  
23 much more affordably and effectively.

24 Senator Tuberville: Yeah. Those have been used well  
25 down in the Caribbean, on our war on drugs, and we are



1 proud of how they have worked. We need to continue to  
2 expand that. I do not think there is any doubt about that.  
3 A lot of eyes out there that we do not have to man people  
4 and train people, but it is good that you go along with  
5 that.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.  
8 Senator Shaheen.

9 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Congratulations, Admiral  
10 Caudle. Thank you to you and your family for your  
11 willingness to continue to serve this country. And thank  
12 you for taking time to meet with me when we had the  
13 opportunity to discuss, among other things, the Portsmouth  
14 Naval Shipyard. I very much appreciated your commitment to  
15 ensuring that the shipyard is able to hire the workers that  
16 they need. I know that Secretary Phelan has also committed  
17 to that.

18 But as we talk to folks at the shipyard, there is  
19 still a challenge with being able to onboard the folks that  
20 they would like to hire. There is still not clarity coming  
21 from the Department of Defense, OPM, and other Federal  
22 agencies about the fact that they are supposed to be  
23 exempted from the reduction in force, full stop. So again,  
24 I appreciated your commitment to work on this. But if you  
25 could just let me know what you think is the challenge and

1    how we assure the public shipyards that they are exempt  
2    from that hiring freeze.

3           Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, thanks for meeting me,  
4    and as I told you, I did bring my Portsmouth clan with me,  
5    and they are happy to sit here and be part of the great  
6    city of Portsmouth, which we talked about quite a bit.

7           I love that shipyard. It is an incredible national  
8    treasure. Any delay to onboard a worker who wants to serve  
9    their country and build our ships needs to be eliminated.  
10   So you have my full commitment, if confirmed, that I will  
11   work with Secretary of the Navy and the Administration,  
12   OMB, and my team to streamline the onboarding of workers  
13   who want to go build our ships, and repair our submarines.  
14   So you have my commitment on that, ma'am.

15          Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you, and I appreciate  
16   that you have a Portsmouth contingent. That means you will  
17   come up to our neck of the woods on a regular basis. So if  
18   I can ever be helpful and meet you at the shipyard to talk  
19   about the good work they are doing there, please let me  
20   know.

21          We also talked about the Shipyard Infrastructure  
22   Optimization Program and some of the challenges that it has  
23   had. Obviously the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the first to  
24   have the SIOP program, is doing great work. But there are  
25   competing priorities at the four public shipyards for those

1 SIOP funds. So can you talk about how you think about  
2 those priorities and how you will evaluate those competing  
3 needs that each of our shipyards have?

4 Admiral Caudle: Well, when it comes to this, the  
5 heart of my discussion today has this at the very point of  
6 it, that I would like to get out of the competition for  
7 those funds. So if that means advocating for more top line  
8 to get that, then I may need to have more top line.  
9 Because I can't say I want to increase the repair  
10 capability and then underfund the exact thing that needs to  
11 be done to actually do that. So if I am forced to do that,  
12 I will have to make my advice and recommendations to the  
13 Secretary of the Navy and how we build out our budget  
14 recommendations. But I would rather just make sure that we  
15 are fully funding the SIOP program lines so that we are not  
16 faced with that.

17 There is nothing more crucial than Portsmouth's  
18 operation up there, of what they are doing with the super  
19 flood basin and the refueling docks there. To actually  
20 refuel the Los Angeles-class submarine, needed to add  
21 capacity to our submarine force, in a period of time when I  
22 am trying to get back to 2.0 per year of Virginia-class,  
23 these Los Angeles-class refueled play a vital role in  
24 bridging a trough that plays an important role to our  
25 overall defense strategy.

1           So I am committed to prioritizing, to the extent I  
2   can, Portsmouth's venture up there to make sure that that  
3   project is not delayed because of the nature of that work  
4   being so vital.

5           Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that,  
6   and I share that view. So with that in mind, can you talk  
7   about the challenges that is presents for the Navy, as you  
8   are looking at these competing priorities and you are  
9   trying to fund, fully fund, your requests, what a  
10   continuing resolution does to your efforts to ensure that  
11   you have the resources you need?

12          Admiral Caudle: Yes, Senator. Continuing resolutions  
13   are highly disruptive, as many who have sat in this chair,  
14   I am sure, have said. It prevents us from having good  
15   planning horizons. It tampers with the timing of contracts  
16   for maintenance. It prevents me from necessarily having  
17   the long lead time materials purchase, so that when these  
18   maintenance periods start, I know that I can start and  
19   accomplish these in a timely fashion.

20          So continuing resolutions are highly discouraged,  
21   because it really tampers with my ability to stabilize  
22   workforce, have good streams of supply parts, and do all  
23   the things necessary, that we talked about in our office  
24   call, to make sure that we are delivering the submarines on  
25   time.

1 Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. I hope this  
2 Congress can do a better job so that you are not faced with  
3 continuing resolutions.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator  
6 Banks.

7 Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral,  
8 great to see you again. Congratulations on this most  
9 important nomination. I love the United States Navy. I am  
10 a veteran of the United States Navy Reserves, and I cannot  
11 imagine someone better at a time like this to lead the Navy  
12 than you, and we appreciate your service to our country.

13 You attended the Crane Naval Surface Warfare Center  
14 breakfast on Capitol Hill a month or so ago. You are  
15 familiar with Crane. You have been there before. It is  
16 very important to the great state of Indiana. It is the  
17 third-largest Navy base in the world, and it happens to be  
18 landlocked in southern Indiana. Can you talk about it and  
19 its importance to the U.S. Navy and to our national  
20 security?

21 Admiral Caudle: Senator, thanks for our meeting, and  
22 thanks for advocating for Crane. It is a jewel. It is  
23 such an inherent part of our combat systems, our Strategic  
24 Systems Programs. As I spoke at the breakfast, and I was  
25 honored to do that, and I learned more about Crane in the

1 preparation of that, of what it does for electronic  
2 warfare, for spy systems, for Admiral Wolfe's Strategic  
3 Systems Programs, and as part of his role for Conventional  
4 Prompt Strike, and his role in developing other nuclear  
5 weapon capabilities.

6 So I think as we talked a bit about, I am not sure a  
7 lot of people know what happens there, because it is in its  
8 position. But you have my full commitment to make sure  
9 that Crane gets the prominence it deserves, because it is a  
10 world-class organization.

11 Senator Banks: It would be great to have you come  
12 back and visit after you are confirmed, to see how far  
13 Crane has come since the last time that you were there.  
14 And I hope to host you when you come back in your new  
15 position.

16 Can you talk about what Congress can do to further  
17 support the programs that are happening at Crane?

18 Admiral Caudle: Well, I think it is important. They  
19 tie directly to our modernization programs. In our Navy  
20 budget, when we are trying to modernize our capabilities,  
21 those funding lines need to make sure they are whole.  
22 Because that world-class work on making sure those  
23 extraordinary, exquisite systems that are part of our Aegis  
24 and spy radar combat systems, as example, our self-defense,  
25 active defense systems, or our surface ships are all done

1    there.  They tie directly to our point defense, to our  
2    offense.  So when we modernize a ship and we want to put  
3    the best kit in the world, when I am already constrained to  
4    capacity, we can have no chinks in the armor that that work  
5    is done, and the professionals at Crane are part of that,  
6    Senator.

7           Senator Banks:  I want to work with you on that, to  
8    support the important work that is going on there.

9           You have talked today a great deal already about  
10   shipbuilding and how we have to do better to build ships  
11   faster and to build them more cost efficiently.  In the  
12   Big, Beautiful Bill that we just passed, the reconciliation  
13   bill, it included \$450 million for autonomy and AI-enabled  
14   shipbuilding.  How can commercial AI software help speed up  
15   shipbuilding and make our shipbuilding work for us more  
16   effective?

17          Admiral Caudle:  Well, Senator, I think we are just on  
18   the tip of the iceberg of leveraging it.  When you think of  
19   the thousands of work documents that have to be processed  
20   to build a ship, and what large language models can do to  
21   do that much more effectively than humans can do, just  
22   using the volumes of records we already have as the data  
23   source, that is one area.

24          AI can go in and look for trends, can find  
25   bottlenecks, can actually examine large volumes of data

1 much more effectively than humans can do, so we can attack  
2 things that are slowing us down. AI can actually drive  
3 robotic systems in the production, so that the assembly  
4 lines and the areas for production, welding and other  
5 things that are being done with autonomous systems, are  
6 optimized.

7 So there are just countless ways that this needs to be  
8 incorporated, and I think our yards need to embrace it  
9 more. That is going to take workforce development to get  
10 the right people there, and to make sure that we can  
11 deliver that type of capability in those yards.

12 Senator Banks: What are the downsides to deploying AI  
13 to speed up the shipbuilding process?

14 Admiral Caudle: I see no downside. There is often a  
15 narrative that it takes the place of jobs. I do not agree  
16 with that. It shifts the jobs. We want workers to get  
17 trained in different areas to oversee the algorithms, help  
18 develop those. It still has to be managed and overseen,  
19 and the production part of that still requires high-quality  
20 jobs.

21 So I do not see a reduction in it. I actually see an  
22 increased opportunity for more workforce.

23 Senator Banks: I completely agree and fully support  
24 your nomination. You are going to be a great CNO. I look  
25 forward to working with you.



1           Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

2           Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Banks. Senator  
3   Rosen.

4           Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Chairman Wicker, for  
5   holding this hearing. Thank you, Admiral Caudle, for  
6   meeting with me this week. We had such a great  
7   conversation, and I thank you for your lifetime of service,  
8   for your family's lifetime of service, your willingness to  
9   continue to serve our country.

10          You brought up the great work of Task Force 59 just a  
11   few minutes ago, and I just have to mention that I was able  
12   to visit Task Force 59 when I was in Bahrain a few years  
13   ago, the Fifth Fleet. They are doing amazing things to  
14   map, protect our waterways, and I look forward to seeing  
15   all the developments they bring to us.

16          But I am going to move on to Fallon, and what we  
17   talked about, Fallon Naval Air Station, and its  
18   modernization. Because as we talked about in our meeting,  
19   Nevada is proud to host Naval Air Station Fallon. It is  
20   home to Top Gun and our nation's premier carrier air wing  
21   and SEAL training centers. I was also corrected by a  
22   Marine earlier this week, who said, "Don't forget to talk  
23   about the Marines that train there too."

24          The Nevada delegation works closely with the Navy,  
25   Federal agencies, Tribal governments, local stakeholders,

1 for years to secure the Fallon Range Training Complex  
2 modernization in the fiscal year 2023 NDAA. It expands our  
3 range by over 600,000 acres, to meet critical national  
4 security training needs.

5 Now, the Navy is moving forward with modernization. I  
6 again want to underscore the importance of fully meeting  
7 the legal requirements that grazing permit holders will no  
8 longer be able to use this land, that they receive their  
9 full and complete compensation for a lifetime of losses.

10 And unfortunately, the initial payment offers to the  
11 ranchers on the B-16 range have fallen well below their  
12 expectations and estimated value. Appraisals must not only  
13 consider land value, but also FSA loans, groundwater  
14 access, and the lifetime -- a lifetime -- worth of lost  
15 business itself. Permit holders' grazing losses should be  
16 treated as a complete loss, not a buyout. This means, for  
17 example, valuing heads of cattle at the full market rate  
18 over time.

19 So Admiral Caudle, if confirmed, will you commit to  
20 reviewing reassessing the Navy's payment offers on the  
21 latest on the latest input that the team in northern Nevada  
22 has received from many departments, to ensure that the  
23 permittees are making whole and that we calculate this  
24 value over time?

25 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator Rosen, thank you for

1 our office call, and Fallon is another national treasure.  
2 I get out there at least once a year, if not more often,  
3 and they do certify our air combat and strike fighters, the  
4 world-class fighters that they are. In fact, I have had  
5 several of the Air Warfare Development Center commanders  
6 have worked for me, so I have a little touch and an imprint  
7 out there.

8 What I committed to in the office, and I will again  
9 here, is transparency in this process. I am fully  
10 committed to that. I want to understand, I will call it  
11 the algorithm by which the compensation is being reviewed.  
12 I will work with my team, if confirmed, to make sure I will  
13 work with your team, and get out there and talk with  
14 people, if necessary, to make sure that we compensate this  
15 in accordance with the regulation rules and law, to the  
16 best of my ability, if I am confirmed.

17 Senator Rosen: Well, I hope that you will commit. We  
18 will just schedule a meeting with maybe my team, some of  
19 the impacted stakeholders, and they can speak for  
20 themselves, bring you up to speed as we embark on this  
21 journey.

22 Admiral Caudle: Thank you. I commit to that.

23 Senator Rosen: Perfect. Thank you. Fallon housing,  
24 we talked about the remoteness of Naval Air Station Fallon.  
25 It is a major asset that provides all the training range

1 that is needed to ensure the fleet is deployable and  
2 operationally ready. It has been designated as a Remote  
3 Duty Installation since 1989, and a lot of quality of life  
4 challenges as many folks have to live in Reno or Carson  
5 City, well over an hour away. And it is actually the only  
6 naval base in the continental U.S. designated with a  
7 critical housing shortage. So it is really, really  
8 challenging, as you are going to grow, expand the range,  
9 and you need not only military housing but civilian  
10 housing, as well. We know that you are going to enter into  
11 a public-private venture to build 172 new homes in Fallon,  
12 but we need more infrastructure, water treatment plants and  
13 other things.

14 So will you commit on updating me with the status of  
15 this project, and also, in order for all of us to go  
16 forward, we have to talk about infrastructure, like the  
17 wastewater treatment plant. And I am hoping we can  
18 schedule a meeting to discuss that, as well.

19 Admiral Caudle: Senator, yes, I commit to all of  
20 that.

21 Senator Rosen: Thank you. You know, you have to have  
22 all the pieces and parts in order to grow, and so we just  
23 have to continue to keep pace with the infrastructure.

24 And the last thing I am going to get in quickly, we  
25 talked about the Sheckler Reserve, outside the Fallon Naval

1 Air Station, frequent flooding over the past decade. It  
2 floods our B-16 range, and it renders training -- just  
3 cannot happen when it is flooded. The Bureau of  
4 Reclamation owns the reservoir, but the flooding is on the  
5 Navy base. So again, I think it is just a meeting of the  
6 minds to try to get this done, because when it floods --  
7 and we have seen flash floods in Texas and other places;  
8 Nevada is prone to that -- we have to get this done so  
9 people can complete their training and their mission. And  
10 I hope you will commit to meeting with me.

11 Admiral Caudle: Thank you, Senator. I will, and I  
12 will find out who owns this. Everything is about  
13 ownership.

14 Senator Rosen: We are going to figure that out, get  
15 it done.

16 Admiral Caudle: And we will figure it out. I commit  
17 to it.

18 Senator Rosen: Thank you, sir.

19 Admiral Caudle: Thank you, Senator.

20 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

21 This concludes today's hearing. I want to thank our  
22 witness for his testimony. For the information of members,  
23 questions for the record will be due to the Committee by 12  
24 noon tomorrow, Friday, July 25th. And we are adjourned.

25 [Whereupon, at 11:15 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]