

Good morning Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you today.

I would like to thank President Biden for my nomination. I would also like to thank Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks for their confidence, and of course, to Michèle Flournoy for her kind introduction.

Michèle has been a mentor to me and so many others over the course of her distinguished career and I am grateful for her years of friendship. As Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, she set a high bar for policy acumen, skillful management, unshakeable integrity, and principled, nonpartisan leadership. If confirmed, I aim to emulate her example.

I would also like to thank my wife Rebecca and my two amazing children, Nora and Rylan, for their love, support, and patience through this process. I wish they could be here today in person, but I know they cheering me on back home in California.

I was born and raised in OSD Policy, and could not be more humbled by the prospect of leading this great organization. I began my government career as an action officer in the Pentagon 16 years ago, during the Bush administration, and I returned to serve as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East during the first term of the Obama administration.

While the challenges we face as a nation have changed over the years, the role of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy—to provide forward-thinking and insightful advice to the Secretary on all matters related to foreign policy and national security—remains just as critical to the defense of the Nation as it ever has been.

Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks have pledged to empower the Policy team, and if confirmed, I pledge to be a strong, constructive civilian voice in the Department. I have the utmost respect for our military professionals at all levels, and if confirmed, I would look forward to working closely with the Joint Staff, combatant commands, and the Services.

We recently reached the devastating milestone of over half a million lives lost to COVID-19—more Americans than were lost during World War II or in all wars since 1945 combined. I agree with Secretary Austin that the pandemic is our most immediate national security threat, and, again, if confirmed, I stand ready to support the Department's many efforts to beat the pandemic.

The 2018 National Defense Strategy—for which this Committee deserves a great deal of credit—aptly recognized the reality of great power competition, particularly with China. If confirmed, I would work diligently to further the Department's efforts to strengthen deterrence and develop a Joint Force to effectively counter the challenge posed by a more assertive China.

Successfully competing with China will requires us to lean into our inherent national strengths by building back better at home, leading with our values abroad, and reinvigorating our unrivaled network of alliances and partners.

It is also critical that we ensure our nuclear deterrent is safe, reliable, and effective—one that is credible in the eyes of our adversaries and our allies. The nuclear triad has been the bedrock of our strategic deterrent for decades, and modernization efforts are key to maintaining our deterrent. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring that the triad remains an important hedge against the prospect of future technological changes that may question the survivability of any given leg.

Climate change represents another existential challenge—one that will increasingly shape the operational environment and contingencies the Department of Defense will face in the coming years. Energy resilience will be a major issue in any scenario for great power conflict, and the Department must take steps to make our infrastructure and facilities less vulnerable to extreme weather. If confirmed, I will champion a comprehensive approach to addressing the national security implications of climate change.

I view the SolarWinds intrusion as the latest example of a cyber-vulnerability that has become even more acute as the pandemic has forced entire communities and institutions online. True cybersecurity requires a whole of government effort, working in partnership with the private sector. The Department should adopt a layered approach to respond to cyberattacks, defend our networks and improve their resilience, and work alongside our allies to shape rules of the road that constrain malign behavior. If confirmed, I would look forward to working with members of this Committee on these issues.

In all of these areas, I believe our allies and partners must be seamlessly integrated into our efforts. If confirmed, I would dedicate myself to energizing our bilateral and multilateral defense relationships. I also recognize that American is strongest when we are leading with diplomacy, and if confirmed, I would closely coordinate with my colleagues at the State Department to support their diplomatic engagements around the world.

Finally, I recognize that our nation, and the Department, faces a moment of reckoning. If confirmed, I would do all that I can to support efforts to address the scourge of sexual assault and end violent extremism and systemic racism within the ranks. You have my commitment to help break down systemic barriers and foster a diverse and inclusive Department.

I am personally grateful for your long, bipartisan commitment to our national defense, thoughtful oversight of our military, and devotion to those who serve our country in uniform and their families. If confirmed, I would seek to forge a collaborative working relationship with Congress, and I would look forward to engaging with this Committee regularly to advance our shared national security objectives.

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