

**Senate Armed Services Committee**  
**Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Daryl L. Caudle, USN**  
**Nominee for Appointment to be Chief of Naval Operations**

**Duties and Responsibilities**

**Section 8033 of title 10, U.S. Code, describes the duties and responsibilities of the Chief of Naval Operations.**

**1. What is your understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the Chief of Naval Operations?**

Under statute and subject to the authority, direction, and control of the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations presides over the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, transmits the plans and recommendations of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations to the Secretary of the Navy and advises the Secretary with regard to such plans and recommendations; after approval of the plans or recommendations of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations by the Secretary, acts as the agent of the Secretary in carrying them into effect; exercises supervision, consistent with the authority assigned to commanders of unified or specified combatant commands, over such of the members and organizations of the Navy and the Marine Corps as the Secretary determines; performs the duties prescribed for him by statute and other provisions of law; and performs such other military duties, not otherwise assigned by law, as are assigned to him by the President, the Secretary of Defense, or the Secretary of the Navy. Additionally, the Chief of Naval Operations shall also perform the duties prescribed for him as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and inform the Secretary regarding military advice rendered by members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on matters affecting the Department of the Navy. Finally, the Chief of Naval Operations keeps the Secretary of the Navy fully informed of significant military operations affecting the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary.

**2. What background and experience do you possess that qualify you to perform these duties and responsibilities?**

During my near 40-year career, I have prepared warships for combat and peacetime deployments at the unit, Squadron, Group, and Type Commander levels; and currently as Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces. There are few that have the years of experience I have in integrating the complex personnel, training, equipment, ordnance, and logistical requirements to generate and maintain the global Naval presence, both conventional and strategic, that protects U.S. interests at home and abroad. Amongst these commands are Submarine Squadron Three, Submarine Group Eight, Submarine Force Pacific, Submarine Forces/Submarine Force Atlantic, and U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

Operationally, I have been responsible at the Flag Officer level for operations within almost every Geographic Combatant Command area of responsibility and across the entire spectrum of warfare. These assignments include Commander, Naval Forces U.S. Northern Command; Commander, Naval Forces Strategic Command; Commander, U.S. Strategic Command Joint

Force Maritime Component Commander; Vice Director of J5 on the Joint Staff; Commander, Submarine Group Eight; Deputy Commander, Sixth Fleet; Director of Operations U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa; Deputy Chief for Security Cooperation for the Office of Defense Presentative, Pakistan; Joint Functional Component Commander-Global Strike; Commander, Submarine Forces Pacific; and Commander Submarine Forces Atlantic.

Throughout the majority of these Flag assignments, I have experienced operating within a Joint structure for both Force Generation and Force Employment. Additionally, coordination with NATO, Allies, and partners have been crucial in each of these assignments and included assignment as Commander, Allied Submarine Command.

### **3. Do you meet the joint duty requirements for this position?**

Yes

### **4. If confirmed, what innovative ideas would you consider providing to the Secretary of the Navy for enhancing the organization, training, and equipping of the Navy?**

I believe that the time is right for a large transformation within the U.S. Navy at this pivotal moment in history. I have an opportunity to make a real and enduring difference. There are numerous areas requiring attention, and my wealth of naval experience affords me unique insights into how best to solve these issues and provide adaptive, creative, and innovative solutions to the Secretary of the Navy. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Secretary on my ideas, as well as others identified by my staff, the Fleets, and the Secretariat. Amongst those, the initial initiative will be:

1) If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of the Navy to finalize and expand the implementation of the Global Maritime Response Plan and readiness improvement efforts such as Combat Surge Ready to optimize the readiness of the current Fleet. I will work with the Commandant of the Marine Corps for similar constructs to ensure the ability to surge integrated Navy and Marine amphibious operations across the spectrum of crisis follows a similar readiness model and accounting methodology.

2) If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of the Navy to employ best practices from corporate America and other storied institutions, to vastly improve the quality of service, including quality of life and work, afforded our Sailors and DoD civilians and their families. I will continue to drive efforts I initiated at U.S. Fleet Forces Command such as ensuring unaccompanied housing (UH) meets DoD standards and more importantly, meets the commonsense standards parents would be proud to have their children live in, including no Sailors with permanent residency on ships, continued improved access to child care, more medical availability, reduction in LIMDU Sailors, on time pay, and numerous others.

3) If confirmed, I will provide an informed plan to streamline Navy command and control (C2), aligning responsibility and accountability with the risk that operational commanders hold for

day-to-day decisions vice continuing to shift decision-making to stakeholders who do not have direct risk or to commanders in comingled, and often, overlapping C2 structures.

**5. What are your goals, if confirmed, for the transformation of the Navy to meet new and emerging threats?**

My goal is to ensure today's Navy is ready for combat while building the Navy of the Future to address emerging threats and peer adversaries. I will drive sustained, smart investments in a force design that endures—anchored by three priorities:

1. Modulization and Scalability – Invest in platforms, sensors, and weapons systems that are modular, scalable, and built for rapid upgrade cycles to stay ahead of emerging threats.
2. Human Capital and Warfighting Excellence – Prioritize investment in our Sailors and warfighters—through advanced training, leadership development, and talent management—to ensure we remain unmatched in operational competence and innovation.
3. Integrated All-Domain Capability – Accelerate delivery of integrated, networked capabilities across the joint force, including unmanned systems, artificial intelligence, and resilient C3 architectures to enable decision advantage and operational dominance in contested environments.

This enduring investment framework will ensure the Navy of the future is not only lethal and survivable, but also adaptable and sustainable—ready to fight and win for decades to come.

**In addition to the duties enumerated in Section 8033, it provides that the Chief of Naval Operations shall perform such other military duties as are assigned to him by the President, the Secretary of Defense, or the Secretary of the Navy.**

**6. In light of the lines of effort set forth in the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), what other military duties do you anticipate the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of the Navy would assign to you, if confirmed?**

If confirmed, I expect to be tasked with advancing the Department's priorities, particularly regarding reviving warrior ethos and standards, restoring trust in the military, strengthening deterrence, and rebuilding our Navy's foundational infrastructure. Additionally, I anticipate being tasked to focus on strengthening the maritime industrial base, fostering an adaptive, accountable warfighting culture, and improving the health, welfare, and training of naval personnel through Quality of Service initiatives. These priorities are essential to delivering the lethal, resilient, and agile force our nation demands.

**7. If confirmed, what duties and responsibilities would you assign to the Vice Chief of Naval Operations?**

In accordance with 10 U.S.C. 8035, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations has such authority and duties with respect to the Department of the Navy as the Chief of Naval Operations, through the approval and delegation of the Secretary of the Navy. If confirmed, I will work with the Vice Chief to delegate authorities as necessary and appropriate, subject to the Secretary of the Navy's approval. However, I will ensure the Vice Chief remains the overall lead for the Navy's Office of Warfighting Advantage in which all continuous improvements and assessments are executed, overseen, and monitored for enduring effectiveness.

### **The Joint Chiefs of Staff**

**Section 921 of the FY17 NDAA made changes to section 151 of title 10, U. S. Code, concerning the service of members of the Joint Chiefs (other than the Chairman) as military advisors to the President, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense.**

**8. What is your assessment of the authorities of, and process by which members of the Joint Chiefs provide military advice and opinions to the President, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and civilian leadership of the Department of Defense (DOD)?**

If confirmed, I understand after first informing the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, in my capacity as a military advisors, may provide advice to the President, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense on a particular matter of my judgment.

**9. If confirmed, would you commit to provide your best military advice to the President, National Security Council, Homeland Security Council, and civilian leadership of the Department of Defense, even when your advice differs from that of the Chairman or the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?**

Yes.

### **Use of Military Force**

**10. In your view, what factors should be considered in making recommendations to the President on the use of military force?**

If confirmed, my recommendations to the President on the use of military force will be consistent with the United States Constitution, U.S. domestic and international law, and informed by national objectives. If required to defend the nation and protect our allies, the Navy will be ready, willing, and able to respond when called upon including the use of force.

### **Major Challenges and Priorities**

**11. What is your vision for the Navy of today? For the Navy of the future?**

In an era defined by global competition, technological disruption, and unpredictable threats, my vision as Chief of Naval Operations is to build a Navy that is ready to fight and win—today and tomorrow. We will relentlessly pursue full-spectrum readiness, deepen integration across all domains—sea, air, cyber, space, and undersea—and harness innovation to outpace our adversaries. Our force must be resilient, agile, and globally present, capable of deterring conflict and, when called upon, achieving decisive victory. We will align tightly with national defense priorities and bolster our enduring advantage at sea—preserving freedom of navigation and projecting power where and when it matters most.

**12. What do you consider to be the most significant challenges you will face if confirmed as the Chief of Naval Operations?**

China's People's Liberation Army/Navy (PLA/N) continues the largest, fastest, most comprehensive military buildup since World War II. Several countries, beyond just China are mounting a sustained challenge to U.S. interest. The Russia-Ukraine conflict continuously poses a threat to escalate and envelope Europe; Israeli conflicts with Iran and extremist regimes threaten to destabilize the region; and numerous other conflict points such as the Red Sea, India-Pakistan, and North Korean test the collective defense of our allies and partners. With China's rapid military buildup in the Asia-Pacific, while the U.S. Navy is ready to tackle the multitude of challenges today, we need to be proactive in addressing the threats facing to our maritime dominance and readiness.

Modernizing our strategic forces, recapitalizing neglected shore infrastructure, improving our industrial base, and developing an executable shipbuilding plan to build and sustain the required Fleet; all while ensuring the existing force is optimized in readiness and lethality, able to respond to any of the conflicts mentioned before or others not yet foreseen will be the most significant challenge I will face if confirmed as the Chief of Naval Operations.

**13. What plans do you have for addressing each of these challenges, if confirmed?**

These deficiencies came into existence over years and will require years to resolve. If confirmed I commit to:

- 1) Maintain nuclear modernization to platforms and C3 systems as the Navy's number one priority.
- 2) Continue to drive improvements in readiness, such as the Global Maritime Response Plan, that ensure our existing Naval forces are as ready as they can be for potential conflict.
- 3) Develop and execute a transparent infrastructure recapitalization plan, prioritizing assets critical to operations in the Indo-Pacific and those that ensure Quality of Service for our Sailors and families.
- 4) Execute organizational reform in the areas of command and control, and acquisitions as required to create a more flexible and effective organization. I will work to remove overlapping C2 structures in which clear and unambiguous lines of authority are missing.
- 5) Work with Congress for policies, authorities, competition, and reform that improve the ability

of our industrial base to produce ordnance, recruit and maintain a workforce, repair and build our ships, and maintain accountability to the same industries to produce and deliver on the contracts already paid for by the American people.

**14. Given the major challenges you identified above, what other priorities would you set for your term as Chief of Naval Operations, if confirmed?**

People First, Foundry Always. Invest in the development, well-being, and leadership of sailors, civilians, and families—building a culture of excellence, accountability, and resilience. Invest in the Foundry, which is the foundation to high-end training systems, on time maintenance and modernization organizations and facilities, strong and accountable governance and policy oversight mechanisms, and a world class industrial base.

Operational Readiness at Speed and Scale. Ensure forces are combat-ready, trained, and able to deploy rapidly across the globe to support deterrence, crisis response, and sustained joint force operations across the spectrum of conflict.

Resilient and Sustainable Force Generation. Maintain and modernize the fleet through efficient maintenance cycles, resilient logistics, and sustainable practices that ensure long-term force health. Build more self-sufficiency in our Sailors and Platforms.

Integrated All-Domain Warfare. Embrace joint and combined force integration across maritime, cyber, space, air, and land domains to ensure dominance in contested environments to support Combatant Commanders' operational plans and capability requirements through prioritized investments.

Innovation and Technology Adoption. Accelerate the integration of cutting-edge technologies like AI, unmanned systems, cyber tools, and data-driven decision-making to outpace adversaries by leveraging faster learning curves and feedback loops from the assessment of existing combat operations.

Global Partnerships and Interoperability. Strengthen alliances and partnerships through joint exercises, training, combined operations, and improved foreign military sales processes that enhance maritime security and global presence while enhancing each nation's ability and willingness to contribute their fair-share responsibility to our collective defense.

**Civilian Control of the Military**

**15. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to ensure that your tenure on the Joint Chiefs of Staff epitomizes the fundamental requirement for civilian control of the Armed Forces embedded in the U.S. Constitution and other laws?**

Civilian control of the Armed Forces is a foundational principle enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. It ensures that our military remains subordinate to duly elected and appointed civilian leaders, reinforcing the legitimacy and accountability of military actions within our democracy.

If confirmed, I would provide candid military advice, respect civilian oversight and direction, engage transparently with Congress, and model and reinforce these principles with the ranks of the Navy.

**16. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to ensure that the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy are fully engaged in preparing guidance for and reviewing contingency plans?**

If confirmed, I will take deliberate steps to ensure the Secretary of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy are fully engaged in the development and review of contingency plans. Their deep understanding and strategic direction are essential to ensure that these plans align with national objectives and policy priorities. As part of my responsibilities, I would maintain early and continuous coordination, seek regular policy input, provide timely updates, and deliver my best military advice within all forums.

**17. How would you define effective civilian control of the military? Aside from civilian control of the military via the Executive Branch, please describe the extent to which you believe Congress plays a role in furthering civilian control of our military?**

That the Armed Forces operate under the authority, direction, and oversight of elected and appointed civilian leaders. This principle ensures that military power is subordinate to the will of the people as expressed through their representatives in the Executive and legislative branches. While the Executive Branch exercises control of the military, Congress plays a vital role in upholding civilian control of the military. As the Constitution grants Congress the authority to provide and maintain a Navy and declare war, it ensures that Congress also exercises its role in furthering civilian control of the military by authorization and appropriation of our resources, advice and consent on nominations for key appointments, and providing oversight and accountability.

**18. In your view, what is the appropriate role for the Department when supporting law enforcement in state or national emergencies?**

The Navy's involvement is in support of, not in place of, civil authorities. At its core, our role is to augment, not replace, the efforts of law enforcement and emergency services during extraordinary circumstances with deference to restrictions such as the Posse Comitatus Act. Our role is defined by the Secretary of the Navy.

**If confirmed as the Chief of Naval Operations, you will testify regularly before Congress and may be asked to comment on partisan political matters.**

**19. What is your view of your responsibility to provide your best military advice to Congress while also ensuring that you and your office remain apolitical, recognizing that you serve as a model for other senior uniformed officers and the entire armed forces?**

My responsibility is to provide my best military advice, honest, informed, transparent, and unfiltered while remaining apolitical. I understand that my actions set the tone for the entire Navy, and I will lead by example in upholding the Constitution, serving with impartiality, and focusing on warfighting readiness.

### **2022 National Defense Strategy**

**The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) identified China as the “most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge for the Department” and stated that Russia poses an “acute threat,” as illustrated by its invasion of Ukraine. The NDS also identifies “[m]utually-beneficial Alliances and partnerships” as “an enduring strength for the United States.”**

**20. In your view, does the 2022 NDS accurately assess the current strategic environment, including prioritization among the most critical challenges and enduring threats to the national security of the United States and its allies? Please explain your answer.**

The Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance (INDSG), which has superseded the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), accurately and precisely assesses the current strategic environment. The INDSG prioritizes defense of the U.S. homeland and deterring China in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, the INDSG prioritizes increasing burden-sharing with allies and partners around the world, in the process strengthening those relationships and setting conditions for lasting peace. This strategic prioritization provides clear focus on how we commit resources, and based on my experience, I am confident the INDSG accurately sets the right priorities and provides the necessary guidance for the DoD.

**21. In your view, does the 2022 NDS correctly specify the priority missions of the DOD and the capabilities by which DOD can achieve its objectives in the context of the current strategic environment? What do you perceive as the areas of greatest risk?**

As we await an updated National Defense Strategy, the Navy is following the direction of the 2025 INDSG to support DoD’s mission to strengthen homeland defense and deter Chinese aggression in the Asia-Pacific. Beyond these challenges, we must continue to address the complex geopolitical environment at the level needed to maintain strategic deterrence and posture to deter regional aggression globally while preparing for an uncertain future. As these challenges demand more capability and capacity from the Navy, we must prepare our Fleets to fulfill the requirements of deterring potential adversaries and prevailing in conflict if necessary. If confirmed, I can discuss the specific mechanisms for achieving these objectives in further detail in a classified setting.

**22. Is the Navy adequately sized, structured, and resourced to implement the 2022 NDS and the associated operational plans? Please explain your answer.**

Yes, with risk. Naval forces continue to be in high demand supporting Combatant Commanders



across the globe. Based on validated operational plan requirements, naval forces are oversubscribed in many areas. However, as a force provider, I believe the Navy can generate and employ sufficient, capable forces to meet the requirements of any forthcoming National Defense Strategy. However, as we look to the future force required, there is a need for a larger Navy with a mix of manned and unmanned platforms. If confirmed, I am committed to working with Congress, the Administration, and throughout the DoD to ensure the force structure is sized to meet the missions assigned.

**23. If confirmed, how would you address any gaps or shortfalls in the ability of the Navy to meet the demands placed on it by the 2022 NDS and the operational plans that implement the strategy?**

If confirmed, I will address any gaps in the Navy's ability to meet operational demands by supporting the Secretary of the Navy's priorities of strengthening the industrial base, enhancing maintenance, partnering to improve shipbuilding capacity, improving readiness, and focusing on Sailor Quality of Service initiatives. Additionally, I will take proactive measures to identify and mitigate any shortfalls through rigorous assessments, strategic planning across multiple horizons, and ruthless execution and accountability. This comprehensive approach will ensure that the Navy is well-prepared to meet both current and future strategic challenges effectively.

**24. If confirmed, what changes or adjustments would you advise the Secretary of the Navy to make in the Navy's implementation of the 2022 NDS?**

The Navy is aligned with the Department's Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance (INDSG) priorities. To address these priorities, I would advise the Secretary of the Navy that we continue to focus on: 1) Prioritizing investment accounts that maximize our exquisite capabilities and capacity, including the munitions needed for a high-end, sustained war fight, as these are critical to the Navy's readiness for both deterrence and warfighting; 2) Supporting shipbuilding investments and the shore infrastructure necessary to maintain the current and future force structure required to meet future NDS objectives; 3) Focusing on Sailor training, competency, and Quality of Service; 4) Empowering U.S. allies and partners to lead efforts against other threats by increasing their responsibility and burden-sharing. Once the National Defense Strategy is updated, I will reassess our initiatives to ensure they fully support NDS priorities and will make necessary recommendations to the Secretary of the Navy to adjust or refine our strategies to ensure continued alignment with national defense objectives.

**25. Does the Navy have the requisite analytic capabilities and tools to support you, if confirmed as the Chief of Naval Operations, in developing and implementing the force structure, sizing, and shaping plans required to position the Navy to execute the operational plans associated with the 2022 NDS? Please explain your answer.**

Yes. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Navy maintains a robust analytical foundation with the tools essential for evaluating force structure and sizing strategies through advanced modeling, simulations, wargaming, long-term planning and forecasting, as well as developing subject matter expertise in strategy, formal planning, and decision science. I will advocate for continued, ongoing development of formal tools like the Force Structure Assessment (FSA), Integrated Naval Force Structure Assessment (INFSA), and Force Design to inform decisions on Fleet

composition. However, it is crucial that these tools are continuously refined, better integrated into our processes, remain state-of-art with respect to AI/ML, and are aligned with real-world operational demands and emerging threats and trends.

### **Overall Readiness of the Navy**

#### **26. How would you assess the current readiness of the Navy—across the domains of materiel and equipment, personnel, and training—to execute the NDS and associated operational plans?**

In my current role as Fleet Forces Commander, the readiness of the naval forces under my command are high in most areas with concerns and managed risks in certain areas. If confirmed, I will assess Navy readiness across all domains—personnel, equipment, supply, training, ordnance, networks, and infrastructure. I will ensure alignment with the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance and that the Navy is able to meet operational plan demands and surge requirements. I will work under the Secretary of the Navy's direction and with the Fleet commanders to address any readiness gaps and ensure the force is prepared to deter aggression and, if necessary, fight and win.

#### **27. In your view, what are the operational challenges for which *current and future* Navy forces should be trained and ready in the context of day-to-day activities, as well as for contingencies?**

As the Nation's forward deployed, expeditionary, day-to-day force, the Navy and Marine Corps team operates in a battlespace that is complex and increasingly more challenging at ever expanding lethal ranges. As we campaign forward, our forces must be ready, equipped, and trained to degrade and destroy enemy capabilities in order to penetrate, operate, maneuver, and endure within this dense network of multi-domain targeting and long-range fires.

The Navy's Future Force, guided by strategic initiatives like Navy Warfighting Concept and Force Design 2045 to incorporate advanced platforms within a Hybrid Fleet, will ensure decisive warfighting capability, distributed and non-traditional sea control, and seamless interoperability with Joint and allied forces to project power globally in support of the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance. If confirmed, I will ensure our modernization efforts are focused and prioritized to address critical capability gaps against our pacing threats to ensure a lethal and ready force.

#### **28. In what specific ways has the Navy improved or not improved its state of readiness across the domains of materiel and equipment, personnel, and training?**

The Navy has made measurable progress in readiness across materiel, personnel, and training, aligned with the Department of Defense's strategic objective to build a more lethal, agile force capable of deterring and defeating aggression. Using Performance to Plan (P2P) and a continuous improvement mindset, skillset, and toolset, the Navy has made targeted investments in predictive maintenance, integrated training, and improved manning practices. As a result, we are advancing toward the goal of 80 percent Combat Surge Readiness—an objective designed to ensure the fleet can rapidly deploy and fight in support of high-end conflict. Through P2P

processes and driver analysis and metrics, we took the availability of F/A-18 aircraft from fewer than 50 percent mission-capable up to 80 percent in less than two years by thinking, acting, and operating differently. We have also improved personnel alignment and recruitment, and expanded use of live-virtual-constructive training to build warfighting proficiency. While challenges remain, these readiness efforts being employed by the System, Type, and Fleet Commanders are foundational to sustaining maritime advantage and meeting the pacing threat of peer competitors.

**The previous Chief of Naval Operations set a goal of 80 percent surge-readiness by 2027 in the 2024 Navigation Plan.**

**29. What is your understanding of the 80 percent surge-readiness goal and how it is measured?**

As the Fleet Forces Commander, I was the architect and designer who recommended the Combat Surge Readiness (CSR) mode to the previous CNO, which was adopted. Achieving 80 percent CSR would result in 80 percent of the Navy's ships, submarines, and aircraft, as calculated against established inventory and readiness criteria, being available and certified to surge on short notice within acceptable levels of risk. The measurement of 80% CSR varies by platform:

Aviation: Units (CVW, CVN, Expeditionary) that have completed their defining event (e.g., Air Wing Fallon) with certification to follow at the Fleet Commander-level.

Surface Forces: Ships that have completed Basic Phase and Surface Warfare Advanced Tactical Training (SWATT) at the highest possible equipment redundancy with manning levels to support all underway watchbills.

Submarine Forces: Operationally Available submarines with required Tactical Readiness certifications.

**30. Do you support the 80 percent surge readiness policy as a realistic and necessary target?**

Yes. CSR forces are essential for the Navy to be ready to fight and win at current force levels. I fully support this goal and if confirmed, will continue to pursue it in order to achieve and sustain this readiness level. We are aiming to achieve this by January 2027. It is a necessary target given the evolving threats to our national interests and those of our allies when coupled with the speed of modern warfare. 80 percent CSR aligns with our commitment to building and maintaining a strong, lethal, and global Navy that is prepared to defend our homeland, deter adversaries, and prevail in combat by providing out of normal deployment cycle options to the Secretary of Defense and the President.

**31. What specific steps would you take to achieve and sustain 80 percent surge readiness, addressing issues in ship maintenance and high operational tempo in the Red Sea and Europe?**

The efforts to meet 80 percent CSR are in progress now. If confirmed, I will vigorously continue those efforts. Each component of personnel levels, training and certification, ordnance, supply parts, and maintenance have dedicated efforts associated with them for improvement. Most pressing are maintenance, new construction, and munition challenges. We are addressing maintenance delays through multiple strategies and we are starting to see improvements. This includes working with our partners in private industry across multiple lines of effort to improve planning, acquire long lead time material, start availabilities on time, understand the ship material condition better to lock the work package, provide stable and predictive workloads to reduce risk, and execute more effectively to improve performance to complete depot maintenance ahead of schedule. Getting our ships, aircraft, and submarines in and out of maintenance on time and on budget is a hallmark of achieving 80 percent CSR and the Navy is fully focused on this effort. Additionally, we need to reduce the number of gaps at sea and our recorded recruiting and retention efforts are addressing that concern. I will work with the Secretary of the Navy and our defense industrial base (DIB) partners on increasing munition production as well as improving the reliability of critical parts with mean time between failure metrics that are unacceptably low.

### **Budget**

#### **32. If confirmed, by what standards would you measure the adequacy of the Navy budget?**

If confirmed, I would measure the adequacy of the Navy budget by assessing the associated risk in our ability to meet the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance and deter or defeat potential adversaries in today's complex geopolitical and contested strategic environment. Notably, of late, the Navy has demonstrated our effectiveness in the Red Sea, the eastern Mediterranean, and in the western Pacific in particular as global threats are evolving. Defending America's interests along with those of our allies and partners requires balance between current readiness, modernization, building the future force, recapitalizing our strategic deterrent, and we require a budget to match. Additionally, continuous and predictable funding, absent of Continuing Resolutions, is foundational to delivering peace through strength while meeting all of our global objectives.

**Section 222a of title 10, U.S. Code provides that not later than 10 days after the President's submission of the defense budget to Congress, each Service Chief shall submit to the congressional defense committees a report that lists, in order of priority, the unfunded priorities of his or her armed force.**

#### **33. What are your views of this statutory requirement and the utility of unfunded priorities lists?**

If confirmed, I will be committed to meeting all statutory requirements. First and foremost, I will ensure a President's budget submission that represents deliberate and balanced investments in the Navy's readiness, capability, and capacity lines. In accordance with statute, through the unfunded priorities list, I will provide my best military advice in identifying executable ways to

reduce risk, accelerate capabilities, and enhance Quality of Service in alignment with the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance.

**34. If confirmed, do you agree to provide your unfunded priorities list to Congress in a timely manner?**

Yes, if confirmed, I will comply with all my Title 10 responsibilities in accordance with required timelines.

**Alliances and Partnerships**

**The 2022 NDS stresses the importance of U.S. alliances and partnerships and considers these relationships a critical strategic advantage.**

**35. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to strengthen existing U.S. alliances and partnerships, build new partnerships, and exploit opportunities in international cooperation?**

If confirmed, I will strengthen U.S. alliances and partnerships under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy, and work with the Combatant Commanders to further their goals and objectives. The Navy, as an unmatched maritime warfighter can focus first on the region of consequence through operations, activities, and investments that demonstrate shared commitments to maritime security and which strengthen homeland defense and national security interests. Then work with allies and partners to assure the access, basing, and overflight authorities the U.S. Navy needs to be able to operate anywhere, at any time, across the globe. I will build new partnerships by addressing shared challenges and presenting opportunities for all nations to contribute to maritime security. I will create agility with our allies and partners by selectively deepening our integration and interoperability in order to seize and maximize opportunities.

**36. What are the major challenges for strengthening existing alliances and partnerships or building new ones, including for improving interoperability and shared operational concepts? What steps would you recommend, if confirmed, for overcoming these challenges?**

The Navy team has built the greatest network of allies and partners on earth. Our challenge is to continue to sustain and leverage that network to shape the global security environment and adapt to changes to maintain our combat credible U.S. advantage. We will continue to pursue seamless integration of allied and partner forces to optimize the use of our shared capability and capacity while ensuring equitable burden sharing. I will pursue smart investments alongside our allies and partners that will maintain our competitive advantages while leveraging our combined power to increase these advantages. I will work to advise, advocate, and work to execute the FMS Programs and other security assistance programs to maximize the lethality and readiness of our allies and partners.

**Lessons Learned from Post-Mishap Investigations**

**The report of the post-mishap investigation into the June 17, 2017, collision between the *USS Fitzgerald* and a Philippine-flagged container ship found that the collision was avoidable and resulted from an accumulation of “smaller errors over time,” ultimately resulting in a lack of adherence to sound navigational practices. Similarly, the report of investigation into the collision of the *USS John S. McCain* and merchant vessel *Alnic MC* on August 21, 2017, also was avoidable and resulted primarily from crew complacency, over-confidence, and lack of procedural compliance.**

**37. What has the Navy done to counter the “smaller errors over time” and the “complacency, overconfidence, and lack of procedural compliance” that resulted in these otherwise “avoidable” collisions?**

Simply said, the Navy is embracing, assessing, and leveraging near misses using the best practices honed over decades by Naval Reactors versus only responding to corrective actions following a significant incident or mishap. Prior to these collisions, the Navy reviewed each incident as a standalone issue and established a working group to directly tackle and address the deficiencies without holistic extensions of the problems or ruthlessly executing all corrective actions to closure. As a direct result of the collisions in 2017 and the fire that destroyed USS BONHOMME RICHARD (LHD-6) in 2020, the Navy implemented sweeping changes with a targeted objective of increased safe operations through rigorous compliance with safety standards, increased focus on improving overall fleet manning and training, improving long-term sustained readiness and establishing a stronger culture of operational excellence. In October 2021, the Navy established the Learning to Action Board (L2AB), which supports the implementation of critical recommendations and measures sustainment and effectiveness of those recommendations over time. The L2AB, co-chaired by the Undersecretary of the Navy and the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, has overseen a cross organizational review and completion of 90 percent, or 349, investigation findings from nine major incident investigations in order to implement more holistic and enduring solutions.

The team has matured into the establishment of the Office of Warfighting Advantage (OWA), which aims at working with Assessment Partners such as the Naval Safety Command, the INSURV Board, the Navy Inspector General, and Fleet Commanders through their Fleet Improvement Offices to identify risks and operational gaps early in order to avoid mishaps. Additionally, this office is focused on improving the Navy’s ability to self-assess, self-correct and continuously improve through enhanced organizational learning at all Echelons and can be credited with the combined reduction of 20 percent in simple fires and 93 percent in major fuel related fires Navy-wide over the last four years, as well the restructuring, streamlining, and simplification of the Navy’s shore-based infrastructure chain of command, and comprehensive overhaul of Sailor Quality of Service policies and programs. If confirmed, I am committed to leveraging the partnerships forged by the Office of Warfighting Advantage to continue to improve unit readiness and safeguard operational excellence, prioritize programmatic and materiel changes necessary to continued improvement of ship operational safety, leadership development and Quality of Life for our Sailors. Finally, I am committed to further developing our ability to leverage the massive data the Navy acquires through the various formal assessment

and reporting processes to better predict and forecast areas for deep dives to prevent mishaps from occurring in the first place. AI and large language models (LLMs) will be essential to this effort.

**38. If confirmed, specifically what more would you do to correct for the deficiencies that were found to have caused these two collisions?**

The Navy has made sweeping changes to the training and continuous assessment processes across the Surface Fleet over the last decade. All Navy homeports now have established seamanship and navigation simulators where bridge and combat information watch teams are qualified by courses and instructors certified to the International Maritime Organization's Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchstanding. In addition, all officer training pipeline schools have been revamped with focused training and accountable assessments in these areas from Division Officer to Commanding Officer that must be passed before assignment.

The Navy has also invested heavily in our System of Systems approach ensuring greater integration and realistic training across our ship control systems. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that those efforts are accelerated and fielded to support our Sailors and watchstanders. Finally, the Navy continues to evaluate our Force Generation and Readiness processes to ensure we can meet the dynamic needs of our Nation under any circumstances with acceptable levels of risk. If confirmed, I will continue to assess and improve our ability to generate forces to meet the readiness requirements of our peacetime presence needs and future combat missions.

Finally, I will continue to accelerate and enhance the work being done by the OWA. This organization continuously looks across the enterprise, working with Assessment Partners and Fleet leadership, to identify issues early and often before they become incidents by leveraging near miss data and formal assessment data sources. The OWA supports breaking down some of the stovepipes in learning, training and assessing that led to the collisions and establishes processes to accelerate lessons learned across communities.

**Joint Operations**

**Naval operations are becoming increasingly joint as Marines plan to deploy in larger numbers and on a wider range of ships; the U.S. Army and Air Force invest in counter-maritime capabilities; and both air and naval forces continue to develop and implement capabilities to defeat anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) networks.**

**39. Are the Services' current roles and mission assignments appropriate in light of today's Joint warfighting requirements? Should certain roles and missions be realigned or divested? Please explain your answer.**

Yes. The Navy's current roles and mission assignments are appropriate for today's Joint warfighting requirements. Navy's forward-deployed, combat-credible conventional forces strengthen integrated deterrence and fulfill an enduring role that bolsters elements of national

power and influence; while providing persistent rapid response options across the globe. The flexible employment of forward deployed decisive naval power remains the nation's most potent, flexible, and versatile instrument of military power and influence. Navy's core functions of sea control, power projection, deterrence, maritime security, and sealift are essential to ensure the collective success of the Joint Force across the spectrum of conflict in all domains.

As we evaluate the present and future requirements for Joint warfighting, we recognize naval operations require continued integration with the Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, Space Force, and Special Operations Forces. The need for continued inter-Service integration is evident as we adapt to project power across all domains and in missions such as Anti-Submarine Warfare, Cyber Operations, Logistics and Sustainment, and A2/AD Countermeasures. If confirmed, I am committed to working transparently and collaboratively with the Joint Chiefs to regularly assess roles and missions that need to be realigned or divested to meet the pacing threat and address emerging challenges, as future conflict will range from the seabed to space.

**40. Which other Service doctrines and capabilities offer the greatest opportunity for synergy with the Navy in joint operations?**

The Navy leverages the guidance provided in the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance and the Joint Warfighting Concept to drive change in our concepts like Distributed Maritime Operations, with an eye toward greater integration, while looking for opportunities to better incorporate maritime capabilities into other Service concepts and doctrine. Working integrated as a department, the Naval Service of the Navy and Marine Corps team naturally has the greatest synergy. Navy also fully supports Joint concepts such as Army Operational Concepts 2040, the Air Force Future Operating Concept, and the Concept for Integrated Maritime-Space Operations in Contested Environments, all underpinned by Combined Joint All-Domain Command and Control (CJADC2). These 16 efforts are supported by the Navy's Analytic Master Plan and the Strategic Education Alignment Plan to ensure key decisions are both threat-informed and data-driven and practiced and validated using the Fleet Learning Continuum.

Increased cross-service integration is essential to winning against any adversary, today and in the future. The Navy is integrating our capabilities with the Marine Corps to maximize the effectiveness of their Stand-In Forces supporting Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations. We also continue to work closely with the Army, Air Force, and Space Force to share sensor data, synthesize intelligence, optimize targeting capabilities, and enable effects to achieve military objectives. Finally, we are in lock-step with the Coast Guard in mutually supporting our basing needs and complementing each other's service-specific maritime missions including the Arctic, Southern Border protection, and countering illicit trafficking.

**41. What innovative ideas are you considering to increase Service interdependence and interoperability to accomplish missions and tasks in support of DOD objectives in joint operations?**

By ensuring the Joint and Navy Warfighting Concepts are understood, practiced, invested in, and assessed, I believe the Navy is well poised to interoperate with the Joint Force and with allies and partners effectively. The Navy is working with the Joint Force to leverage emerging



technologies to better integrate maritime capabilities across the Joint Force. Some of these emerging technologies include artificial intelligence, robotic and autonomous systems, advanced manufacturing, as well as space and cyber capabilities. The Navy is integrated with joint offices and working groups such as the Joint Long-Range Fires Networked Office and Joint Robotic and Autonomous Systems Enterprise in collaboration of technology development through tactics, techniques and procedures as well as how best to employ and deploy these systems.

Together with the other services, the Navy will create a common Electronic Warfare technology infrastructure to foster rapid development and future upgrades. Under the CJADC2 umbrella, the Navy continues to deliver the Naval Operational Architecture through Project OVERMATCH, working deliberately with Air Force, Space Force, Army, and USMC to identify and deploy service interoperability opportunities in the areas of networking, tools and data standards, communications as a service, and battle management aids.

If confirmed, I will continue to increase integration and collaboration through exercises, war games, experimentation, modeling, simulation, and analysis with the other Services by leveraging the Fleet Learning Continuum.

### **Acquisition**

**In recent National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs), Congress expanded and refined the acquisition-related functions of the Chief of Naval Operations.**

**42. If confirmed, how would you assist the Secretary of the Navy in the performance of certain acquisition-related functions, while ensuring compatibility with the duties and responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition (as established in title 10, U.S. Code, sections 8014 and 8016)?**

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Secretary of the Navy and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition (ASN RD&A) to ensure a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities that respects statutory boundaries. My focus will be on providing strategic guidance and operational insight from the fleet perspective to inform acquisition priorities, ensuring that requirements are realistic and aligned with Navy warfighting needs, prevent requirement creep through disciplined approaches, and work with DIB partners to execute on time and on cost. I would facilitate transparent communication between fleet commanders, program managers, and the ASN RD&A team to promote acquisition programs that deliver timely and effective capabilities.

**43. If confirmed, what actions would you take to improve all three aspects of the acquisition process—requirements, acquisition, and budgeting?**

We must ensure that our requirements, acquisition and budgeting processes are fully aligned to deliver effective and suitable capabilities to our Sailors. If confirmed, I will collaborate closely within the Department of the Navy and with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Congress, and industry for all ongoing efforts to improve efficiency across requirements

generation and prioritization, acquisition, and budgeting so we can most effectively deliver the best capabilities to the Fleet at a pace that gives us significant warfighting advantage. This includes embracing and implementing improvements that may result from acquisition and Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution (PPBE) reform measures currently being discussed.

**44. If confirmed, what actions would you propose, if any, to ensure that requirements are realistic, technically achievable, and prioritized?**

If confirmed, I will validate that our formal warfighting requirements process takes into account input from the acquisition and technical communities for technical viability. I will collaborate closely within the Department of the Navy and with OSD, Congress, and industry for all ongoing efforts to improve efficiency across requirements generation, prioritization, and discipline, so we can most effectively deliver the best capabilities to the Fleet at a pace that gives us significant warfighting advantage.

**45. If confirmed, what specific measures would you recommend to control “requirements creep” in the defense acquisition system?**

If confirmed, I will diligently work to ensure and validate that our formal warfighting requirements process has the discipline to prevent requirements creep in the execution of our programs. We must have well-defined capability requirements up front and be fully informed of proposed changes with sufficient flexibility for our DIB partners to execute, and with decisions made at the appropriate level via Configuration Steering Boards. I will work within the Department of the Navy to include the acquisition community to ensure the same level of rigor for what I would call specifications, managed by the System Commands, that can have the same potential for requirements creep if not correctly managed, overseen, and held accountable.

**46. If confirmed, how would you ensure the “process” of programs of record does not limit service investment in portfolios of capabilities or mission threads?**

The Navy applies a strategy-driven, analytically based process to evaluate program decisions, to include both programs of record and other capability investments, to prioritize recommended investments and divestments competing for Navy resources within our available Total Obligation Authority. If confirmed, I will validate that the Navy’s process ensures all issues competing for resources (programs of record and otherwise) are aligned to Defense and Navy strategic priorities, and our process ensures we apply the right resources to our portfolios of capabilities, mission threads, and programs of record.

**47. If confirmed, how would you ensure that functional support activities, such as engineering authorities, contracting officers, and other officials within the Navy Systems Command, are responsive to demands of the Program Managers?**

If confirmed, I would ensure the functional support activities within the different Systems Commands such as NAVSEA 05 for engineering and NAVSEA 02 for contracting are actively and frequently engaged with our Program Managers and Program Offices.

**48. How would you enable processes for the Navy that empower acquisition professionals and reduce institutional policy barriers to enable cross service requirements development and capabilities discussions?**

If confirmed, I would empower acquisition professionals and reduce institutional barriers by fully embracing the changes being offered by the Deputy Secretary of Defense related to “Reforming the Joint Requirements Process to Accelerate Fielding of Warfighting Capabilities.” In order to obtain meaningful change in acquisition outcomes, action is required in the requirements, PPBE, and acquisition domains. The proposed memo is a positive outcome, which seeks to accelerate a key (and often somewhat hidden) part of the chain of acquiring and delivering capability. It will provide greater autonomy to the Navy and Marine Corps for our own requirements, will have as a key tenant earlier industry engagement, and will refocus various Joint entities on identifying, ranking, and applying resources to Key Operational Problems.

**Joint Acquisition**

**49. What are your views regarding the merit and feasibility of joint development and acquisition programs?**

Joint development and acquisition programs offer significant merit in terms of interoperability, cost efficiency, and capability integration across the Services. When executed effectively, they can reduce redundancy, leverage shared resources, and accelerate delivery of capabilities that serve multiple domains of the joint force. Critically, these types of joint programs are reflective of how we fight: together with other Services and partners. However, feasibility depends heavily on aligned requirements, governance structures, and collaboration between the involved Services. If confirmed, I would champion strong early engagement on joint efforts to most effectively synchronize requirements and ensure the Navy’s unique warfighting needs are adequately represented.

**50. What are your views on joint, enabling or cross-cutting capabilities that may not be treated as acquisition programs, such as JADC2? Do you have sufficient authority to advocate or manage Navy capabilities to ensure there are no seams in planning or execution of such efforts?**

Joint and cross-cutting capabilities like JADC2 are critical enablers of future warfighting effectiveness and require a holistic, integrated approach beyond traditional acquisition program boundaries. These efforts often involve complex coordination across multiple services, agencies, and industry partners, which can create seams if not managed carefully through effective governance structures. If confirmed, my statutory authority may be limited in direct program management of such capabilities, but I would use my position to advocate vigorously for Navy interests and ensure integration into broader joint concepts and plans.

**Recapitalizing the Fleet**

**Despite the Navy's 355-ship requirement, it is currently operating with only 287 battle force ships.**

**51. Do you consider the 355-ship force structure requirement to be appropriate given the current and future strategic environment? If not, please describe what changes need to be made.**

I support the 355-ship battle force requirement, as established by Section 1025 of the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2810/P.L. 115-91 of December 12, 2017). Continual assessment of the most likely and most stressful threat scenarios should drive us to ensure our requirements remain valid for current and future warfighting needs. If confirmed, I will also work to ensure that the Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan reflects the requirements that are executable based on current and projected industrial capacity.

**52. What actions do you believe are necessary to execute the Navy's shipbuilding plan within the Navy's budget estimates?**

Executing the Navy's shipbuilding plan requires increased and sustained investment in shipbuilding and our infrastructure, as reflected in the FY 2026 President's Budget Request; efficient budget management; and exploring a range of acquisition strategies. It also required discipline to stay on plan versus constantly changing the requirements. I assess we need to balance fleet modernization while simultaneously procuring and building the platforms we will need to meet future warfighting requirements.

**53. How would you characterize the risks to national security posed by the current shortfall in battle force ships and tactical aircraft?**

I assess the risk to national security as moderate with areas of higher risk for certain scenarios. Continual assessment of the most likely and most stressing threat scenarios should drive us to ensure our requirements remain valid for current and future warfighting needs. If confirmed, I will work closely with Combatant Commanders to understand their warfighting requirements in order to ensure the Navy is investing in the right capabilities with the appropriate prioritization.

**54. What adjustments to the respective shipbuilding programs are necessary and appropriate to reduce the risk of erosion in cost, schedule, or performance? To reduce the operational risk?**

Multi-ship buys, multi-year procurements, and block buys of ships offer potential cost savings and stability for the industrial base for ships with stable, proven designs, which is important for ensuring production lines remain open and skilled trades workers are retained. This is why a disciplined approach to the 30-year shipbuilding plan is required. Additionally, the multiple lines of effort the Maritime Industrial Base Program Office is working will provide continued ramp up of producing additional skilled labor, parts, and innovative technologies to reduce the risks of erosion in cost, schedule, or performance. All these efforts combine to more efficiently deliver ships on cost and schedule to reduce operational risk. Long term, I believe we need to level load all aspects of shipbuilding to include design, transition to production, production improvements,

and sustainment in order to avoid the major boom/bust intervals of our past. Lastly, close collaboration with an iterative approach between the Navy Program Offices, the designers, and the ship builders is required to ensure alignment and deep understanding of the requirements once production begins.

**55. What additional adjustments would you consider if the Navy's shipbuilding program comes under further fiscal pressures, either due to reduced total resources or cost growth in individual programs?**

Robotic and Autonomous Systems (RAS), also referred to as Unmanned Systems, are a force multiplier already being employed across a wide range of missions. Prioritizing the integration of RAS at scale, as appropriate, into naval and joint force architecture would be a necessary step. Additionally, we could potentially expand and accelerate current RAS systems further across the fleet, in all cases focusing on affordability, training, and interoperability with manned platforms.

**Nuclear Enterprise**

**56. Do you agree that modernizing each leg of the nuclear triad and the National Nuclear Security Administration weapons complex is a critical national security priority?**

Yes. As the current Naval Component Commander to U.S. Strategic Command, modernizing each leg of the triad is essential. The nuclear triad and the deterrent that it provides is critical to deter strategic attacks, to ensure continuity of government and decision-making, to assure our allies and partners, and to achieve U.S. objectives if deterrence fails. In addition, the nuclear weapons stockpile must be underpinned by responsive and resilient design and production capabilities and infrastructure that are managed by the National Nuclear Security Administration. Ensuring that the triad remains safe, reliable and effective requires a once in a generation recapitalization effort as the current legacy triad platforms and systems including NC3 age into obsolescence.

**57. What is your assessment of the efficacy of current nuclear modernization acquisition programs with respect to nuclear certification of the systems at issue?**

The sea-based leg of our strategic deterrent relies on the *Ohio* Class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) and the TRIDENT II D5LE missile. Procuring the *Columbia* SSBN on time, as well as the development of the TRIDENT II D5LE2 replacement missile, will ensure the safety, reliability, and effectiveness of our SSBN force into the 2080s.

The *Columbia* SSBN Program is the Navy's number one acquisition priority. The delivery of the first of class is currently behind schedule. The Program Office and shipbuilder are taking aggressive action to regain schedule and the Navy has developed a mitigation strategy that extends the life of selected *Ohio* SSBN's to ensure Commander, U.S. Strategic Command force generation and employment requirements will continue to be met during the transition.

TRIDENT II D5LE2 is the second extension of the existing TRIDENT II D5 missile. D5LE2 must be fully funded to ensure successful redesign and critical maturation of technology to ensure it meets certification in time for its first deployment in FY39 on *Columbia* Hull 9.

**58. Do you believe the current Navy program of record for the *Columbia*-class submarine is sufficient to support the full modernization of the Navy's leg of the nuclear triad?**

Yes, with risk. The Navy Program of Record for the *Columbia*-class submarine, when combined with the development of the TRIDENT II D5LE2, will fully support the modernization of the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad and meet current Commander, U.S. Strategic Command requirements for a survivable sea-based strategic deterrence platform. Additionally, full recapitalization and sustainment of the nation's Nuclear Command, Control and Communications (NC3) architecture is essential and a critical enabler of the Navy's leg of the triad.

**59. What are your ideas for working across the Joint Force to mitigate the risk that all three legs of the nuclear triad will be "aging out" simultaneously at the end of the 2020s?**

As a result of previous decisions to postpone phased modernization efforts across the triad, we now find ourselves requiring all three legs to be recapitalized simultaneously. All three legs of the triad are equally challenged by a generational recapitalization effort. Each leg of the triad is essential to achieve overall deterrence and assurance objectives of the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance. It is critical that the Navy, Air Force and National Nuclear Security Administration work together on their individual modernization programs to ensure we manage the constrained industrial base and fiscal realities of some common components, including rocket motors. Additionally, the Navy continues to work with the Air Force, OSD, and the Nuclear Weapons Council to identify options available to both services to mitigate any potential shortfalls across the enterprise.

**The Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N) program, reintroduced in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review to counter Russian and Chinese regional nuclear threats, gained legislative momentum with the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which mandated its development and initial operational capability by 2034 despite initial cancellation in 2022. Recent Congressional funding reflects bipartisan support.**

**60(a). Do you support the SLCM-N program as a necessary enhancement to U.S. theater deterrence?**

Yes. I fully support the development of the SLCM-N program. SLCM-N will provide the President with enhanced flexible response options, which will support deterrence of limited nuclear use and high-consequence non-nuclear strategic attacks against U.S., allied, and partner vital interests.

**60(b). Given Congressional backing and the deteriorating global security environment highlighted in 2024 testimony, what steps would you take to accelerate the SLCM-N's timeline to meet the 2034 operational goal?**

If confirmed, I am committed to seeking the necessary resources to develop SLCM-N to the Congressionally mandated IOC of 2034. Further, I am committed to working with select stakeholders, such as Strategic Systems Program, to accelerate facets of the SLCM-N program as applicable.

### **Columbia-class Submarines**

**Navy leaders have testified that the *Columbia*-class program will require significant investment and will result in equivalent reductions within the Navy budget, if a higher Navy topline or outside funding is not provided.**

**61. What is your recommendation for funding the *Columbia*-class program?**

I am concerned that the Navy's strategic deterrent force recapitalization and modernization could impact the Navy's ability to invest in conventional assets and foundation infrastructure due to constrained fiscal resources. The *Columbia*-class Submarine Program is the Navy's top acquisition priority, and should be for a host of indisputable reasons. The Navy has a history of fully funding the *Columbia*-class program. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize the *Columbia*-class as our top priority and will work closely with the Secretary of the Navy to ensure the *Columbia*-class program remains fully funded, while advocating for additional resources as required and to ensure the entire Navy is whole, capable, and meeting our global requirements across all mission sets.

**62. What additional authorities do you believe are necessary to make acquisition of the *Columbia*-class program more efficient and effective?**

I appreciate Congress's continued support of National Sea Based Deterrence Fund (NSBDF) authorities for the *Columbia*-class and I understand that the Navy has found success reducing procurement costs and sending clear signals to the industrial base as a result of this authority. If confirmed, I commit to working with Congress, the Secretary of the Navy and within the Administration to identify where additional authorities or relief could accelerate *Columbia*-class production or improve the overall program efficiency.

**Navy leaders have testified that the Navy needs to procure a minimum of 12 *Columbia*-class submarines and avoid schedule delays in the *Columbia*-class program in order to ensure the first deterrent patrol occurs in 2031.**

**63. Do you agree that the Navy must buy a minimum of 12 *Columbia*-class submarines to meet requirements?**

Yes. I believe that 12 *Columbia*-class submarines is the minimum number designed to allow the Navy to meet Commander, U.S. Strategic Command's force structure requirements for existing

OPLANs. Requirements analysis assumed that the required deterrent presence would not change. Therefore, the smaller *Columbia* force of 12 SSBN's must have a higher operational availability than the *Ohio* class it is replacing. While this fact will incur risk to force generation, this improved availability is enabled by the life of ship reactor core design which reduces the length of time the ship must spend in overhaul over the course of its service life. This also assumes that US Strategic Command requirements do not change as emerging nuclear threats continue to evolve.

**64. In your view, what are the most significant risks associated with meeting established cost, schedule, and performance requirements for the *Columbia*-class program?**

The submarine industrial base is in a period of significant demand. To address the limitation of two nuclear-capable shipyards, a reduced number of vendors, the challenges of an inexperienced workforce, and unacceptably high attrition, the Navy is working in concert with the OSD to address industrial base risk by targeting investments and efforts to increase shipyard workforce wages, support supplier development, shipbuilder infrastructure, strategic outsourcing, workforce development, improved government oversight and accountability, applicable automation, and targeted technology. If confirmed, I am committed to supporting these efforts and any additional measures that are necessary to ensure we deliver *Columbia*-class submarines on time, while also ensuring our Fast Attack Submarine production and repair goals are achieved while managing impacts to Carrier maintenance and new construction.

**65. In your view, are there additional authorities Congress could provide to the Navy to ensure the *Columbia*-class remains on schedule?**

Congress has granted unique authorities to aid the Navy with its top priority acquisition program through the NSBDF as well as the authorities granted to the Executive Branch through the Defense Production Act. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of the Navy and the Administration on any new authorities, and ways to maximize the benefits of the existing authorities.

**66. Do you assess that *Columbia*-class submarines will have the capabilities and attributes needed to perform their unique mission in the 2030s?**

The *Columbia*-class submarine requirements were established based on the expected threat environment up to and including the 2080s, which is arguably a challenging prediction. Even so, I am confident the ship will be able to meet all of its mission objectives throughout its service life with the same success the *Ohio*-class SSBN had against the spectrum of threats it encounters during its service life. Like previous classes of SSBNs, the *Columbia*-class will rely primarily on stealth for survivability and modernization improvements for sustained overmatch. The Key Performance Parameters for stealth are designed to ensure the platform remains survivable against all presently known and credible future threats.

**67. What is your understanding of the current cost estimates for the *Columbia*-class lead ship and follow-on ships, respectively?**



The *Columbia* Program is funded to the current estimate with an average procurement unit cost of \$7.84B (CY17\$), compared to an Acquisition Program Baseline objective of \$7.45B. Cost increases identified by Naval Sea Systems Command in their annual cost checkpoint were driven by inflation and shipbuilder performance. These impacts did not drive program cost above OSD affordability caps.

**68. How confident are you that the program will be able to produce *Columbia*-class submarines that meet current cost and schedule estimates?**

The *Columbia*-class submarine program, similar to all of our shipbuilding programs, is challenged by an often single-sourced, oversubscribed and atrophied industrial base that was not maintained properly over the last several decades. While efforts to improve the industrial base have enjoyed strong bi-partisan support, the complexity of shipbuilding means those efforts take significant time to manifest into improved production timelines. First of class issues have contributed in large part to the delays to date; however, incorporation of lessons learned into follow on hulls gives me confidence that construction timelines will be met as we enter serial production with authorization of the Block II (up to five hulls) procurements in FY26.

**69. What is your understanding of mitigation options DOD should consider in the event the *Columbia*-class program incurs schedule delays that prevent the lead ship from deploying in 2031?**

The Navy has implemented a plan to conduct life extensions on up to five *Ohio*-class submarines to ensure that U.S. Strategic Command force generation and employment requirements will continue to be met during the transition from *Ohio* to *Columbia*. This mitigation strategy is constantly evaluated by Naval Sea Systems Command, Submarine Force leadership, and the *Columbia*-class program office and will be adjusted as necessary to ensure full coverage of U.S. Strategic Command operational requirements.

**Attack Submarine Force Levels**

The Navy's current requirement for attack submarines is 66. However, the Navy projects that the number of attack submarines will fall as low as 47 boats in 2028 and remain below the 66-boat requirement until 2054.

**70. What options, including improved maintenance and life extensions of current submarines, as well as increased new construction, exist to ensure the Navy deploys attack submarines sufficient to meet the requirements of the combatant commanders and other intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance needs?**

Increasing the inventory of our operationally available attack submarines requires the Navy to improve the sustainment and maintenance schedules of our current submarines as well as significantly improving our new construction performance. If confirmed, I will continue to ensure the Navy remains focused on driving positive outcomes across the submarine enterprise

and working with the Secretary of the Navy to ensure those efforts are properly resourced and prioritized. The Navy's P2P efforts, better accountability, Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program, and more effective oversight and barrier removal are all necessary to achieve these outcomes.

**71. What should the Navy do to get the *Virginia*-class program to a construction rate of at least 2.0 per year?**

The Navy's focus has been accelerating the submarine production rate through targeted Submarine Industrial Base investments to reach a rate of at least two *Virginia*-class submarines per year. These investments are underway across multiple lines of effort, including supplier development, shipyard infrastructure, outsourcing, oversight, and workforce development. To set expectations, I believe it will take several years before these improvements will achieve the required production rate. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize investments that build and strengthen the Submarine Industrial Base's capacity, capability and resiliency supporting the growth necessary to meet the required one *Columbia*-class plus two *Virginia*-class production cadence.

**72. What risks are incurred by allowing the attack submarine force levels to remain below 66 boats until 2048?**

Any time a force structure requirement is not met, there is an incurred risk to the military's ability to fulfill its assigned missions and tasks. The Navy must rely on the asymmetric advantages we retain over near peer adversaries until our investments in submarine shipbuilding, industrial base and sustainment are fully realized. Our attack submarines are the most lethal and technologically superior submarines in the world, manned by the most highly trained and proficient operators in the world. If confirmed, I will continue to leverage these advantages and prioritize investments to build up our inventory to match the force structure requirement, in addition to improving maintenance throughput to increase the number of operationally available submarines in our current inventory.

**73. If confirmed, how will the Navy deal with the transfer of *Virginia*-class submarines to Australia under the AUKUS agreement between the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom?**

If confirmed, I will work alongside the Secretary of the Navy to improve submarine maintenance throughput and new construction to ensure the Navy maximizes the capacity of its operational submarine fleet. Current trends are worrying, and should I be confirmed, this issue will have my utmost attention and priority to ensure a productive outcome. If confirmed, I will support the Department of Defense's review of the AUKUS Security Pact with my best military advice.

**Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD)**

**The Navy plays an important role in defending the nation against the threat of long-range ballistic missile attack and in defending allies, friends, and deployed forces against theater ballistic missile threats.**

**74. Do you view ballistic missile defense as a core Navy mission?**

Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) from the sea is a core mission of the U.S. Navy. Our world-wide deployable Navy conducts BMD primarily from the sea, and in limited exceptions, our Navy is tasked to conduct the BMD mission from fixed shore sites. The Navy currently operates 56 BMD capable ships, with five others currently undergoing modernization to deliver BMD capability. While BMD from land is a core Army mission, the Navy also operates two land-based Aegis Ashore sites in Europe and will eventually operate the land-based Aegis Guam System, as a subset of the Guam Defense System. BMD is designated as a primary mission in the Required Operational Capabilities / Projected Operating Environment documents for BMD capable DDG 51 class ships. Recent Real-World Events in the Red Sea and in the defense of Israel underscore Navy's commitment to the BMD mission.

**75. What is the Navy's current requirement for ships equipped with BMD capability?**

The FY16 FSA determined that 54 BMD capable ships would be required by FY25. The Navy currently has 56 BMD capable ships, and I expect that number to approach 75 by the end of the decade. As we have seen during recent events in the U.S. Central Command and U.S. European Command Areas of Operations, the Navy's sea-based BMD capability continues to be critical and remains in high demand for the protection of our Carrier Strike Group assets, High Value Unit protection, and defense of critical infrastructure for our allies and partners.

**76. To the extent there is a shortfall between ships with BMD capability and the associated requirement, what options should be explored to reduce this shortfall and when does the Navy anticipate meeting the requirement?**

The Navy is committed to delivering BMD capability to the DDG 51 class and maintain BMD capacity through new ship construction, the DDG modernization program, and through the DDG Service Life Extension Program. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring BMD capabilities are sustained to the requirement.

**Amphibious Fleet Requirements**

**77. What is your view of the need for and size of the Navy's amphibious fleet?**

As a Navy-Marine Corps team, we will generate ready and certified forces to meet our service and joint requirements. The FY 2023 NDAA delineated in statute a requirement for not less than 31 traditional amphibious ships. I support procuring our amphibious ships affordably and as efficiently as possible to meet this legal requirement.

**78. Do you consider the Landing Ship Medium to be an integral aspect to logistics in the Indo-Pacific and the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations concept? If so, how will you control requirements to ensure the affordability and timeliness of the platform?**

Yes. There is a critical need for organic littoral operational mobility and tactical maneuver to support the Marine Corps' scheme of maneuver in the Indo-Pacific. The Navy and Marine Corps team continues pursuing the Medium Landing Ship (LSM) to fill this need in the priority theater to support Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.

To control requirements and ensure affordability and timeliness, the Navy is using congressional authorization in the FY25 NDAA to pursue a Non-Developmental Vessel this year as the initial LSM Block 1 to meet the Marine Corps' critical mobility need for Marine Littoral Regiments in U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).

**79. Do you support the Marine Corps' requirement for 35 Landing Ship Medium to maneuver three Marine Littoral Regiments?**

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Commandant and the Marine Corps team to evaluate and assess the adequacy of the LSM inventory and effectiveness to support the Marine Corps combat, maneuver, and lift requirements.

**Frigate**

**80. What is your assessment of the root cause of the announced three-year delay to the *Constellation*-class frigate program?**

While delays in shipbuilding programs are always the sum of several challenges, I understand the main drivers associated with the three-year delay in the *Constellation*-class Frigate program primarily stem from the iterative design change process and, to some extent, the shipyard's underperformance. Specifically, a systemic overstretch and capacity deficit combined with the inherent technical complexities of developing a new, advanced warship. Requirement creep has been a common narrative in recent programs. There are also challenges such as workforce shortages, excessive workload on the shipbuilder, and design maturity issues, all of which are symptoms reflecting an underlying strain on our nation's ability to concurrently design and construct multiple complex naval platforms. The *Constellation*-class frigate program is an example of these common themes.

**81. At what point should we consider expanding frigate production to a second source?**

As to whether the Navy will pursue a second shipbuilder to produce *Constellation*-class Frigates, I will defer to the Secretariat for that issue. I am aware an assessment team recently reviewed the details of the Frigate Program. Based on this review, recent visits to Fincantieri Marine Group,

and a thorough data-informed analysis of the Frigate Program metrics and milestones, the Secretary of the Navy is currently evaluating options for the way ahead.

### **Ready Reserve Force (RRF) recapitalization**

**DOD has asked for authority to purchase additional foreign-built ships to recapitalize the Ready Reserve Force (RRF). Acquisition plans for new domestically produced sealift ships have been repeatedly delayed.**

#### **82. What is your understanding of the Navy's recapitalization strategy for the RRF and the affordability of acquiring 19 sealift vessels as outlined in the latest 30-year shipbuilding plan?**

I understand the Navy, including its Military Sealift Command (MSC), in coordination with the OSD, U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), and the Maritime Administration (MARAD), is actively executing a recapitalization plan aimed at enhancing readiness and sustaining critical sealift capacity to meet national defense objectives. If confirmed, I will be committed to advocating for preserving essential Roll-On/Roll-Off surge sealift capacity through strategic procurement.

#### **83. To what extent do you believe the Navy has identified the appropriate mix of used and new ships to continue to meet sealift and auxiliary requirements?**

I believe the Navy will maintain sufficient sealift capacity over the next decade by replacing sealift vessels reaching the end of their service life through new vessel construction. The Navy, in coordination with USTRANSCOM, has developed Top Level Requirements to support the MARAD new construction program for recapitalizing the RRF. If confirmed, I will continue to assess the feasibility of acquiring used vessels as an alternative to new construction when recapitalizing auxiliary vessels.

### **Tactical Fighter Programs**

#### **84. How do you envision manned-unmanned teaming manifesting in naval aviation and with strike-fighters in particular?**

Manned and unmanned teaming in naval aviation, particularly with strike fighters, will involve piloted aircraft coordinating with autonomous Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCAs) to enhance situational awareness, mission effectiveness, and overall lethality. CCAs will be multi-role capable, having the ability to handle a myriad of mission sets which enhance 4th and 5th generation effectiveness and complement their 6th generation counterparts. This synergy will optimize resource allocation, increase operational flexibility, and reduce risks to human pilots in complex combat environments. If confirmed, I will strongly advocate for the most effective mix of manned and unmanned combinations for naval aviation.

**85. With the Navy's delay of the F/A-XX program in early 2025 how do you plan to maintain air superiority against peer competitors without a next-generation manned fighter to succeed the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet on your original timeline?**

Nothing in the Joint Force projects combat power from the sea as a Carrier Strike Group, which at the heart has a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier (CVN). To maintain this striking power, the CVN must have an air wing that is comprised of the most advanced strike fighters. Therefore, the ability to maintain air superiority against peer competitors will be put at risk if the Navy is unable to field a 6th Generation strike fighter on a relevant timeline. Without a replacement for the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and E/A-18G Growler, the Navy will be forced to retrofit 4th generation aircraft and increase procurement of 5th generation aircraft to attempt to compete with the new 6th generation aircraft that the threat is already flying. The Navy has a validated requirement for carrier-based 6th generation aircraft, and it is critical that we field that capability as quickly as possible to give our warfighters the capabilities they need to win against a myriad of emerging threats.

**86. With the FY 2025 budget facing a shortfall for operations and maintenance, how will you balance funding for F-35C procurement against sustaining the aging Super Hornet fleet through the 2050s?**

The Department of the Navy continues to invest in F-35C as our premier 5th generation fighter. At the same time, we must sustain our existing strike fighter inventory, to ensure that the F/A-18 remains in the highest state of readiness into the coming decades. We prioritize the deployed squadrons while ensuring that we increase future lethality by continuing to procure F-35Cs. Each year we work very hard to determine the best way to balance these operations and readiness constraints versus new procurement requirements across our portfolio to achieve the optimal result.

**87. What is being done to ensure that the Navy and Marine Corps airborne data links are resilient against peer competitors and interoperable—not only with each other—but with the Air Force and Army platforms as well?**

The Department of the Navy, designated by the DoD as the lead service for Link-16 and Tactical Targeting Network Technology waveforms, directs efforts to enhance airborne data link resilience and interoperability. We are actively modernizing these critical waveforms, including Link-16, which is utilized by all Joint Services and over 50 allied and partner nations. Our focus is on integrating low probability of intercept/detection capabilities and ensuring seamless, secure information flow among Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Army platforms, crucial for coalition operations in a contested environment.

**Current technologies allow “low probability of intercept/low probability of detection” datalinks to connect 4th and 5th generation aircraft. As well, other platforms, operating across multiple domains can be networked.**

**88. Who is leading this effort for the Department of the Navy, and what progress is being made?**

Within the Department of the Navy, the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information Warfare holds the primary leadership role for these efforts. This office actively collaborates with OSD and across the Joint Force to advance these capabilities. While significant progress is being made, specific programmatic details pertaining to this development are reserved for classified discussions.

### **The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program**

**The follow-on modernization for the F-35 is scheduled to bring key warfighting capabilities to the fleet, but the budget and schedule remain in flux.**

**89. Are you concerned about the affordability and executability of the Department's plan for Block 4 Continuous Capability Development and Delivery (C2D2)? Why or why not?**

The Department of the Navy continues to invest significantly in follow-on modernization and development efforts for the F-35C. We're focused on supporting the delivery of Tech Refresh-3/Block 4 upgrades in a tactically relevant timeframe. This support is essential in order to keep pace with our adversaries with our 5th generation aircraft. These are complex technologies, and we've had challenges with integration efforts, affordability, and executability. This has been exacerbated by headwinds ranging from test aircraft shortages to lab and personnel capacity limitations. There have also been development cost overruns that have placed financial strain on the program. If confirmed, I will closely monitor affordability and executability to ensure that we identify where the challenges exist, and I will actively work with the joint program offices and industry to address them.

**90. What do you view as the biggest challenges to successful integration of the F-35 into the carrier air wing?**

The Navy has three F-35C squadrons today and has completed multiple successful deployments. These F-35C squadrons are comprised of TR-2 aircraft, the most capable F-35Cs currently deploying. The biggest challenge to integration will be any future delays in the full combat capability of TR-3 aircraft and the associated combat capabilities that define a Block 4 aircraft and its delivery.

### **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles**

**91. If confirmed, what will be your role in leading capabilities and requirements development to increase the role of unmanned aerial combat systems in the Navy?**

Recent events in Ukraine and the Red Sea have demonstrated the impact that unmanned aerial combat systems can have on the modern battlefield. If confirmed, I will leverage iterative development and commercial innovation to accelerate learning and responsiveness to warfighting needs. A hybrid formation of our skilled Naval Aviators and unmanned, long-range, penetrating strike aircraft will create a highly lethal manned-unmanned team, effectively deterring and countering potential aggression from our near-peer and pacing adversaries.

**92. What do you envision as the balance between manned and unmanned combat aircraft in the Navy's future force structure?**

I envision an enhanced and seamless team of manned and unmanned combat aircraft working together as a force multiplier - extending the reach, lethality, and speed of action of our manned warfighters. It is too early to predict the exact mix of manned and unmanned aircraft. However, as autonomous systems demonstrate increasing capability and warfighting effectiveness, we intend to iterate to deploy the most effective combination of manned and unmanned aircraft to maximize the lethality, combat effectiveness, and range of the naval aviation combat power.

**93. Considering the addition of the MQ-25, Unmanned Surface Vessels, and Unmanned Undersea Vessels to an already growing fleet of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (i.e., TRITONS, FIRESCOUTS, SCAN EAGLES, BLACKJACKS), how will the Navy train personnel to operate and maintain these systems inside the current Fleet?**

Our incredibly talented Sailors have operated various unmanned systems for decades, and as we expand the capability and capacity of these systems, we will leverage lessons of the past and combine them with the latest approaches to training curricula and pipeline schools to ensure Sailors effectively operate and maintain robotic and autonomous systems. The nature of unmanned systems, increasingly operating in AI-enabled swarms of hundreds or thousands of vehicles, reinforces the necessity of investment in Live, Virtual and Constructive (LVC) training. Navy, Joint, and combined LVC-enabled exercises will build and sustain our Sailors' tactical effectiveness with new systems fielded at an accelerating pace.

**Munitions**

**Navy munitions inventories—particularly for precision guided munitions and air-to-air missiles—have declined significantly due to high operational usage, insufficient procurement, and a requirements system that does not adequately account for the ongoing need to transfer munitions to our allies. Due to draw down of certain weapons systems to support Ukraine and defend shipping lanes in the Red Sea, the Department of Defense has begun efforts to increase production and bolster the industrial base.**

**94. If confirmed, what steps would you take to ensure the Navy has sufficient inventories of munitions to meet the needs of combatant commanders?**

The Navy requires robust munition inventories to win our nation's conflicts. The demand for munitions has increased significantly over the past three years, underscoring the importance of maintaining a healthy and effective munitions industrial base capable of meeting growing requirements and surging when necessary. If confirmed, working with the Secretary of the Navy and all stakeholders I will first ensure that we operate at maximum production capacity across all critical munitions including making good on existing contracts. Second, I will conduct a thorough analysis of the challenges facing our production vendors to identify and address limitations that may hinder production and expansion. Third, I will explore opportunities to build



capacity across warfare domains by engaging additional vendors, encouraging new entrants into the industrial base, and leveraging allied partnerships or foreign military sales where appropriate. Fourth, I will assess how to accelerate the recertification process for munitions currently in non-combat usable status on Navy shelves to rapidly reintegrate them into our usable inventories. Finally, I will advocate that munition production and delivery priorities are tied to the most stressing OPLAN firing unit requirements to ensure the Navy's ability to meet its warfighting objectives has the munitions required to win.

**95. What changes in budgeting and acquisition processes would you recommend to facilitate faster Navy munitions replenishment rates?**

To accelerate munitions replenishment, I would recommend a combination of process modernization, increased budget flexibility, and supply chain resilience initiatives. PPBE reforms are necessary to enable swift response to changing operational demands. Acquisition processes could benefit from streamlined contracting authorities and simplified requirements tailored to urgent replenishment needs. If confirmed, I would also emphasize strengthening partnerships with industry to improve production capacity and supply chain visibility, mitigating bottlenecks before they impact readiness. Finally, I will advocate to eliminate excess steps in transporting our preferred, critical munitions around the country and centralizing production more efficiently.

**96. Do you believe the Patriot PAC-3 MSE integration with Aegis provides a viable path to increase air defense capacity on Navy ships?**

Yes. Integrating PAC-3, among other similarly sized and available missile systems, into Aegis will leverage a proven Army program-of-record and operational production line to deliver needed munitions to the Fleet. PAC-3 expands the Surface Navy's arsenal by providing a complementary weapon to the existing Standard Missile program for surface-launched missiles to support a better option against the spectrum of threats encountered.

**Equipment Readiness**

**97. What is your understanding and assessment of the methods currently used for estimating the funding needed for the maintenance of Navy equipment, particularly ships and aircraft?**

The Navy uses validated and accredited models to estimate the funding needed for maintenance of its equipment, including ships, submarines, aircraft, and other assets. These models are based on fleet operational availability requirements to ensure combat-ready forces can respond to national objectives in joint, naval, and combined operations. This current approach, particularly for ships and aircraft, relies on a combination of historical maintenance data, readiness metrics, reliability predictions, and other predictive analytics. The Navy builds on this foundation by incorporating continuous refinements to include real-time, condition-based data to best forecast operational impacts on sustainment needs. Through data analytics and initiatives like P2P, the Navy has identified root causes and key drivers to improve maintenance capacity and throughput, reduce delays, remove barriers to performance, and increase mission-capable rates.

**98. Do you believe that increased investment is needed to reduce the backlog in equipment maintenance?**

Yes. Since 2013, the Navy has steadily improved equipment maintenance, but additional investment is needed to reduce surface ship and submarine maintenance backlog. Overall, manpower, operations, and maintenance costs continue to grow above the rate of inflation, necessitating increased funding. Preventing further delays and backlog requires strategic investments today, including strengthening the industrial base through programs like the Fleet Readiness Center Infrastructure Optimization Plan. It is critical that this increased investment be targeted toward platforms and systems that deliver operational lethality and can be fielded in a timely manner, while respecting the capacity constraints of the industrial base. The reduction of the materiel backlog is very important to maximize material condition as ships prepare for deployment and to ensure the ability to meet every operational challenge. In order for our Sailors to obtain maximum effectiveness during pre-deployment training and certification cycles, equipment must work as designed. The reduction of the maintenance backlog also enables ships to stay within their Class Maintenance Plans and improves the ability to maximize operations for the duration of ship's expected service life. While fleet expansion remains a long-term goal, the immediate priority is sustaining and enhancing the readiness of existing and near-term force structure. Investment must be carefully balanced with the industrial base's capacity to absorb and execute maintenance and modernization work efficiently and return assets to service in a timely manner.

**99. How important is reduction of the materiel maintenance backlog to improvements in readiness?**

Getting ships and aircraft out of maintenance on time is critical to achieving our operational availability goals and improving overall readiness. Delays in maintenance not only pressurizes other phases of the Optimized Fleet Response Plan for the affected unit or strike group but can also create ripple effects that disrupt future workload schedules. Although our forces have redundant systems, ensuring all equipment is fully operational remains vital to mission success. As Fleet Forces Commander, I made reducing maintenance delays, including healthy supply part acquisition, a top priority to ensure Navy readiness, and if confirmed, I will continue this focus. By concentrating on high-priority platforms and systems, backlog reduction directly results in increased operational availability of mission-critical ships, submarines, and aircraft; enhanced lethality and warfighting capability; improved cost efficiency by avoiding deferred maintenance penalties and extended downtime; elimination of the substantial backlog of repair parts that has accumulated over time; and a strengthened force posture aligned with strategic objectives and operational demands.

**Navy leaders assert that continued implementation of an improved deployment framework—the Optimized Fleet Response Plan (O-FRP)—will stabilize rotational deployments and render them more predictable.**

**100. What is your understanding of the O-FRP?**

As the Commander of U.S. Fleet Forces, I am personally responsible for overseeing and executing the OFRP for U.S. Atlantic Fleet Forces and the doctrine development for the entire Navy. The OFRP is the Navy's readiness production model designed to generate (supply) forces to meet Joint Force employment demands and Global Force Management requirements. OFRP consists of maintenance, training, deployment, and sustainment phases. It strives to maximize employability of our forces for the high-end fight, while preserving required maintenance and modernization, training, and acceptable levels of operational and personnel tempo. The construct is designed to:

1. Provide certified forces for rotational deployments to meet worldwide presence requirements and sustain forces ready to meet crisis and contingency requirements through the Combat Surge Ready goals.
2. Man, train, and equip in order to build and certify integrated combat teams to high-end, major combat operational standards and to enable dynamic and agile employment and sustainment during deployment.
3. Enable efficient maintenance and modernization to meet the expected service life of all platforms and to pace emerging threats and obsolescence of legacy systems.
4. Continuously reset these forces to sustain long-term Navy readiness generation and platform end of service life requirements.

**101. To what extent has O-FRP been successful in stabilizing rotational deployments and making them more predictable?**

OFPR provides a largely predictable force generation and peacetime deployment schedule by a reproducible planning model, and most classes of ships have seen more predictable schedules and improvement in deploy-to-dwell ratios between rotational deployments since its inception. However, global Joint Force demand for maritime forces in response to crises can create unpredictability, resulting in unplanned deployment extensions or early (out-of-cycle) operational deployments. In the maintenance phase, unplanned growth work has led to maintenance extensions that may impact deployment schedules and the ability for a ship to remain in the "Sustainment" phase of OFRP.

Continuing resolutions and deployment extensions make executing the OFRP more difficult. However, the execution of major depot availabilities within the OFRP is the most destabilizing and unpredictable element for our Sailors and families. Unnecessary home port transfers to execute major depot availabilities and late decisions on these home port transfers disrupts Sailor's and their families' ability to adequately plan and prepare, creating uncertainty and angst. If confirmed as CNO, minimizing the number of home port transfers within the OFRP will be a priority of mine. To mitigate scenarios in which home port transfers are unavoidable, notification as early as possible to Sailors and their families will be crucial.

**102. To what extent will O-FRP need to adapt to meet the demands of Dynamic Force Employment?**

During my tenure as the Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, the historical OFRP model has been adapted to meet the true concept of Dynamic Force Employment. I recognized the OFRP's inability to fulfill this function early in my tenure as U.S. Fleet Forces Commander and have since championed the transition to the Global Maritime Response Plan and Combat Surge Ready concepts that have been added to the Navy's Force Generation model to meet the Joint Force's need for Dynamic Force Employment.

The historical model relied on "just-in-time" certification and generation for Major Combat Operations (MCO) shortly prior to deploying to rotational peacetime global presence operations. The model has worked well to ensure there is a continuous world-wide presence of combat power across the entire spectrum of warfare available to the President and Geographic Combatant Commanders at a moment's notice. No other service can provide the immediately available capabilities that our MCO certified Naval assets provide operating forward (deployed) or on-call at home port (sustainment) due to the Navy's expeditionary culture and extraordinary mobility.

However, the assets certified to execute MCO comprise a small portion (~one-third) of our Naval Force. Due to the "just-in-time" certification inherent to the OFRP model, the duration of MCO certification is a relatively small percentage of a ship's operational cycle. The existing OFRP model would require significant time for the remainder of Naval forces that are not MCO to become combat ready. Shrinking windows of indication and warning of pending crises limit the amount of time to prepare these forces. Relying on the OFRP model would limit the number of warships able to immediately be brought to bear in any major power conflict and limit the flexibility necessary to respond to smaller scale crises and contingencies underpinning the concept of Dynamic Force Employment.

The Global Maritime Response Plan and Combat Surge Ready concepts modify the historical OFRP model to meet the objectives of Dynamic Force Employment. These new concepts ensure that non-MCO assets are certified for limited combat operations early in their operational cycle, establishes process to rapidly certify additional assets for combat, are manned and armed sufficiently, and leverage shore support structures and System Commands to support these units if required to surge in response to crisis.

### **103. To what extent has O-FRP improved, maintained, or degraded the material readiness of the fleet?**

The OFRP is a multi-year plan coordinating the execution of Joint Force employment demands with Class Maintenance Plans. The stability of the schedule has generally improved maintenance planning and has contributed to improved material readiness in the Fleet. The root cause of most material readiness issues within the Fleet can be traced to shipyard performance issues, weak or underfunded supply chain issues, unstable and highly varying Sailor manning vice inherent to the OFRP structure.

However, Class Maintenance Plans were built under a set of assumptions that may no longer be true or effective, such as the "just-in-time" certification model of the OFRP. Class Maintenance Plans will likely require evaluation to more effectively meet the ideals of Dynamic Force

Employment via the Global Maritime Response Plan to maximize the number of Combat Surge Ready ships.

**104. What metrics should Congress use to track the material readiness and material condition of Navy ships and aircraft, as well as the effectiveness of O-FRP?**

In accordance with Title 10, readiness ratings and supporting information are reported to Congress in the Semi-annual Readiness Report (SRRC). Ultimately, the SRRC is derived from unit readiness levels that are reported in the Defense Readiness Reporting System using resourcing and training category metrics (C-levels). The C-levels reflect the status of the unit's resources measured against the resources required to undertake the unit's wartime missions, assessing personnel, equipment availability and condition, and training indicators.

Additionally, the Navy is also responsible for meeting the Joint Force Directed Readiness Tables, which define the readiness requirements for all platforms for Threshold Forces, Immediate Response Forces, Contingency Response Forces, and Follow-On Forces.

Finally, the Navy provides Congress with annual Board of Inspection and Survey reports in accordance with Title 10. These reports depict how well over time the Navy is maintaining individual ships and classes, taking into consideration Sailors' ability to effectively operate and maintain ship's equipment.

**Indo-Pacific Region**

**China's robust anti-access, area denial (A2/AD) capabilities—including long-range ballistic and cruise missiles, advanced integrated air defenses, electronic warfare, and cyber—pose a significant challenge for U.S. forces. The Commander of United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and the Chiefs of the Military Services have often emphasized the importance of distributed, adaptive, and resilient basing in the Indo-Pacific region to address the challenge posed by China's advanced A2/AD capabilities. China has also embarked on a significant shipbuilding program that outpaces that of the United States.**

**105. What are the key areas in which the Navy must improve to provide the necessary capabilities and capacity to the Joint Force to prevail in a potential conflict with China?**

Recognizing the challenge China poses, the Navy is already seeking to increase our capabilities, capacities, and our contribution to the Joint warfighting ecosystem. Specific efforts include: (a) seeking a 80 percent Combat Surge Ready posture for our ships, submarines, and aircraft; (b) improving key capabilities in critical areas such as Long Range Fires, Non-traditional Sea Denial, Counter-C5ISR, Terminal Defense, and Contested Logistics; (c) incorporating new disruptive and emerging technologies to expand, extend, and bolster the reach, resilience, and lethality of our conventionally manned fleet; (d) ensuring we are recruiting and retaining the most talented Sailors to operate our fleet; (e) seeking realistic, integrated, and distributed training capability for our Sailors; among other efforts. China's nuclear arsenal also means that competition and conflict will occur under the nuclear shadow. The Navy's operational success

will depend on our ability to integrate conventional and nuclear operations to deter aggression, manage escalation, and ensure our continued lethality at any level of war. While progress is being made on all these issues, more work remains to be done, such as improving our shipbuilding efforts and working with our partners to strengthen the defense industrial base to include munition production. If confirmed, I will continue to work these and other issues alongside the Secretary to ensure our fleets remain ready for crisis and conflict and to defend American interests around the globe.

**106. How should the Navy adapt to this shifting maritime balance in the Indo-Pacific?**

The Navy emphatically acknowledges the need for a larger, more lethal force given the rising capabilities and capacities of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA(N)); however, I fully recognize that we cannot build a bigger traditional Navy in a few short years. The Navy's Strategic Laydown and Dispersal Plan commits our most capable platforms to the Indo-Pacific, including VIRGINIA Class Block V SSNs, ARLEIGH BURKE Class Flight III DDGs, F-35 Lightning II Squadrons, and our most robust unmanned systems and platforms. The Navy is already adapting the way we fight in numerous ways to include seeking a Distributed Maritime Operations approach to increase our forces' resiliency, lethality, and synchronicity. The fleet also seeks to maintain our freedom of maneuver in the battlespace by effectively employing Joint Counter-C5ISR capabilities against potential adversaries and increasing our ability to command and control our forces via Maritime Operations Centers (MOCs). MOCs certified across the joint warfighting functions. Additionally, the Navy seeks greater unmanned system integration to enhance warfighting capabilities and effectiveness for our traditional naval platforms while continuing to design a future hybrid fleet. If confirmed, I will seek innovative and efficient ways to leverage emerging technologies while continuously evaluating how we operate and our tactics, techniques, and procedures to ensure the Navy is prepared for the challenges our nation faces.

**107. The United States maintains a critical advantage in undersea warfare. What investments is China making to erode this advantage? What is your assessment of how successful these efforts have been? How should the Navy respond? How would you assess the threat to Navy forces and facilities from Chinese missile forces?**

Reporting indicates China's submarine force is expected to grow to 65 units in 2025 and 80 units by 2035. The PLA(N) is also prioritizing the modernization of the undersea / anti-submarine warfare capabilities and seeks: (a) advanced capabilities for their nuclear and conventional powered submarines, (b) improved sensors and weapons for their surface forces, (c) unmanned underwater vehicle technologies, and (d) technology transfer and collaboration with Russia. While the PLA(N) is improving its anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities, a 2024 DoD assessment reported that they continue to lack a robust deep-water ASW capability that can threaten our Submarine Force.

The Navy is maintaining advantage through continued investments in acoustic superiority, advanced weapons to include Conventional Prompt Strike, payloads to include torpedo tube launch and recovery of Robotic Autonomous Systems, sensors that further reach and discrimination, and design efforts for the next generation SSN (X).

The threats from Chinese missile forces to U.S. Navy forces and facilities are significant. The PLA Rocket Force possesses a very capable and advanced force, whose capabilities continue to grow. Two specific examples include: (a) Phasing out the DF-21 missile with the DF-26, which is capable of conventional and nuclear strikes against Navy targets ashore and afloat in the Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea; and (b) Expanding its inventory of hypersonic glide vehicle-capable DF-17 and DF-27 missiles which also have the ability to strike Navy infrastructure, bases, and ships in the Western Pacific. A 2024 DoD assessment also indicated that China is continuing advanced development of nuclear- and conventionally-armed intercontinental range missiles system, including ballistic, hypersonic, and fractional orbit trajectories, once fielded, these will enable China to threaten conventional strikes—backed by the threat of nuclear escalation—against targets in CONUS, Hawaii, and Alaska.

**108. In your assessment, have Navy investments, operational concepts, and/or posture shifts to date sufficiently addressed this threat?**

Yes, but with risk. As mentioned in my previous responses, the Navy is taking a holistic approach to ensure we are prepared to fight and win any war. We are continuously reviewing and improving the way we fight through efforts like Distributed Maritime Operations and establishing MOCs to command and control our forces. We also are continuing to: (a) invest in critical capabilities to include Long Range Fires, Non-Traditional Sea Denial, Counter-C5ISR, Terminal Defense, and Contested Logistics; (b) leverage and integrate proven robotic and autonomous capabilities to deliver a truly hybrid fleet; (c) invest in ways to improve how we train, retain, and recruit the finest Sailors in the world; and (d) work with our industrial partners to increase our Combat Surge Ready posture for our ships, submarines, and aircraft. The Navy will also continue to evaluate our overseas posture in support of the Department's priorities and is taking active steps to assess, prioritize, and program resources to repair infrastructure directly supporting Navy Task Critical Assets to improve operational readiness in the Pacific and to sustain and project the fight from shore. The production limitations of the DIB for critical ordnance stockpiles remain a concern and add risk to our theory of victory.

**109. Do you believe the planned joint force mix of tactical aircraft is sufficient to counter current and future threats in INDOPACOM, where the “tyranny of distance” is such a major factor?**

PLA capabilities have advanced significantly in recent years. While USINDOPACOM has more details in terms of joint force mix assessments, I agree with ADM Paparo's April 2025 SASC testimony that we operate as a resolute and ready Joint Force that is always prepared to fight and win. Naval Aviation provides unique advantages in terms of flexibility and operational reach from platforms that are resilient and worldwide deployable. The Navy's ongoing efforts to maintain technological superiority will ensure our ability to challenge any adversary. Detering and denying China will require an “All Hands on Deck” approach from the Joint Force including the massing of lethal fires from the sea, which comes from carrier strike groups with the latest and most capable strike fighters.

**110. Do you believe DOD has sufficient sealift and airlift capabilities to support the Naval Forces throughout INDOPACOM for both training and contingency purposes?**

Yes, with risk. I believe the Navy is positioned to meet U.S. Transportation Command's strategic sealift requirements for USINDOPACOM through a layered approach that includes government-owned, commercially operated surge sealift vessels and the Maritime Prepositioning Force. This capability is further bolstered by commercially owned and operated vessels supported through key programs such as the Maritime Security Program, Tanker Security Program, the Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement, and the Voluntary Tanker Agreement.

However, the current Military Sealift fleet, which is relied upon to move approximately 90 percent of wartime cargo, is aging and requires urgent recapitalization, with most ships expected to reach the end of their service life in the 2030s. ADM Paparo also recognized this as he testified in April that there are "significant gaps in sealift." To address this, the Navy has adopted a recapitalization strategy that includes acquiring cost-effective used commercial vessels to close near-term capability gaps and identifying requirements for the design and construction of new sealift ships to meet future demands.

The most significant risk comes from shortages of civilian mariners to operate our Combat Logistics Force and sealift ships. The Navy is currently in a MSC Reset period in order to allow the numerous number of initiatives to improve the shortages through a focused and closely monitored campaign plan. This plan relies on a whole of government set of solutions and commitments. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Secretary of the Navy in engaging with the other departments, especially Transportation and the MARAD as well as Congress for legislative proposals to solve these issues.

**111. What alternative concepts of operation, platforms, and basing opportunities exist to address potential shortfalls in this area?**

The Navy's concept for Distributed Maritime Operations is built on the Joint Warfighting Concept, which requires sustaining the Fleet in contested environments and acknowledging that our installations and maritime operations centers are among our key warfighting platforms. Modern warfare requires secure, integrated systems to manage and logistically sustain a distributed, forward deployed force. We should design our platforms and support facilities considering those requirements.

Additionally, the Navy is actively exploring alternative concepts to meet fleet and joint force fuel delivery requirements. A key initiative involves expanding the use of commercial tankers to refuel Navy oilers and large-deck combatants extending their time on station and enhancing operational flexibility. Additionally, efforts are underway to develop fuel delivery systems that enable commercial tankers to refuel smaller combatants at sea, helping alleviate the demand on our fleet oilers. The continued development and deployment of the Joint Petroleum Over the Shore family of systems provides a versatile set of capabilities and deployment options for delivering fuel effectively ashore to austere locations.



Finally, our naval force is also committed to working with regional allies and partners including Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Singapore, India, and other Pacific Island countries as well as South American countries to identify and leverage opportunities, share best practices, and advance mutual interests.

## **AUKUS**

**In 2021, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States announced the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership with the objective of helping Australia to acquire a fleet of nuclear-propelled submarines and increasing collaboration on a range of advanced technology initiatives.**

### **112. What are your views of the AUKUS partnership?**

Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. have a long-standing history of undersea cooperation. I understand the Department of Defense is reviewing the AUKUS Security Pact and, if confirmed, I will support the Department of Defense in this review with my best military advice.

### **113. How do you envision supporting the transfer of *Virginia*-class submarines to Australia without decreasing the operational capacity of the US Navy with respect to attack submarines?**

If confirmed, I will work alongside the Secretary of the Navy to improve submarine maintenance throughput and new construction to ensure the Navy maximizes the capacity of its operational submarine fleet. Current trends are worrying, and should I be confirmed, this issue will have my utmost attention and priority to ensure a productive outcome. If confirmed, I will support the Department of Defense's review of the AUKUS Security Pact with my best military advice.

### **114. What specific operational and strategic benefits do *Virginia*-class submarine port calls and sustainment activities in Australia provide to the U.S. Navy and the AUKUS partnership?**

Virginia-class submarine port calls and sustainment activities in Australia enhance the U.S. Navy's readiness in the pacing theatre, increase operational flexibility, complicate adversary planning assumptions, and support combat-ready forces for the U.S. INDOPACOM Commander. U.S. nuclear powered warship visits to Australia also demonstrate U.S. commitment to maintaining open sea lanes of communication in the Indo-Pacific to promote peace, open trade, and prosperity, and serve to uplift the Royal Australian Navy's development of nuclear-powered attack submarine operations, maintenance, sustainment, and stewardship capabilities.

If confirmed, I will work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense to complete the review of the AUKUS Security Pact with my best military advice. I will also work with the U.S. INDOPACOM Commander to continue to assess the benefits of Virginia-class submarine port calls and sustainment activities in Australia and the status of achieving our goals and timelines.

## **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**

**Officials of the Department of Defense, including previous Chiefs of Naval Operations, have advocated for accession by the United States to the Law of the Sea Convention.**

### **115. Do you support United States accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea?**

The United States is a maritime nation, and our economy relies on sea lanes of communication. I believe maintaining the global mobility of U.S. forces is a critical consideration. The Convention codifies a global legal framework for freedoms of navigation and overflight that reflects customary international law. If confirmed, I will carefully review all the Convention's provisions and potential impacts to the Navy.

### **116. How would you respond to critics of the Convention who assert that accession is not in the national security interests of the United States?**

The United States currently relies on customary international law to counter unlawful maritime claims made by other States, including our adversaries. If confirmed, I will carefully review all the Convention's provisions and potential impacts to the Navy.

### **117. In your view, what impact, if any, would U.S. accession to the Law of the Sea Convention have on ongoing and emerging maritime disputes such as in the South China Sea and in the Arctic?**

If confirmed, I will carefully review all the Convention's provisions and potential impacts to the Navy.

## **Unmanned Systems**

### **118. What is your vision for unmanned systems in the Navy?**

Unmanned systems are a force multiplier and provide options to manage risk to force and risk to mission across the spectrum of conflict. When paired with manned platforms, unmanned systems expand capacity and provide increased flexibility that is central to the success of Distributed Maritime Operations. The Navy is building a mix of high-end warfighting systems and affordable, attritable, and attainable systems that provide mass and scale to challenge our adversaries. The Navy continues to expand the range, the reach, and the lethality of these systems by tapping into the innovation base of our Service, the Joint Force, and our country's industrial base. If confirmed, I will continue to design and develop the Navy's hybrid fleet concept to deliver effects in all domains, leveraging our advancing capabilities and operational learning across the Fleet and with our allies and partners.

**119. To what extent will unmanned systems interoperate with manned naval platforms?**

If confirmed, my vision and goal will be to ensure unmanned systems seamlessly and affordably integrate with manned platforms. Manned naval platforms will operate in tandem with unmanned systems as an integrated fleet to enable Distributed Maritime Operations in support of the Joint and Naval Warfighting Concepts. Unmanned systems will be operated from deployed naval platforms or from ashore operational centers as needed, reducing risk to the U.S. warfighters and enhancing fleet lethality across all mission sets.

**120. What is your understanding of the Navy's shift away from Large Unmanned Surface Vessel and acceleration of the Medium Unmanned Surface Vessel, and the operational roles such a vessel could fill?**

The Large Unmanned Surface Vessel was an exquisite single-mission vessel, with capabilities that made it mission restricted and unaffordable. The Medium Unmanned Surface Vessel (MUSV) is an affordable and flexible vessel capable of filling multiple roles within the fleet. The low-cost, non-exquisite, mass-producible characteristics of MUSV will allow for the rapid deployment to address immediate fleet needs, provide an adaptable, attritable vessel, and expand accessibility for industry partners that would otherwise be unable to compete in the construction of larger vessels.

**121. Do you support expanding the Navy's robotics warfare specialist rating to train personnel for operating and maintaining unmanned systems, and how will you ensure this workforce meets the growing demands of small, unmanned surface vessels and other autonomous platforms?**

If confirmed, my goal will be to work with industry partners to reduce the complexity of the interfaces and programming requirements of robotic and autonomous systems to allow more Sailors to operate these systems. This will require changes and improvements to existing training curricula. I will continue to evaluate the Navy's Robotics Warfare Specialists rating to ensure it is meeting the needs of the Navy. The Navy will continue to incorporate robotic and autonomous systems into the fleet, achieving a hybrid fleet of manned and unmanned systems. The Navy constantly explores and evaluates new methods for bringing in qualified, motivated, and capable applicants for all ratings, including Robotics Warfare Specialists. We continue to build and explore pathways to attract as many qualified individuals who want to serve as possible.

**Operational Energy**

The Department defines *operational energy* as the energy required for training, moving, and sustaining military forces and weapons platforms for military operations, including the energy used by tactical power systems, generators, and weapons platforms. Longer operating distances, remote and austere geography, and anti-access/area denial

**threats are challenging DOD's ability to assure the delivery of fuel. As the ability to deliver energy is placed at risk, so too is the Department's ability to deploy and sustain expeditionary Air Force units around the globe.**

**122. What are your ideas for future capabilities that would enable expeditionary Navy forces to operate through the assured delivery of energy to the warfighter?**

The Navy must broaden its array of secure and protected fuel distribution systems to effectively sustain a wide spectrum of naval assets, including unmanned platforms, particularly in austere and contested environments. This effort encompasses the advancement of future petroleum over-the-shore systems, fleet oilers, and commercial tanker integration for fuel delivery. Additionally, it is imperative to accelerate innovation in energy efficiency leveraging technologies such as advanced battery storage, electric propulsion systems, and optimized auxiliary equipment. These initiatives are designed to enhance the endurance and operational reach of our naval platforms, minimizing the need for frequent resupply. If confirmed, I am fully committed to driving these efforts forward, ensuring our naval forces preserve both strategic depth and tactical superiority amid evolving global challenges.

**123. What are your ideas for reducing the risk associated with the Navy's dependence on vulnerable supply lines?**

The Navy must accelerate the integration of advanced logistics planning and predictive analytics while reinforcing cybersecurity measures to reduce risks associated with vulnerable supply chains. Expanding logistics capacity and deepening collaboration with partner organizations are also critical to improving supply chain resilience and agility. Key efforts include chartering commercial vessels to transport fuel and cargo providing essential support for replenishing aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, and other naval combatants. These capabilities collectively enhance operational flexibility and ensure logistical redundancy. Operational protection options must be considered and built into the schemes of maneuver for achieving victory over any peer competitor. If confirmed, I will strongly advocate for the pursuit of innovative distribution strategies, including the exploration of unmanned platforms and emerging technologies, to preserve and strengthen the Navy's logistical advantage across maritime operations.

**Cyber**

**The readiness of the Cyber Mission Forces assigned to U.S. Cyber Command is substantially below acceptable levels. This shortfall is due primarily to the lack of sufficient numbers of personnel in each of the services in three critical work roles that are especially demanding: tool developers, exploitation analysts, and interactive on-net operators.**

**124. What is your understanding of the causes for the Navy's shortfalls in recruiting, training, and retaining personnel qualified for these work roles?**

The Navy has taken, and continues to take, aggressive steps to increase readiness across all Cyber Operations. Like all organizations, the demand for Cyber expertise has expanded faster than manpower and training were previously structured to support. Our aggressive action to correct has begun to turn the tide, and Navy readiness for Cyber is rapidly improving in order to

meet this demand. Recruiting has met the enlisted Cyber Warfare Technician recruiting goals for the last three years. Training opportunities for the advanced work roles have increased, which has led to enhanced readiness levels. The Navy continues to maintain adequate enlisted retention levels utilizing reenlistment incentives and focused distribution guidance. And if confirmed, I will continue to evaluate this and build upon this progress.

**125. What is your understanding of the Navy's plans to correct this shortfall?**

The Navy remains fully committed to meeting DoD and USCYBERCOM Cyber Mission Force (CMF) requirements both in readiness and directed growth. We have prioritized fixing readiness while still aggressively working to grow the force. To do this, Navy established Cyber Qualification Training Teams and implemented improvements in Force Generation to streamline training and to fix processes prior to growing the Navy CMF from 40 to 44 teams. If confirmed, I will continue to engage with Information Warfare leaders to ensure adequate training opportunities and consistently re-visit monetary and non-monetary incentives to maintain our cyber workforce manning and readiness levels.

**The mission of U.S. Cyber Command (CYBERCOM) is offensive and defense warfighting in the cyber domain. However, so far, General and Flag Officers selected to serve as Commander of Cyber Command have been intelligence specialists rather than line officers. If confirmed, you will be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and an adviser to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense.**

**126. Do you think that CYBERCOM as a warfighting command could or should be led by an officer trained and experienced in commanding combat units and joint operations?**

My dissertation for my doctoral degree was based on cyber warfare and the use of force in cyberspace. I have studied what it takes to lead cyber forces for many years. Much more so than a URL or Intel pedigree is a deep understanding of the complex and interconnecting environment that surround cyberspace across intelligence, information services, inter-connected networks, and Service requirements. Therefore, USCYBERCOM must be led by a General or Flag Officer trained and experienced in commanding joint operations with extensive experience in cyber and intelligence. The use and understanding of cyberspace and cyber-based intelligence is integral to all warfighting domains and is a key aspect to joint operations. It is important that the Commander, USCYBERCOM has the ability to lead effectively our cyber operations and provide informed and timely recommendations to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense.

**Electronic Warfare (EW)**

**127. What is your vision for the future of Navy EW capabilities?**

The next war will not be fought with missiles alone - electronic and cyber weapons will play a key role. I envision a Navy equipped with advanced EW and integrated Information Warfare capabilities that can blind, deceive, and deny the enemy's ability to sense and understand the

battlespace. These capabilities will allow the Navy to have additional non-kinetic options to enable freedom of maneuver and action which is critical to deterring, fighting, and winning. If confirmed, I will strongly advocate for investments in EW capabilities that pace or overmatch our expected threats.

**128. What is your assessment of the Electronic Protection capabilities of Navy systems in relation to the offensive electronic warfare threat from peer and near-peer adversaries, especially in light of the Northern Edge exercises?**

The Navy relies on lessons learned from exercises such as Northern Edge to incorporate improvements to Electronic Protection capabilities across our tactical platforms. These ongoing improvements will continue to adapt as our understanding of the modern threat evolves. Many shipboard systems—particularly legacy radars, communications, and datalinks—remain susceptible to jamming, spoofing, and deceptive electronic attack due to limited electronic protection features and lack of rapid reprogramming. Northern Edge exercises have revealed ongoing challenges with electromagnetic convergence, including instances of self-jamming and unintended interference among U.S. systems during high-density operations. To address these challenges, the Navy is investing in systems like SPY-6 radar, Surface Electronic Warfare Improvement Plan Block 2/3, and the Next Generation Jammer, which feature advanced signal processing, frequency agility, and cognitive capabilities to ensure resilience in contested electronic warfare environments.

**Spectrum**

**129. Electromagnetic spectrum plays a critical role in many DOD missions. In what ways does the Navy rely on spectrum to support warfighter requirements?**

Being able to maneuver within the electromagnetic spectrum is integral to the Navy's ability to defend the homeland, project power, and operate globally as part of the Joint Force. Our fleet and weapon systems depend on uninterrupted spectrum access across all domains and phases of conflict—whether tracking nuclear-capable missiles to defending the homeland or commanding distributed maritime operations across vast theaters.

Every aspect of our warfighting ecosystem, from capability development and testing to calibration, training, and live operations relies on access and maneuverability within the spectrum. To maintain strategic superiority, we must maintain access, while optimizing spectrum usage across platforms and missions, ensuring the Navy remains ready, resilient, and interoperable.

**130. In your view, which warfighter spectrum requirements will be essential to competing with Russia and China on a future battlefield?**

Spectrum access is foundational to our combat systems' ability to detect, defend, and dominate in any future conflict. The Golden Dome architecture amplifies this need, particularly within the S-band, which supports our core ballistic missile defense and anti-air warfare systems.

**In March 2023 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense Austin stated that, with respect to losing “S-band” spectrum, “it be devastating, ... it would take us somewhere north of 20 years to try to recover from -- from the loss of that -- that spectrum. Parts of that spectrum are vital to our national defense and the protection of the homeland. And -- and, you know, in order to describe exactly -- well, you know what the -- what the specific platforms are, but we would have to go to a classified session to speak in detail about this. But I would tell you that this is not something you can fix overnight once you break it. It’ll take 20 years plus to recover from that.” Discussions about the U.S. Navy potentially losing access to the S-band spectrum (2-4 GHz), critical for systems like the Aegis SPY radar, have intensified since 2023 due to commercial pressure for 5G expansion, with Pentagon leaders warning that sharing or vacating this band could disrupt military operations.**

**131. What Navy systems might be affected by this loss of “S-band” spectrum, in your view?**

Loss of access to the S-band spectrum would pose an unacceptable risk to our Navy’s ability to successfully conduct its missions and to our nation’s defense. The Navy’s core homeland defense architecture—including the Aegis SPY radar and other systems contributing to the Golden Dome—is anchored in the 3.1 to 3.45 GHz mid-band range. Vacating this spectrum jeopardizes our ballistic missile defense capability and undermines national readiness.

Beyond these systems, S-band supports a wide range of mission-critical functions: precision-guided missiles, secure communications, air traffic control, weather radars, and radio frequency signature characterization. Our six Major Range and Test Facility Bases in CONUS depend on this spectrum to develop, test, and validate the next generation of naval technologies.

Preserving DoD primacy in this band is essential to the Navy’s ability to effectively train, operate, modernize, and fight. Once the Navy’s access to the spectrum is compromised, the path to recovery spans decades. We cannot afford that timeline.

**132. Were DOD required to “vacate” or leave the spectrum “S-Band” instead of sharing, what would be the potential operational and monetary costs to the Navy, in your view?**

Spectrum is a finite and non-renewable strategic asset. Forcing DoD, and specifically the Navy, to vacate the S-band would impose profound operational risk across critical missions, including homeland defense. Our premier radar systems, including Aegis SPY and the Golden Dome architecture, rely on the unique characteristics of the 3.1 to 3.45 GHz band to enable threat detection, tracking, and missile defense.

Loss of access would degrade radar performance, impair target discrimination, and compromise command-and-control across the Joint Force. Development and fielding of substitute capabilities would take decades and cost hundreds of billions without guaranteeing equivalent performance. Preserving this spectrum is not simply a technical requirement—it is a strategic imperative.

**133. How long would it take for the Navy to move its systems to a different area of the spectrum, in your view?**

The Navy's use of the S-band is based on optimal propagation characteristics, detection fidelity, and the practical constraints of shipboard integration. There is currently no viable alternative band that offers comparable performance.

Hypothesizing, if technically possible, relocating systems to other areas of the spectrum would take decades, if at all, requiring wholesale system redesigns, hardware replacement, and significant ship alterations. Such a shift would impose significant operational and financial costs.

### **Science, Technology, and Innovation**

**U.S. superiority in key areas of innovation is decreasing or has disappeared, while our competitors are engaging in aggressive military modernization and advanced weaponry development. DOD has identified 14 critical technology areas in which investment to develop next generation operational capabilities is imperative: hypersonics; future generation wireless technology; advanced materials; integrated network systems-of-systems; directed energy; integrated sensing and cyber; space technology; quantum science; trusted artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomy; microelectronics; renewable energy generation and storage; advanced computing and software; human-machine interfaces; and biotechnology. Much of the innovation in these technologies that could prove suitable for national defense purposes is occurring outside of the traditional defense industry.**

**134. What do you see as the most significant challenges (e.g., technical, organizational, or cultural) to U.S. development of these key technologies, or gaining access to such technologies from the commercial marketplace?**

If confirmed, I will continue driving efforts to accelerate innovation and ensure the Navy can access and integrate critical technologies rapidly. One of the most significant challenges is bridging the gap between fast-moving commercial innovation and the Department's traditional processes for technology development and acquisition. Many of the breakthroughs in these key areas are occurring outside the defense sector, requiring us to strengthen partnerships with non-traditional industry, academia, and startups. We are making progress through prototyping, experimentation, and early vendor engagement, but continued success depends on embracing a culture that supports disciplined risk-taking, rapid iteration, and flexible transition pathways. By streamlining acquisition processes and reinforcing collaboration across the Naval Research Enterprise and private sector, we can deliver advanced capabilities to the warfighter at the speed required to maintain our advantage.

**135. In your view, how has the Navy prioritized limited R&D funding across your technology focus areas? Specifically, where is the Navy either increasing or decreasing focus and funding?**

If confirmed, I will ensure the Navy continues to prioritize R&D funding to develop future technologies that enable innovation across shipbuilding, aviation, weapons systems, expeditionary capabilities, and utilizing emerging technologies. The Navy is focusing its limited resources on areas that both modernize the force and enhance readiness. We are focusing investments on fundamental research to drive advancement in key technology areas such as



artificial intelligence, autonomy, hypersonics, cybersecurity, additive and advanced manufacturing, and quantum sciences. Concurrently, we are developing advanced operational prototypes, including next-generation directed energy weapons and autonomous systems. Where appropriate, we are aligning or scaling back efforts that can be addressed through joint programs or commercial solutions to ensure the most efficient use of limited resources.

**136. What efforts is the Navy making to identify new technologies developed commercially by the private sector and apply them to military and national security purposes? What are the challenges that you perceive to increasing collaboration between the private sector and Navy?**

If confirmed, I will continue to advance the Navy's efforts to identify and integrate new technologies developed commercially by expanding engagement with both traditional and non-traditional partners, including innovative commercial companies, entrepreneurs, and academia. The Navy recognizes that innovation requires a disciplined process of trial, error, rapid learning, and risk-taking to mature and transition cutting-edge technologies to the warfighter at the speed of relevance. Through the Office of Naval Research, we have centralized and strengthened the business of innovation within the Department of the Navy to broaden the military industrial base and accelerate the discovery and transition of technologies with military applications. The primary challenges to increasing collaboration include aligning differing cultures and timelines between the private sector and the Navy, as well as navigating complex acquisition processes. If confirmed, I will work to further streamline these processes and foster a culture that embraces innovation and partnership to ensure our warfighters receive the most advanced capabilities in a timely manner.

**137. If confirmed, how can the operational experience of the warfighter better be integrated into the research and development process? Are there appropriate places to interject warfighters in the interaction between the DOD research and engineering community and the private sector?**

If confirmed, I will ensure warfighter identified gaps are prioritized to guide the research and development process. Additionally, I will leverage experimentation and demonstration opportunities to obtain our Sailor's insights into how emerging technologies can/should enhance our operational capabilities. This will enable the DoD research and engineering community, in collaboration with the private sector, to rapidly iterate on technology solutions to provide meaningful operational impacts at speed. Finally, I will ensure opportunities are available for our officers as experience tours and career intermission programs with academia, industry, national laboratories, and other R&D organizations.

**138. If confirmed, how would you leverage experimentation and prototyping opportunities to look at new technologies and concepts that might be beneficial for the Navy, or better support the Navy role in joint operations?**

The Navy has a proud history of leveraging experimentation and prototyping opportunities to evaluate how new technologies improve warfighting operations. For example, the Navy Warfare Development Center Fleet Experimentation program conducts rigorous experimentation

initiatives to evaluate emerging, priority technologies in realistic scenarios. Capabilities like LVC and Navy Continuous Training Environment are at the heart of these efforts.

If confirmed, I will prioritize collaboration with industry partners, academic institutions, our science and technology research laboratories, and fellow services to facilitate joint exercises and simulations that rigorously test critical new capabilities under realistic conditions. These efforts will ensure that we not only identify beneficial technologies but also validate their effectiveness in supporting the Navy's role in joint operations.

**One of the main objectives of the defense research enterprise is to develop advanced technologies that will be of benefit to the warfighter. In this regard, it is critical that advancements quickly transition from the development phase into testing and evaluation and ultimately into a program of record for the deployment of capability to the warfighter.**

**139. If confirmed, how will you ensure that a greater percentage of the technologies being developed by Navy labs transition into programs of record for deployment to the warfighter? How would you ensure that appropriate technologies are transitioning more quickly into programs of record?**

If confirmed, I will ensure the science and technology community is focused on priority problems and closely aligned with Program Offices and Requirements and Resource Sponsors early in technology development including alignment with ongoing research with academic institutions. This alignment will allow the Navy to budget more effectively to enable successful transition of new capabilities into Programs of Record, ensuring that emerging capabilities reach the warfighter more quickly.

**140. How do you see the Navy's laboratory facilities contributing to your goals for developing technology for the warfighter? Do you think Navy laboratory facilities are keeping pace with the needs of the Navy? If not, what do you think could be done to improve the Navy's ability to modernize its laboratory infrastructure?**

If confirmed, I will prioritize strengthening the Navy's laboratory facilities, recognizing their critical role in developing and transitioning advanced technologies to the warfighter. These labs form the foundation of our technical capabilities, but many face infrastructure and workforce challenges that limit their responsiveness to emerging threats. I fully support the Naval Research and Development Establishment's efforts to modernize through its infrastructure roadmap and better align with future capability needs. Ensuring seamless coordination between our labs and acquisition programs will be essential. If confirmed, I will be committed to providing the resources and support necessary to maintain our technological edge.

### **Technical Workforce**

**A significant challenge facing the Navy today is a shortage of highly skilled data scientists, computer programmers, cyber and other scientific, technical and engineering talent to work at Defense laboratories and technical centers.**

**141. In your view, what are the pros and cons of having Navy Active-duty military personnel trained and working as scientists, engineers, software coders, and in other technical positions across the Navy's research, development, and acquisition enterprise?**

Maintaining Navy personnel in these technical positions provides a competitive advantage in this critical space without complete reliance on contractors and private industry. By being in uniform and staying current on operational matters and with the right level of technical competency, the Navy can ensure the skill does not atrophy. Most importantly, keeping this talent in uniform ensures the deliverables they create are in the best interest of the organization they serve. Because these personnel are hard to develop and are in high demand commercially, they are often hard to retain or to replace.

**142. How do you propose to leverage other initiatives in the Navy or in DOD to help with these challenges, such as the Defense Civilian Training Corps or the work being done through the Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment program to support the submarine industrial base workforce?**

Navy Commands and leadership work across organizations to recruit and retain a skilled workforce, particularly in support of the Submarine Industrial Base and shipyard community of practice. One such approach used to expedite the readiness of the industrial base force is the Accelerated Training and Promotion Program (ATPP). Approved by the Office of Personnel Management, the ATPP enables Commands to offer a strong recruitment and incentive package, to include training that expedites the career progression of the workforce. Another program used to recruit top quality science and engineering talent is the SMART (Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation) program. The Navy also continues to leverage intern programs to quickly integrate post-secondary students in the technical fields – we learned that when we familiarize these students with our work, they are more likely to permanently join the workforce and contribute to the mission. I also understand the Secretary of the Navy is heavily invested in solving this problem, so if confirmed, I intend to work closely with him and in collaboration with Congress.

**Suicide Prevention**

**The number of suicides in each of the Services continues to concern the Committee. Over the past several years, the Navy has struggled with suicides for sailors in a limited duty status, and sailors assigned to ships in long-term maintenance.**

**143. If confirmed, what actions would you take to prevent suicides within the Navy and Marine Corps, including within the Navy and Marine Corps reserve components, and within the families of sailors and marines across all Components?**

There is nothing more tragic than the loss of a Sailor or a family due to suicide. The loss of any Sailor, civilian, or family member to suicide is one too many, and we must remain committed to ensuring the health, safety and well-being of all members of our military community. If confirmed, I will continue working every day to ensure the wellness of all Sailors, civilians, and

family members, and continue to support the Department's current efforts to encourage individuals to ask for support when they need it, eliminate stigma associated with help-seeking, and eliminate barriers to accessing support across the spectrum of care. My goal is to bolster the effectiveness of the warrior toughness initiatives at Boot Camp as well as improve Quality of Service of Sailors to reduce their stress and day-to-day friction.

**144. If confirmed, what would you do to enhance the reporting and tracking of suicide among family members and dependents of sailors and Marines across all Components?**

If confirmed, I will continue to champion robust reporting and tracking of suicides – to potentially include family members and dependents. Further, I want to improve the timeliness and comprehensiveness of reporting. Effective data collection is vital to enhance our understanding and inform the development of evidence-based, data-driven suicide prevention strategies.

**Military Health System Reform**

**Section 702 of the NDAA for FY 2017, as modified by Sections 711 and 712 of the NDAA for FY 2019, transferred the administration and management of military hospitals and clinics from the Military Services to the Defense Health Agency (DHA).**

**145. Do you support the purpose and implementation of section 702 of the FY 2017 NDAA, as clarified by sections 711 and 712 of the FY 2019 NDAA?**

Yes, with assessed risk. The Military Health System (MHS) is critical to the Navy's ability to Force Generate medically ready operational forces, and we are committed to help stabilize the MHS with a staffed and ready medical force.

**146. In your view, is the Navy medical force properly sized to meet the joint medical requirements set forth in operational plans implementing the 2022 NDS and the most recent Joint Medical Estimate?**

No, but improving. Navy Medicine manpower force structure is in alignment with both the Joint Medical Estimate and INDSG. The Navy is aggressively addressing medical personnel shortages through enhanced incentives and recruiting initiatives to ensure our Navy's medical facilities and platforms are properly manned.

**147. In your view, do Navy medical providers possess today the critical wartime medical readiness skills and core competencies required to provide effective and timely health care to sailors and Marines engaged in combat or contingency operations?**

Yes. Navy Medicine personnel are exceptionally trained and highly skilled, possessing the core competencies essential for providing critical medical care across the full spectrum of operations.

Our medical personnel are actively developing and testing new operational constructs and care delivery models designed to ensure robust medical support in austere, contested environments.

### **End Strength**

**In recent years, the Navy has faced significant recruiting challenges, missing its active-duty enlisted goal by 7,464 in Fiscal Year 2023. These struggles prompted reforms such as the Future Sailor Preparatory Course and relaxed enlistment criteria, which helped the Navy rebound in FY 2024, though persistent at-sea shortages of sailors remain a concern.**

#### **148. Do you believe Navy end strength must continue to grow?**

Yes, to meet the requirements of the current and future operational environment, Navy end strength must continue to grow. Ensuring that our units are manned to the highest level of readiness is fundamental to effective, efficient, and safe operations. The FY 2026 President's Budget requests an increase in enlisted Active-Duty end strength from 271,753 to 283,680, which will help support our growing inventory. If confirmed, I will continue to ensure the Navy maintains high standards for accessions and retention as critical drivers of combat credibility.

#### **149. Will you commit to ensuring that, if confirmed, the Navy maintains sufficiently high recruitment and retention standards, even if such standards result in the Navy not achieving authorized end strength levels?**

Yes. The Navy continues to sustain focus on improving access and recruiter performance in a challenging recruiting environment and through end strength mitigation initiatives. The Navy has achieved success through various policies without lowering standards. If confirmed, I commit to upholding our high recruiting and retention standards – and will continue to ensure every Sailor is qualified fully for their assignment. The Navy will continue to be an institution that everyone in America can aspire to join, knowing that a Navy career is professionally rewarding and personally fulfilling.

#### **150. What additional force shaping authorities and tools does the Navy need, in your view?**

From my experience, and in conversation with Navy leadership, quality access to middle and high schools as well as community colleges would provide significant benefit to service recruiting. While we have legislative authorities that dictate access, enabling high quality recruiter/student interactions would help increase consideration for military service. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of the Navy and Congress to ensure that we are leveraging current authorities appropriately and continue to communicate as we see opportunities or needs for improvement.

### **Navy Reserve**

#### **151. In your view, what is the appropriate relationship between the Active Navy and**

## **the Navy Reserve?**

The Navy Reserve is an integral and necessary component of the Navy Total Force, providing the strategic depth required to compete and win across the spectrum of conflict. The Navy Reserve enables the expansion of operational capacity while preserving warfighting effectiveness at a reduced manpower cost. I am confident that the balance currently in place is aligned with the future needs of our Navy. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Chief of Navy Reserve to ensure that this balance is maintained.

### **152. What is your vision for the roles and missions of the Navy Reserve? If confirmed, what new objectives would you seek to achieve with respect to the Navy Reserve's organization, force structure, and end strength?**

The Navy Reserve remains agile, lethal, and indispensable to the Navy Total Force, ready for missions across the globe, in both steady state and conflict. The Navy Reserve capitalizes on both essential civilian skillsets and the extensive training that we've previously invested in our Sailors during their active-duty service. This combination provides the strategic depth necessary for our Navy to maintain a competitive edge in this era of strategic competition.

If confirmed, I will prioritize expanding the mass mobilization capacity of the Reserve Force, including the Reception, Staging, Onboarding, and Integration of our Reserve Force, Force flow, and Reserve pay accounts activation. Specifically, this will be tested during the Large-Scale Exercise 25 in which we will conduct the largest mobilization test of our processes in recent history. Additionally, I will assess areas within our Navy where it is prudent to place capabilities in the Reserve Force, thereby reducing near-term manpower costs and utilizing those savings to reinvest in the future capabilities our Navy requires.

### **153. Are you concerned that continued reliance on the Reserve Component to execute operational missions—both at home and around the globe—is adversely affecting the Navy Reserve's ability to meet its recruiting and retention missions? Why or why not?**

No. FY25 has been a successful year in achieving recruitment and retention objectives across both our Navy Reserve and Active Duty. We anticipate that the Navy Reserve will exceed its control numbers by 600 Sailors at the close of FY25, a first in 5 years. I am confident that our Sailors, both Reserve and Active Duty, take pride in their service and find fulfillment in the missions assigned to them.

It is essential to maintain the right balance between Individual Augmentation requirements and Navy demands, ensuring that the Reserve Component's core mission of providing strategic depth is not impacted and that recruitment and retention efforts are not adversely affected. If confirmed, I will collaborate with the Joint Staff and other Service Chiefs to preserve this balance and safeguard the success of our recruiting and retention initiatives.

## **Recruiting and Retention**

**The National Defense Strategy Commission asserted unequivocally that the most critical resource required to produce a highly capable military is highly capable people, in the quantity required, willing to serve. Yet, DOD studies indicate that only about a quarter of today's youth population is eligible for military service, and only a fraction of those who meet military accession standards are interested in serving.**

**In response to military recruiting difficulties, the Navy has lowered enlistment standards more than any other service, including accepting category IV recruits at the maximum amount allowed by law and lowering the test scores required to serve in dozens of enlisted ratings.**

**154. If required to choose between maintaining high recruitment and retention standards and achieving authorized end strength levels, which would be more important, in your view?**

I believe both can be met effectively. The strength of our Navy comes from the quality, capability, and character of the Sailors who serve. Maintaining our standards is just as important as recruiting and retention goals, because the quality and quantity of our people, in large part, is due to the Navy being an elite organization with high standards with accountable assessments to determine fitness and competency for duty. A force that maintains the readiness, discipline, or technical skill to meet operational demands enables mission success, which in turn drives higher retention and recruiting.

**155. Rather than relying solely on ever-higher compensation for a shrinking pool of volunteers, what creative steps would you take, if confirmed, to expand the pool of eligible recruits and improve Navy recruiting?**

The Navy met its recruiting goal this year three months ahead of schedule by executing a deliberate, data-informed strategy: reaching talent in every zip code, building trust-based relationships, and delivering a compelling message of service and opportunity. That momentum is continuing into FY26, with recruiting success accompanied by rising quality. We are fully committed to expanding the pool of eligible and interested young Americans—leveraging modern tools, innovative approaches, and the full range of authorities provided by Congress. Some of those initiatives include modern, targeted marketing, non-monetary incentives and career acceleration, improved access to schools, innovative pilot programs and streamlined candidate experience.

If confirmed, I will ensure that the Navy will continue to harness the creativity of our recruiters, and the full suite of authorities granted by Congress to grow the talent pipeline and elevate the message of service.

**156. What do you consider to be key to the Navy's future success, if confirmed, in retaining the best qualified personnel for continued service in positions of greater responsibility and leadership in the Navy?**

We must invest in the quality of service for our Sailors, to include housing, medical care, childcare, spouse employment support, and mental health services. We must train and select

leaders who embody leadership, accountability, and a commitment to warfighting excellence and the welfare of their Sailors. We need to ensure our billet base and sea-shore flow supports billet-based advancement and geographic stability which is critical to our Sailors and their families. To retain the best, the Navy must continue to treat its Sailors as its most strategic asset while holding leadership at all levels to high standards.

**157. What steps, if any, should be taken to ensure that current operational requirements and tempo do not adversely impact the overall recruiting, retention, readiness, and morale of soldiers?**

From my current role as Commander of U.S. Fleet Forces Command, it is critical that we adhere to planned maintenance and training schedules (Optimized Fleet Response Plan) and to work with the Joint Staff and OSD to prevent extended deployments from becoming the norm. We must reduce unplanned readiness consumption and surge deployments where possible, overuse of high-demand units burns out crews and degrades readiness. Increasing our end strength will ensure gaps at sea are reduced, will increase the amount of unit duty sections, will improve preventative and corrective maintenance capacity, and will help prevent excessive workloads – all of which can help reduce operational stress. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Congress to continue to work through the balance of operational demands with Sailor quality of life policies to ensure that we can continue to recruit and retain a combat-ready force.

**158. Given the historically low numbers for eligibility to serve, do you believe a reassessment of accessions standards is in order? If so, what accessions standards in your view are outdated or worthy of review?**

The historically low eligibility rates for military service—driven by rising disqualifiers in areas like health, education, conduct, and fitness—are a serious concern for the long-term health of the All-Volunteer Joint Force.

A standards review does not mean lowering expectations. Rather, it means continuously evaluating whether existing criteria accurately predict performance, retention, and deployability in today's modernized Navy. I believe the following areas are worthy of ongoing analysis: medical standards, body composition and fitness metrics, and educational credentials and testing.

The Navy remains fully committed to recruiting a high-quality, deployable force—I also believe that expanding the pool of eligible Americans must include a continuous, data-driven review of accessions standards to ensure they serve both recruiting and operational mission success. While the Navy has met mission with rising quality, the service supports a responsible reassessment of accessions standards to ensure they remain relevant, evidence-based, and aligned with both modern force requirements and the realities of today's youth. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Navy partners with DoN, DoD and Congress to ensure that we continue the conversation on accessions standards with accountability and rigorous assessments.

**U.S. Naval Academy**



**159. If confirmed, what changes to the organization, curriculum, or operations of USNA do you envision recommending?**

The Naval Academy has been instrumental in preparing our officers for the challenges facing our Navy since 1845 and will continue to serve in that important role going forward. To prepare for future warfare, the Naval Academy has in recent years expanded its offerings in computer science and cybersecurity, introduced wargaming, and added its newest majors, Foreign Area Studies and Data Science. The Academy is currently reviewing its core curriculum provided to every Midshipmen to ensure that Naval Academy graduates have the foundation necessary to lead our Navy and Marine Corps in 21st century warfare. Just as warfare is ever evolving, a modern educational institution must self-evaluate and look forward, anticipating the challenges to come. If confirmed, I plan to continue to ensure alignment of the curriculum and operations at USNA with future warfighting needs, and meet the mission of developing midshipmen in mind, body, and character to lead effectively as naval officers. I also will ensure the ratio of STEM to non-STEM majors meets the needs of our highly technical Navy systems and platforms.

**The National Defense Authorization Act re-emphasized for the third time in the last five years that service academy graduates are expected to serve for at least two-years on active duty prior to pursuing employment as a professional athlete.**

**160. Do you support this requirement?**

Yes. The service academies exist to develop officers and warfighters who will lead our military in the future. I am focused on developing Navy and Marine Corps Officers and following the policies set forth in the NDAA. The FY25 NDAA authorizes the Secretary of the Navy to commission up to three midshipmen per year, who have obtained a professional contract, into the Navy or Marine Corps Selected Reserve to compete as professional athletes while also participating in efforts to recruit and retain members of the armed forces. I support this recent legislation as written.

**Military Quality of Life**

**The Committee remains concerned about the sustainment of key quality of life programs for military families, such as family advocacy and parenting skills programs; childcare; spouse education and employment support; health care; and morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) services.**

**161. If confirmed, what quality of life and MWR programs would you consider a priority?**

In my current role as Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, I have made Sailor Quality of Life a top priority and will continue do so, if confirmed. The strength of our military depends first and foremost on our Sailors and their families. MWR programs are an essential component to the well-being and readiness of Sailors and their families. If confirmed, I would ensure continuous delivery of high-quality, customer-focused programs and services that contribute to resilience, retention, readiness, and quality of life. I would prioritize those programs that receive

positive customer service feedback and identify those that are most impactful to the quality of life for our warfighters and their families. Furthermore, if confirmed, I will continue the Navy's efforts to increase the capacity and availability of key programs such as childcare and on-base MWR services and facilities.

**162. If confirmed, how would you work across the Navy, and with the Military Service Organizations and Congress to sustain and enrich high-value quality of life and MWR programs for sailors and their families?**

Quality of life initiatives are integral to the success of our Navy, and the Navy has capitalized on authorities provided to us in the FY25 NDAA to bolster the quality of life for those entering Naval service and to retain the Sailors already serving. We appreciate Congress' commitment and support by enacting these provisions that have been extremely beneficial to our Sailors, including programs that support fitness, nutrition, housing, mental and behavioral health, and Wi-Fi access. These initiatives restore our focus on lethality and increase our military readiness. If confirmed, I will promote and continue to reinvigorate the Navy's Quality of Service (Quality of Life + Quality of Work) efforts that positively impact the readiness of our service members and their families. Further, in collaboration with the Department of Defense and Military Service Organizations, we will strive to provide the programs and services our warriors and their families deserve. I look forward to working with Members of Congress on these critical issues.

**Military Housing**

**163. What is your current assessment of privatized housing inside the Navy?**

I believe that our warfighters and their families deserve safe, high quality, and well-maintained housing free of mold, mildew, broken furniture, and unsightly buildings and grounds. To that end, I am dedicated to ensuring housing for Sailors and their families is preeminent across the military services. I understand that the Navy has made significant strides to improve oversight of our partners' performance. The Navy has made significant progress at holding Private Partner Venture partners accountable but more remains to be done. Once fully briefed, I would assess injecting additional resources and accountability into certain partnerships in order to improve housing and family/Sailor quality of life. I will also continue to identify opportunities to further improve our privatized housing inventory. I use the "would I live there" test and be proud of my home. Lastly, I am committed to ensuring no Sailors permanently live onboard our ships.

**164. As it pertains to unaccompanied barracks, do you believe the Navy should utilize waivers to waive habitability and living standards?**

Waivers should be a temporary exception as a last result versus the norm. Far too often, waivers have been overused and that must be reversed. We must pay the cost it takes to adequately care for our Sailors, and I will act aggressively to ensure we do so. Providing quality UH remains important to the Navy, as I believe there is a direct correlation between peace of mind with housing and a junior service member's focus towards the mission. Habitability and living standard waivers will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Navy approves waivers if they

improve the Sailor's existing living conditions, such as enabling a move ashore while in homeport or in instances where the location lacks the capacity needed to house Sailors that do not qualify for Basic Allowance for Housing.

### **Family Readiness and Support**

#### **165. What do you consider to be the most important family readiness issues for sailors and their families?**

I consider access to high quality housing, including UH for Sailors in industrial environments, access to healthcare, affordable and available childcare, on time pay and entitlement delivery, and spousal employment as the most important family readiness issues for our warriors and their families.

#### **166. If confirmed, how would you ensure that the family readiness issues you identified are properly addressed and adequately resourced?**

As Fleet Forces Commander, I have been part of and remain fully aware of the efforts we are making to address these and other issues through our Quality of Service initiatives. If confirmed, I am fully committed to continuing the Navy's cross-functional team line of efforts to include improving family housing and UH, improving access to medical care and resources, expanding our access to quality food, and supporting our Sailors in getting access to childcare, which all contribute to readiness.

#### **167. If confirmed, how would you ensure that support related to mobilization, deployment, and family readiness is provided to Navy Reserve families, as well as to Active Duty Navy families who do not reside near a military base?**

Reserve families are an important and essential part of our warfighting team. Their support enables the Navy to meet mission demands, often with little notice and under challenging circumstances. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for programs that meet the unique needs of Reserve and Active-Duty families, especially those who live far from military installations. I fully support initiatives like Weekend Drill Child Care and Returning Warrior Workshops. These programs directly support the well-being, operational preparedness, and reintegration of our Force. Programs like these, along with efforts to expand access to fitness, counseling, and family support resources for decentralized families, are not just Quality of Service efforts, they're critical to retention, readiness, and long-term sustainability of the Force. If confirmed, I will work closely with Commander, Navy Installations Command and the Navy Reserve Force to ensure these efforts are resourced and expanded where they're most needed.

**The Committee often hears that Active-Duty families have difficulty obtaining child care on base and that there are thousands of military families on waitlists to receive infant care.**

#### **168. If confirmed, what specifically would you do to provide Navy families with accessible, high-quality childcare, at an appropriate cost?**

The lack of accessible, affordable, and quality childcare is a national issue and an important readiness issue for the Navy. The primary challenges for the Navy, as with the private childcare industry, are staffing and capacity. To get after staffing, the Navy initiated recruitment and retention bonuses, increased salaries, and will begin providing childcare discounts for staff members starting 1 September 2025 (100% for first child, 20% for each additional child, improved staffing and other worker benefits). We have expanded our fee assistance program and are pursuing additional partnerships to add physical space, as a quicker, more cost-effective alternative to the military construction process. We are also investing in new child development centers in fleet concentration areas to increase our overall childcare capacity. We have also standardized a modular, scalable child development center (CDC) and are implementing a multi-year procurement of multiple CDCs to drive down costs of construction and make childcare more accessible. I am committed to ensuring mission readiness by addressing the childcare needs of our Sailors. If confirmed, I will continue to search out additional options and work with Congress, OSD, and other stakeholders to provide high quality, affordable childcare solutions.

### **Sexual Assault Prevention and Response**

**169. Do you believe the policies, programs, and resources that the Department of the Navy have put in place to prevent and respond to sexual assault, and to protect sailors and marines who report sexual assault from retaliation, are working? If not, what else must be done?**

Sexual assault is a crime that has no place in our military. It runs counter to our ability to accomplish the mission and erodes readiness. Offenders must be held appropriately accountable, and victims should have access to the support they need. The Navy is unyielding in our pursuit to reduce the prevalence of these harmful behaviors and ensuring comprehensive care and support to victims. I support Navy's commitment to the prevention of sexual assault and the shared partnership that exists with Congress on this. I believe improvements to prevention training—both type, curricula, and practical events—are necessary to reduce the overall prevalence rates. If confirmed, I will prioritize these programs, ensuring they have the support and resources they need to succeed. I will focus on healthy and positive environments, where leaders at all levels foster a climate in which Service members and civilians have the opportunity to thrive. I will also adopt best practices from the other Services such as the Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, and Act Program (EAAA).

**170. If confirmed, what specific role would you establish for yourself in preventing sexual harassment in the Navy, including within the civilian workforce?**

If confirmed, I will focus on innovative and evidence-based prevention programs such as the EAAA and use data to assess both risk and protective factors. I will continue to prioritize professional development, promoting the enduring proficiencies to foster positive behaviors. I will also continue to create policies that help those who come forward and/or need support. Finally, I will ensure our reporting processes remain robust and effective.

**171. Do you perceive that you need additional authorities from Congress to improve the Navy programs to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault?**

There is no place for sexual assault or sexual harassment in the Navy. Offenders must be held appropriately accountable, and victims must be able to access the resources that they need. Navy will continue to stress the importance of a unit culture that promotes trust, connectivity and mutual respect. I look forward to Navy's continued partnership with Congress on this important issue. I do not perceive additional authorities from Congress are required. However, I do believe the Navy's prevention training needs to be improved to enhance effectiveness to reduce prevalence.

**Mental and Behavioral Health Care**

**172. If confirmed, what actions would you take to ensure that sufficient mental and behavioral health resources are available to sailors in theater or at sea, as well as to sailors and families at home station locations?**

Mental health resources are extremely important to me. And, while mental health services are available worldwide from a wide array of sources, I am committed to ensuring Sailors and families have access to the right care, at the right level, at the right time, with the right level of privacy. Resources include installation counseling centers, military treatment facilities, embedded providers in operational units, virtual health platforms, and Navy Chaplains. All DoN installations now have a Director of Psychological Health to better coordinate mental health services for Sailors and families. Additionally, the 2023 Mental Health Playbook remains a valuable tool for Command Triads and Navy leaders to support their understanding of the comprehensive resources available, which includes information on the fully implemented Brandon Act, which enables Sailor self-referral for mental health needs.

**173. If confirmed, what specifically would you do to ensure that sufficient mental and behavioral health resources are available to Reserve Component sailors and their families who do not reside near a military base?**

We support the Reserve Component through the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Psychological Health Outreach Program (PHOP). PHOP ensures Reservists and their families have full access to appropriate psychological health services prior to deployment, post-demobilization, and before retirement/discharge. PHOP offers outreach, education, assessment, and case management to connect Sailors and families to targeted community resources that are designed to help reduce stress, promote resiliency, and support mission readiness.

**Audit**

**174. Why is it important for the Navy to achieve a clean audit opinion?**

Achieving a clean audit opinion is essential to strengthening the Navy's financial stewardship and operational effectiveness. It reflects reliable, credible financial and logistical data and efficient business processes—enhancing accountability and transparency in how we manage our

precious resources across the enterprise. A clean audit also helps embed a culture of audit rigor into the Navy's day-to-day operations, process standards, and drive improvements in how we track, safeguard, and employ critical assets. These improvements directly support warfighter readiness by ensuring that decision-makers have accurate, timely information.

Ultimately, audit readiness is not just a financial milestone, it's a strategic enabler and a warfighting imperative. Visibility of equipment, munitions, and material at the tactical edge directly impacts how we posture and sustain our forces. All of these combined strengthen our ability to execute the mission, demonstrate responsible stewardship to Congress and the American taxpayer, and reinforce the trust placed in the Navy to deliver results with discipline and integrity. Learning from the Marine Corps' success and building on this has helped my audit experiences at Fleet Forces Command. I clearly see a path forward working closely with the Secretary of the Navy, if confirmed.

**175. What steps has the Navy taken to evaluate unit readiness and commander performance based on audit results?**

As the Navy advances toward achieving a clean audit opinion, from what I have seen at Fleet Forces Command, we are actively standardizing business processes and modernizing systems across the enterprise (e.g., ERP). This standardization enhances our visibility into equipment, supplies, and financial data—directly supporting improved warfighter readiness and operational decision-making. In fact, audit remediation has already improved inventory accuracy at key ordnance and supply sites, allowing more precise demand forecasting and reducing readiness-degrading stockouts.

We are also developing and implementing performance metrics and governance frameworks that tie audit outcomes to unit and leadership accountability. These efforts allow us to assess readiness not only through operational measures but also through the quality and integrity of financial and logistical data.

If confirmed, I will establish a clear tone at the top, underscoring that audit readiness is a fundamental leadership responsibility. I will reinforce the Secretary's expectation that Navy commanders be held accountable for audit results by embedding audit-related objectives into executive performance evaluations and incorporating audit performance as a consideration in military promotion board deliberations.

**Joint Officer Management**

**The NDAA for FY 2017 modified the Joint Qualified Officer (JQO) system established by the Goldwater-Nichols Act in two significant ways. First, it broadened the statutory definition of "joint matters" to expand the types of positions for which an officer can receive joint duty credit. Further, it reduced from three years to two the minimum tour length required for joint duty credit.**

**176. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of the FY 2017 modifications to the JQO system?**

Overall, I assess this was a positive change. The Goldwater-Nichols Act modifications of 2017 have allowed the Navy to balance career timing and an officer's primary warfare specialty when assessing JQOs proportional time in a joint tour to the overall career prior to Flag selection. The overall types of positions which were expanded are not all encompassing as the variance of experience vastly depends on the type of joint duty the specific service member lands in following Flag selection.

**177. In your view, are the requirements associated with becoming a JQO, and the link between attaining joint qualification and eligibility for promotion to flag officer rank, consistent with the operational and professional demands of Navy line officers?**

Yes, professional demands are routinely balanced by detailers and the service members themselves as joint training and the associated requirements to become a JQO are spread over an officer's career through touch points where professional demands, the needs of the Navy, and the development goals of the officer allow.

**178. In your view, what additional modifications, if any, to JQO prerequisites are necessary to ensure that Navy officers are able to attain both meaningful joint and Navy-specific leadership experience and adequate professional development?**

I believe JQO prerequisites are currently aligned appropriately and managed to allow specific experience. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of the Navy to weigh any need for changes and make recommendations.

### **Professional Military Education**

**The 2022 NDS asserts that Professional Military Education (PME) should be refocused to foster critical thinking and analytical skills, fluency in critical languages, and integration of insights from the social and behavioral sciences.**

**179. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to enhance the Navy's PME system to ensure that it fosters the skills highlighted in the NDS to develop a cadre of strategic thinkers and planners with both the intellectual and military leadership acumen to merit promotion to flag officer?**

If confirmed, and in full alignment with the Navy's Education Strategy, I will continue to support the continuous intellectual development and lifelong learner goals of our Sailors to further our warfighting advantage. Learning and Development opportunities will be provided to our Sailors continuously over their careers to develop strategically-minded Sailors who can think critically, assume increasing responsibility, and out-think our adversaries to defend the Nation and our global interests. The inclusion of these key skills in our officer and enlisted development pipelines will ensure, aligned with Talent Management and advancement policies, that we will develop the skills supporting the intellectual and military leadership acumen to merit promotion at every level, including Flag Officer.

**180. In your view, are there opportunities in Navy PME to improve STEM cognizance and cyber fluency across the joint force to ensure that leaders understand and can effectively employ technologies to fight and win our nation's wars?**

The Navy has identified STEM, inclusive of cyber, as a key competency that every leader requires at a baseline level knowledge and skill. By identifying these areas as a key competency, we are able to provide opportunities to grow our leaders over their career. Our approach to development will evolve to take advantage of modern modalities of learning including hybrid and distributed learning models. Modular, technology-supported education delivery methods enable more tailored learning, enhanced assessment, increased collaboration, and can be quickly updated for relevancy. DON will provide the total force with scalable, world class, easily accessible, and cost-effective education.

**181. In your view, is there a role for Navy PME in developing basic product management skills across the joint force to ensure that military leaders are proficient in the employment of software and automation in warfighting?**

Yes. There is a role for Navy PME in developing basic product management skills across the joint force. All leaders will need basic awareness, which will also be a part of PME-related development curriculums, of how to leverage automation in warfighting, and understand how software and hardware come together to achieve our mission requirements. Leaders must be able to leverage the promise of technology and understand how advances in technology can support warfighting readiness and lethality. This must include an understating of AI/ML algorithmic approaches, Large Language Models, Data Science and Standards, and Decision-Making Aids.

### **Congressional Oversight**

**In order to exercise legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress receive timely testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information from the executive branch.**

**182. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to appear and testify before this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes

**183. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and when asked before this committee, its subcommittees, or other appropriate committees of Congress to give your personal views, even if those views differ from the position of the Administration? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes



**184. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to provide this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs such witnesses and briefers, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information, as may be requested of you, and to do so in a timely manner? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes

**185. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to consult with this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs, regarding your basis for any delay or denial in providing testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information requested of you? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes

**186. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to keep this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs apprised of new information that materially impacts the accuracy of testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information you or your organization previously provided? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes

**187. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to provide this committee and its subcommittees with records and other information within their oversight jurisdiction, even absent a formal Committee request? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes

**188. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to respond timely to letters to, and/or inquiries and other requests of you or your organization from individual Senators who are members of this committee? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes

**189. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to ensure that you and other members of your organization protect from retaliation any military member, federal employee, or contractor employee who testifies before, or communicates with this committee, its subcommittees, and any other appropriate committee of Congress? Please answer yes or no.**

Yes