

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Donald Trump's nominee to be the Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to God for His many blessings.

I also want to explicitly thank President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, and Deputy Secretary Feinberg for the confidence and trust they have placed in me to serve in this critical position.

Finally, I also want to acknowledge my family — including my wife, Melissa, my daughter, Ellen, and her fiancé, Josh — who are here with me today; and my son, John, and my mother and father, Karen and David Payne, who couldn't be here. Thank you all for your continued support.

Growing up in a small village in upstate New York, I was surrounded by a family and community of people who love this country. I was greatly influenced by the stories of World War II veterans, like my great uncle, Army Captain, Jack Marshall. My uncles, Raymond and Carroll Welker, my cousin Brian Welker, and my brother, Steve, also served in the Army. Their example instilled in me a strong sense of service and commitment to the security of the United States.

Today, our great nation faces an urgent challenge. The rise of China — particularly their expanding military and deepening ties with Russia, Iran, and North Korea — is alarming and presents one of the most pressing challenges of our time. China continues to develop, test, and field advanced military capabilities at a rapid pace. Their progress and determination are unmistakable.

We must meet this challenge with resolve. Strength remains our surest path to peace. Yet, we must also confront the hard truth: for too long our military has been asked to defend our nation with systems that are outdated, over-budget, and delayed—while our adversaries modernize with purpose and speed.

Under the leadership of President Trump and Secretary Hegseth, we will restore the military to unmatched strength and readiness. They set a clear vision and charted a path to protect the homeland with the Golden Dome for America initiative; they prioritized restoring America's maritime dominance by addressing our shipbuilding industry; and they have initiated efforts to shore up our nation's supply chain—to include munitions production. These efforts, and many others, will ensure peace is preserved through unmistakable American power.

If confirmed as the Director of CAPE, I will support these efforts by focusing on three core priorities. First, during my time as a career civil servant in the Pentagon, I have worked both within CAPE and in other organizations working with CAPE. I recognize that CAPE has often been viewed as operating beyond its mission responsibilities and has consequently been under heavy scrutiny. That is why, if confirmed, my first priority will be focusing CAPE on its defined mission of providing independent cost-estimating and program evaluation analyses to the Secretary, Deputy, and other Department leaders. Objective, fact-based analysis is the cornerstone of sound defense decision-making that puts the most advanced capabilities in the hands of our warfighters.

Second, I will modernize CAPE processes and systems. We must leverage cutting-edge methods, tools, and digital systems to deliver faster, more accurate, and more relevant evaluations to keep pace with modern warfare and acquisition demands.

Third, I will invest in the next generation of analysts and leaders. America's strategic advantage depends not only on technology, but on people—dedicated professionals who think critically, challenge assumptions, and embody integrity in service to the nation. CAPE has exceptionally talented men and women. If confirmed, I will do everything possible to enhance their professional development and uphold the independence and integrity that define their work.

I believe that with a focus on maintaining our advantage over China, we can adapt Department processes to unleash latent American innovation, deliver advanced capabilities at speed and scale, and ensure our warriors receive the rigorous, advanced training they need to remain the best in the world.

I believe strongly in the Department's mission to deter conflict, defend our nation, and ensure every taxpayer dollar strengthens the security of the United States. If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I will work tirelessly to uphold these principles and provide the objective, rigorous analysis that national security demands.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.