

**Senate Armed Services Committee**  
**Advance Policy Questions for Mr. Benjamin Kohlmann**  
**Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs**

**Duties and Qualifications**

**1. What is your understanding of the duties and functions of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs?**

The ASN (M&RA) is responsible for the overall supervision and oversight of manpower and reserve component affairs of the Department of the Navy (DON), including the development of programs and policy related to military personnel (active, reserve, and ready reserve), their family members, and the civilian workforce; the tracking of the contractor workforce; and the oversight of human resources systems in the DON.

**2. What background and experience do you have that qualify you for this position?**

I've spent my career working at the intersection of national security, innovation, and talent management. After commissioning via Navy Reserve Officers Training Corps, I flew F/A-18s in combat with a Navy squadron and as a flight instructor with the Marine Corps. I stood up and led the Chief of Naval Operations Rapid Innovation Cell as a junior officer, working closely with DON civilians and senior officers. I also worked as an aide and speechwriter to the four-star admiral at U.S. Fleet Forces Command, seeing firsthand the challenges of manning in maintenance depots and aboard ships. As a Reserve officer, I helped stand up the Defense Innovation Unit (Experimental) and aided the lead officer of NavalX in developing his strategy, experiencing the opportunities and challenges that reserve service offers. My combined 20 years of active duty and reserve service provided deep insight into personnel policy across the Department of the Navy. In the private sector, I've dedicated my career to national security topics. Most recently, I invested early-stage capital and supported numerous defense technology, manufacturing, and workforce startups, experiencing how critical recruitment and talent management are for achieving exceptional outcomes.

**3. If confirmed, how would you adhere to and further the fundamental principle of civilian control of the armed forces?**

Civilian control of the military is a bedrock principle of American democracy and enshrined in our Constitution. If confirmed, I will work closely with Congress, the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. I will lead by example and steadfastly fulfill my Constitutional and statutory responsibilities within the ASN(MR&A) portfolio.

**Conflicts of Interest**

**Federal ethics laws, to include 18 U.S.C. §208, prohibit government employees from**

**participating in matters where they, or certain family members or organizations with which they have certain relationships, have a financial interest.**

- 4. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to disclose any potential conflicts of interest, including investments, business ties, family relationships, or other connections that could be perceived as influencing your decision making?**

I agree to comply with all conflicts of interest disclosure requirements set forth in the Ethics in Government Act and implementing regulations.

- 5. Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, that if a conflict of interest arises, you will recuse yourself from participating in any decisions regarding that specific matter?**

I agree to comply with all recusal requirements under 18 U.S.C. § 208 and implementing regulations.

- 6. Do you commit, without qualification, if confirmed, to decide matters on the merits, and exclusively in the public interest, without regard to private gain or personal benefit?**

I commit to deciding matters on the merits based on the public interest, without regard to any private gain or personal benefit.

### **Major Challenges and Priorities**

- 7. In your view, what are the major challenges confronting the ASN(M&RA), and how would you address them, if confirmed?**

Secretary Hegseth has challenged the Department to revive the warrior ethos, and if confirmed, I will work closely with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to recruit and retain the very best talent by maintaining high standards, upholding merit-based principles, and supporting our Sailors, Marines, and their families. One of the major challenges facing the ASN (M&RA) is aligning talent, both active duty and the civilian workforce, with evolving mission needs amid budget constraints and complex hiring processes. Delays in funding, competition with the private sector, and bureaucratic barriers hinder timely recruitment and retention, especially to emerging fields like cyber and artificial intelligence and to our defense industrial base. To address these challenges, I would focus on streamlining hiring, training personnel in new skills, using data to drive workforce planning, and expanding flexible authorities and partnerships to build a ready and resilient Navy and Marine Corps capable of defeating any adversary.

### **Personnel Policy Implementation**

- 8. If confirmed, what Department of the Navy personnel policies and processes would you implement to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of human**

**resources management—both military and civilian—across the Department of the Navy?**

If confirmed, I plan to implement a comprehensive review of personnel policies within the Navy and Marine Corps, in collaboration with key stakeholders, both military and civilian, to identify and address any issues that hinder organizational effectiveness or create barriers for personnel. I will ensure there is a commitment to evidence-based decision-making and a focus on improving the overall performance and well-being of the military and civilian workforce. I will promote efficient, modern approaches to personnel management policy. I will ensure the Department's military personnel policies align with guidance from the President, Secretary of Defense's, and Secretary of the Navy, and that the DON implements civilian hiring reforms directed by the President, including the Merit Hiring Plan recently issued by the Office of Personnel Management, to improve efficiencies.

**9. What is your understanding of your responsibility, if confirmed, to inform and consult with this Committee and other appropriate committees of Congress, on the implementation of Department of the Navy personnel policies directed by law?**

If confirmed, I am committed to maintaining open communication with Congress. I will keep the Senate informed of DON personnel matters and foster regular dialogue with Senate members and Armed Services Committee staff to ensure compliance with all personnel policies directed by law.

**10. If confirmed, what specific steps would you take to ensure consultation with the Committee on significant changes to Department of the Navy personnel policies, including when the changes are not directed by law?**

If confirmed, I am committed to promote open and frequent dialog with Senate members and Armed Services Committee staff.

**11. What is your understanding of the time period within which the Department must implement personnel policies directed by law?**

Legislation generally becomes effective on the date that the President signs it, unless the legislation prescribes a different effective date. Legislation also may call for the promulgation of regulations within a specified period. If confirmed, I will adhere to these principles.

**Non-Deployable Service Members**

**12. In your view, should sailors and marines who are non-deployable for more than 12 consecutive months be subject either to separation from the service or referral to the Disability Evaluation System, as is current Department of Defense policy?**

The expeditionary nature of the Navy and Marine Corps is such that non-deployable service members contribute to manning gaps in deployed environments and place extra constraints on our ability to maintain readiness. That said, we have a diverse set of occupations and assignments where non-deployable personnel with extensive skills and experience can be of great value to the services. In those cases, we should decide whether the service member's retention is in the best interest of the service and consistent with Department of Defense and DON policy. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to better understand the decision-making process behind retaining non-deployable Sailors and Marines, and ensure the DON is focused above all on maintaining a high-quality, ready force.

**13. Under what circumstances would the retention of a sailor or marine who has been non-deployable for more than 12 months be in the best interest of the Department of the Navy?**

I understand non-deployable service members can be retained when in the best interest of the service. In those cases, we must weigh their unique skills, experience, and occupational demands against their inability to deploy. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to better understand the decision-making process behind retaining non-deployable Sailors and Marines to ensure we are focused on maintaining a high-quality, ready force.

**14. What are your ideas for addressing the challenges of medical non-deployability in the Department of the Navy's reserve components?**

Medical readiness is paramount to the Reserve Component requirement to provide strategic depth to the Navy and Marine Corps. The Navy and Marine Corps Reserve must always be ready. I am not aware of the specifics of non-deployable concerns within the Reserve Component, but if confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to understand, assess, and address these challenges.

**Sexual Assault Prevention and Response**

**15. In your view, how adequate and effective are the Department of the Navy policies, programs, and training in regard to the prevention of and response to sexual assault in the Navy and Marine Corps?**

Sexual assault and other harmful behaviors are a serious breach of trust that harm mission readiness and must not be tolerated. The Navy and Marine Corps continue to make progress on implementing critical reforms and expanding efforts to foster healthy and positive work environments. I will remain committed to eradicating these behaviors and ensuring access to comprehensive care for those who seek help. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize integrated prevention, survivor support, commander accountability, and leadership engagement.

**Sexual Harassment**

**16. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of the military sexual harassment**

## **programs of the Department of the Navy?**

Sexual harassment undermines trust and readiness across the force. While the Department of the Navy has made important progress, its leaders must continue their focus to ensure DON sexual harassment programs are effective. If confirmed, I will build on this data-driven foundation to advance evidence-based prevention strategies that reduce reporting barriers for individuals and that strengthen respect, trust, and leader accountability at every level.

### **Suicide Prevention**

**In 2023, the Department of Defense released the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) report which included recommendations to the Department to improve quality of life, aid in building healthy climates and cultures, and better address stigma as a barrier to help-seeking, amongst other things.**

#### **17. If confirmed, what efforts, if any, from the SPRIRC report implementation will you continue to prioritize?**

If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize ongoing implementation efforts, which include revising suicide prevention training, fostering supportive environments, addressing stigma and other barriers to care, improving the delivery of mental health care, and promoting a culture of lethal-means safety. It is my understanding that the DON works closely with the Defense Suicide Prevention Office and the services to ensure the DON implements all recommendations from this report thoroughly, accurately, and aligned with the original intent. I am committed to building on the past progress and accelerating implementation where it matters most.

#### **18. If confirmed, what additional efforts would you undertake to strengthen the Department of the Navy's suicide prevention programs to reduce the number of suicides among service members, including in the reserve components, and their families?**

If confirmed, I will support evidence-based suicide prevention efforts, expand upstream interventions, and ensure leaders have the training and resources to recognize and respond to risk across Active and Reserve Component service members and their families. The DON must continue its investment in ensuring access to mental health services, improving access to care, equipping leaders with the tools necessary to reduce stigma, and cultivating healthy command climates that view seeking help as a sign of strength. My focus will be on fostering a culture of resilience, connection, and trust through innovation and community engagement.

### **United States Naval Academy**

#### **19. What is your assessment of the efficacy of the policies and processes in place at USNA to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment?**

Even one incident of sexual assault or harassment is too many. If confirmed, I will prioritize regular review of current data trends, seek adequate resourcing for prevention programs, and

work directly with USNA leaders to strengthen our response. USNA has made meaningful progress, but sexual assault prevention remains a top priority requiring continuous leadership attention. Current programs include mandatory prevention training, bystander intervention education, and multiple confidential reporting options. I will continue the commitment to implementing key reforms, including enhanced leader accountability measures and improved support services for survivors.

**20. What is your assessment of the efficacy of suicide prevention programs at USNA?**

If confirmed, I will support the ongoing USNA efforts that equip leaders and peers with the tools to foster resilience, recognize risk, and connect midshipmen with appropriate support resources. In addition to addressing risk factors like inadequate sleep, poor nutrition, alcohol abuse, lethal-means safety, and access to high-quality physical and mental health care, the Naval Academy provides training in stress management, conflict resolution, healthy relationships, and peer crisis intervention to build healthy, resilient teams. I will continue to prioritize evidence-based suicide prevention strategies that support warfighter readiness.

**Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (SROTC)**

**21. In your view, to what extent is the Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (SROTC) program still a viable source of officer accessions for the Navy and Marine Corps?**

As a graduate of Navy ROTC, I believe it remains a viable and important source of commissioned officers for the Navy and Marine Corps, particularly enlisted-to-officer programs and occupations demanding technical skills and STEM education. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps to better understand the volume and quality of accessions across the officer programs and identify opportunities for program improvement to ensure NROTC remains a valuable accession source in the future.

**22. In your view, should the Navy and Marine Corps continue to operate SROTC units at colleges and universities that fail to meet their minimum annual commissioning requirements? If not, please explain the factors you believe should be used to determine which units should be terminated.**

NROTC units should provide an appropriate return on the Department's investment. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps to ensure we have a fair but rigorous process to assess the viability and effectiveness of all NROTC units.

**23. To what extent would you seek to modify the SROTC program to enhance geographic diversity in Navy and Marine Corps officer accessions?**

I believe the primary focus for SROTC should be the production of leaders and warfighters in the quantity and quality required by the services. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine

Corps to ensure that there is adequate availability of rigorous SROTC opportunities across the country to meet that demand.

### **Military Compensation**

**24. Do you agree that the primary purpose of a competitive military pay and benefits package is to recruit and retain a military of sufficient size and quality to meet national defense objectives?**

Yes, I agree that the primary objective of competitive pay and benefits is to recruit and retain a talented workforce of the right size, quality, and skills. Competitive pay requires financial recognition of the increased demands that we place on our Sailors and Marines, such as deployments and the risks of serving in the Armed Forces. Without competitive pay that recognizes the unique aspects of military life and the market value of advanced skills, it would not be possible to sustain the modern All Volunteer Force.

**25. The 14<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, released in January 2025, concluded that the current military compensation package is strongly competitive with the civilian labor market. What is your assessment of the current military pay package and its adequacy in recruiting and retaining servicemembers?**

I agree with the assessment of the Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) that DoD's core compensation package is strongly competitive with the civilian labor market, when comparing the average Sailor or Marine with their average civilian counterpart. Continued strong retention and improved recruiting provide clear evidence of that competitive compensation. However, persistent recruiting and retention challenges for particularly in-demand marketable skills indicate that our compensation packages for those skills may not be as competitive. As a former fighter pilot, I know that our service members may have other lucrative options in the private sector, such as flying for the airlines. If confirmed, I plan to work closely with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to ensure we are adequately compensating our Sailors and Marines.

**26. What specific recommendations do you have for balancing rising military personnel expenditures with other defense spending priorities, such as procurement and modernization?**

There are several approaches I would recommend to get the most value out of our military personnel expenditures. First, consistent with the conclusions of the Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, we need to make better use of targeted compensation. Broad-based servicemember pay raises above those in the civilian labor market do little to improve recruiting and retention where we have key shortfalls. Instead, targeted use of special and incentive pays would more effectively help recruit and retain personnel with key skills and would leave more of the Department's budget available for other priorities. Additionally, any time we use military personnel to perform work that does not include the hardships and dangers of military service, for which we pay a premium, we should reevaluate who does that work, to maximize the value of our personnel expenditures.

**27. How can the Department of the Navy utilize targeted bonuses and incentives to reward and retain personnel in critical skill areas?**

If confirmed, I will work to ensure that bonuses and incentives are used to improve recruiting and retention in undermanned skills where regular military compensation alone is inadequate. Skill-based incentives are a critical tool to ensure competitive compensation and to retain personnel in occupations that are highly compensated in the civilian labor market, such as pilots, nuclear power plant operators, cyber professionals, and medical personnel. I will also ensure that bonuses and incentives are targeted to critical skill areas, supported by robust analysis, and not paid simply because the Department has historically provided them.

**Professional Military Education**

**28. If confirmed, what actions would you take to improve the quality of education at Naval War College and Marine Corps Command and Staff College?**

If confirmed, I will ensure the Department's education programs, including the Naval War College and Marine Corps University's Command and Staff College, continue to provide programs designed for warfighting advantage. These education programs enable our service members to out-think adversaries by producing innovative leaders educated to address complex challenges across multi-domain environments. My focus would be on ensuring these colleges continue to develop the knowledge and cognitive skills service members need to succeed in those environments. These institutions will remain the foundation for developing the warfighters our nation requires.

**29. What actions would you take to enhance the perception of Navy and Marine Corps officers about the quality and value of the Naval War College and Marine Corps Command and Staff College?**

If confirmed, I will call for a DON review of curricula to ensure that they provide operationally relevant education, and that education is further integrated into talent management processes so that officers clearly understand the connections between their education experiences, career progression, and warfighting. I also will ensure the DON delivers the right education at the right time in the service members' career progression, using the most effective methods to maximize value. This will enhance officers' view of these institutions as vital investments in developing the strategic thinking and leadership capabilities needed for a strong, agile, and lethal force.

**End Strength**

**30. Are the Navy and Marine Corps current end strengths sufficient to meet current national security objectives and execute the associated operational plans? If not, what end strengths do you believe are necessary? Please explain your answer.**

I am not aware of the current operational plans of the Navy and Marine Corps, and the estimations of end strength necessary to support those plans. I am aware that, consistent with the



Department's budget request for Fiscal Year 2026, Congress is considering an increase in end strength of approximately 12,000 for the Navy while the Marine Corps end strength would remain the same. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to advise the Secretary of the Navy on the appropriate end strength to fulfill our national security objectives as the Department prepares its annual budget request.

### **Recruiting and Retention**

**The 2024 National Defense Strategy Commission stated that "The DoD workforce and the all-volunteer force provide an unmatched advantage. However, recruiting failures have shrunk the force and raise serious questions about the all-volunteer force in peacetime, let alone in major combat." In addition, DOD studies indicate that only about 23% 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.**

**31. In your view, what are the main reasons that less than a quarter of 17 to 24-year-olds are eligible for military service, and how would you propose increasing the size of that pool without degrading the quality of recruits?**

It is my understanding that the decreased number of young Americans eligible for military service is driven by medical history, including decreased fitness, and increased conduct issues, such as illegal drug use. I understand the Department is pursuing innovative initiatives to help recruits succeed, such as the Future Sailor Prep Course. If young Americans are willing to raise their hand and serve, the Department should give them due consideration to determine whether they meet the standards and values. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to ensure we meet our recruiting needs while preserving high standards.

**32. 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?**

Rigorous standards ensure that the Navy and Marine Corps remain the world's premier naval force, and effectively support our national security objectives. I am confident that the dedicated cadre of Navy and Marine Corps recruiters, who push themselves every day, will continue to find capable young Americans willing and able to meet those high standards and serve. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps leaders to maintain positive momentum for both recruiting and retention.

**33. Similarly, why do you believe that the propensity of youth to serve continues to drop and is at its lowest level (about 10 percent according to DOD data) in years?**

I believe American youth are less aware of the value of military service today than ever before, with fewer family ties and a smaller geographic footprint. This limits the opportunity for young people to see and understand the military way of life and benefits of service, resulting in misperceptions and false narratives. If confirmed, I will support Department efforts to explore

ways to increase the public's awareness of the values of military service across all ages.

**34. What impact do current medical and other qualifications for enlistment in the Navy and Marine Corps have on the number of individuals eligible for military service? If confirmed, what changes to such qualifications, if any, would you recommend to increase the number of individuals eligible for service without degrading the quality of recruits?**

Our medical standards ensure the Navy and Marine Corps remain a ready and deployable force. However, fewer and fewer young Americans are medically eligible for military service. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to determine if and where it might be appropriate to recommend changes to policy or the risk assumed by granting medical waivers, to expand eligibility while maintaining the services' high standards.

**35. In your view, should existing medical and other qualification standards be reconsidered to accommodate youth willing to enlist for service in certain high-demand specialties, such as remotely piloted aircraft pilots or the cyber workforce?**

I understand the Navy and Marine Corps already consider an applicant's ability to perform in his or her designated occupation when considering their medical history and that both services continuously evaluate the appropriate factors that determine medical readiness and eligibility. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to understand the impact of current medical standards and determine if and where it might be appropriate to recommend changes.

**36. 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 and Marine Corps recruiting?**

The Navy provided me with tremendous opportunities for personal and professional growth. The services are already seeing a boost in recruiting due to President Trump's and Secretary Hegseth's renewed focus on warfighting, readiness, and lethality. I believe the Department also needs to reinvigorate a national conversation about the value of military service to increase public awareness. If more young Americans understand what military service can offer and see themselves in a military career, then that will expand the population who are interested and able to meet our existing standards.

**37. 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 sailors and Marines?**

The operational requirements of the Navy and Marine Corps are unique compared to the other military services. Our Sailors and Marines are expected to deploy regularly, which poses certain hardships to their personal well-being and their families. We must be vigilant in supporting both service members and their families. Our Sailors and Marines need to know that when they

deploy away from home for months, their families will have the support they need in quality housing, childcare, education, and other support services. We must also support their mental and physical well-being so they remain ready and resilient. If confirmed, I will collaborate with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to ensure the Department is doing everything possible to uphold our commitment to our Sailors, Marines, and their families.

**38. Several services have reported record high retention rates to Congress in the last year. While retention has helped to offset recruiting challenges in recent years, how will you ensure retention efforts are not only meeting end strength goals, but also ensuring retained personnel possess the right skills, experience, and readiness to meet future operational demands?**

Secretary Hegseth has directed that the Department of Defense will be guided by merit-based principles. A service member's performance, skills, experience, and potential to excel in higher positions of responsibility should be the guiding factors when making retention decisions. If confirmed, I will work with Navy and Marine Corps leaders to ensure that continues to be the case.

#### **Department of the Navy Reserve Components**

**Historically, the reserve components have been positioned as a strategic reserve to be used in the event of significant armed conflict involving the United States. In the post-9/11 era, reserve forces have been used more extensively to support both contingency operations and ongoing military requirements in a garrison environment. Today, in addition to being an operational reserve, members of the reserve component are used continuously as a part-time workforce for the Department of Defense to perform its ongoing training and readiness requirements.**

**39. In your view, should the reserve components serve as a part-time workforce, an operational reserve, a strategic reserve, or some combination of those?**

A Reserve Component that is engaged both operationally and strategically is necessary to support national security objectives. The division between operational and strategic reserve is a balance that requires increased attention to ensure operational requirements do not harm strategic depth. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps leadership to ensure the Department allocates resources to the Reserve Component to ensure mission success.

**40. In light of your answer, do the reserve components require increased levels of full-time support and oversight by the active component, including improved equipment, increased training, adequate compensation and reimbursement, effective career management, balanced Professional Military Education requirements, and higher levels of overall resourcing for readiness going forward?**

Additional support for equipment procurement and training will ensure the Reserve Component is trained and equipped with the modern equipment necessary for near peer competition, and to

seamlessly integrate with the Active Component. I believe the Reserve Component deserves adequate compensation and reimbursement that is commensurate with their commitment to service. That compensation should also include effective career management and balanced access to professional military education. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps leadership to assist them with accomplishing these goals, while ensuring effective resourcing and readiness.

**41. In your view, is the Department of the Navy executing existing authorities to improve permeability between the active and reserve components to the fullest extent?**

It is my broad understanding that the Department of the Navy has a variety of authorities available to improve permeability between the active and reserve components, such as Title 10 provisions, Total Force Management Policies, Direct Commissioning Programs, Selective Reserve Incentive Programs, Active Duty for Operational Support, Full-Time Support Program, Interservice Transfer Authority, Joint Professional Military Education (JPME), and Mobilization Authorities under Title 10 Sections 12301, 12302, and 12304. To determine if these authorities are being executed to their fullest extent would require an in-depth review of current practices, programs, and data. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps leaders to identify any areas where changes need to be made to improve the execution of authorities, identify any potential barriers or gaps in execution, and implement processes to ensure continuous improvement.

**42. In your view, are the current requirements for becoming a Joint Qualified Officer appropriate for reserve component officers? If not, how should they be revised to better meet the needs of reserve component officers?**

While Navy and Marine Corps Reserve officers have the opportunity to achieve Joint Qualified Officer (JQO) status, I currently lack the data necessary to definitively assess the appropriateness of the existing requirements for Reserve Component officers. If confirmed, I plan to work with the Navy and Marine Corps leaders to examine potential increased flexibility in joint experience, enhanced access to joint assignments, tailored JPME programs, recognition of civilian skills and experience, a review of the administrative process, and a pathway for reserve component officers to achieve JQO status that aligns with their circumstances, maintains the high standards of joint capability within the force, and meets needs of the services for maritime warfighting readiness.

**43. In your view, what legislative reforms, if any, should be made in order to facilitate easier transitions for members of all components between active and reserve status?**

Permeability between components for a smooth transition process has been and continues to be a focus area within the Navy and Marine Corps. At this time, I am not able to determine specific legislative reforms that would facilitate easier transitions. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy and Marine Corps leadership to identify any areas where legislative changes may assist the transition process for members of all components.

## **Military Quality of Life**

### **44. If confirmed, what qualify of life and morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) programs would you consider to be priorities?**

MWR programs are an essential component to the well-being and readiness of Sailors, Marines, and their families. If confirmed, I would work to 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 feedback and identify those that most contribute to the quality of life for our warfighters and their families. Furthermore, if confirmed, I will continue the Department's efforts to increase the capacity and availability of key programs such as childcare and on-base MWR services and facilities.

### **45. What metric would you apply in determining which MWR and quality of life programs should be sustained or enriched and which should be eliminated or reduced in scope as ineffective or outmoded?**

MWR programs are fundamental to maintaining force readiness, improving retention rates, and ensuring quality of life for both military families and single Sailors and Marines. If confirmed, I will focus on optimizing operational efficiency while preserving the essential readiness advantages that many Department of the Navy MWR initiatives provide. I would collaborate closely with service leaders to develop comprehensive evaluation criteria for these programs, ensuring we measure their effectiveness in supporting our families and mission objectives. I look forward to partnering with Congressional members to address these important matters and implementing sustainable approaches to maximize both fiscal responsibility and Service member well-being.

## **Military Family Readiness and Support**

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

Strong military families are the foundation of mission-ready forces. When we provide comprehensive support to families, our service members can concentrate fully on their duties, without distraction. The issues that affect Sailors and Marines and their families are access to healthcare, career opportunities for spouses, affordable housing, strong educational options for their children, and access to reliable, affordable, quality childcare. These core requirements—along with additional support mechanisms—are crucial for enabling our Sailors and Marines to undertake deployments with the added confidence of knowing their families have the resources and stability needed during separations. If confirmed, my commitment goes beyond merely sustaining families through challenges; I will also work to ensure an environment where Navy and Marine Corps families thrive as valued members of our military community.

### **47. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to ensure that military families are provided with accessible, high-quality childcare, at an appropriate**

**cost?**

I recognize that reliable, affordable, and accessible childcare is critical for supporting service member readiness, operational efficiency, and retention across the Navy and Marine Corps. If confirmed, I will prioritize expanding childcare availability through targeted initiatives to attract and retain qualified childcare professionals. We will also explore innovative collaboration with community partners and work to maintain affordable childcare fees for our military families. Additionally, I will examine opportunities to modernize our childcare infrastructure and explore flexible care options that accommodate the unique demands of military life, including irregular schedules and deployment cycles. My focus will be on improving our childcare system so that it meets current needs and can address evolving family requirements, while providing the highest standards of care and safety.

**48. If confirmed, how would you ensure that sailors and Marines with family members with special needs are assigned to duty stations where services are available to address those needs?**

Ensuring our service members with special needs family members are stationed where appropriate medical care and educational resources are accessible is a critical responsibility. These families require specialized support systems to enable our warfighting Sailors and Marines to serve effectively. If confirmed, I will conduct a comprehensive review of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) to evaluate its effectiveness in matching families with services and specialized care. This assessment will examine how well the program identifies family requirements, coordinates with providers, and ensures assignment processes account for access to essential support services. My goal is to ensure our assignment processes adequately account for the unique circumstances these families face and relieve members from facing the difficult choice between career progression and their family's critical care needs.

**49. If confirmed, how would you ensure outreach to those military families with special needs dependents so they are able to obtain the support they need?**

If confirmed, I will collaborate with Navy and Marine Corps leadership to conduct a review of our outreach strategies and communication methods to ensure families needing EFMP services are effectively identified and connected with resources. I will examine how the Department proactively informs families about available programs, streamline the process for accessing services, and ensure outreach methods reach families at all stages of their military journey—from initial assignment through transitions and deployments. I will also explore partnerships with family readiness groups, medical facilities, and community organizations to create increased opportunities where families can learn about and access the support they need. My plan is to develop an outreach framework that identifies families requiring special services and ensures they receive timely, accurate information about resources, while maintaining ongoing support throughout their military experience.

**50. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to improve military spouse employment?**

If confirmed, I will focus on identifying and removing obstacles that hinder career development, increasing awareness of available opportunities and resources, and building robust support networks that connect spouses with employers and career services. This approach includes fostering partnerships with employers who understand military life's unique demands and advocating for opportunities that support license portability across state lines. My goal would be creation of an environment within the Department of the Navy where military spouses have meaningful opportunities to advance professionally, contribute to their family's financial stability, and strengthen the communities where they serve.

### **Department of the Navy Civilian Workforce Matters**

**51. How would you describe the current state of the Navy and Marine Corps' civilian workforce, including workforce morale, as well as their ability to successfully recruit and retain top talent?**

In my experience, the civilian workforce and leadership of the Department of the Navy comprises individuals of exceptional talent and unwavering commitment, all driven by a profound sense of purpose in their service to the mission. To maintain future capabilities, the DON must prioritize its human capital, leveraging all available resources to cultivate and retain talent. The well-being of the DON's civilian personnel is critical to mission success, as are opportunities to meaningfully contribute. While I am not in a position to assess current morale, I recognize the potential impact of recent changes on the civilian workforce. I anticipate that the benefits to mission in reshaping the DON will inspire committed and talented employees to continue their service and lead others to join.

**52. What is your view of the effect on morale, and effectiveness of the Navy and Marine Corps' civilian workforce in light of the Administration's proposed reductions in the workforce?**

To increase efficiency and productivity while aligning with the Administration's call for workforce reductions, it will be my main goal that all reductions be accompanied by process improvements, technological upgrades, and the restructuring of inefficient or cumbersome workflows. This will require careful planning and investment. With these increased efficiencies, the workforce will be primed with new opportunities for upskilling and development, which should inspire hard-working employees who seek to advance.

**53. What will be the impact on the effectiveness and readiness of the Navy and Marine Corps civilian workforces if the Administration's proposed reductions are achieved through the use of voluntary incentives? What do you understand the costs of such incentives to be?**

The DON has various tools to promote voluntary reductions. These tools include the Voluntary Separation Incentive Program (VSIP), which allows the DON to offer a financial incentive for employees looking to voluntarily leave the federal workforce. VSIP allows agencies that are downsizing or restructuring to offer employees lump-sum payments up to \$25,000 as an incentive to voluntarily separate. The DON's science and technology research laboratories have

the authority to offer employees up to \$40,000 for VSIP payments. The goal of any proposed reduction is to increase the efficiency and productivity of our civilian workforce.

**54. In your judgment, what are the biggest challenges facing the Navy and Marine Corps in effectively and efficiently managing its civilian workforce?**

I see the DON's biggest ongoing challenges as advancing its mission, taking advantage of technological innovation, and preparing for the workplace of the future. If confirmed, I will collaborate with leadership to build a workforce that not only achieves the DON's goals but also establishes it as a top employer, attracting and retaining the best talent. My priority will be ensuring we maintain a global competitive edge against our adversaries.

**55. In your view, what are the benefits and detriments to the use of borrowed military manpower?**

Borrowed military manpower can provide essential expertise and flexibility in support of civilian or joint operations, but its use must be carefully balanced against the need to preserve warfighting readiness. Warfighting readiness is Priority One, and the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve forces must remain focused on their core mission of providing strategic depth and rapid response capabilities. While borrowed personnel can fill urgent needs, overreliance may strain operational units and detract from mission preparedness. The civilian workforce is structured to relieve service members of non-core duties, enabling Sailors and Marines to focus on combat readiness and maritime dominance. If confirmed, I will work across the Department of the Navy and the Department of Defense to ensure workforce strategies are aligned to support readiness, lethality, and efficient mission execution.

**Cyber and Science-Technical Workforce**

**56. In your view, how effective is the Cyber Excepted Service Workforce authority under section 1599f of title 10, United States Code, in helping the Department of the Navy meet its requirements for a highly qualified and competent cyber workforce? Do you have any recommendations for improvement for that authority?**

The Cyber Excepted Service (CES) workforce authority under section 1599f of Title 10, United States Code, is a critical tool for the DON to build and maintain a highly qualified and competent cyber workforce. CES provides the DON greater flexibility in hiring and compensating cyber professionals than traditional Title 5 Civil Service rules. This allows the DON to compete more effectively with the private sector for talent, particularly in highly specialized and competitive cyber fields. Additionally, the Navy uses CES personnel in our Cyber Mission Force teams. If confirmed, I will determine the right balance of active-duty and civilian manpower on our operational teams and look to better integrate civilians into our operational commands.

To enhance the effectiveness of the CES authority, I would recommend standardization and streamlined implementation of future conversions into the CES. Expansion of the CES authority would enable the DON to meet cyber mission requirements more effectively, but it should be



based on specific criteria for eligibility to enter the CES.

**57. In your view, what are the pros and cons of having active-duty military personnel—as opposed to civilian employees—trained and working as scientists, engineers, software coders, and in other technical positions across the Department of the Navy’s research, development, and acquisition enterprise?**

I believe the fleet requires a mixed active-duty and civilian workforce in the research, development, and acquisition enterprise. Active-duty personnel bring their warfighter experience to the research, development, or acquisition projects, but they may not have the same technical education and experience as a civilian or a contractor. If confirmed, I look forward to working across the Department to continue to develop an optimal balance of operational and technical expertise throughout all components of the workforce (military, federal civilian, and contractor).

**58. If confirmed, how would you ensure that the directors of defense labs under the purview of the Department of the Navy have the civilian workforce management tools they need to shape their science, technology, and engineering workforces?**

If confirmed, I am committed to strengthening the Naval laboratory enterprise by making it more agile and by fully leveraging our national strengths in science and engineering. Recognizing that Naval dominance depends on expertise spanning from the seabed to space, this enterprise covers groundbreaking research, disruptive prototypes, and critical technical support for industry and acquisition. I will actively support efforts to address workforce challenges, meet emerging technology needs, and modernize infrastructure, ensuring lab directors have the tools necessary to shape and sustain a world-class civilian science, technology, and engineering workforce.

**59. Do you have recommendations for how to better track the workforce with highly specialized technical skills, including cyber, acquisition, scientific and engineering degrees, to ensure that the Department of the Navy has sufficient people to assess whether it is able to compete with the private sector for talent?**

The Department of the Navy’s highly skilled civilian and military workforce plays a critical role in supporting warfighting readiness, particularly in technical fields like cybersecurity, engineering, data science, undersea capabilities, hypersonics, and other scientific areas essential to the Navy’s mission.

I understand that the DON has significantly advanced its ability to track specialized cyber workforce positions through precise identification, reporting, and interactive dashboards, and has introduced Navy Enlisted Classifications to better track the technical proficiency of Sailors in cyberspace operations. The DON attracts and retains world-class scientists and engineers by emphasizing its mission focus and sense of service. It is imperative to continue recruiting individuals with these critical skills while retaining the current technical workforce through opportunities for growth, competitive compensation, and world-class research facilities. If confirmed, I will review existing human capital strategies and collaborate with stakeholders to develop innovative approaches that strengthen the Department’s ability to recruit, track, and retain highly skilled technical personnel dedicated to advancing American greatness.

## **Senior Executive Service**

**60. Given that competent and caring leadership is one of the most significant factors in shaping a high-performing Department of the Navy civilian workforce, what factors and characteristics would be most important to you in selecting candidates for appointment to the Senior Executive Service?**

When selecting Senior Executive Service (SES) candidates for the Department of the Navy, I would prioritize individuals who demonstrably embody the updated Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs), with a particular emphasis on "Leading People" and "Achieving Results" through competent and caring leadership. This means seeking candidates who inspire and empower their teams, fostering a culture of respect and professional development. They must also demonstrate a proven track record of achieving measurable outcomes while upholding the principles of merit, competence, and the rule of law. Furthermore, I would assess their ability to "Drive efficiency" by optimizing processes and resources to maximize the Department's effectiveness. Ultimately, the ideal candidate would be a strategic leader who ensures mission accomplishment while promoting the well-being and growth of their workforce, ensuring a high-performing civilian component committed to the American system of government.

**61. If confirmed, how would you ensure that SES under your authority are held accountable for both organizational performance and the rigorous performance management of their subordinate employees?**

If confirmed, I will hold DON SES members accountable for organizational performance and rigorous performance management by building on the high standards and expectations already in place. Recognizing these dedicated leaders' commitment to public service and the demanding requirements they already meet, I will focus on providing ongoing opportunities to enhance their leadership. This will empower them to achieve exceptional results and cultivate a culture of accountability and excellence—an environment where employees are empowered to thrive, innovate, and contribute to mission success.

**62. Are you satisfied with the subject matter and rigor of SES professional development programs currently available? If not, what changes would you make to these programs, if confirmed?**

As a candidate for a Senate-confirmed position, I recognize the vital importance of robust and effective professional development for the SES. While I have not had the opportunity to fully assess the current landscape of SES professional development programs, I understand the concerns that have been raised about these programs' subject matter and rigor. If confirmed, I commit to working with relevant agencies to conduct a thorough review of these programs, with an emphasis on evolving challenges such as leadership, innovation, data analytics, and cybersecurity. Furthermore, I would explore opportunities to incorporate more rigorous evaluation methods, enhanced executive coaching, and experiential learning opportunities, to better prepare SES leaders for the demands of their roles. My goal would be to cultivate a culture

of continuous learning and development within the SES, equipping our Senior Executives with the skills and knowledge to effectively lead and manage the federal workforce.

**63. What is the impact to the SES program, and the morale of the members of the SES service, of the shuttering of the Federal Executive Institute?**

The closure of the Federal Executive Institute represents a pivotal chance to modernize SES leadership training and enhance morale by re-investing in programs directly aligned with the new ECQs. This shift prioritizes "Leading People" through supportive environments, "Achieving Results" with data-driven strategies, and "Driving Efficiency" via streamlined processes, reinforcing a commitment to "Merit and Competence" and ensuring SES members receive relevant, cutting-edge training that prepares them to excel while upholding the rule of law and American founding principles. By seizing this fresh start, the SES can cultivate a more engaged, effective, and forward-thinking leadership corps dedicated to serving the needs of the modern federal workforce and the American people.

**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.**

**64. 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 with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**65. 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 with a simple yes or no.**

Yes

**66. 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 with a simple yes or no.**

**Yes**

- 67. 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 with a simple yes or no.**

**Yes**

- 68. 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 with a simple yes or no.**

**Yes**

- 69. 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 with a simple yes or no.**

**Yes**

- 70. 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 with a simple yes or no.**

**Yes**