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Department of Defense  
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

SASC Opening Statement (Coffey)

Thank you, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and other distinguished members of this Committee.

I want to begin by thanking my wife of over thirty-two years, Anne, and our children Kate, Cameron, and Conor. I cannot say enough about what their support, and patience, has meant as I pursued parallel careers in the law and in the Navy. I am so pleased that Anne and Conor could be here today.

I am very grateful to President Biden for his trust and confidence in nominating me to serve as General Counsel of the Department of the Navy. I thank the Committee and its staff for making time over the past few weeks to discuss my nomination. I am eager to return to public service, and hope I can earn your support.

I would like to address briefly why I believe that, if confirmed, I would bring a number of pertinent strengths to the role of Navy General Counsel.

First, I have for over thirty years led a varied career in the law, including several years as a federal prosecutor in the Southern District of New York and as a civil litigator handling some of the country's most challenging and impactful cases. I have experience solving difficult problems; building effective teams; providing candid, timely counsel; and advocating for my clients' interests.

Second, I served in the United States Navy for over thirty years, as a midshipman at the Naval Academy, on active duty for eight years, and, after graduating from Georgetown Law's night program while stationed here in Washington, as a reservist for eighteen years. I took on several operational roles—including as a P-3 Orion mission commander tracking Soviet submarines—and I was privileged to be selected twice for command. In Washington, I had the opportunity to serve as personal aide to Vice President George H.W. Bush and in Pentagon policy and planning roles.

Third, I bring the perspective of a child of immigrants. I am humbled by the possibility that, if confirmed, I could once again serve the country that drew my parents here from Ireland seven decades ago. I grew up in a home where my six younger siblings and I were told on a near-daily basis that, if we did our homework, applied ourselves, and went to Mass, there was no limit to what we could accomplish in America. Our family went through some tough times—my Dad was a construction worker who was often out of work when the economy soured—but our parents always reminded us that how lucky we were to be American. And that because we had been given this great gift, much was expected of us.

These principles have animated much of my life, leading me to take the oath to protect and defend our Constitution as a 17-year old midshipman at Annapolis and, after completing my obligated active duty service, to continue to serve in the Navy Reserve for almost two decades while juggling a career and a family. And it's why I sit here today, ready—if confirmed—to bring all of my experience, energy, and love of country to the role of Navy General Counsel.

If confirmed, my top priority would be to ensure that the Office of the General Counsel robustly supports the mission of the Navy and Marine Corps by providing the timely, candid, and accurate legal advice they need to carry out their missions successfully.

I would if confirmed also focus on taking care of our Sailors, Marines, Department civilians, and their families, which I know firsthand enables mission success.

And if confirmed, I would seek to promote a culture where ethical decision-making is paramount throughout the Department. Relatedly, I would work hard to leverage the Office of the General Counsel to ensure that every taxpayer dollar given to the Department of the Navy is spent wisely, fully accounted for, and subject to effective oversight and full transparency to this Committee and to the American public.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Navy Secretary Del Toro, the senior leadership of the Pentagon, and this Committee, doing so in the bipartisan tradition that is a prized hallmark of this Committee.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer your questions.