

STATEMENT OF ERICH HERNANDEZ-BAQUERO, NOMINEE TO BE ASSISTANT
SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE FOR SPACE ACQUISITION AND INTEGRATION

Good morning Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee and your enduring support of our national security interests in space. If confirmed, I would be honored to serve as the second Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Space Acquisition and Integration.

This opportunity is only possible by the grace of God and His Divine Providence. I humbly thank President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, and Secretary Meink for their trust and confidence in me. I am eternally grateful to my family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me throughout my career. Most especially, I thank my wife Kimberly and my sons Kurtis and Nathan, who are here with me today and who deserve recognition for their steadfast love and patriotism.

My passion for space began when I was a child. Much like many children of my generation, I dreamed of being an astronaut. That dream led to a calling, and I joined the Civil Air Patrol at the age of 12. That calling guided me through 36 years of military service in the Air Force and executive leadership in the space industry. It is that calling that draws me here today.

Our nation faces rapidly growing threats in and from space. Adversaries are increasing their anti-satellite capabilities, attempting to deny our freedom of action in space. Additionally, adversaries seek to hold our homeland at risk with advanced space-enabled weapon systems designed to evade our defenses. To counter these threats, we must move quickly to seize the opportunities made possible by the most innovative and productive industry in the world.

To do so, if confirmed, I will focus on three priorities: space acquisition reform, mission integration, and the acquisition workforce.

I am excited by the acquisition reform the Department and this Congress have started. If confirmed, I will further the implementation of these reforms by optimizing work for speed, harnessing commercial innovations, adopting new business models, and focusing on mission outcomes. I have done this as a military officer and as a business leader—and it works. If confirmed, I will codify this approach in acquisition strategies and

implement change through good execution of space programs emphasizing technical expertise; sound risk management; agile processes; and mission-driven operational support. These changes will foster a culture of excellence and innovation critical to mission success.

In recent years, progress has been made in making space acquisitions nimbler through the development of smaller satellites and modular software-driven architectures. Such architectures can be fielded faster and at lower unit cost, but they create significant integration challenges as no single system can perform the full mission. If confirmed, I will drive mission integration by validating capabilities end-to-end early and often, leveraging the new mission-aligned Portfolio Acquisition Executives (PAE). If confirmed, I will also establish key mission threads, such as space-enabled kill chains, to close gaps, increase efficiency, maximize capacity, and ensure interoperability. Finally, if confirmed, I will partner with stakeholders using the authority that Congress established as Chair of the Space Acquisition Council to ensure architectural alignment across the space enterprise.

None of these efforts are possible without the professionalism of a talented acquisition workforce. In my experience, we lose talent when people are not empowered with decision authority and are shackled by red tape. If confirmed, I will champion initiatives to revitalize and sustain a vibrant workforce. These include promoting a mission-first culture; proactively managing careers; enhancing training and education; and ensuring programs are staffed with the right people in the right job. Finally, if confirmed, I will personally coach and mentor every PAE, modelling the behavior I expect of them. In the end, the acquisition workforce needs to be recognized for the essential warfighting function they perform.

In summary, if confirmed, I commit to advance space acquisition reform, energize mission integration, and revitalize the workforce, working closely with Congress, to accelerate delivery of innovative space capabilities to the warfighter.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.