

James N. Stewart
Nomination Hearing for Assistant Secretary of Defense
For Manpower and Reserve Affairs
Opening Statement Before the Senate Armed Services Committee

Senator Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed and distinguished members of the Committee on Armed Services, I am deeply humbled and honored to be here with you today. I want to thank the full time staff of the Armed Services Committee for taking time to see me during my courtesy call, and thank you for considering my nomination for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

I am also grateful to the President and Secretary Mattis for their support, trust, and confidence in my ability to fill this important position.

Finally, I would like to thank my immediate family members who are with me here today; my wife of 40 years, Kristi and my daughter Aubrey. Not able to be with us today is my son Aaron who is working in Atlanta. I'd also like to thank my brother and sisters, my mother, and my father who is no longer with us for their untiring support over these many years as I served, like my father and brother, in the United States Air Force.

There are over 4.5 million Active, Reserve Component, and Retired military personnel and over 860,000 appropriated and non-appropriated civilian employees in the Department of Defense. If confirmed, it will be my responsibility to serve as the principal advisor to Secretary Mattis and Under Secretary Wilkie on all personnel policy, plans, and program issues involving these outstanding Americans and their families. From rating systems and awards, to child care, education, and groceries, this is an enormous and humbling charge.

Thankfully, I was fortunate to grow up in a military family and acquire some life experiences that I can draw upon, if confirmed. As the son of a retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, who during his 23 year career served a tour in Vietnam, I am familiar with the many hardships dependents deal with growing up in a military family. A product of JR Army ROTC and an Auburn Air Force ROTC graduate, I served 14 years on Active Duty and 22 years in the Air Force Reserve. I also served over 20 years as a military technician within the federal civil service system, gaining an appreciation for the challenges facing both military and civilian cultures. Finally, I have been retired now for over 3 years, and have gained the unique perspective of a military retiree as well. If confirmed, I will draw upon the lessons learned and experience gained from previous positions held to deal with the future challenges ahead.

Given the diverse and extensive scope of the Manpower and Reserve Affairs portfolio, it is crucial that each decision made by the Assistant Secretary enhances Secretary Mattis' vision to provide management systems and policies "where leadership can harness opportunities and ensure effective stewardship of taxpayer resources." This position has the awesome responsibility of ensuring our most important asset, our people and their families, are well served, by providing them with the tools and help they need to ensure our national defense, in a budget constrained environment.

As the Department of Defense seeks to improve and sustain readiness, balance capability and capacity, and maximize lethality, improvement must be pursued in the overall management of our Total Force of Active and Reserve Component military, government civilians, and contracted service personnel. Reforms and efficiencies should be pursued in order to provide the maximum capability and lethality for the personnel dollar spent. If confirmed, I will work with the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Office of Personnel Management, the Department's subject matter experts, along with the Joint Staff, Service Chiefs, and Reserve Component leadership to pursue promising courses of action that best serve mission needs while freeing up money for readiness demands. I will organize for innovation by adapting organizational structures to best support the force; drive budget discipline; consolidate and streamline processes; and eliminate duplication of effort.

Sustainment of the all-volunteer force is my ultimate priority, and this objective cannot be met unless you take care of the member's family. Whether it is spouse education or career opportunities, dependent education, medical care, child care, relocation assistance, Exchange or Commissary, deployment support, Yellow Ribbon Reintegration, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, etc., if you don't pay attention to the family's needs, the member will leave. Trust me - there are numerous civilian companies looking for the skills our members possess.

If confirmed for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs position, I will strive to be a consistent, transparent, and honest advocate for the needs of **ALL** of our Department of Defense personnel and their families, while maintaining open lines of communication between my Office and Congress. To this end, I will proactively communicate with Congress and ensure the Congressional Defense Committees receive timely and informative updates on all major issues and initiatives in my portfolio, were I to be confirmed.