

Pete Hegseth

**Opening Statement, Secretary of Defense Nomination Hearing
Senate Armed Services Committee, January 14, 2025**

Thank you Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and all members of this Committee for the opportunity today. I am grateful for, and learned a great deal from, this “advise and consent” process. Should I be confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee—Senators from both parties—to secure our nation.

I want to thank the former Senator from Minnesota, Norm Coleman, for his mentorship and friendship in this process. And the incoming National Security Advisor, Congressman—and more importantly—Colonel Mike Waltz, for his powerful words. I am grateful for you both.

Thank you to my incredible wife Jennifer, who has changed my life and been with me throughout this entire process. I love you sweetheart, and I thank God for you. And as Jenny and I pray together each morning, all glory—regardless of the outcome—belongs to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His grace and mercy abound each day. May His will be done.

Thank you to my father Brian and mother Penny, as well as my entire family—including our seven wonderful kids: Gunner, Jackson, Peter Boone, Kenzie, Luke, Rex & Gwendolyn. Their future safety and security is in all our hands.

And to all the troops and veterans watching, and in this room—Navy SEALs, Green Berets, Pilots, Sailors, Marines, Gold Stars and more. Too many friends to name. Officers and Enlisted. Black and White. Young and Old. Men and Women. All Americans. All warriors. This hearing is for you. Thank you for figuratively, and literally, having my back. I pledge to do the same for you. *All of you.*

It is an honor to come before this Committee as President Donald Trump’s nominee for the office of Secretary of Defense. Two months ago, 77 million Americans gave President Trump a powerful mandate for change. To put America First—at home and abroad. I want to thank President Trump for his faith in me, and his selfless leadership of our great Republic. The troops could have no better Commander-in-Chief than Donald Trump.

As I’ve said to many of you in our private meetings, when President Trump chose me for this position, the primary charge he gave me was—to bring the warrior culture back to the Department of Defense. He, like me, wants a Pentagon *laser focused* on warfighting, lethality, meritocracy, standards, and readiness. That’s it. That is my job.

To that end, if confirmed, I’m going to work with President Trump—and this committee—to:

1. **Restore the Warrior Ethos** to the Pentagon and throughout our fighting force; in doing so, we will reestablish trust in our military—and address the recruiting, retention and readiness crisis in our ranks. The strength of our military is our unity—our shared purpose—not our differences.
2. **Rebuild our Military**, always matching threats to capabilities; this includes reviving our defense industrial base, reforming the acquisition process (no more “Valley of Death” for new defense companies), modernizing our nuclear triad, ensuring the Pentagon can pass an audit, and rapidly fielding emerging technologies.
3. **Re-establish Deterrence**. First and foremost, we will defend our homeland—our borders and our skies. Second, we will work with our *partners and allies* to deter aggression in the Indo-Pacific from the communist Chinese. Finally, we will responsibly end wars to ensure we can prioritize our resources—and reorient to larger threats. We can no longer count on “reputational deterrence”—we need real deterrence.

The Defense Department under Donald Trump will achieve Peace Through Strength. And in pursuing these America First national security goals, we will remain patriotically a-political and stridently Constitutional. Unlike the current administration, *politics should play no part in military matters*. We are not Republicans or Democrats—we are American warriors. Our standards will be high, and they will be equal (not equitable, that is a very different word).

We need to make sure every warrior is fully qualified on their assigned weapon system, every pilot is fully qualified and current on the aircraft they are flying, and every general or flag officer is selected for leadership based purely on performance, readiness, and merit.

Leaders—at all levels—will be held accountable. And warfighting and lethality—and the readiness of the troops *and their families*—will be our only focus.

That has been my focus ever since I first put on the uniform as a young Army ROTC cadet at Princeton University in 2001. I joined the military because I love my country and felt an obligation to defend it. I served with incredible Americans in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, Afghanistan and in the streets of Washington, DC—many of which are here today. This includes enlisted soldiers I helped become American citizens, and Muslim allies I helped immigrate from Iraq and Afghanistan. And when I took off the uniform, my mission never stopped.

It is true that I don't have a similar biography to Defense Secretaries of the last 30 years. But, as President Trump also told me, we've repeatedly placed people atop the Pentagon with supposedly “the right credentials”—whether they are retired generals, academics, or defense contractor executives—and where has it gotten us? He believes, and I humbly agree, that it's time to give someone with dust on his boots the helm. A change agent. Someone with no vested interest in certain companies or specific programs or approved narratives.

My only special interest is—the warfighter. Deterring wars, and if called upon, winning wars—by ensuring our warriors never enter a fair fight. We let them win and then bring them home. Like many of my generation, I’ve been there. I’ve led troops in combat...been on patrol for days...pulled a trigger downrange...heard bullets whiz by...flex-cuffed insurgents...called in close air support...led medevacs...dodged IEDs...pulled out dead bodies...and knelt before a battlefield cross...*this is not academic for me*; this is my life. I led then, and I will lead now.

Ask anyone who has ever worked with me—or for me. *I know what I don’t know*. My success as a leader...and I very much look forward to discussing our many successes at my previous organizations, Vets for Freedom and Concerned Veterans for America. I’m incredibly proud of the work we did. My success as a leader...has always been setting a clear vision, hiring people smarter and more capable than me, empowering them to succeed, holding everyone accountable, and driving toward clear metrics. Build the plan. Work the plan. And then work harder than everyone around you.

The President has given me a clear vision, and I will execute. I’ve sworn an oath to the Constitution before, and—if confirmed—will proudly do it again. This time, for the most important deployment of my life.

I pledge to be a faithful partner to this committee. Taking input and respecting oversight. We share the same goals: a ready, lethal military; the health and wellbeing of our troops; and a strong and secure America.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.