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SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF

THE HONORABLE HUNG CAO
ACTING SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

ON DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY POSTURE

BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
17 NOVEMBER 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to testify on my nomination to be the Secretary of the Navy. I would also like to thank President Trump and Secretary Hegseth for trusting me and nominating me to be your 80th Secretary of the Navy.

This is the absolute honor of my life. I am joined today by my beautiful wife of nearly 28 years. April is the mother of our five children: 2nd Lt Gabriel Cao, Grace, Claire, Evelyn, and Liam. She is also the grandmother to our little Ellysia. I would also like to give praise and glory to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, without whom I would not be here today.

You can see God's fingerprints throughout my life bringing me to this moment. He plucked me out of Vietnam right before the fall of Saigon and from there Sailors and Marines cared for me at refugee camps in Guam and Camp Pendleton. I grew up in West Africa, where again in 1979, I faced another possible evacuation when the Shah of Iran Fell. It was another Marine who stood watch over me. When I saw the look in his eyes that said "nothing will hurt you tonight, not on my watch" I knew at that point that I wanted to serve in the military to pay back our debt to this amazing country. My family returned to the United States when I was twelve, where I learned English and attended American Schools. I spent my entire adult life serving in the United States Navy Special Operations Community with multiple combat deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia. With my son now a 2nd Lieutenant in the Marine Corps, my next fight has just begun.

We are in an era of transformational change. This is our 1939 moment, when the nation came together to deliver an arsenal for freedom. Today we must strengthen our shipbuilding capacity through predictable federal funding and sustained investment in a skilled maritime workforce. This will require a generational shift to align our entire force to support the workload, break through bottlenecks, and move with urgency.

As the Acting Secretary of the Navy for the last 7 months, and if confirmed as the Secretary, I will seek to drive the necessary change through my three priorities:

- Take Care of Sailors and Marines
- Advance Shipbuilding Initiatives
- Defend Our Homeland

TAKE CARE OF SAILORS AND MARINES

Sustained investment in our people will increase readiness, improve retention and recruitment, and enable our ability to support national objectives. Simultaneously we must uphold standards because the bedrock of this Department is to produce a lethal fighting force, forged through good order and discipline and committed to embodying our Warrior Ethos.

The Chief of Naval Operations, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Commanders at each echelon are charged to serve as standard-bearers, and I view this as a shared priority and welcome the opportunity to partner with this great body to take care of our people.

ADVANCE SHIPBUILDING INITIATIVES

In May of this year, we released the Navy's Shipbuilding Plan. The Navy is transforming its maritime power by modernizing the Navy, strengthening shipbuilding, improving operations, and investing in American workers to build a stronger future.

We are changing how we do business by substituting bureaucracy for accountability. At the same time, we are seeking to enhance our maritime dominance by building a larger, balanced fleet, comprised of advanced ships and unmanned systems to deliver combat power and flexibility. And revitalizing our industrial base will require the creation of more skilled jobs, which in turn strengthens our national security.

We deliberately acted upon the President's mandate to accelerate shipbuilding by issuing the Navy's Implementation Direction for the President's National Security Presidential Memorandum on Navy Shipbuilding (NSPM). This is our Marshall Plan to revitalize shipbuilding by increasing the size of the Fleet and fast-tracking warfighting readiness of our ships and submarines.

DEFEND OUR HOMELAND

The Secretary of War's primary effort is to defend the U.S. Homeland. The Department of the Navy is building technologies that will dominate the drone and autonomous battlefield while preparing our fighting force for this critical domain. We must also harden our Homeland and critical infrastructure against cyber threats and counter Frontier AI threats. My task is to provide a trained and lethal force to meet future demands, and I seek the opportunity to partner with each of you on this endeavor.

CONCLUSION

My qualifications are fueled by my passion for our Navy and Marine Corps. If confirmed, I will care for our Sailors, Marines, and civilians and seek to lead the Department of the Navy forward. I will deliver the most lethal Navy and Marine Corps team the world has ever seen. My Sailors and Marines know that I am never above them, never below them, I'm always beside them.

Chairman Wicker, I yield my time and I am standing by to answer your questions.