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HEARING
ON
NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT
FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026
AND
OVERSIGHT OF PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED
PROGRAMS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION
—
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
ON
**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FISCAL YEAR
2026 BUDGET REQUEST**
—

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET REQUEST

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Thursday, June 12, 2025.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Mike Rogers [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE ROGERS, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM ALABAMA, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order. Without objection, the chair reserves the right to declare the committee in recess at any point.

Before we begin, I would like to remind those in the audience that this hearing is open to the public, but actions that disrupt or distract from the proceedings will not be tolerated. The chair reserves the right to remove disruptive persons from the hearing. U.S. Capitol Police are on hand to assist with that task, and I thank them for their service.

I want to welcome our witnesses and thank them for their service to our great nation. We are here today to hear from the Department of Defense about its fiscal year 2026 budget request. Unfortunately, we still have not received the fiscal year 2026 budget.

This historic delay by the Office of Management and Budget in releasing this information is absolutely unacceptable. It is impacting our ability to move forward with the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act], the next big step in enacting the President's peace through strength agenda.

That is a problem, because threats to our nation have never been more urgent or complex. Adversaries like China, Russia, North Korea, Iran continue to expand their military power. They are no longer acting alone. These countries are strategically building alliances and supporting each other with drones, munitions, satellite technology, and energy supplies. And we are seeing that acutely in Ukraine.

Make no mistake, a Russian victory in Ukraine would be a victory for China, North Korea, and Iran. We cannot let that happen. Russia must be stopped. Russia is not our friend.

While our adversaries collaborate on the development and deployment of innovative new capabilities, we are facing challenges. Our defense industrial base has atrophied significantly, making it harder for us to sustain prolonged conflicts. That is why now, more

than ever, it is critical that we make a significant investment in our national security.

This investment is at the heart of achieving the President's, President Trump's, peace through strength agenda. We look forward to steps toward enacting that agenda with our reconciliation legislation. Together with the President and our Senate colleagues, we have developed a historic investment of \$150 billion plus-up that will go a long way toward modernizing our military, rebuilding our industrial base, and restoring American deterrents.

While this is a great first step, it will have limited impact without sustained investment in the following years. To truly achieve the President's peace through strength agenda, we need to grow the defense spending to at least 4 percent of GDP [Gross Domestic Product]. But we need to be smart about how we invest these dollars.

That begins with identifying and cutting inefficient and unnecessary DOD [Department of Defense] spending. The Secretary has taken the lead on that, and we appreciate his work. But spending wisely also means fixing a broken acquisitions system that is needlessly driving up costs and delaying delivery of critical capabilities to our warfighters.

The current system is simply not meeting our needs or the warfighters'. It is not taking advantage of American's innovative private section, and it is not the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

The bipartisan SPEED Act that the ranking member and I introduced this week will fundamentally reform defense acquisition. It streamlines the process and significantly reduces the time it takes to fill new military capabilities. I know the Secretary is determined to fix the broken system, and I look forward to partnering with him to enact real, meaningful, game-changing reform.

I also look forward to understanding from the Secretary what the administration's plans are for a global force posture. Maintaining a forward presence of U.S. troops in strategic areas across the globe is essentially to ensuring peace through strength.

The current level of American forces stationed in Eastern Europe are a crucial bulwark against further Russian aggression and another devastating war in Europe. Our forces in South Korea protect our ally, but also serve as a critical strike force if North Korea attempts a launch on our homeland.

U.S. servicemembers in CENTCOM [United States Central Command] and AFRICOM [United States Africa Command] are fighting daily to defeat the terrorist threat against America and Israel while maintaining maximum pressure on Iran. And our forces in Japan, the Philippines, and throughout the Pacific are keeping China's hegemonic desires in check and preserving trade routes critical to our economy.

Together, this collaborative posture forms the backbone of American deterrence. Secretary Hegseth is right when he says America first does not mean American alone. I appreciate the time you recently spent in the Pacific and Europe reinforcing our alliances and partnerships, but also pressing our allies to increase their defense spending.

It is long past due for our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies and those around the globe to shoulder a greater share of the collective defense. But we must understand it will take some time for them to grow their capacity. In the interim, we should not make large scale posture changes that undermine our deterrents.

I look forward to working with the administration on building the ready, capable, and lethal fighting force we need to deter our adversaries. And with that I yield to my friend the ranking member for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that. And I will start with three substantial notes of agreement.

One, we do face an incredibly complex threat environment. We face Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, various other terrorist organizations working together against American interests in a way we have never seen before, with an economy like China's that we have never seen before. It is going to be very difficult to meet those challenges.

Second, innovation is incredibly important and crucial to that. The changes in warfare are happening at a more rapid pace than I think we have ever seen before. We have to innovate more quickly, and I appreciate your leadership on getting after acquisition reform.

Because what is absolutely true is the Pentagon is not ready for this right now. And certainly that predates this Secretary of Defense and this administration. It is a problem that we need to get after to do the acquisition reform so that we can get the materials that we need quickly, innovate more quickly. We have got a lot of good ideas on this committee, look forward to working with the administration on trying to get that done.

Second, the budget is a major problem. It is simply unacceptable that we are this late in the year and we do not have a budget. That is the basics of how you plan to do all of that. And this is but the culmination of a series of problems.

We had a CR [continuing resolution] for fiscal year 2025, largely at the insistence of President Trump. And then by the time we did pass a budget, it was just a CR. And now we are on a path again towards a CR in fiscal year 2026.

There is no budget transparency and no plan that we can see. And what we have seen happening at the Pentagon in the interim is also very disturbing and without explanation. There has been talk about 8 percent cuts across the board. Nobody on this committee knows what that means.

Some of it is happening. It has not been made transparent to us. Is it going to make us better? Is it part of a larger strategy? Nobody really knows.

We also heard the plan to cut 20 percent of the flag officers. Again, no strategy, no plan. This is why the budget is so important. The budget can inform all of this. Maybe that is a good idea, but

we have no idea because there is no transparency and no follow through.

Also, quite disturbingly, within Department of Defense and also across the Federal Government, the one and only criteria that is consistent is loyalty to Trump as opposed to loyalty to the law or loyalty to the Constitution. This started with one of the more shameful events in DOD history, and that is when we pulled security details from former members of the Pentagon who face security threats.

Why were those security details pulled? They weren't pulled because anything told us that they were safe. Chairman Milley is one great example. He was on the threat list because he carried out an order from President Trump, and rightfully so, to kill Soleimani in the Middle East.

He is now on Iran's hit list, and we pulled his security detail, leaving him and his family vulnerable. Why? Because he had the audacity to say something critical of President Trump.

I mean, that is just embarrassing. If you told me 10 years ago on this committee that something like that would have happened, I wouldn't have believed you. And now we have a dictate from the White House saying that all Federal employees will be tested for whether or not they are supportive of President Trump.

The New York Times had a great headline on that, saying why does an air traffic controller have to be a Trump supporter? Well, I would ask why does an acquisition professional have to be a Trump supporter. If you are focused on loyalty, you are not focused on competency, you are not focused on ability, and it is the wrong way to go.

Even within the budget, we see the influence of the President over the influence of common sense. We have all heard about the Golden Dome.

When I first heard about the Golden Dome, it was interesting because it reminded me of a joke I first told about 12 years ago when we were dealing with a large number of Pentagon programs that were more ambitious than practical, future combat systems, the expeditionary fighting vehicle.

You know, basically they had, well, this is what we want. And we had this joke that well, all I want is sharks with fricking laser beams attached to them. That became the Armed Services thing. Actually, I have a little plastic shark that my staff made for me with a laser beam attached to it.

Making the perfect the enemy of the good is a problem. And nobody on this committee knows what Golden Dome is. The other thing that is really important about this, contained within that is one of the most important national security threats that we face: missile defense and counter-drone. We have a lot of programs that people are working on in that direction.

What happens to those programs when you take \$25 billion towards a project that no one can explain and no one can understand? And again, we don't have a budget, so we are taking it on faith. That is deeply troubling.

Equally troubling is the Air Force One airplane that we got from Qatar. There is all kinds of ethics problems with that, which I will

leave aside for the moment. But that airplane is going to have to be fitted to be Air Force One.

It is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Again, no transparency. We are not told what that is going to cost and where it is going to go. But because President Trump wanted it, he gets it, hundreds of millions of dollars goes out the window. We don't have the capacity to sort of say, sorry, sir, that is not a good idea.

And the last one on this list is one that frankly I had a hard time believing when I first heard it. Apparently the President has decided that the F-35 would be a better plane if it had two engines.

And to a certain degree, it is hard to argue with. I guess two engines is better than one, except that you can't just add a second engine to the F-35. This is a program that has taken us over 25 years, and we are, knock on wood, finally to the point where we are going to have the plane.

Now, I would have thought this would have been dismissed, but I hear defense contractors, Pentagon, they are looking at this idea. It is okay to tell the boss that he is wrong. We all have dumb ideas. It is good to have people around us who have the capability and the competency to say no, we are not going to do that. We are walking down the wrong direction.

In terms of the global strategy, I substantially agree with the chairman, except that I fear that, you know, America first does mean America alone. We have seen that in a number of different issues. Certainly, placing tariffs on absolutely every country in the world, irrespective of our relationships—well, sorry, except for Russia, didn't place tariffs on Russia—that alienates people.

Cutting off foreign aid programs, which I realize is not the purview of the Department of Defense, but I will remind you of something that Secretary Gates said before this committee. You know, if you are going to cut off the State Department, you better give me more ammunition. The two things are related.

We stopped programs that were feeding hungry children in Africa. Literally took food out of the mouths of hungry children. Why? Apparently because there were a couple of USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] programs that supported LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer] programs.

Now, why we didn't just cut those instead of cutting the ones that were feeding hungry children in Africa, I don't know. But that really sends the wrong message to the rest of the world.

And the last one, and once we get to the Q&As [questions and answers], I would be curious to hear what the Secretary has to say about this, threatening to use military force to invade Greenland and Panama. I don't believe the President has actually threatened military force against Canada just yet, he has just threatened to annex it.

So Denmark, Canada, Panama, three peaceful nations that we are allies with, or were anyway. The message that sends to the rest of the world is one that the U.S. is purely in it for itself and does not care about the rest of the world.

And this has implications for trying to stop China. We are in a global competition with China. We have built up excellent partnerships across Asia over the course of the last 6 or 7 years, in Australia, in Japan, in India, and the Philippines.

Largely, that was because China exercised economic coercion. They went ballistic on Australia for daring to suggest that China could be more transparent about COVID. And Australia recalculated. Now we are the ones using economic coercion on our partners and allies and pushing them away.

And this filters back over to Ukraine, where I am in violent agreement with the chairman about how important Ukraine is to our national security interests. And I also agree with the Secretary. We need to get peace in Ukraine. The longer that war continues, the more dangerous it is for everybody.

But the administration made a crucial mistake at the start by showing weakness to Vladimir Putin and fundamentally misunderstood the war. Actually put out quotes that bought into the notion that Ukraine was somehow responsible for the war, even though Russia was the one who invaded. And Putin saw that signal, he saw that big green light and knew if he just waited a little while, we would abandon our allies, we would abandon our partners, and we abandon Ukraine.

The President promised to end the war Ukraine on day one. Now, admittedly that was a moronic thing to say and he wasn't ever going to do it. But well over 100 days in, the war is going stronger than ever. Putin is attacking more aggressively than he ever has because President Trump sent him the message: we are walking away, it is all yours.

We need to change that message. Ukraine can defend itself and we can get to peace. But not if we don't make it clear that we are going to keep the 53-nation alliance together, and that we are actually going to defend Ukraine going forward.

The other part of this that is deeply disturbing is apparently if policy isn't going well, the solution to it is to just act like it is. In the Middle East, and you hear the President, you know, peace through strength is back, everything is fine, we are all doing well.

But just like Ukraine, when the President took office, there was a cease fire in Gaza. Now that war is going stronger than ever. The humanitarian crisis is growing. Israel is continuing to attack in Lebanon and Syria. Yemen is still a problem.

Yes, for the moment they have stopped attacking U.S. ships. But President Biden went through that as well. Attacked Yemen from time to time, they stood down, and they stood back up. And now we are dangerously close to that conflict spreading to Iran.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not blame President Trump for that, all right. But to stand up and say it is all solved because I am President and to not be engaged and figure out how to solve it, just to imagine that you can create the factual world that you want just with your words is an incredibly, incredibly dangerous thing.

The last issue that I want to talk about is the issue around DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion], because I am deeply disturbed about what the Pentagon is doing in this direction. But keep in mind I say that as someone—I didn't love the excesses of the DEI programs they put in place. I live with them out in the Seattle King Country area. I think there were a lot of mistakes behind that.

But instead of addressing that in a sensible way, we have decided to go at it with a right-wing cultural war. With a sort of right-wing cultural revolution that, frankly, would make Chairman Mao proud. We are banning books, we are pulling images down off the website, leading to some just sort of ridiculous things.

There was of course the instance when all reference to the Enola Gay disappeared for a few days. Now, that is kind of funny, because in that context, gay means something different.

But why do we care if the world "gay" that means "homosexual" is printed somewhere? Why is that threatening to us? Why are we spending time on that instead of, I don't know, giving us a budget? That might have been more productive.

And then we are pulling books off the shelves, which led to one really amusing outcome, where someone said in one particular, you know, library within the Pentagon you could not find a copy of Jackie Robinson's biography, that had been pulled. But you could find two copies of *Mein Kampf*.

So it is interesting, I guess, well, got to have two because if one is checked out, somebody needs something to do. Why are we doing that?

And now we have got the changes to the names, and this—changing the names of ships, going back to the original names of the Confederacy for all of our military bases.

A lot of different things can be said about this, but I just want to close by drawing one particular contrast, and that is about Medgar Evers, who is actually a personal hero of mine. I read his wife's book when I was a freshman in college and it inspired me. My son's middle name is Evers.

We are talking about pulling Medgar Evers' name off of a ship. Now, this is a man who served in the military. But also, he stood up to Jim Crow, White supremacy, and racism in the South. And I know we are focused on the warrior ethos. If you don't think that it took a warrior ethos to do that in Mississippi in the 1950s and the 1960s, then you are just not paying attention. Why are we having this conversation?

And Mr. Secretary, your summary of the problem, where you said that basically the problem with DEI is there just aren't enough trannies from Brooklyn or lesbians from San Francisco who want to join the 82nd Airborne. Not only do the trannies and lesbians not join, but those very same ads turn off the young, patriotic, Christian men who have traditionally filled our ranks.

We can go after the extremes of DEI without denigrating and insulting people. And by the way, leaving out the Jews, apparently, while you are putting that group in there. Because the thing is, the insulting, you know, belittling language aside, you are right, there aren't enough trannies in Brooklyn or lesbians in San Francisco to fill the military.

There also aren't enough, what is the word here, young patriotic Christian men who remind us of John Wayne to fill the military either. We are a diverse nation. We need to be inclusive. And we need to not actively insult people who don't happen to fit our pre-conceived notion of what a member of the military should look like.

So we are at a situation now where the military is denigrating Medgar Evers, who died standing up for the values that I think are

central to our country. One of the things I love about the military is service above self. I mean, it is such an important message that everyone who serves there says that. No one I can think of personifies that more than Medgar Evers.

Instead, we are going to go back to renaming the bases after the Confederates. Now, I know, apparently you spent a lot of time finding other names that applied to people who actually did serve this country honorably.

But President Trump just, was it yesterday, 2 days ago now down at Fort Bragg when he blatantly politicized the United States military, sort of as they like to say, said the quiet part out loud. That those bases are being renamed for the Confederates.

So we honor White supremacist, slave-owning insurrectionists who lost, by the way, they are losers, instead of Medgar Evers. Can we please just stop and get back to the business of treating everybody equally and with respect? You know, a fear of a left-wing cultural revolution is not solved by launching a right-wing cultural revolution.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the ranking member. And now I would like to introduce our witnesses, all before us for the first time.

General Caine, have you been before the committee before?

General CAINE. No, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. I didn't think so. Well, welcome, glad to have you.

First we have the Honorable Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense. We have General Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. And accompanying our witnesses is Mrs. Bryn MacDonnell, Acting DOD Comptroller, who is here to assist and answer our questions. Welcome.

First, we will start with you, Mr. Secretary, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE PETE HEGSETH,
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in full support of President Trump's proposed fiscal year 2026 budget for the Department of Defense.

I am honored to testify today alongside General Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Bryn MacDonnell, who is performing the duties of DOD's Comptroller and Chief Financial Officer.

We are very proud to represent and serve our warriors and their families. And today, as they do every day, they are keeping America safe. They are defending our homeland, they are standing up to communist China, they are working hand in glove with our allies and partners. They are achieving peace through strength.

I would like to start today by thanking this committee and Congress for your bipartisan leadership to give our troops a big pay raise in 2025. This included an additional 10.5 percent raise for our junior enlisted servicemembers, E-1 to E-4. Thank you also for supporting other initiatives that improve the quality of life for our warriors and their families.

With a focus on our troops and their loved ones, we have directed additional actions that will further improve their quality of life. These include making historic investments in this budget to improve living conditions in barracks and base housing, reforming the PCS [Permanent Change of Station] process to reduce the cost and stress of moves for military families, and improving the quality of the care provided by our defense healthcare system.

The best part of our job is meeting and interacting with troops and their families. We hear their concerns. I know how it feels to face these challenges. I have been there recently. Each of these initiatives responds to feedback we have received from the force. We will keep listening and keep looking for ways to improve their quality of life.

Under President Trump's leadership this budget puts America first and gives our warriors what they need. The \$961 billion budget request, more than one trillion in total for national security, ends 4 years of chronic under-investment in our military.

Now, as is customary with first-year administration budget releases, additional time was necessary to implement this President's initiatives. In the last 4 months, we have moved quickly to reverse course after 4 years of weakness and mismanagement.

In that 8 percent exercise, we found nearly 30 billion in savings across the Department, which we reinvested. We killed wasteful programs, targeted bureaucratic excess, and redirected funding from Biden-era priorities to President Trump's priorities.

Working with the Department of Homeland Security, we have increased border security. We reduced China's malign influence in our hemisphere. We defended freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. However, we still have a lot of work ahead of us to achieve peace through strength. A lot of deferred maintenance to catch up on.

To carry out the President's mission, we have set three priorities for the department: restore the warrior ethos, rebuild our military, and reestablish deterrence.

First, we are restoring the warrior ethos. President Trump charged me to focus relentlessly on warfighting, lethality, meritocracy, standards, and readiness, and that is exactly what we have done since day one. We are refocusing on what is truly important, which is warfighting and our warriors, sweeping away distractions and bureaucracy.

We are setting standards that are high, equal, and unwavering. DEI is dead. We replaced it with a colorblind, gender-neutral, merit-based approach. Our force is responding incredibly to these changes.

Because of President Trump and his America first priorities, recruitment and retention under this administration are higher than they have been in decades. Historic numbers of young Americans are putting on the uniform and raising their right hand because they believe in the leadership they see. This budget provides a historic level of funding for military readiness, putting our warfighters and their needs first.

Second, we are rebuilding our military. 25 years ago, our military was unchallenged. Yet we squandered that advantage as China

carried out an unprecedented military buildup. President Trump, as he did in his first term, is correcting those mistakes.

And we are doing this by, as was mentioned multiple times, reviving our defense industrial base, reforming our acquisitions process, and working with Congress to do so, and rapidly fielding emerging technologies and new weapons so our warfighters can meet the challenges of the evolving nature of warfare.

This budget invests 25 billion in Golden Dome for America, a down payment on President Trump's priority to defend our homeland. It also commits more than \$62 billion to modernize and sustain our nuclear forces as we face rising nuclear dangers. The budget allocates 3.5 billion for the F-47, the world's first sixth generation air superiority fighter.

The budget will also revitalize our ship building industrial base with 6 billion in funding in fiscal year 2026, bringing it to 47 billion in total we request for ship building after neglect from the previous administration.

The budget also significantly increases funds to buy next generation technologies that we need now into the future, autonomous systems, long-range drones, long-range fires, and hypersonics. We will put these capabilities in the hands of our military. These steps will help us remain the strongest and most lethal fighting force in the world for generations to come.

And third, we are reestablishing deterrence. When an opponent sees our well-equipped and tough-as-nails warriors, they will decide that today is not the day to test U.S. resolve. Credible deterrence starts at home. It starts with securing our borders. We will achieve 100 percent operational control of our southern border, and to that end, illegal crossings under the Trump administration have decreased 99.9 percent.

The Indo-Pacific is our priority theater and China is our pacing threat. That is why I traveled to the Indo-Pacific twice already to visit our forces and meet with allies and partners. As we shift our focus to the Indo-Pacific, President Trump looks to our allies and partners to be force multipliers alongside the United States, and we are making progress on those fronts.

We applaud allies who are stepping up, but others need to do more, and they need to do it quickly. And at the NATO Heads of State meeting later this month, we expect our NATO allies to commit to 5 percent of GDP on defense and defense-related investments, something that was almost inconceivable before President Trump led the charge in his first administration and continues in this one.

As the President has rightly pointed out, it is only fair that our allies and partners do their part. We can't want their security more than they do.

The Department of Defense is executing a common sense agenda to achieve peace through strength. The threats we face are serious. Our investments to counter them must also be. That is what this budget does: it matches capabilities to threats. While we long for peace, we prepare for war. And we must overcome decades of neglect and decline.

We must fortify our position as the world's most lethal fighting force, and that means acting fast as our opponents are. This com-

mittee is our critical partner in everything we do. We appreciate your leadership and oversight.

We look forward to accomplishing these goals, to achieving peace through strength, to supporting our warriors, to protecting our citizens and our taxpayers. Together with you, may God grant us the wisdom to see what is right and the courage to do it.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Hegseth can be found in the Appendix on page 111.]

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the Secretary.

General Caine, you are recognized for 5 minutes to summarize your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAN CAINE, CHAIRMAN OF THE
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

General CAINE. Chair Rogers, thank you, sir. Ranking Member Smith, other members of the committee, I am honored to join this Secretary here today and Mrs. Bryn MacDonnell to appear before you to testify on the President's fiscal year 2026 budget.

Today's hearing reflects our shared commitment to maximize efficiency, accountability, and lethality and survivability through the investments that you make in us, ensuring every expenditure increases the survivability of the Joint Force and providing our warfighters the advanced capabilities, cutting edge technologies required to dominate our adversaries at scale.

I have got deep gratitude for everyone in this room and your commitment to helping us deliver the capability and capacity of our Joint Force and the 2.8 million servicemembers, civilians, and their families. To help us deliver the peace through strength that the Secretary talked about is very important, and I'm very thankful.

It is my responsibility as Chairman to understand the global situation, integrate the Joint Force to confront and manage risk worldwide, and ultimately advise our leaders. This demands a comprehensive understanding across every domain: land, sea, air, cyber, space, undersea, and all military services in every region of the globe, and frankly, all time horizons.

It also requires making hard, informed decisions, which we advise on, in order to prioritize the finite taxpayer dollars that we have to ensure the greatest impact and capability for our joint warfighters across the globe. The President's budget enables the Joint Force to defend our great nation from adversaries seeking to do us harms.

We are relentless in our pursuit of innovation and technology that allows us to deter and if need be win the wars of the future at every opportunity, while ensuring that we learn from the battlefields of the past and position ourselves for the battlefields of the future.

This budget empowers the Joint Force to get after the Secretary's three pillars as he just talked about: restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing our deterrence, and ensures our Joint Force is properly armed, globally integrated, and ready, while doing our number one job of protecting our homeland.

The President's budget investment on warfighters, as I said, to win on the battlefields of the future, we have got to be properly

armed with the right capabilities, lethal, modern, reliable, and survivable at scale. Victory requires people and platforms that overmatch the enemy, systems that work together in the harshest conditions, and technologies that give our warfighters an advantage at the tactical edge.

The budget gives us necessary tools to reinvigorate our national and defense industrial base. Our nation is full of incredible entrepreneurial talent, and we need every bit of it to support the increasing demands of the warfighters.

This budget also helps the Joint Force become more globally integrated. I think of us as relationship entrepreneurs in the Joint Force, not only working together in the military, but working with our allies and partners, the interagency, industry, and of course Congress before crisis begins and before conflict comes upon us.

Finally, the President's budget reflects our mandate to stay ready. Always be on the account, anticipating the next fight and getting out in front of it so that we are best prepared for our warfighters and their families.

The most important component of our Joint Force is our people. This budget makes meaningful investments in our servicemembers and their families, improving the quality of life of our servicemembers, medical care, and things important to them, like the moving process.

As I mentioned, our people are the most important part of this, and it is an honor every day for me to serve alongside some of the most extraordinary warriors, civilian teammates, and families our nation has ever known. I assure this committee that the force remains ready, capable to defend this nation, but we have got some work to do.

With your continued support and prudent investment, we will maintain our competitive edge, strengthen our advantage, and ensure that our men and women in uniform are equipped with the right capability.

I also remain thoughtful of those currently deployed right now and their families, who stand the watch around the world, quietly serving to do our nation's work so that we can be here in this room right now. And I also hold a special remembrance for our fallen and their families, who continue to show us every day what real courage and tenacity looks like.

I thank the Congress and this committee for your support and collaboration in our shared commitment to deliver peace through strength. I look forward to your questions, and again, I am honored to be here.

[The prepared statement of General Caine can be found in the Appendix on page 130.]

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the witnesses, and I now recognize myself for the first questions.

Secretary Hegseth, you know, you have talked with me about this. We both know the President has a peace through strength agenda and he is serious about it. And as I have talked to you about this, we are at the lowest level of defense spending as a nation in 80 years, and that has got to change.

And I think that you and the President have sent a strong signal about wanting to get after that and change it with this year's pro-

posed spending that includes the reconciliation package, which will put us over \$1 trillion. It is a great first step.

But as you and I both know, it is a 1-year, we are going to have to seek continued funding, in my opinion, and growth in that top line in the out years. Do you share that opinion?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, Mr. Chairman, the baseline of our planning process for fiscal year 2026 was looking-working with our partners in OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] and the COCOMs [combatant commands] and elsewhere, identifying the threats that exist, the priorities of the administration, and what we need to spend to make sure we have those capabilities.

And that was a reorientation from the previous approach and the previous administration. So that included exercises where we looked at reductions, where we could reinvest those into different priorities.

So when you look at the two bills in one budget that add up to \$961 billion and over a trillion, truly a historic investment, 13 percent increase, that was our statement to the President of what we think we need in order to spend and invest in ways that are postured for now and into the future.

And what I would commit to you and to this committee is that in fiscal year 2027, in 2028, in 2029, in this administration, we will perform the same exercise, knowing that threats, you know, we believe the policies of this administration will lead to peace and more opportunities.

But as our adversaries continue to increase their capabilities and we learn about what is happening on the battlefield, that will lead to commensurate increases in ours. So we anticipate through that review that there probably will be increases, but I wouldn't put a number to it in the future.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I just shared the President's commitment that every NATO member nation should reach 5 percent of its GDP, and that includes us, and I think we can do it by the end of this President's term, and I am determined to help him get there.

Secretary Hegseth, at the President's direction, you are developing a plan on reforms of DOD acquisition. It just so happens we are too. You may have heard of the SPEED Act. It is a bipartisan, bicameral effort.

As you develop your plan, what problems have you identified with acquisition reform that need attention?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, our A&S [Acquisition and Sustainment], Under Secretary for A&S, was just confirmed, Mike Duffy. He is doing a fantastic job. He is diving right into this, to include the SPEED Act, which we are reviewing in real time, that identified a lot of the same problems we have.

Streamlining processes, consolidating. We need competition in actual new entrants into acquisitions. And a stale process, it is too bureaucratic. There are too many gatekeepers. Too many programs are gold-plated, which add to cost overruns and they're late-to-need.

So throughout the entire process we have reached out to industry and to innovators and to outside-the-box thinkers and said what you would do. How would you look at this problem, to include this

committee. How would you attack this so that we can get what we need in the hands of warfighters faster?

It is unacceptable in this real-time world we live in, where you have got off-the-shelf capabilities and open architecture opportunities. And you can do virtual design of products and you don't have to build copy that we are not doing it faster.

So everything necessary we want, and we are going as fast as we can.

The CHAIRMAN. Great, thank you.

General Caine, as you know, there has been a lot of dialog around here about selling off some of our spectrum. Can you talk to us about the importance of preserving the spectrum around lines that the DOD uses?

General CAINE. You bet, sir. Spectrum is a critical part of our warfighting enablers, and as the administration and the Congress carefully consider the slices that we must preserve, there are certain areas within that that, you know, my military advice to the Secretary and others is to hang onto that.

I am grateful that the Deputy has been really leading this effort with the Congress and to sort of measure risk. I understand that economic security is also national security, so the truth is always somewhere in the middle. But there are some segments in the lower end that frankly I would strongly recommend we preserve and protect for defense matters.

The CHAIRMAN. I raise that because I want you to know we are going to be taking our cues from you, and if you are against it, I am going to be against it.

With that I will yield back and recognize the ranking member.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just another budget point, I made this point before the committee before. The House just passed a budget that adds nearly \$3 trillion to an already out of control debt. So if we do really want to spend money on defense or anywhere else, we got to be willing to pay for it.

And this, you know, certainly go back through generations of, you know, bipartisan problems with this. You can't have a debt that size and keep coming back talking about how much money you are going to spend, you know, whether it is defense or whatever your priorities are.

And Mr. Secretary, you said the 99 percent down on border crossings and the border is secure. At the same time, we are going to take a billion dollars out of the MILCON [military construction] budget. Not building barracks, to send it for the border. And there is another 4000 troops that we are planning on sending down to the border.

Given that the border is secure, might you rethink that spending?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, sir, we are securing it. It is secure, but it has become—it is a manpower-intensive effort at the—

Mr. SMITH. Those are two different words. It is either secure or insecure, and it sounded to me like you said it was secure.

Secretary HEGSETH. It is secure.

Mr. SMITH. Okay.

Secretary HEGSETH. But what we are continuing to do is expand that and fortify it through infrastructure, which is a big part of the budget on the Department of Homeland Security side as well.

So it is—that billion dollars you are talking about is from the CR in fiscal year 2025. We fully fund that back and more in fiscal year 2026, with a recognition that we were dealing with the world as it existed when we came in. And the previous administration said they needed new legislation to secure the border. It turns out you just needed a new President—

Mr. SMITH. I would point out that you have not—

Secretary HEGSETH.—and a President with a Defense Department and DHS [U.S. Department of Homeland Security] that was willing to go to the border and actually secure it, which is what—

Mr. SMITH. You have not submitted a budget yet. So whether or not you are putting that money back in remains to be seen. You have definitely taken it out.

And I think the obsession there, and I don't disagree, the border needed to be secure. But from a pure budget standpoint, let's just not keep the political focus on that. Let's make sure that we are funding some of the other priorities that we have.

So when it comes back to acquisition reform, and the chairman's point, it is our committee, certainly Congress is part of the problem. We set up a lot of requirements. Defense contractors are part of the problem. I am curious, how would you get after reforming the culture at the Pentagon so that you can move faster, number one? And number two, how would get after the defense contractors that push the requirements process? And specifically, what would you do about the requirements process to try to speed things up?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, first of all, I think gold-plating is a real problem, sir. I mean, across the Department—

Mr. SMITH. Interesting you used the word gold in this particular context, but yes, I agree with you actually.

Secretary HEGSETH. We maybe could use a little bit more silver plating on occasion. A recognition that the 99.9 percent solution is oftentimes the enemy of the 85 percent solution that delivers 2 years sooner.

And that is contractors and other companies wanting to do right but trying to do too much and overpromise and then they're under-delivering—

Mr. SMITH. But not always want to do right. In some cases, just—

Secretary HEGSETH. Not always, not always.

Mr. SMITH. —want to make money, but yes.

Secretary HEGSETH. The change is also in acquisitions about people. You need reformers in these positions. I am here to be a disrupter of those processes. Our Deputy Secretary has extensive business experience.

The types of people we are bringing in as Under Secretaries have been disrupters and innovators in the private sector who recognize that bureaucracy can be dysfunctional and needs to be disrupted.

And so it is taking outside-the-box unique approaches. I mean, virtual design is a big example. How many times are we going to build something physically that takes a year to build when you

could AI and computing power, design it virtually, identify the flaws, and move more quickly? Or create open architecture—

Mr. SMITH. Our committee stands ready to work with you.

Secretary HEGSETH. I mean there is—

Mr. SMITH. One final question.

Secretary HEGSETH.—500 different things we can do, and we are doing them.

Mr. SMITH. Yeah. And I am sincerely concerned about this. Is it the policy of the Department of Defense that we need to be prepared to take Greenland and Panama by force if necessary? Is this a policy that you have in the Department of Defense in accordance with President's wishes?

Secretary HEGSETH. I heard what you said about those two countries and saying we need to worry about China. Well, we are worried about China.

Mr. SMITH. That wasn't my concern.

Secretary HEGSETH. China's malign influence in Panama.

Mr. SMITH. I was concerned—

Mr. SMITH. —to take another sovereign country's territory.

Secretary HEGSETH. We should pay attention that, right. So Panama is a very key terrain that we have focused on, and we have been willing to focus—

Mr. SMITH. So we should take it—

Secretary HEGSETH. —as is Greenland—

Mr. SMITH.—we should take it by military force. They are important. I am not going to argue with that.

Secretary HEGSETH. The Arctic is incredibly important and adversaries are trying to gain—

Mr. SMITH. I am arguing with the use of our military to take it by force.

Secretary HEGSETH. Our job at the DOD is to have plans and—

Mr. SMITH. Do you have a plan for that?

Secretary HEGSETH. Our job at the Defense Department is to have plans for any particular contingency.

Mr. SMITH. Including the contingency of basically invading Denmark.

Secretary HEGSETH. Any contingency you need, we have got it. We have got a building full of planners, and we are prepared to give recommendations whenever needed.

Mr. SMITH. To just be clear, you have plans to take Panama and Greenland by force if necessary.

Secretary HEGSETH. I think the American people would want the Pentagon to have plans for any particular contingency.

Mr. SMITH. Not for that.

Secretary HEGSETH. And thankfully, we are in the planning business.

Mr. SMITH. Speaking on behalf of the American people, I don't think the American people voted for President Trump because they were hoping we would invade Greenland. I am going to go out on a limb on that one.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Wilson, is recognized.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Chairman Mike Rogers, for your visionary leadership. And indeed, each witness, thank you for your service to America.

And in particular, Mr. Secretary, your service is so appreciated. And I am especially grateful as the son of a Flying Tiger who helped liberate China, as the father of four sons who have served in Iraq, Egypt, Italy, and Afghanistan, and as a 31-year Army veteran myself.

Your leadership of peace through strength is crucial, and I believe we are in a Cold War we did not choose of dictators with rule of gun invading democracies with rule of law. It began with war criminal Putin invading Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and then Iranian puppets invading Israel on October 7, 2023, with the Chinese Communist Party threatening Taiwan.

President Trump tried to deter war criminal Putin his first term with Javelin missiles to Ukraine, American troops in Poland, and stopping Nordstream 2. But Putin ignored Trump, and defying Biden, has continued his efforts. Upon election of Trump, there were hopes for peace, but Putin insulted Trump with the murderous attacks at Christmas and New Year's. Every time President Trump tries to reduce the conflict, war criminal Putin increases mass murder of drones of missile attacks on the people and civilians of Ukraine, including hospitals this week.

War criminal Putin is clearly fixated to resurrect the failed Soviet Union, with troops still in Transnistria of Moldova, rigging elections on Belarus, invading the Republic of Georgia, and rigging elections against the legitimate president, Salome Zourabichvili of Georgia. Additionally, there have been new threats this week against the Baltic republics, our NATO allies.

Every outreach by Trump has been mocked by Putin. With that in mind, an incredible achievement of President Trump is to awaken our NATO allies, now including Sweden and Finland, that with Germany pledging 5 percent remarkably. And 17 of our allies of now provide a larger GDP support for the people of Ukraine than the United States because of President Trump's encouragement.

What is the latest status on encouraging our NATO allies of providing for peace through strength?

Secretary HEGSETH. Thank you for the question, sir. The one thing I would take issue with is the characterization that Vladimir Putin ignored President Trump. I think Vladimir Putin paid a lot of attention to President Trump in his first term, and that is why the invasion did not happen under President Trump's watch. Instead, under the weakness—

Mr. WILSON. Ignored and proceeded to—

Secretary HEGSETH. He paid attention to President Trump and then when Joe Biden was in the office—

Mr. WILSON. But it set—it really set the stage, sadly, that if he had really appreciated what President Trump was trying to do, he wouldn't have invaded again. But, whether Biden was president or not.

Secretary HEGSETH. But to your question about Europe.

Mr. WILSON. Yes.

Secretary HEGSETH. President Trump has invigorated a truly historic investment amongst NATO allies to shoulder the burden of the defense of the continent of the Europe.

Vladimir Putin saw what he believed to be weakness, and I believe President Trump has stood up to that by reminding our allies that they need to spend on their own defense and ensure that they are able to shoulder the burden to defend the continent. That has been a good development.

Mr. WILSON. And indeed, I was grateful last February coming back from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and meeting with the President. And I told him how exciting it was to see our allies understand that indeed he supports Ukraine, he supports NATO and peace through strength.

And General Caine, I particularly appreciate your VMI [Virginia Military Institute] credentials for professionalism. And with that in mind, we understand that even today, the International Atomic Energy Agency has declared Iran in breach of non-proliferation agreements. And what are we doing to deter the aggression coming from Iran?

General CAINE. Well, sir, first, I noticed in your bio that you went to that other school in Lexington, which is always hard for me to get my head around, sir.

Mr. WILSON. Hey, I grew up in the Holy City of Charleston. When I saw VMIs, I thought they were Citadel cadets.

General CAINE. Yes, sir. I am now a Joint guy, so I will keep all those comments to myself, sir.

Mr. WILSON. Hear, hear.

General CAINE. You know, sir, the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] report is certainly troubling. The international community seems to be thinking about what they are going to do about it, and as are we, watching the situation develop and carefully monitoring the report.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Courtney.

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, this morning the eyes of our closest allies, U.K. and Australia, are on your department as a result of Under Secretary of Policy Elbridge Colby announcement last night that he is launching a 30-day review of the trilateral AUKUS [Australia-United Kingdom-United States] mission.

I would just note that it is not just their eyes, it is our eyes in this committee. In 2023, by a vote of 310 to a small minority, we passed the AUKUS authorities and followed up on that in terms of AUKUS investments in the billions of dollars into our submarine industrial base. Australia has reciprocated, as you know, with its own investments in our submarine industrial base.

And since then, since 2023, what we have seen, the three countries working together, that we now have well over 100 Australian sailors and naval officers that have gone through joint training. I have seen them in my district at graduation ceremonies. They are joint crewing Virginia class submarines.

We also have joint U.S.-Australian submarine repair work that is happening in Guam and Hawaii. And our submarine industrial base delivered two Virginia class attack submarines. They are the

New Jersey and Iowa. This year, it will be Massachusetts and Idaho. And the year following it is going to be Arkansas and the Utah are going to be delivered during that 3-year period.

General CAINE, how many nuclear-powered attack submarines is in the Chinese navy? Do you know that answer?

General CAINE. It is nuclear-powered attack boats.

Mr. COURTNEY. Yes.

General CAINE. It is—

Mr. COURTNEY. How many attack nuclear-powered?

General CAINE. Yes, sir, many, I will get you the number.

Mr. COURTNEY. No, well, the answer is six.

General CAINE. Yes, sir.

Mr. COURTNEY. Okay, so what we have seen in the industrial base is that last year, this year, and next year, we are going to be delivering that identical number. They are building a seventh.

You can check the Wall Street Journal, and you can see where that boat ended up at the bottom of the Yangtze River because of their inability to actually do the hard work of building nuclear-powered submarines, which is probably one of the most complex undertakings in really industry of any sort.

Again, the Australians are investing in Perth and so that we are going to have rotations of Virginia class submarines that are already started to happen. Admiral Paparo testified in vocal support of AUKUS when he came before this committee just a few weeks ago.

And again, I would just say, you know, there is nothing wrong with reviewing any program. We are all accountable. Anything of this magnitude certainly deserves review.

But a 30-day review on a project that really took years to develop and which this committee was instrumental in terms of enabling. And in my opinion China's reaction to AUKUS is the ultimate sort of endorsement of AUKUS, because they hate it.

And the one commitment I would ask, Mr. Secretary, is just your commitment that this committee and Congress is going to be integrally involved in whatever the review process is. Because we have skin in the game, we have history, and we have allies who really are, again, issuing statements this morning.

The Prime Minister of England, Stephen Lovegrove, the Special Representative for AUKUS, Richard Marles, putting out statements trying to reassure their countries that the U.S. is still going to follow through on this commitment. And we want that reassurance as well from you.

Can you, again, give us that commitment that Congress will be involved in this review process? And I have just one more follow-up question.

Secretary HEGSETH. As it has been, Congress will be involved. But I have had an ongoing review myself. I have spent a great deal of time—

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you.

Secretary HEGSETH. Marles and Healey at the Australia and U.K.

Mr. COURTNEY. And I have been following your work there.

Secretary HEGSETH. —reviewing it myself.

Mr. COURTNEY. Yes.

Secretary HEGSETH. Secretary Colby is reviewing it. We know that. It is all important to make sure it is—

Mr. COURTNEY. Right. State Department, by the way, has skin in the game too, and they should be involved in it as well.

I just want to reiterate Mr. Rogers' point and Mr. Smith's point. If we really care about strengthening the industrial base, we need to have procurement stability. Which means we need to have a budget, a real budget, not a \$20 billion ship building budget, which Senator Wicker just eviscerated a couple of days ago.

That is \$17 billion less than the last Biden ship building budget. That is what got sent over to us. And again, that is the way, and I represent a district that has the general contractor for both programs, you want to strengthen hiring, supply chain, and facility growth, you need to have procurement stability. That is not what we are seeing from the Office of Management and Budget.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. Turner.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your written statement. And also thank you for your recognition of the importance of our nuclear deterrent, and specifically our investment in our modernization of our nuclear deterrent. We are behind, as you know, in the modernization of our nuclear stockpile.

Your recognition of our investment in our triad and our command and control is incredibly important. Thank you also for your recognition of the importance of our future investment in missile defense and the importance that Golden Dome will play.

The Secretary General of NATO has recently made statements of his concern of Russia's future attempt to place an anti-satellite nuclear weapon into space. Specifically he has said, We are aware of reports that Russia is examining the possibility of placing nuclear weapons in space. This is very worrying. Space is also very importance for our deterrence and defense, just as important as land, sea, air, and cyber space. In recent years, space has become increasingly crowded, dangerous, and unpredictable. And we know that competition in space is fierce.

I recently had the opportunity to speak to him. He was at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in my community as we were commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Peace Accords. His concern was that this not getting worldwide enough of attention.

We had General Saltzman recently in front of the committee. He has characterized that if Russia were to place an anti-satellite nuclear weapon into space, that that would be Day Zero.

That if that was put in space, that next day, that it would be irresponsible for us to count on space. That we would have to spend trillions of dollars and seek technology that we don't have to find solutions as an alternative to space, both commercially, for military, and really to redo what is really society today.

As you know, it would affect both our nuclear deterrents, our efforts for missile defense, even our investments in Golden Dome. In this venue, obviously we can't discuss all of the details of what we are doing, but I would ask if you would please confirm that this is a threat that is a priority to the Department of Defense, as it has been characterized by the Secretary General of NATO, and ac-

knowledge that as it is a priority, it is a priority for us to prevent the deployment of nuclear weapons in space.

And that it is a priority for us to work with our allies to work with our allies to uphold our commitment to the Outer Space Nuclear Treaty that prohibits the deployment of nuclear weapons in space, sir.

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, thank you for the question, sir. As you alluded to, there are a number of aspects to this question or answer that can't be discussed here. But I would underline our complete commitment to the space domain, to the hardening of the space domain, to prevention of escalations in the space domain.

But most importantly, to the dominance of the space domain. I mean, that is—it is the future of how we see. It is the future of how we sense. It could be the future of how our adversaries fight and how we deal with that.

And so I think President Trump yet again was ahead of the curve when he created the Space Force in his first administration. People said we didn't need it.

We are relying on it every single day now to ensure, alongside Space Force and private enterprise, that we are delivering the capabilities we need that are resilient, that are redundant, that are capable of all aspects of all the main warfare, if necessary. And preventing adversaries from gaining an advantage is a huge part of how we look at space.

Mr. TURNER. This threat is not classified. Russia's threat of deploying an anti-satellite nuclear weapon in space is not classified.

Obviously this is a priority of the Department of Defense, and I just want your confirmation that this is a priority that you are tracking. And you, too, see that as a threat to the United States and certainly the United States and our space infrastructure, and certainly, you know, our whole national security infrastructure.

Secretary HEGSETH. We track all potential escalations, yes, sir.

Mr. TURNER. And lawyer here, I just want to help you out, because people try to, you know, twist your words. You were not confirming in your testimony today that at the Pentagon there are plans for invading or taking by force Greenland, correct? That is not your testimony today?

Secretary HEGSETH. All my testimony is, is that the Pentagon has plans for any number of—

Mr. TURNER. It is not your testimony today that there are plans at the Pentagon for taking by force or invading Greenland, correct? I sure as hell hope that it is not your testimony.

Secretary HEGSETH. We look forward to working with Greenland to ensure that it is secured from any potential threats.

Mr. TURNER. Excellent. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Garamendi.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your opening statement, your concerns about Ukraine and the budget issues.

Mr. Secretary, in your opening statement, you spoke to the issue of cutting waste and abuse at the Pentagon. I assume you intend to do that. Is that correct? Yes, no?

Secretary HEGSETH. Now we have done that, sir.

Mr. GARAMENDI. All right. And, therefore, it must be a responsibility. I want to bring to your attention a statement that the President made in early February. He said there is no reason for us to be building brand new nuclear weapons. We already have so many. You could destroy the world 50 times over, 100 times over, and here are building new nuclear weapons, and they are building new nuclear weapons. We are spending—we are all spending a lot of money that we could spend on other things that are actually hopefully much more productive.

So I would like to focus for a few moments on one of the most expensive programs at the Department of Defense, the Sentinel ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile], which is to replace the Minuteman-3. The cost of this program has exploded from \$78 billion to over \$141 billion, not including a new nuclear bomb for the Sentinel and the command and control systems, which would add somewhere \$20 to \$40 billion, all the while we have a Minuteman-3 that can continue to provide the ground leg of the triad for at least 10 to 15 more years.

Should we cut the Sentinel program?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, President Trump is correct to point out that proliferation is very dangerous. But he has also in his budget ensured that we fully fund the nuclear triad, every aspect of it, in a historic way.

The Sentinel is one leg of it. And that modernization is critically important, as you know, faces a Nunn-McCurdy breach for being behind. And as a result, it is being—it has to be reviewed. But it is incredibly important and so our budget does—

Mr. GARAMENDI. So you have made—

Secretary HEGSETH. —have to ensure to—

Mr. GARAMENDI. Excuse me, sir. So you have made a decision to continue even though the review is incomplete?

Secretary HEGSETH. The review is ongoing. The investments we have made allow us to continue should the review come out the way we hope it does.

Mr. GARAMENDI. The answer is you continue to—you continue the Sentinel Program even though the Nunn-McCurdy review is incomplete.

I would like now to move over to Ukraine. The chairman of this committee spoke very strongly about the Ukraine situation and the necessity of the United States being strong in support of Ukraine.

It is very, very clear that a review of what Mr. Putin has said over the last two decades that he is determined to reestablish the Soviet empire, and Ukraine is the current step to achieve that.

Ukraine's security is our security, my view. And what is dangerous for Ukraine will be dangerous for NATO and therefore dangerous to the United States.

2 days ago, in response to Senator McConnell, who asked which side of the Ukraine conflict do you want to win. And you said, the President is committed to peace in that conflict. Ultimately, peace serves our national interest. And we think it serves the interest of both parties even though that outcome will not be preferable to many in this room, at that time the Senate, and I would also say this room too, preferable to many in this room and many in our country.

Mr. Secretary, when you said that peace serves our national interest, does that peace come from a complete surrender of Ukraine and total victory for Russia?

Secretary HEGSETH. That has never been a characterization of my statement, sir. We think peace is in the best interest. But I would point out, Ukraine is not the U.S., and Ukraine is not in NATO. And to draw that comparison is to draw one that is not correct.

But we hope for peace. We believe peace is in the best interest of the United States of America, and our policies are pointed toward that.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Let me go back to what I asked you. Is that peace—could the achievement of that peace through the complete surrender of Ukraine and the withdrawal of U.S. support for Ukraine, is that a worthy peace and is that peace in the long-term, and actually the short-term, interest of the United States?

Secretary HEGSETH. If you look at the billions of dollars that have been invested in Ukraine, you could hardly characterize that as a surrender from the United States.

So the existing military front line of troops, as difficult as it is, is moving slowly. Where peace ends at the end of that, nobody really knows. But the President has worked harder than anybody else to try to get a peaceful outcome.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Wittman.

Mr. WITTMAN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today, Secretary Hegseth, Chairman Caine, Mrs. MacDonnell, thank you. Thank you for the incredible job that you all are doing.

Secretary Hegseth, I want to begin with you and talk about all of the efforts that went into the defense portion of the One Big Beautiful Bill in making sure that we are getting all of the pieces of this correct. Lots of back and forth, and we know that there is a long-term need to make sure that we get this right. And we want to make sure, too, as we look at priorities from all of the different bodies that we are assuring that those are continued on as the process takes place.

We know there is going to be additional investments in things like shipbuilding and ground vehicles. And we have also made substantial investments in modernization, including things like Golden Dome and things that are critical to this nation's future.

I just wanted to get from you, can you assure the committee that of the \$150 billion that is here, that it is going to be laid out and spent in exact alignment with what the committee has laid out really on a line by line basis?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, sir, you will have—I can refer to Bryn on that for the details. But you will have a complete reckoning and many of the committee already does have of what we intend to spend and where.

But from our viewpoint, it is two bills, one budget.

Mr. WITTMAN. Right.

Secretary HEGSETH. And ultimately, we have worked with the committee and will continue to ensure that every priority is

funded either through the base bill or through reconciliation. But I defer to Bryn.

Mrs. MACDONNELL. I just concur with the Secretary. We have worked very well with Chairman Rogers' staff and with Senator Wicker's staff on it as well, and we will continue to do so now that the data of the budget is released.

Mr. WITTMAN. That is great. Listen, I think it is key especially since there are a lot of different moving parts here to make sure that we are all in alignment with that.

Yesterday Admiral Kilby confirmed that the U.S. Navy still needs a sixth generation fighter. That F/A-XX is still critically important. And earlier this year in our Tactical Air and Land Subcommittee, we received a lot of testimony about the continued requirement need for F/A-XX, the Navy's unique need to have that fighter that is able to function in a highly contested environment, having the ability to deal with even more ability for our adversaries to sense that aircraft.

We know that in the fiscal year 2025 CR, there was \$453.8 million—billion dollars, excuse me, put a million dollars put towards that. I will get the number right—and in reconciliation, a \$500 million.

So you can see Congress is consistently pushing ahead and saying this is where we need to go. And we would be a little surprised if the support for this fell off, especially since we are looking at the requirements and not seeing any change there.

So, General Caine, I wanted to get from you, do you still see the requirements for F/A-XX being the same today as it has been developed through the recent months by the Navy to project and say this is what the Navy needs in order to have that ability to provide a tactical air presence in places like the South China Sea and elsewhere where that environment is going to be highly contested?

General CAINE. Congressman, thanks for the question. And, you know, as we look at the threat picture out in the Pacific, the requirements themselves, I think, are still valid. I think it comes down to a question that many of the folks on the committee have talked about and that is the ability to produce at a particular time.

And I will defer to my civilian leaders on the timing and synchronization of that program. But we do need, you know, capability that is mobile, whether it is F/A-XX or others that enable us to win on the battlefield to the future.

I will defer to the Secretary and Bryn for policy-related stuff on the synchronization.

Mr. WITTMAN. Well, Secretary, I will ask in addition to that, I think to build on Chairman Caine's comments, has the Pentagon's plans changed because, you know, since April and especially in our subcommittee, you know, we have looked very, very specifically about this need, looking at NGAD [Next Generation Air Dominance], which the President has made a decision on. But then looking at the Navy's need, can you tell us, are things continued on track for F/A-XX? Are there any changes there?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, as you know, certainly, we have adjusted the way we see the world from the Biden administration through the Interim National Defense Strategy and planning guidance.

Mr. WITTMAN. Sure.

Secretary HEGSETH. That is what went into the decision that we made on F-47 or NGAD. And this budget has a significant investment in that.

Fiscal year 2026 funds the complete design of F/A-XX. We are certainly reviewing it, working with the Joint Staff, working with the COCOMs at its application around the globe.

So it is in the mix, but we recognize we need—we also need a capability as quickly as possible for the threats that we face.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Moulton.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Hegseth, I would like to clarify a few important details for the record. When you texted the launch time for F-18s to go into combat over enemy territory facing anti-aircraft missiles on an unclassified Signal chat, did that launch time come from Central Command? Yes or no.

Secretary HEGSETH. I know what you are referring to. And there were no targets or locations—

Mr. MOULTON. It is a very simple question. Did it come from Central Command.

Secretary HEGSETH. In this committee, there is no way in which I communicate or what I communicate on a successful strike is something that I would share.

Mr. MOULTON. So you can't even identify the combatant command under which this operation occurred?

Secretary HEGSETH. So everybody knows the—

Mr. MOULTON. So everyone knows the Central Command. So when Central Command sent you this information, did they send it on a classified system or an unclassified system?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, as you know, having served yourself, anyway that the Secretary of Defense communicates or provides information in and of itself is classified and not to be discussed.

Mr. MOULTON. So what was the classification marking of the launch time when it was sent to you, because DOD regulations require information on classified systems to be marked?

Secretary HEGSETH. What was the classification mark time?

Mr. MOULTON. What was the classification marking because DOD regulations—

Secretary HEGSETH. Again, classifications of any information in an ongoing operation that was successful are not things that would be disclosed in a public forum.

Mr. MOULTON. You can very well disclose whether or not it was classified. It is not classified to disclose whether or not it was classified. In fact, DOD regulations state that any classified information has to be labeled with its classification. Was it classified Secret or Top Secret?

Secretary HEGSETH. What is not classified is that it was an incredible mission against the Houthis.

Mr. MOULTON. Okay. So it was classified. So are you asserting—are you trying to say that the information was unclassified?

Secretary HEGSETH. I am not trying to say anything.

Mr. MOULTON. That is what I thought. You are not saying that. So you took classified information from Central Command that had a classification marking on it, because that is what is required by DOD regulations, and you put it on an unclassified system.

So we are going to get a report in a few days from the DOD Inspector General. And if the DOD inspector general finds what is pretty obvious both to you smiling there on the witness seat and to all of us up here that the information was, in fact, classified, do you plan to take any accountability for that?

Secretary HEGSETH. As I pointed out at the time—

Mr. MOULTON. You said that accountability is back. Does that not apply to you?

Secretary HEGSETH. As I said at the time, Congressman, there were no names, targets, locations, units, routes, sources, methods, no classified information.

Mr. MOULTON. Okay. So if it comes back that it is classified, will you take accountability or not.

Secretary HEGSETH. As I have said—

Mr. MOULTON. We have already established—you have already admitted that it was classified because everything you get from CENTCOM is classified. You just explained that to me. That is how you justified not answering the question.

Secretary HEGSETH. That is not what I said. I didn't confirm any classification or clarification. Mr. Moulton. Okay. So if it is confirmed—

Secretary HEGSETH. What I know is that—

Mr. MOULTON. —will you take accountability?

Secretary HEGSETH. —everything I share, everything I talk about—

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. Secretary, does accountability apply to you or not.

Secretary HEGSETH. —as to the Department of Defense is classified whether I talk or not.

Mr. MOULTON. Does it apply to you or not?

Secretary HEGSETH. Does what apply to me?

Mr. MOULTON. Accountability. You said accountability is back at the Secretary of Defense.

Secretary HEGSETH. And, you know, what the Houthis were held accountable for shooting at our troops—

Mr. MOULTON. I am just asking if it applies to you.

Secretary HEGSETH. —very successfully.

Mr. MOULTON. I am not asking about the Houthis.

Secretary HEGSETH. The previous administration let our ships get shot at and nothing was done about it. And thankfully because of the skill and courage of our troops—

Mr. MOULTON. I reclaim my time.

Secretary HEGSETH. —we actually put them in a place—

Mr. MOULTON. I reclaim my time.

Secretary HEGSETH. —where they called for a ceasefire.

Mr. MOULTON. I reclaim my time. I am just asking if accountability applies to you. It is a very simple question.

Secretary HEGSETH. I serve—

Mr. MOULTON. We use leadership by example.

Secretary HEGSETH. Of course. Unlike, you know, I serve at the pleasure of the President like everybody else does.

Mr. MOULTON. So it only applies to the President and not to you?

Secretary HEGSETH. I serve at the pleasure of the—

Mr. MOULTON. You talked about the success of the Houthi operation. About how much money did it cost? How much money did you spend on missiles shooting at the Houthis?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, you would have to compare that with what it cost—

Mr. MOULTON. I am just asking how much it cost.

Secretary HEGSETH. —to divert our shipping lanes around—

Mr. MOULTON. I am told it is several hundred million dollars, maybe close to a billion dollars. How many U.S.-flagged commercial ships have transited the Red Sea since your so-called successful operation?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, thankfully, unlike the previous administration—

Mr. MOULTON. The answer is zero.

Secretary HEGSETH. —military vessels trans—

Mr. MOULTON. No, I didn't ask about military vessels.

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, which would be the precursor for—

Mr. MOULTON. How many commercial vessels? It has been several weeks. How many commercial vessels, U.S.-flagged, have transited the Red Sea?

Secretary HEGSETH. Would you, Mr. Congressman, put civilian ships through the dam before military ships?

Mr. MOULTON. The questions are not to me, Mr. Secretary. They are to you.

Secretary HEGSETH. We have responsibly put military ships—

Mr. MOULTON. The answer is zero. I reclaim my time. How many generals and admirals have you fired?

Secretary HEGSETH. I don't know the exact number, but—

Mr. MOULTON. You don't the number? It is eight. Can you explain why any of them were fired? But just explain—why was the Army JAG [Judge Advocate General] fired? Why did you fire him?

Secretary HEGSETH. They all serve at the pleasure of the President. And I think—

Mr. MOULTON. No, I am just asking you why.

Secretary HEGSETH. General Caine is a great example of a people that we need—

Mr. MOULTON. I am just asking you why.

Secretary HEGSETH. —at the—

Mr. MOULTON. You probably learned at Princeton what why means. Why did you fire him?

Secretary HEGSETH. We serve at the pleasure of the President. And we wanted better representation—

Mr. MOULTON. Why did you fire him?

Secretary HEGSETH. —in each and every of those—

Mr. MOULTON. You can't explain why you fired any of them?

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Scott.
Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, ma'am, and Mr. Secretary. Most of my questions are going to be for General Caine. I

will tell you, Mr. Secretary, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you offline about a couple of things.

I am from Georgia. I spoke with you briefly. I supported Hal and Julia Moore's name remaining on the base as you know. I support Eisenhower's name remaining on the base. I don't want to go too far into that. I don't want any questions.

But I will tell you this, the selection of Gary Gordon, he is one of the most valorous, heroic acts of any American soldier, certainly in modern times. He was one of the two soldiers that went in with a Blackhawk Down Delta snipers that both died there together. I do have a suggestion on that.

When the Army has named anything after Gary Gordon, Randall Shughart's name has been tied to the name. The Army has historically named things Shughart-Gordon because those two guys went in together. They fought together. They literally died together. And the historical accounts cannot figure out which one actually died first.

And so if the name in Augusta is going to change back to Gordon, I just respectfully suggest that you consider Shughart-Gordon as the Army who has historically named other things. You can't tell Gordon's story without Shughart's story. And I say it out of respect.

General Caine, the Communist Chinese Party assesses U.S. strength, that our strength lies in our alliances and partnerships. If they believe those ties are fraying, how can we use the Ukraine War to demonstrate U.S. strength, capability, and resolve to regain leverage over the Chinese in their assessments of the United States?

General CAINE. Well, sir, thanks for the question and first thanks for recognizing two great warriors who showed us what courage and tenacity look like when you infill into the place that they did on those two MH-60s knowing full well what they were going to face on that objective and then making the full commitment to give their lives on behalf of an injured teammate. That is what America looks like.

So thank you for highlighting that, sir. Bless you, Congressman, by the way.

Mr. SCOTT. He is a SEAL.

General CAINE. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. I know a lot of SEALs. So, I think, you know, mil-to-mil, you know, military-to-military, our relationships with allies and partners around the world remain incredibly important. I am grateful to serve alongside so many great, not just joint force partners, but international partners as well.

And I think that the courage and tenacity that our forces out in EUCOM [United States European Command] have shown through this journey and the teammates that they have built on both sides of those borders is an example of what we should be doing.

Mr. SCOTT. If I can follow up with that, the assessments, Ukraine would survive 9 days, 10 days, some 15 days at the outside. But the rapid innovation cycles that they have candidly taught us in some cases how to do, how do we implement that into the U.S. defense industrial base and get our weapons developed as fast and candidly at the cost because we cannot afford to pay what we are paying per weapon for what we are going to have to do.

And at the same time, how do we develop the defense systems against drones so that we don't lose million dollar—multimillion tanks to \$5,000 drones?

General CAINE. Yes, sir. Thanks for highlighting the innovative entrepreneurial and diabolical spirit of attack that exists out in that part of the world. And, you know, I have been out there and seen what they are doing in terms of drone manufacturing, iterating on the line, linking up with partners, taking the fight to the enemy out there. It is impressive. And we have learned from those examples.

That same spirit of innovation has come back to the United States. And when I think about rebooting our defense industrial base and our national industrial base, I think of it through four C's, and it starts with that culture that you are alluding to about innovation and entrepreneurialism inside combat.

The second part is creating some competition. And I think that is a key part is you help us do that here in the Congress.

The third thing is we got to write better contracts on our side.

Mr. SCOTT. 100 percent.

General CAINE. And we have to be better buyers and share the risk, as I have talked about with the chairman before.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It shouldn't come as no surprise that I have serious concerns with both the Department of the National Guard and the Marines in Los Angeles.

I served in the Marine Corps. We are trained to be warfighters not for crowd control. Everyone here should be alarmed that the President has sent Armed Forces into a city against the wishes of a governor and mayor.

I am concerned that this administration is purposely escalating the situation with this step and politicizing our Armed Forces in the process. Let's call it for what it is. It is political theater.

Hegseth, are the Marines in Los Angeles ordered to protect property by any means necessary?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, I would say the ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] officers and police officers being attacked is not political theater. The National Guard and Marines—

Mr. CARBAJAL. Just yes or no, just yes or no.

Secretary HEGSETH. The National Guard and Marines have the full authority to protect federal ICE agents.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Yes or no. Can you just say yes or no? This isn't Fox anymore, just yes or no.

Secretary HEGSETH. They are there to protect federal agents and federal—

Mr. CARBAJAL. Another BS answer. Under the SRUF [Standing Rules for the Use of Force], the use of force, are Marines allowed to fire warning shots?

Secretary HEGSETH. No.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Now that is more like it. Isn't that easy? Will you—you know, I am going to beat this drum because you refuse to take responsibility. Will you take responsibility for having made a mistake, not to mention many people would say break the law,

in participating in the Signal group chat that included a journalist, your wife, your brother where classified information was shared?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, every way I communicate is authorized.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Okay. If you want to say that. I have called for your resignation. I didn't think you were qualified before your confirmation. And you have done nothing to inspire confidence in your ability to lead competently.

You broke the law in sharing classified information and in doing so, endangered the lives of our servicemembers that you are responsible for. Your inability to hold yourself accountable makes you incapable to lead, to lead. This alone makes you unfit to be the Secretary of Defense.

Secretary, do you think the United States should continue supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russia, a nation that is hostile towards the United States?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, as you know, sir, President Trump is committed to peace.

Mr. CARBAJAL. I just want yes or no answers.

Secretary HEGSETH. The United States has spent billions of dollars—

Mr. CARBAJAL. Yes or no, yes or no. Just yes or no. Can I get a yes or no out of you?

Secretary HEGSETH. We continue to send Presidential—

Mr. CARBAJAL. Come on.

Secretary HEGSETH. —Presidential drawdowns.

Mr. CARBAJAL. It is that easy. Kindergartners could give me a yes or no.

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes, we support peace in Ukraine.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Come on. Is this really leadership? You are an embarrassment to the United States. If Russia invades NATO allies, are you going to recommend to the President that we fulfill our Article 5 obligations?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, Russia has not invaded NATO allies.

Mr. CARBAJAL. No, no, no, no, no, no.

Secretary HEGSETH. President Trump—

Mr. CARBAJAL. No, no, no, no, no. I reclaim my time. Yes or no. It is that simple.

Secretary HEGSETH. There is Article 5 in NATO, which we recognize.

Mr. CARBAJAL. So is the answer yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. That is what Article 5 is, yes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Good. I am glad you brought yourself to saying yes. Do you think political allegiance to Trump is a requirement for serving our nation either in uniform or a civilian in the Department?

Secretary HEGSETH. I am incredibly proud, as are millions of Americans.

Mr. CARBAJAL. No, no, no, no, no, no. No, no, no, no, no, no. Not today, Hegseth. Yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. Congressman, you know what a silly question that is.

Mr. CARBAJAL. But silly enough to warrant a very straightforward answer, yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. We all support and defend the Constitution of the United States. We are proud—

Mr. CARBAJAL. You know what? I am not going to waste my time anymore. You are not worthy of my attention or my questions. You are an embarrassment to this country. You are unfit to lead. And there has been bipartisan members of Congress that have called for your resignation. You should just get the hell out and let somebody competently lead this Department.

Mr. MILLS. Mr. Chairman, do we not have any decorum in here?

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much. I yield my time.

Mr. MILLS. This is absolutely disruptive. This is horrible.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. And I would urge everybody to remember and maintain a decorum suitable for this chamber for their further comments.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee, Dr. DesJarlais.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to thank you, Secretary Hegseth and General Caine for bringing pride, strength, and respect back to our military.

Many critics have described the President's deployment of the National Guard in Los Angeles as unprecedented. But as you know, we have seen similar actions throughout history from Eisenhower sending the 101st to Little Rock, to Johnson and Kennedy federalizing the Guard over the objections of Southern governors during the civil rights era, to George H.W. Bush deploying federal troops during the 1992 LA Riots.

Isn't it fair to say that there is a well-established precedent for the Presidents acting as state leaders who are either unwilling or unable to enforce federal law or protect federal facilities?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, nothing that we are doing on the ground is unprecedented. I would argue what is unprecedented is a governor and a mayor unwilling to protect law enforcement.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Well, I thank you for being willing to step up.

We are going to shift gears here to the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile program. I just wanted to touch base on that other subject because I think it is ridiculous the criticisms that we are hearing in the media.

But with Putin talking freely about using low-yield or tactical nuclear weapons, I think it is important we discuss the SLCM-N [Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile] program for a minute.

As you know, restoring SLCM-N capability of the Navy was recommended in President Trump's 2018 Nuclear Posture Review. The Biden administration proposed to cancel this program. But based on consistent testimony from our senior military leaders that this system was necessary to address deterrence gaps, Congress continued to fund it. And the Fiscal Year 2024 Defense Authorization Bill required the Department to create a dedicated program of record for its development.

What is your view of the SLCM-N program and the broader issue of modernizing our nuclear forces to ensure we have nuclear deterrent that meets the evolving threats we are seeing?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, your characterization is correct. I want to thank Congress for keeping SLCM-N effectively alive under the previous administration because we think it is a critical capability.

And you will see in the fiscal year 2026 budget, we fund it at over a 1000 percent increase. So we completely recognize the need for that capability alongside the entirety of the nuclear enterprise is critically important to maintain deterrence. If you are going to have peace through strength, if you are going to reestablish deterrence, you need to have a credible deterrent, especially at the foundational and baseline level, which is the nuclear level.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. And General Caine, STRATCOM [United States Strategic Command] commanders and your Vice Chief Admiral Grady have testified about the importance from a military perspective of being able to provide the President with an additional response option and how SLCM-N can strengthen deterrence by providing a non-strategic response option that is not air delivered. Do you share that view?

General CAINE. I do.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Thank you. And General Caine, your testimony warns that the PLAs [People's Liberation Army] exercise around Taiwan are not just pressure campaigns, but rehearsal for forced unification.

Throughout my visits to our regional partners in the INDOPACOM [United States Indo-Pacific Command] region over the last few years, you can feel that there has been a rising tide of recognition that China is a threat on their doorstep and ours as the United States, and the world has woken to the increasingly adversarial actions of China.

Can you expand upon how the DOD is rightsizing our force structure to prepare for a conflict in the Pacific should our adversaries continue to escalate tensions in the region and what are we doing now, not years from now, to ensure we can stop that move if it comes?

General CAINE. Yes, sir. Well, first I share your—you know, I share your views and those of Admiral Paparo related to what certainly appears like increasing rehearsals by the PLA in and around the Pacific.

You know, the administration and the Secretary, in particular, through our interim national defense guidance and strategy, which I won't get into in this forum, but is clear around the need for the department to focus on the Pacific and to scale our combat capability with systems capabilities and effects that would prevent Xi from advancing his narrative and create, frankly, multiple simultaneous dilemmas in their decision-making.

And so we continue to work diligently on that through the services as you talked about. And it is something that I am keenly focused on with my global integrator role.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Thank you. And I think, Secretary Hegseth, you covered that pretty thoroughly in your opening statement. So I am out of time, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Khanna.

Mr. KHANNA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, I am hoping we can start where we may have common ground, no war in Iran.

In 2016, President Trump was one of the few people on the Republican stage to have the guts to say that George W. Bush's war in Iraq was an utter disaster. He promised the American people no endless wars.

Tucker Carlson has said that thousands of Americans will die if there is a war in Iran. And he is cautioning that currently neo-cons are trying to get President Trump into a war in Iran. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene has said the American people don't want to bomb Iran.

Will you today assure the American people in the MAGA [Make America Great Again] movement that you will not bomb Iran unless we are hit?

Secretary HEGSETH. Congressman, it is good to hear you quoting conservatives.

Mr. KHANNA. When they are right, I quote them.

Secretary HEGSETH. I will tell you this. The President has been earnestly and completely committed to a peace process. He has given Iran every opportunity. Those talks are ongoing. But he also fully recognizes the threat that Iran—that a nuclear weapon would exist.

Mr. KHANNA. Will you commit to us not bombing them? I mean, that's what the conservative—the MAGA movement is calling for it online. You will see. I mean, they want a commitment that we not bomb Iran unless we are directly hit.

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, here in this forum it wouldn't be prudent for me to commit or not to commit. My job is to be postured and prepared in the region just as the chairman—

Mr. KHANNA. How about this—

Secretary HEGSETH. —potential capability.

Mr. KHANNA. Would you agree with this analysis that Netanyahu is itching for a fight. If Netanyahu uses American missiles to hit Iran, he is going to drag us into a war there because Iran is going to say they are using American missiles.

Our military knows that you cannot just throw hits, eliminate Iran's nuclear capability. They will simply go underground, and they will then end monitoring. And unlike Iraq, they are in heavily civilian sites.

Will you stand up today and make it clear to Netanyahu that that escalation, what he is threatening just yesterday, is not in the American interest? That he should not be dragging America into war with Iran?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, Congressman, that question included a lot of speculation. What I know is that Bibi Netanyahu is going to put his country first, and we are going to put our country first. And we are positioned properly in the region to ensure that we are prepared for any potential contingency.

Mr. KHANNA. Are you concerned about his escalation into Iran and will you assure the American people you are going to do everything possible to keep us out of war in Iran?

Secretary HEGSETH. We remain, as the President has said, committed to creating the conditions for peace, creating the conditions for talks where Iran does not have the ability—

Mr. KHANNA. I have given you my—

Secretary HEGSETH. —to develop a nuclear weapon.

Mr. KHANNA. I am running out of time, 2 minutes. So let me ask you another matter.

Senator Baldwin asked you about the illegal authority for the Marines in my state. I disagree with you. Not only do I not want Marines in Iran, I don't want them in California.

But I don't want to get a got you. You know, they said what provision? Your administration since then has filed in the federal district court. You are arguing that the Marines should be allowed to defend federal property. I disagree with you. That is your argument.

Here is where I hope we can agree. Whatever the federal district court decides, will you abide by it?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, this is a pending—

Mr. KHANNA. Sure.

Secretary HEGSETH. —it is a pending situation.

Mr. KHANNA. So will you agree though that it is not my legal view, it is not your legal view that makes the decision in America? It is the federal judiciary. If the federal court in California and the San Francisco district judge orders a preliminary injunction, will you agree to abide by the federal courts?

Secretary HEGSETH. What I will tell you is my job right now is to ensure that the troops that we have in Los Angeles are capable of supporting law enforcement in the—

Mr. KHANNA. Sir, I agree with that. But will you—

Secretary HEGSETH. And we know, we have this constitutional and statutory authority—

Mr. KHANNA. That is fine. But can you just assure us that you will abide by the decisions of the courts?

Secretary HEGSETH. We have always looked to the decisions of the courts.

Mr. KHANNA. Well, the Vice President has said that he doesn't believe that the courts should be respected in military matters.

Secretary HEGSETH. This is not my lane. But we also recognize that the way in which the judiciary has expanded its powers during the Trump administration is quite clear.

Mr. KHANNA. Well, let me ask you this, two simple questions. You got 30 seconds. I am not trying to trick you. I think it would assure the American people. Because we shouldn't—it shouldn't be Ro Khanna's view of the Constitution, and it shouldn't be Secretary Hegseth's. It should be the Supreme Court and the federal courts.

Can you assure the American people on two things. You will respect any Supreme Court decision on this matter about whether the Marines are constitutional, and you will respect the district courts when they rule before the Supreme Court rules.

Secretary HEGSETH. What I can say is we should not have local judges determining foreign policy or national security policy for the country.

Mr. KHANNA. So you are not willing to say you would respect those decisions?

Secretary HEGSETH. What I am saying is local district judges shouldn't make foreign policy for the United States.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Kelly.

Mr. KELLY. Thank you, Secretary Hegseth and General Caine for being here today. Under President Trump's leadership, America has restored deterrence and secured our southern border.

Thanks to this renewed strength, we are seeing positive momentum in both recruiting and retention. Our adversaries are thinking twice, not just because of our advance capabilities but because of the courage and dedication of the men and women in uniform who defend this nation every day.

Still we face serious growing challenges. China remains a pacing threat. Deterring that threat requires more than just strategy. It requires a strong, responsive defense industrial base.

That starts with the timely and adequate investments and investments begin with a budget. We have to have a budget. Despite the spending, defense spending is the price of deterrence. And we have got to stay focused and strong.

With that being said, Mr. Secretary, I have championed the Ships for America Act with Mr. Garamendi from California and Senator Young and Senator Kelly in the Senate. I know the administration is behind this.

Right now are you committed to getting the Ships Act and getting our maritime industry at base to where we need it to do to be a strong maritime nation, which means a great nation?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, I would refer to Bryn for the actual details of what is included from that bill in our budget. But I can say top line, we are historically committed, \$47 billion in shipbuilding in this budget alone.

It was mischaracterized because of baseline versus reconciliation. But when you look at the total investment, historic. It is the same with defense industrial base.

So we recognize the failures and failings of the past. We are also not just pouring money into the same processes. We are hiring innovators. We have got Secretaries who are driving change, personally reviewing each shipyard across the country to recognize what is failing and what isn't. How we address workforce issues, how we address modernization.

Mr. KELLY. I am going to take that as yes where I can get something out because we work with the administration and the Senate and the House, bipartisan, bicameral throughout the administration to get that done.

Acquisition reform, General Caine, thank you for your leadership. As the committee works to streamline acquisitions through the SPEED Act and get program executive office PEOs [Program Executive Officer] more agility, I want to make sure we are doing the right things that DOD writ large, especially when we are talking about Navy and Air Force and some of the programs that we do.

Requirements cannot be shifted on a yearly basis. They at least need to stand steady through an administration. So we need requirements that are steady. We can't tell them how to build things. What we need to tell them is the capabilities we need and let industry build that.

We can't always let perfect be the enemy of good. We need to keep and maintain during the acquisition process intellectual property rights so that we can repair those things ourselves so that we can 3D print. There are so many things that we can do better that we put artificial barriers because we have a risk averse DOD now, especially in acquisitions.

And finally, we need to make sure if we say we are building four destroyers next year we don't need to next year say, well, we are going to change that to three. We have to send a steady demand signal. We have to do block buys, and we have to hold these PEOs responsible for finishing the program or at least getting it to a point where it is in production. We cannot rotate every 2 or 3 years.

Are you committed to make sure that we do everything we can to help our industrial base give the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, the products they need to win?

General CAINE. Well, sir, there was a lot of goodness in the statement. And by the way, thank you for your service yourself here in the uniform for so many years.

You know, you covered a lot of ground between requirements to PEOs. One of the things that I think, both the military and the Congress, are going to have to think through is how do we buy aligned with the technology development curve, back to your point about requirements.

And what I need to try to think through with you is how do we ensure that the force of the future has the relevant and current combat capability to dominate on the battlefield?

And technology is evolving so incredibly fast that we need both the requirement system and acquisition system leaders that understand that. And I think that is going to require some partnership between the Department and the Congress to think through that and clarity around what are we solving for?

Mr. KELLY. And finally real quick, Secretary Hegseth, please have the Navy get us a shipbuilding plan that is not an option. We have not had one for the last 7 years. Please get us a 30-year shipbuilding plan of which the first 4 years are locked in.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to take my time to react to the testimony already given.

The three pillars that each of the witnesses and the Secretary highlighted, pillar number one, restore the warrior ethos.

You know, I have had the privilege in this committee to see firsthand the special window of our troops, their courage, their tenacity, their commitment. You don't have to restore the warrior ethos, sir. It is already there. We have never lost it.

Pillar two, I just want to highlight something that is a concern. Pillar two is the border security issue. And among that, I am really worried about the agreement with El Salvador that exists.

I think it is very cloudy. We don't know exactly what they are getting in return for their commitment to house the hell hole prisons, and the hell hole prisons they have. People that are shipped there, transported there illegally.

But there are problems with that. It violates the Constitution number one. It violates the First Step Act that President Trump paraded around and took so much credit for in his first term, he and his son-in-law Jared Kushner. It violates the Lahey Law, which prohibits federal money to be used for prisons of that type. It violates the Foreign Assistance and Transparency and Accountability Act that our Secretary of State was a proud sponsor of, demands taxpayer accountability for monies because all we know is the White House has said they have given El Salvador, given their strong man Bukele \$6 million. But then they are holding another \$15 million in international narcotics and control and law enforcement to the side for prospective use here.

And of concern too is we are now transferring helicopters, military assets, to Bukele. We are giving him helicopters. And I am concerned about that. Supposedly, it is there for humanitarian reasons.

It is being taken away from drug control task force dealing with the fentanyl issue. And now it is there for humanitarian reasons in Bukele's control. And I am just worried about going down the road here. I think there should be strict oversight of what they are getting from the U.S.

If that is not there and there is dark money and dark assets being passed, we could have the makings of another Iran Contra.

Thirdly, the third pillar, deterrence. And I look to what every expert, militarily from a security standpoint said, is the greatest deterrent that we have with China and Russia and our greatest weakness if we lose it, and that is the war in Ukraine.

If we fail to support Ukraine and Ukraine loses, that is a green light for China. That is just not my opinion, that is virtually every security expert.

We have something China and Russia don't have. We have a coalition of 50 countries, 50, dealing together. They don't have anything near that yet you have attacked that alliance. You said they are pathetic. You called them freeloaders. They have paid—and we want more money, and they are giving more money for their own defense. But they have given \$199 billion towards Ukraine, more than the U.S. by the way.

They were not freeloaders when they came to our assistance at 9/11. They suffered thousands of casualties, several hundred deaths, their young men and women sacrificed to defend Article 5, the only time it was exercised for the United States. They are not freeloaders dealing with that.

And yet today, you attacked one of them saying that now you have confirmed that the U.S. has plans in place to invade the territory of a founding member of NATO, Denmark. That is not being strength. That is not being strong. It is also chaotic.

This is the chaos cabinet when it comes to Ukraine. Secretary of the Treasury, Putin is a war criminal. Trump's chief negotiator, Putin is trustworthy. He is not a bad guy. Secretary of State, Putin was a war criminal, I guess. But now he is not. He doesn't know.

Trump says Ukraine was the aggressor. The Secretary of State says Russia was the aggressor. You, sir, Secretary of Defense said Russia was the aggressor.

The chair of Joint Chiefs said yesterday that Putin wouldn't even stop at Ukraine. The Trump ambassador resigned because of this policy. And I think Vice President Vance said it best. He said he doesn't care what happens to Ukraine one way or the other.

That is not strength. That is not using our coalition. That is not deterrence. You are wrong on all of your pillars. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska, Chairman Bacon.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome all three of you here. I appreciate you being here. And I want to congratulate the chairman. I served three decades in the Air Force. I didn't serve with you, but many of my friends have, and they think very highly of you so our congrats.

Mr. Secretary, during your comments early on, I would say I agree with you. Homeland security, defense of our homeland is important. China is our pacing threat. I agree with that.

But we never hear Russia. You didn't mention it in your comments upfront. And it's not just you. It's the entire administration. Two-thirds of Americans see clearly that Russia is a threat. That they are the aggressor in Ukraine. It is in our national security interest that Ukraine prevails here because Russia will not stop Ukraine.

Just this week, Putin said that he would stop—he would only stop the invasion of Ukraine if we pull out of the Baltic countries. I mean, this just gives you some insight into what Putin is thinking.

What we see right now in the administration is some moral blindness here. We want moral clarity. We want strength when it comes to Russia.

Secondly, I also share concerns about the firing of the generals. Yes, it is currently pretty much in your constitutional right to fire and hire generals and the President has that right. But there is also decency involved here.

I have known many of these people. I served with most of these folks when I was a colonel and as a one star. I knew one as a captain. They served their whole adult life. And I think they deserved an explanation of why they were fired. And I think the American people deserve that as well.

And the impact on Cyber Command, having General Haugh fired, we groomed him for over a decade to fill those shoes. I don't know if anybody can fill those shoes right now. It is going to take a year or two for people to get there.

I really believe the most happy on the firing of General Hawk was Russia and China.

Now for my questions. I am on the cyber subcommittee. I chair that committee. We learn, and we know, and I know you all know that Russia and China are attacking us every day. I also have learned that within the executive branch there are very limiting rules of engagement on what Cyber Command can do in response.

I would ask both the Secretary and the chairman if you would review those rules of engagement and see if they were—I think we should be carrying a bigger stick here, when we are being attacked every day.

So would you at least look at those rules of engagement and consider revamping them?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, we do review those on a regular basis. And I would say there has been some incorrect reporting on what has or has not been done. But internally, we are ensuring that anything we do on cyber offense or cyber defense is coordinated with the administration's priorities and the way in which the department views threats and how we manage them in real time.

Mr. BACON. Since I mentioned I am the chairman of the committee, and I talked to multiple layers, they are restricted based off of the rules of engagement. Maybe they are appropriate. I just hope we relook at them because if China can attack our energy grid, our Wall Street grid, our hospitals, I think we should be reviewing, okay, is our response adequate?

So I just want to submit that for you to think about and consider.

I agree, China is the pacing threat. And the best way to—we want to prevent a war. Day one of a war with China and Taiwan is a day too late.

I happen to know that we owe billions of dollars of weapons to Taiwan. We have committed to or they purchased them. And this is really our previous administration's fault. But we are talking about billions of dollars of weapons. They need sea mines now. They need Harpoon missiles, air and missile defense, things like that.

I asked the previous Secretary under the previous administration, what are you doing? Oh, well, I am studying it. He is the Secretary. I just asked for you all's review and figure out who do we got to—who is behind, do we got to kick to circuit these weapons to Taiwan faster so we have deterrence? And I would just appreciate your comment to that.

Secretary HEGSETH. I will defer to the chairman as well. But this is not something we are simply reviewing. It is something we are implementing in real time. I think there was a lot of talk about a shift to the Indo-Pacific in previous administrations, but the Department had not put in place—not just—there was strategy changes at some level, but driving change in to the institution to make decisions, prioritize and tradeoffs in your budget, in force posture, in training and exercises, in where you forward position troops and munitions, those are things we are actioning in real time, and I think very different than in the past with a realistic view of what threats could emerge in the Indo-Pacific. I defer to the chairman.

General CAINE. I will just add in general terms about the size and capacity of our defense assistance worldwide. You know that all tacks back to our national and defense industrial base. And what I am encouraged by is the leaders that we have in the Department, in the joint force and in the Congress right now.

It feels like, if not now, then when? And if not us, then who? And these are the right leaders across the USG [United States Government] to get after this and to support through the—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Pennsylvania, Ms. Houlahan.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, I have been looking forward very much to our time together.

My name is Chrissy Houlahan. In addition to representing a part of Pennsylvania, the Sixth District, I also am a veteran. I come from a family of veterans and servicemembers. And it is very deeply personal to me this conversation that we are having as I know it is to you as well.

Over the last several days, I have had the opportunity to watch a bit of the hearings that you have testified at this week, and I can see and know that you have quite a bit to say. But since I only have 5 minutes, I am going to try and focus my time on a concept that you talk about very frequently, and that is lethality.

By definition, lethality simply means capable of causing death. Secretary Hegseth, I have a couple of clarifying questions that I would like very much to get through, so in the interest of time and efficiency, I would ask just simply for a yes or no from you for the answers to these questions in advance. And I thank you.

So given that definition of lethality, would it be fair to say that both men and women are, generally speaking, capable of causing death?

Secretary HEGSETH. It depends on the—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes or no, sir.

Secretary HEGSETH. It depends on the context.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes or no. Are men and women capable of causing death?

Secretary HEGSETH. It depends on the context.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. It depends on the context. Ms. Houlahan. It is unbelievable to me that you can't come up with an answer whether or not a man or a woman can cause death. That is an obvious yes.

Would it be fair to say that the U.S. military trains our soldiers in multiple ways to be capable of causing death, whether they are men or women?

Secretary HEGSETH. That's a big part of our job.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes. Would it be fair to say that both men and women are capable of pulling a trigger of a rifle to cause death? Yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sure.

Ms. HOULAHAN. And would it be fair to say that both men and women are capable of operating an unmanned combat drone or maybe pushing a button to launch a missile to cause death again? Yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. I know what you are getting at, ma'am.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes?

Secretary HEGSETH. But it is—

Ms. HOULAHAN. So lastly, sir.

Secretary HEGSETH. —men and woman carry equipment differently—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Lastly, sir.

Secretary HEGSETH. —a 155 differently—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Lastly, sir.

Secretary HEGSETH. —a 245 or a machine gun differently.

Ms. HOULAHAN. I am reclaiming my time. I asked about missiles and drones.

The CHAIRMAN. It is the gentlelady's time.

Ms. HOULAHAN. I am reclaiming my time.

The CHAIRMAN. It is the gentlelady's time.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Would it be fair finally to say that both men and women are capable of piloting a jet or a helicopter to combat people and to cause death as a consequence?

Secretary HEGSETH. A lot of wonderful female pilots—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes or no. So while I agree with you that physical fitness, as you were mentioning, is a very strong and important component of lethality, the warfighter that you have written about in your books and talked about on various podcasts is but a very, very small piece of the overall lethality picture. In fact, we estimate only about 10 percent of our military personnel are directly involved in the kind of combat that you are referring to.

Rather 90 percent, that is the math, of our troops are doing other jobs that support and enable those 10 percent. So to put it simply, lethality cannot be measured solely by the damage that a 6 foot 3, 225 pound, Christian male with a rifle can do to the enemy any more.

Sure, I agree. He is part of that solution. But it is an incomplete and at best very dangerous and very homogenous description of that.

Lethality is equal parts technical skills, tactical experience, cognitive problem solving and physical fitness. It is not about one person. But it is about many. It is not about blue or red. It is not about liberal or conservative, Christian, Jewish or agnostic. It is not about north and south.

Here are some statements that you have said previously about women in service. This is 2024, sir, not when you were a 19 year old. You have said that women are life-givers. That dads push us to take risks and that moms put the training wheels on our bikes. That we need moms, but not in the military.

Secondly, you have said, "I am straight up just saying we should not have women in combat roles. It hasn't made us more effective, and it hasn't made us more lethal."

With what is left of my time, sir, I will say to you that women have served our country for 200 plus years in our militaries and in service and protection of our nation. They are watching you, what you do and what you say. And we deserve better from you.

Women can and do serve with lethality today. We can and do all of the jobs that are required of us. Yes or no, do you believe military women should be in all roles in the military?

Secretary HEGSETH. Women have joined our military in record—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes or no, sir.

Secretary HEGSETH. —numbers under this administration.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Should women be in all roles in the military?

Secretary HEGSETH. The standards should be high and equal for all positions.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes or no, sir. We agree. Should they be in all roles in the military?

Secretary HEGSETH. My job is that 10 percent—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Yes or no? Reclaiming my time.

Secretary HEGSETH. —stays as sharp as possible. The standards should be high and equal.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Reclaiming my time. Do you agree that all women—that women should be able to perform in all combat roles, assuming they meet the standards?

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Secretary HEGSETH. It is all about standards.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Disappointing.

The CHAIRMAN. Before we move to the next witness, I would like to hearken back to my several decades ago time as a trial lawyer and remind the members, you control your questions. The witness controls his or her answers. You can ask a yes or no question, but the witness is entitled to give his or her answer the way they choose to frame it.

With that, I recognize the gentleman from Texas, Dr. Jackson.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I deeply appreciate your time.

Mr. Secretary, I would like to start by apologizing for some of the rude and childish behavior that was demonstrated earlier by one of my colleagues. I think I speak for several members on this committee. I apologize for that. Unfortunately, it is probably not the last bit of disrespectful grandstanding that is going to take place before this hearing is over.

Secretary, under President Donald Trump's leadership, our government has been refocused on the most pressing challenges facing our nation. Instead of woke DEI and climate change programs, this administration is advancing our military readiness and lethality.

As adversaries seek to challenge the United States, we must do better to equip, train, and defend this great nation.

Mr. Secretary, on behalf of the patriotic Americans in the 13th Congressional District of Texas, I want to thank you for what you are doing to reclaim our military. I think you are doing a wonderful job.

Last month at SOF [Special Operations Forces] week, you stressed an important and foundational SOF truth. People, not equipment, make the critical difference. Our SOF community employ a number of capabilities and special expertise that bolster our ability to deter the PRC [People's Republic of China] and set conditions if needed that provide the United States with distinctive advantages.

We ask a lot of our special operations forces more and more as each day goes by. And that is only going to continue.

Crisis response remains a critical mission performed by SOCOM [United States Special Operations Command]. And despite flat funding, this responsibility has risen as high as 200 percent over the last decade.

Mr. Secretary, as you highlighted during SOF week, our operators' lethal precision and timely crisis response capabilities have met these growing demands every single time.

Given this significant and sustained increase in operational tempo, what can the department do to alleviate resource constraints in SOCOM's budget to ensure critical crisis response capabilities are properly funded and that our SOF operators can con-

tinue to meet the evolving global threats both with great power competition and in the counterterrorism arena?

Secretary HEGSETH. It is a great question, sir. I appreciate it. We start by listening to those units, to those men, what they are facing, what they need, what their families need, and then resource it. Because not only have they been used more than anybody else over the last 20 years, but even in just the last 4 or 5 years, the amount of times we call on the special forces community, special operations community has increased.

So the funding needs to match that, which you will see in this budget. The training needs to be commensurate with it. And then I think morale and standards really matter. There is a reason why we looked at school houses of some of our most elite special operations forces and ensured that standards have not eroded because under the previous administration, for political reasons, in pursuit of political correctness, for other ideologies, standards were dropped, whether formally or informally, amongst certain communities to sometimes reach quotas or sometimes for ideological perspectives.

We want to ensure standards go up to the highest possible level. Anyone who can quality meets those standards. And guess what that does for those units? It increases morale, increases unit cohesion because they know they are as capable as they can possibly be.

Dr. JACKSON. Thank you. General Caine, do you have anything to add to that?

General CAINE. Sir, most of those matters are policies that my civilian leaders set and not something that the Joint Force weighs in on as you know. And thank you for your service.

Dr. JACKSON. Yes, sir. And thank you. And I will say that, you know, we have had lots of discussions about this. And I know you are aware of this, but the special operations community is being spread extremely thin right now.

And, you know, SOCOM, JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command], they are repeatedly and more and more often having to tell the geographic combatant commanders that they cannot do what they are being asked to do just because they don't have the resources or the people to do the job.

So anything I can personally do, and I am sure many others on this committee, we are willing to make sure that we can do that.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Crow.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Chairman Caine, Secretary Hegseth, and Mrs. MacDonnell. You are doing a great job today, Mrs. MacDonnell.

Secretary Hegseth, we have a lot of things in common. In fact our careers started the same way. We were both infantry officers. We were both platoon leaders. We both deployed our platoons to combat in a counterinsurgency environment.

There are very few better leadership training grounds than that experience. And it is that experience that I want to transport us back into time into, back to Lieutenant Hegseth and Lieutenant Crow.

There are a lot of things that make a leader and that make a unit effective. Would you say that unit cohesion is important?

Secretary HEGSETH. Unit cohesion amongst many is very important, yes.

Mr. CROW. It is an important element. And part of that is making sure that all members of your unit felt included in that team, correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. Far more important that every member of that unit felt capable to do the mission and united in that mission.

Mr. CROW. But that they were included and felt part of the team as well.

Secretary HEGSETH. I wouldn't use the word inclusion, sir, but yes, they were cohering as a team, yes.

Mr. CROW. And that you reduced tension and in-fighting and points of tension between your platoon members so that you can focus on the mission. That was a part of the regular job.

Secretary HEGSETH. Absolutely. That is why I have said that our diversity is our strength is the single dumbest phrase in military history.

Mr. CROW. And words are important.

Secretary HEGSETH. Unity is our strength.

Mr. CROW. Words—

Secretary HEGSETH. Unity amongst members despite differences, backgrounds, race, whatever that is—

Mr. CROW. And I agree with you on that.

Secretary HEGSETH. —to ensure we work together on a mission.

Mr. CROW. Part of that is words are important and setting the tone is important, correct, when you are a leader? Secretary Hegseth. All aspects of leadership, mostly leading by example.

Mr. CROW. Did you ever tell them your political affiliation? Did you ever tell your platoon members your political affiliation?

Secretary HEGSETH. We certainly discussed lots of topics. And I am sure my political affiliation—

Mr. CROW. Did you ever ask them theirs?

Secretary HEGSETH. No, their political affiliation was never a concern to me.

Mr. CROW. Because it is important that everybody feel included and that people weren't excluded, correct? That would be antithetical to leaders.

Secretary HEGSETH. I am sure my platoon contained Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, and I had no idea what their affiliation was.

Mr. CROW. That was actually my next question. So I appreciate you answering that.

You led your unit in a counterinsurgency environment, and you interacted with civilians, correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. Interacted with members of the civilian population, interact, sure.

Mr. CROW. And you were in fact a COIN [counter insurgency] instructor, a counterinsurgency instructor, correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. In Afghanistan in 2011 and 2012, I was the senior counterinsurgency instructor.

Mr. CROW. And you signed off on a manual. There is actually a counterinsurgency manual that you signed off on and helped create. And your name is on that manual, correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. We were a part of creating a lot of content at the COIN Academy, yes.

Mr. CROW. Do you remember this portion of the manual? It says if you have killed two innocents, you have set yourself back more than you have moved forward. Do you still agree with that?

Secretary HEGSETH. I would have to take a look at the manual, but obviously no one in warfare is seeking to kill innocents.

Mr. CROW. Okay. So it is important to show why we are different from the enemy because we are not the enemy, right? We are different from our adversary. Would you agree with that? We have different morals and different values.

Secretary HEGSETH. We are not the enemy, sir.

Mr. CROW. We have different morals and different values than the enemy.

Secretary HEGSETH. We have a code, a Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Mr. CROW. The answer to that is yes.

Secretary HEGSETH. —pre-societal formations that we try to—

Mr. CROW. You are not trying to compare us to Al Qaeda and ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] are you? We are different.

Secretary HEGSETH. I know the code of the United States Military and Army that I signed up for—

Mr. CROW. You can't tell me whether we are different.

Secretary HEGSETH. —and I swore to uphold by raising my right hand.

Mr. CROW. You are not willing to say we are different.

Secretary HEGSETH. Of course we are different.

Mr. CROW. Okay. Thank you.

Secretary HEGSETH. This is absurd.

Mr. CROW. That is why I am trying to reconcile the fact that we learned many of the same lessons as platoon leaders about unit cohesion, making sure that people were included, that we didn't ask people's political affiliation, that we interacted respectfully with civilian populations. That what a leader says matters. That the tone you set matters. That we are not the enemy. That we are different from them. We lead differently. We have different morals.

How can I reconcile that experience and those lessons learned from Lieutenant Hegseth to now Secretary Hegseth where you say things like what you just saw here, making us equivalent on the same standards as our adversaries, doing the same things that ISIS and Al Qaeda would do. How can you possibly reconcile that? I can't.

And just the other day down at Fort Bragg in our beloved 82nd Airborne Division, sitting there while we politicize the military and pull our paratroopers into politics, booing elected officials, booing politicians with whom you disagree, it is antithetical to our values. And you, sir—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Gimenez.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, when you say that you want the military to have standards, high standards, is that for each job classification? You were going to be setting the standards that that job classification merits?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sure. So if you are looking at combat arms, you are going to have a certain set of standards there that are very important, and that anybody who meets that standard is qualified to have that job, whether it be male, female, whatever race, political affiliation, et cetera. We have made that clear, from day one, that those jobs are open to anybody that can reach the standard for that particular job. It shouldn't be lowered for any reason.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Fair enough, but are you—when you are setting these standards, are you going to make sure that they don't set artificial barriers for entry for anybody? In other words, if you don't want a particular race or gender, you are going to set standards that kind of push them away? Or are you going to be fair in setting your standards?

Secretary HEGSETH. The only thing that matters in the setting of standards is the capability to do the job.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Fair enough. And I think that is all we ask for. I want to transition a little bit and you are saying about peace through strength. Our doctrine is peace through strength, correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes, sir.

Mr. GIMENEZ. And the only way that really that works is if your enemy knows that you will use that strength. Is that correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes, credible and capable matters.

Mr. GIMENEZ. And would you say that if you are ambiguous about using that strength, that actually invites not peace, but war?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, there are certain environments where strategic ambiguity is an important thing, but for the most part your enemy or adversary needs to know you are capable and willing to use force, if necessary.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Fair enough. Would you consider Russia and China to be allies?

Secretary HEGSETH. Unfortunately, especially under the previous administration, the Biden administration, policies have driven Russia and China into an even greater alliance, yes.

Mr. GIMENEZ. And so would you consider that anything that benefits Russia and its aggression, would also benefit China?

Secretary HEGSETH. I don't know that I would agree with every characterization of that statement, but certainly if you are benefiting folks that are on the same side, that matters.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Fair enough. Now I commend you and the Trump administration for pushing our allies, our NATO allies into defending more of Europe. In other words, it is their responsibility. They have a bear in their backyard. They need to understand they have a bear in their backyard and that they need to protect themselves from that bear. But if that bear gets out of hand, will the United States come to its aid?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, the goal of this administration is peace in Ukraine. And there is no doubt about that and we understand—

Mr. GIMENEZ. I am not talking about Ukraine. I am saying if a bear, okay, and we are a part of NATO, okay? If the bear starts

getting out of hand and we are part of NATO, will the United States fulfill its duties under NATO's obligations?

Secretary HEGSETH. Article 5 is a real part of NATO. We acknowledge that. Never have not. But at the same time, we have been very aggressive in reminding Europe it is responsible for its defense first.

Mr. GIMENEZ. No, that is not a small thing.

Secretary HEGSETH. I—no, no.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I am not saying a small thing at all. Okay? I agree with it. The NATO nations need to be more involved in their own defense. I agree. They need to bear a big portion of that defense. But we are part of an alliance.

Secretary HEGSETH. But increasingly, not just a bigger part, but the lead of their defense on the continent in the years on after World War II, the belief of this administration is that European countries ought to be able to build combat credible capability that they bear fears and worries about, not a continual backstop reliance on the United States of America for decades and decades and decades. And that is why a 5 percent commitment for European countries is a huge focus for this administration that only President Trump could achieve because in a world of a lot of threats, you can't just continually stay in the same posture and the same places for the same reasons of the last 80 years. So we are encouraged by the investment—

Mr. GIMENEZ. I have only got a certain amount of time. I need to put this out, okay? I believe like when we started out this conversation, okay, that it is imperative that that bear knows that yes, Europe needs to protect itself, but that the United States will also demonstrate peace through strength in order to keep the peace in Europe and I yield my time back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields. At this time, the chair would like to note that at approximately 12:30, the committee will recess for 15 minutes and reconvene at 12:45.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Maine, Mr. Golden.

Mr. GOLDEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Secretary Hegseth, yesterday, Admiral Kilby testified before the committee about the importance of building DGG Flight III ships. The anti-air ballistic missile radar capabilities are chief among the reasons why, as I am sure you know, and you can ask just about any of the U.S.-flagged merchant vessels that have been attacked by the Houthis, or the Americans, who were protected by destroyers when Iran attacked Israel for this large-scale missile attack, why these ships are so important.

So we don't have a complete budget request from your Department yet, but the word on the street is that it is going to request zero new destroyers. Of course, destroyers are well known as the backbone of any modern Navy fleet and China is closing the gap between us and them having doubled its destroyer fleet in the last 20 years. I am also now hearing that the President plans to eliminate the frigate program outright.

Yesterday, Senator Collins asked you about the absence of anything referencing destroyers in your fiscal year 2026 spreadsheets that were delivered to Congress. You didn't really answer the ques-

tion, instead you referenced a historic shipbuilding investment that is forthcoming.

So just focusing on destroyers, there is really nothing historic about the two destroyers in the reconciliation bill. Just last year, Congress funded three new destroyers. We did two in fiscal year 2024. We did three in fiscal year 2023. So from my perspective, the reconciliation bill sets you up for an easy opportunity to increase the size of America's destroyer fleet. So I want to give you an opportunity to tell us what this committee could expect in the fiscal year 2026 request pertaining to destroyers. I know you have been talking a lot about tradeoffs and in the short-term I would agree that maybe there is no immediate negative tradeoff there or negative effects of not requesting any destroyers, but in the mid-term and long-term, I think surely any gap in production of destroyers may come back to bite us, so I wanted to hear what your thinking is here.

Secretary HEGSETH. I appreciate the question, sir. We are procuring destroyers and I would contrast the previous administration's budget, last budget, effectively which procured five ships. This one includes 19.

Mr. GOLDEN. I am talking about destroyers only here.

Secretary HEGSETH. There is a plus up of destroyers. We are reviewing the frigate program for reasons I think this committee is well aware of. Another one of those difficult decisions that we think we are in a place where we have to make them, again, another program that was supposed to be off the shelf and reflecting something based on existing design that was gold plated time and time again and pushed backwards. So that is one of the things we are reviewing. We call it historic because it is multiples of what we had before, not all destroyers because you have got a lot of back-end capabilities you need to invest in to be effective in the maritime space, but it does make it a historic investment.

Mr. GOLDEN. You said plus up when you say that. Are you referencing the two destroyers in the reconciliation bill?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes.

Mr. GOLDEN. So that would be a plus up on top of forthcoming request for more destroyers in the fiscal year 2026 budget request?

Secretary HEGSETH. I would ask Bryn, how would you break that down?

Mrs. MACDONNELL. Yes, sir. So our budget, I associate that as one budget, two bills. So the two destroyers he is referencing are the two in the reconciliation bill.

Mr. GOLDEN. Okay, so, again, does that mean that you will request additional destroyers as part of the fiscal year 2026 NDAA in the appropriations process, yes or no?

Mrs. MACDONNELL. When we built the budget, sir, the 4 months that you and the Secretary referenced, we found the requirement for two destroyers in fiscal year 2026, so the budget only requests two across those bills.

Mr. GOLDEN. Yes, absolutely. The Navy has been planning to get two destroyers in fiscal year 2026 and fiscal year 2027. However, I think this committee, the Senate, appropriators as well, have been pretty clear that the destroyers in reconciliation were to supplement that anticipated request of four ships in 2 years, not the

plan itself. I suppose if that is all you are asking for it will be up to members of this committee and the Congress whether or not we want to exercise we think is the right call here which would be to grow the size of our destroyer fleet, not slow down its growth. With that, you can take the 40 seconds if you have any other comments or I will yield it back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Luttrell.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary and General Caine and Mrs. MacDonnell, thank you for joining us today.

Mr. Secretary, I am very laser focused in on the advancements and the buildout of hypersonic capabilities in our military at the classification level obviously in this room, and I will always be concerned and always plan for the worst and hope for the best, but we are very far behind when it comes to our ability to build out hypersonics. The nefarious actors globally have really kind of taken advantage of that over the past two decades and they are way out front.

And you can pass this off to Mr. Caine if you like, but I would like to hear where we are and are we moving forward aggressively enough to outfit our arsenal?

Secretary HEGSETH. I will defer to the chairman on that, but very aggressive. Long range fires, hypersonics are central to this fiscal year 2026 budget in some creative ways as well. So I wouldn't fully agree with every characterization of what you said. We are catching up quickly on capabilities and that is because of things that are known and things that are unknown in hypersonics because that is the capability that we need to have existing and—

Mr. LUTTRELL. Need to have. Well said. Yes, sir. General?

General CAINE. Congressman, first, thanks for your service in the teams. Appreciate it and a bunch of SEALs in the room here, so I will be mindful of that.

Mr. LUTTRELL. They are not as good as I was.

General CAINE. No comment, sir.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Case in point.

General CAINE. Yes, sir. Sir, it is very much on our Joint Force radar. As you know, the services handle a lot of that and the Navy is all over SM-6 [Standard Missile-6] Block 1B which will hit in 2029. The Air Force is working on HACM [Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile] and doing operational tests on that now and thinks that that was progressing along the way. We are looking at partnering with industry to look at additional capacity and capability on the hypersonic side, but the ability to leverage that capability to cause dilemmas in those ground force commanders on the other side is key and essential and something that we are very focused on through the services.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Okay. Good to hear. Mr. Secretary, I have spoken to the Secretary of the Navy, Secretary of the Army. I have spoken to Secretary Collins of the VA [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs] and I am going to completely shift gears on this with you. If I am able to accomplish anything and I am putting this out for public consumption, so I am probably going to get beat up for it, but if I can before I leave this place, this wonderful place we call

Washington, D.C., if I can make the transition from Department of Defense, our servicemembers into the VA space seamless and effective, I have done something amazing.

Now as a veteran yourself, I can understand, you certainly understand, you know the complexities of what it looks like when somebody says hey, thank you for your service. Here is everything you need. The VA is that way. We lose 6,000 veterans a year to suicide. We have disability claims that are through the roof and our veterans' community is more or less lost.

And I wholeheartedly believe that the DOD and the VA worked shoulder to shoulder with this where it was almost just a drag and drop. Here is your DOD service record. VA, he or she are on their way. There we go. You have them. We are good to go. And the veteran is absolutely taken care of. That does not exist currently and it is something that I am working every day on.

I know you will support this. I probably am putting words in your mouth and I shouldn't do that, but I want you and the Secretary of the VA if you haven't been in the room together to talk about this, I would love to be involved, but I want this put to bed. This is a problem that has existed for decades and decades and decades and it shouldn't. And I think if we make this process easier, we will decrease the amount of veteran suicides down the zero. Our veteran space will be just wholeheartedly happier and then we can move on and focus on other things.

Secretary HEGSETH. As you know, I do agree wholeheartedly. I hope you have seen Secretary Collins and I—we look for it. We have never seen a memorandum written together by a DOD Secretary and VA Secretary which we signed together in his office at the VA. He came to see me. We talked about it. I came to see him in his office. He put out a video and a memorandum and put our staffs together to say this is a problem we need to fix. We need to streamline that transition in real time for those who served. So we are fully committed.

Mr. LUTTRELL. Thank you, sir. And I will reach out to your office for that point of contact so I can—I won't hold it over top of them, I would like to have someone that I can talk to on a weekly basis. Thank you and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, the gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from California, Ms. Jacobs.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you to all of our witnesses for being here.

Secretary Hegseth, as you probably know, today is National Women Veterans Day and in your confirmation hearing and in subsequent conversations, you have said and I am quoting you now, "Women in our military have and continue to make amazing contributions across all aspects of our battlefields" and that women were some of the best soldiers you served with.

Do you still stand by those statements?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you. As you probably know, I represent San Diego, the biggest military community in the country, so I meet with countless servicemembers all the time. And with your focus and emphasis on merit and standards, I want to tell you about three incredible women in our military.

So the first woman is a major responsible for advanced collective warfighting training. Her officer evaluation report rates her as most qualified and some of the comments included are and I am quoting now "She lives the Army values and demonstrates the warrior ethos daily. She rates within the top 5 percent of officers I have encountered in 18 years of military service."

The second woman is an aviator with a record of over 50 combat missions, including deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Two quotes from her most recent fitness report in April include, quoting again, "People excel under her leadership and she has my strongest possible recommendation for promotion."

The third woman is an instructor for an Army ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] battalion. According to her evaluation report, her overall performance was rated at far exceeds standards. And the comments include she is undoubtedly within the top 5 percent of noncommissioned officers I have worked with in my 22 years of service.

Given their stellar qualifications and accomplishments and their record of surpassing standards, I assume that you agree that the Pentagon and the services should do everything they can to retain women like these, correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. I would commend the major, the aviator, and the instructor for their service.

Ms. JACOBS. Great. I am glad you agree because I also believe we should be recruiting and retaining the very best and brightest in our country to serve in the military. And yet, you are actually kicking out these three highly qualified servicemembers solely because of their identities. These are trans women. And you are using the very same arguments that have been used against desegregating the military or allowing women to serve or allowing gay people to serve. And in all those cases those arguments were wrong. So I think it is clear that this is actually not about standards or and I am quoting you again, "an equal, unwavering gender neutral, merit-based system." Because if it were, you would be keeping these women in. Instead, you are the one injecting culture wars into the military and it is at the detriment of our military readiness and national security.

Now General Caine, I would like to turn to you.

Secretary HEGSETH. So to be clear, these are men who think they are women.

Ms. JACOBS. These are women. I am happy to educate you on trans—

Secretary HEGSETH. What we have identified is that there are mental health issues in that belief system—

Ms. JACOBS. I would like to turn to General—

Secretary HEGSETH. —that are detrimental to readiness. And that is the determination that we have made and that we stand behind. Gender dysphoria creates—

Ms. JACOBS. So you don't trust your commanding officers to be able to evaluate the people under them to decide? If that were true, wouldn't that show up in their fit reps and yet these fit reps are from the last 3 months and all of their commanding officers say that they exceed standards.

I am turning to General Caine now. General Caine, I would like to touch on something you said yesterday before the Senate Appropriations Committee. When asked whether the United States is under a foreign invasion you said at this point in time I don't see any foreign state sponsored folks invading.

Despite that testimony, 2,000 national guard troops have been federalized and deployed to Los Angeles and 700 Marines from my community of Southern California are now on the ground there as well. And on Tuesday, President Trump, flanked by hundreds of uniformed troops, said they are there, said this is the reason they are there. They are there—I am quoting now, "Generations of army heroes did not shed their blood on distant shores only to watch our country be destroyed by an invasion."

General, have you personally informed the President that according to your own assessment there is no invasion?

General CAINE. Ma'am, first, the definition of an invasion, whether or not that is—that is really a policy decision and from a military-only perspective, I stand by what I said yesterday. But my advice to the President in any particular matter from a security standpoint or for the Secretary for that matter, I keep that between them.

Ms. JACOBS. I understand that, but the highest ranking military advisor in the country does not believe there is an invasion, and yet the President of the United States is federalizing the National Guard—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. JACOBS. —in the name of an invasion.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. This will be the last member before we have our break.

The gentlelady from South Carolina is recognized.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and just to clarify, I want everyone to know that men are not women and I find it deeply offensive as a woman who has broken the glass ceiling. So to all the women out there who are fighting their way through their track meets, their scholarships, their jobs against mentally-ill men, I want you to know Republicans, we see you, and we support you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you Secretary Hegseth and General Caine for joining us today. The Department of Defense and our Armed Forces exist to protect our country's interests and our citizens' freedoms. Under the previous administration, this mission was supplanted by divisive ideology and social experimentation. Allowing ideological advocacy to come before military readiness was an enormous mistake.

At the direction of President Trump, and under your leadership, the DOD is rightfully returning to its focus on lethality and readiness. Our country faces a complex array of challenges and must maintain unparalleled readiness. The changes you are implementing at DOD are critical to returning our military to its core mission.

So I have a few questions for you, Secretary Hegseth, today. How much did the Biden administration spend on DEI programs at DOD?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, when you look at directly or ancillary reflections of it, it was billions of dollars, ma'am.

Ms. MACE. And did it focus on equitable outcomes rather than merit or improved our effectiveness in the military?

Secretary HEGSETH. No, I think if you look at ongoing operations under the Biden administration and also recruiting and retention under the administration, it was a distraction, not an enabler.

Ms. MACE. Do DEI programs make our military more lethal?

Secretary HEGSETH. No.

Ms. MACE. Secretary Hegseth, how much money did the Biden administration spend on the chemical and surgical mutilation of our servicemembers under the guise of gender affirming here?

Secretary HEGSETH. I don't know, but one dollar is too much.

Ms. MACE. I agree. Did sex change experiments and the chemical and surgical mutilation or castration of servicemembers improve our defense capabilities and make us more lethal?

Secretary HEGSETH. No.

Ms. MACE. That is what I thought. Secretary Hegseth, can a history of mental health conditions disqualify someone from military service?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes.

Ms. MACE. And is gender dysphoria a documented mental illness included in this list of disqualifying conditions?

Secretary HEGSETH. It was not, but it is now per an Executive Order from the White House and reinforced by the Defense Department, gender dysphoria is properly recognized as a mental disorder and a disqualifying one for military service.

Ms. MACE. God bless America. Okay, so I welcome the announcement of the Navy that they would be ending animal testing on cats and dogs, huge one for animal lovers and those against the barbaric treatment of cats and dogs. However, I understand there is still some active dog and cat testing funded by the DOD.

Secretary, do you plan to end these experiments as well?

Secretary HEGSETH. As you know, Congresswoman, we have looked at a lot of those. We have reviewed a lot of those and we have ended a lot of those. There are probably others under review and we will do that.

Ms. MACE. I would love for you all to do review and eliminate all of them and see them ended as well.

Will you, do you think you will enact a DOD-wide ban on conducting or funding cat and dog experiments? Do you think that will be in the future under your leadership?

Secretary HEGSETH. We will review that. Right now, our focus is studies that actually add to our capability, our readiness, our warfighting ethos. So if they don't contribute to enabling better capabilities, then they will be reviewed and ended.

Ms. MACE. Okay, and talk to me about recruitment. How far—you have already met your recruitment numbers this year so far, right, or close to it?

Secretary HEGSETH. In record numbers. Months and months ahead in all services.

Ms. MACE. Why do you think that is?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, a new commander-in-chief was elected in November and inaugurated in January and I used to call it the Trump Bump. You can't call it that any more. It is a tsunami of young Americans who believe in the direction President Trump is

taking the country and specifically his leadership as commander-in-chief and they look at a fighting force that is going to be back to basics. We get accused of wanting to ideology—ideology on the other side that was pushed into the military. We are pulling that out and getting back to basics, fidelity to the Constitution, focus on warfighting. Americans respond when that is the focus.

Ms. MACE. So if there is a young person watching today on C-SPAN and I hope that there are a few and if they don't know what they want to do with the rest of their life, how do they get recruited into the military? What can they go do today right now to come work for you?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, the menu, any different services, any different jobs, and contrary to the narrative being pushed by one side, we have a record number of females, minorities as well. This is not just one group of people joining the military. And we welcome all Americans who are qualified to serve our country.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back. As previously stated, the committee will stand in recess for 15 minutes.

[Recess.]

The CHAIRMAN. The hearing will return to order. The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Washington, Ms. Strickland.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Thank you, Chairman Rogers. I represent Joint Base Lewis-McChord, home to over 40,000 active duty servicemembers and their families. JBLM [Joint Base Lewis-McChord] is the Department of Defense's most important installation for projecting power into the Indo-Pacific region, hosting the Army's 1 Corps and one third of the Air Force's entire C-17 fleet.

I want to start by recognizing the Army's 250th birthday. I am an Army brat myself. My father served in the military. He joined the Army when it was segregated and he continued to serve when President Truman desegregated, something that probably would have been defined as woke back then.

I could not be more proud of the soldiers who make up Army and what it is and as part of the celebration, the Pentagon is going to host a day-long festival and parade estimated to cost up to \$45 million. Department of Defense officials have described this as a generational recruiting tool and a plan to highlight every era and legendary leaders throughout Army history.

So Secretary Hegseth, do you plan to include displays of Colin Powell, our first Black Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff? Will you include displays about the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, one of the most decorated units of all time? Will you include displays about Major General Charles Calvin Rogers, whose Medal of Honor your Department previously labeled as DEI?

Recent articles by Stars and Stripes, Military Times and others outline how your team has gone to great lengths to wipe out references of these American heroes. I am incredibly concerned and actually disappointed that you will continue trying to tell an incomplete story about the Army's proud history, especially when you consider that 40 percent of those who are serving who are enlisted represent minority communities.

So I am going to ask you, sir, will you be able to talk about these things and will they be included? And I am going to have another question after that.

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, Congresswoman, I do not accept your insinuation that we would seek to disclude [sic] any race or group of people in representing 250 years of incredible service of the United States Army, including your father which I thank him for. We are proud that we are going to put on full display the Army's military might 250 years on which is a demonstration of American freedom, power, and commitment.

Ms. STRICKLAND. And I agree. Are these three people that I mentioned going to be included in this celebration?

Secretary HEGSETH. This is a parade demonstrating military might, capabilities through the years, including to today.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Yes. There will be exhibits. So will these folks be included, sir?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think you will be heartened to know that the Secretary of Defense is not involved in choosing individual exhibits in the celebration, but our team has put in a great deal of effort to make sure the Army's history is well represented.

And I will say this, part of the reason I am sitting right here and I put on the uniform is a parade that went through my parents' home time in Wanamingo, Minnesota, blink and you miss it, nothing farm town.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Absolutely, no I am talking about the exhibition. Are you going to include Colin Powell, the Japanese-American 442nd, or Major General Charles Calvin Rogers? That is my question.

Secretary HEGSETH. I am sure we will include a cross section of a lot of incredible Americans and possibly all of them, too. I have no idea.

Ms. STRICKLAND. So you have no idea or I am going to take that as a no.

Next question. Let's talk about Ukraine and Russia. So we know that Russia started this war. They have long been an adversary of the United States and at the same time, you heard the President make some really interesting comments including, not including Russia in the widespread random terrorists. So I think one question I will ask you as we talk about wanting peace, because we all agree that is a desired outcome, do you and the President support surrender to Russia by Ukraine as your definition of peace?

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, no one has talked about surrender. We are talking about a negotiated peace.

Ms. STRICKLAND. So does that mean that you are okay with Russia keeping this territory that they are trying to take so they can march on to one of our NATO allies?

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, I think the situation is unfortunate, unleashed by the previous administration, but everyone that talks about winning and prevailing has yet to present to me a plan that is going to push the Russian army out of those territories.

Ms. STRICKLAND. So, sir, I appreciate you talking about the previous administration often, but we are now in this administration, so as the person who serves at the pleasure of the U.S. President,

do you believe that Russia is a true adversary and is your definition of peace going to be surrender of Ukraine from this invasion?

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, I have never said surrender and we are prepared to negotiate what we hope will be a lasting peace.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Guam, Mr. Moylan.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our distinguished witnesses, Ms. MacDonnell, Secretary Hegseth, and General Caine, for your service and appearing before us today.

Secretary Hegseth, I also want to thank you for visiting Guam. And it is great to see you once again, sir. Thank you very much. I appreciate your keeping an eye on the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, sir, and wanted to make sure that our construction, our readiness projects on Guam stay on time and on budget.

Considering the complexity of working in our isolated territory, of course, with workforce constraints and logistical constraints as well, tell us about the mechanisms that you have in place to ensure we maintain our time and budget on the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, sir.

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, thank you for the question, sir. It was great to visit you. I will say a big part of that is focus and attention and time and I was struck, not to be critical of any of my predecessors in this context, but that it had been over 20 years since the Secretary of Defense had visited Guam. It was one of the first places we felt like we should go because our focus is in the Indo-Pacific and the troops we have there, the capabilities we have there, the facilities we have there, the forward posture we want to maintain there, Guam being a central part of that.

So seeing is understanding. We came back from that with an even better understanding of what that island and other parts of multiple island chains needed to consider deterring China. And our group went right to work, responsive to many of the things we spoke about, but also to ensure that this budget funds those priorities. So indeed the Pacific Deterrence Initiative is increased robustly through this budget and then a lot of other ways in which Guam will be part of the future fight.

Mr. MOYLAN. I thank you and I also ask for your continued support. Our main workforce there is the H-2B workers which we will be looking at to extend once again with your support. So thank you, Mr. Secretary.

One thing that would be helpful for our contractors on Guam is regarding the design bid, bid and build. So this makes a lot of delays and change orders and cost overruns due to our site location and our logistical complexities. As the Department or I ask the Department also to review some lessons learned from the design/build versus design/bid/build models instead. That will really speed things up and I am hoping your project will enable more flexibility for our contracting strategies to do just that.

Secretary HEGSETH. One of the core pillars of how we are changing MILCON acquisition is flexibility with a recognition that each site, CONUS [Continental United States] or OCONUS [Outside the Continental United States], or more far flung, has unique complexities, workforce complexities, logistical challenges, resourcing chal-

allenges that need to allow the local leadership there to adapt as quickly as possible and the last thing the DOD usually does well especially the bureaucracy is adapt. So we are trying to give maximum flexibility and latitude, sir.

Mr. MOYLAN. That will be extremely helpful. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

And then, General Caine, with the transition to fully integrate Guam's Defense System, GDS, how are we synchronizing the existing capabilities like THAAD [Terminal High Altitude Area Defense] and Aegis Ashore and the Golden Dome architect plans to ensure seamless integration with global missile warning and reconnaissance systems?

General CAINE. Well, sir, thanks for the question, and thanks also for your service in the Army previously. You know, the importance of integrating our defense capabilities is critical. And as we look at systems like THAAD and Aegis Ashore, you know, the Department is looking carefully at what has to be true to make sure that the other systems like GDA [Global Dome for America] are able to bring forward a layered defense system from sensing layer all the way through the kinetic layer to ensure that we don't have any gaps. And so that is something I know the team that is running GDA, the team that is running THAAD and Aegis, are doing, sir, down in the services.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you. And I think a lot of research will be done for the island of Guam to make sure this is right to protect our nation and our island. That is such a forward proximity. And then this lessons learned from that will help our nation build on the Golden Dome. Would that be a correct statement?

General CAINE. Sir, I think, you know, our goal is to share lessons from not only your home, but the other places that GDI and Golden Dome will be a part of. And so they do accelerate our learning, sir.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from New Jersey, Ms. Sherrill.

Ms. SHERRILL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Hegseth, Chairman Caine, that you both for being here today. Mr. Secretary, your testimony over the last several days before Congress I have heard you speak about all of your supposed accomplishments from your time at the Pentagon. I have to say your training at Fox News has let you spin months of dangerous dysfunction and incompetence into catchy phrases like restoring the warrior ethos and increasing lethality, but the truth is it is really been chaos at the Pentagon under your leadership.

You have clearly shown you are unable to manage the Department of Defense, but what I am most concerned about are three specific areas: your operational incompetence, your managerial incompetence, and your budget incompetence. So let's start with operational.

According to news reports in your first week on the job you got confused in a National Security Council meeting and thought President Trump wanted you to stop all aid to Ukraine. And while functioning in administration you would have asked for clarification be-

fore making that seismic policy shift, but instead you ordered vital military aid heading to the front lines turned around, costing the U.S. millions and depriving Ukrainian soldiers of equipment they needed to fight Russia.

So, Mr. Secretary, can you explain how exactly you misunderstood such a monumental presidential order?

Secretary HEGSETH. One of many fake news headlines we have dealt with.

Ms. SHERRILL. So President Trump told you to halt military aid to Ukraine on January 30?

Secretary HEGSETH. As is often the case, highly ideological and very ill-informed reporters love to speculate about things they know nothing about in order to spear President Trump and myself.

Ms. SHERRILL. So it sounds like actually the reporting is correct because I will say if it wasn't, why—if it wasn't a mistake, why did aid restart only a few days later?

Secretary HEGSETH. Again, we would take complete issue with what would—some call reporting and others call a hatchet job.

Ms. SHERRILL. So why did aid start just a couple days later?

Secretary HEGSETH. I am saying the reporting is inaccurate, ma'am.

Ms. SHERRILL. I don't think that is correct. So let's move onto your managerial incompetence. I think we can see why you misunderstood the President because you are obviously misunderstanding my questions.

Less than a month into the job you fired the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, C.Q. Brown, and the Chief of Naval Operations, Lisa Franchetti, without cause. And to this day you still have not provided an adequate explanation for removing them. As far as I can tell, you fired C.Q. Brown because he was black and Lisa Franchetti because she is a woman. So nearly 4 months later we still don't have a new nominee for Chief of Naval Operations. News reports, and you can contest it, but I would love to hear your answer, say that you haven't nominated someone because qualified admirals keep turning the position down.

So tell me, Mr. Secretary, when will Congress receive your nomination for the next Chairman of the Naval—the next Chief of Naval Operations?

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, with all due respect, I would suggest not believing every headline you read.

Ms. SHERRILL. With all due respect, I would like your nomination. When will we see it?

Secretary HEGSETH. There is not a single admiral or any military official has turned down a position that has been—

Ms. SHERRILL. So when will see your nominee for the Chief of Naval Operations?

Secretary HEGSETH. In due time, for all the right reasons.

Ms. SHERRILL. Again, I think we have seen the managerial incompetence.

Okay. Let's move on to budgetary incompetence. You missed the deadline to submit a draft defense budget to Congress which makes it impossible for us to complete our work on the NDAA or appropriations and makes it more likely you will receive delays in funding you need for new acquisitions, programs, and other priorities.

Additionally, you are blowing money on poorly-conceived operations and vanity projects for President Trump.

Retrofitting the Qatari jet to serve as Air Force One will cost about \$400 million. The parade in D.C. this weekend will cost upwards of \$40 million. Your bombing campaign in Yemen cost about 1 billion and a week later they were having missile strikes in Israel. Your operations in L.A. will cost tens of millions of dollars. And you claim to be cutting costs at the Pentagon, but all I see are wasted dollars better spent addressing our most pressing threats like China.

So, Mr. Secretary, what priorities have you cut funding for to pay for these projects?

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, I would just say your list left off securing the southern border.

Ms. SHERRILL. So, Mr. Secretary, what priorities have you cut funding for to pay for these projects?

Secretary HEGSETH. We make tradeoffs every day and I would imagine what we want to spend on is quite different than what the previous administration did.

Ms. SHERRILL. Well, I think the American—

Secretary HEGSETH. We made those changes quickly and they are reflected in this budget, and we are very proud of them.

Ms. SHERRILL. I think the American people can see why I am so concerned about this incompetence.

Thank you and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Mills.

Mr. MILLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary and panel, let me just go ahead and commend you on an amazing job that you have done, not only in highlighting the importance of the war fighter, but also guaranteeing that our recruitment and retention is at the highest levels that we have seen. This is due to good leadership, not managerial problems, as one of my colleagues just tried to reiterate, and will note for the record is walking away because they know they don't want to hear the actual facts and truth.

I am going to go through a couple of things. They keep bringing up this plane, this aircraft. Well, let's go through history. This has been a long-standing cultural share as aviation was one of the most remarkable things that man had innovated. And in 1945 President F.D.R. actually gifted a Douglas DC-3 to King Abdulaziz, which marked the beginning of civil aviation in Saudi Arabia.

The airplane is nothing more than a reason to complain about the President advancing U.S. interests. And this is more to conflate optics than actual outcomes. But we will let them go ahead and spin their wheels on a \$400 million upgrade, not realizing the total cost of an aircraft. I think that is a good cost savings; a good negotiation.

Now they talked about the Golden Dome. There are a lot of things that is intentionally left off operationally and classified to ensure that we can keep the sovereignty and protection of our nation without our adversaries actually knowing it. Our colleagues know this, but they want to try and highlight it in a way that

brings about that you are trying to hide or not being transparent as opposed to operational and communications security.

But what they should be realizing is that there is a real violation of the 1962 Outer Space Treaty, that when the leak was made about Sputnik 2's capabilities and what Russia was trying to do to arm and weaponize from a nuclear capability in space that maybe we should take a vital interest in not just what we are seeing here on earth, but what we are seeing abroad as well. The President knew this in his first administration, which is why he created Space Force.

I will also go ahead and talk about DEI. Our recruitment and retention is high because we are no longer factoring diversity, equity, inclusion. We are focused on increased lethality, readiness, and being properly equipped. The war fighter ethos that he claimed was so intact—if it was intact we wouldn't lower our standards. And our standards aren't arbitrary. The standards that you are setting for our Armed Forces are based on real military and combat needs that we have seen and evaluated and usually lessons that are left from bloodshed and loss of life that we then base our standards upon to guarantee that we have the best, strongest, and most prepared war fighters and the greatest voluntary force in the world.

With programmatic reform I love the fact that you are going after the ideas that it is not about trying to have the most expensive at 100 percent, but what actually functions, works, and saves cost-effectiveness, and readiness, and having it on the table for our war fighter now, not in 5 years from now. So again, a great achievement.

When we talk about recruitment and retention one of the things I wanted to bring up, and I hope that you will address, is those who were in my opinion unconstitutionally purged from our military for actually having their medical and religious rights denied. And I would like to see these individuals who were wrongfully purged given the opportunity to not only return to serve in our Armed Forces and our nation, not a political agenda, but to also have the ability to be re-incentivized by having back pay, full benefits, and being able to be returned to the ranks that they deserve without it being politicized.

I think that we should start naming a lot of our cities in Texas and New Mexico and Arizona something that was by a Ukrainian city. Then our colleague might actually care about the protection of our borders. This is one thing that you have actually done great by sending our military down there. And we have a 600 percent increase in apprehension rates and a complete decrease in human and sex trafficking and fentanyl and opioids that are killing Americans by the thousands.

Now when it comes to the cartels, the President has designated our cartels, rightfully so, as a foreign terrorist organization. What can Congress provide to DOD in order to better support the mission, the physical security of servicemembers in the southern border, and is there a possibility of maybe a Title 55/Title 11/Title 10 combination that will allow us to be able to work with DOD and the IC [intelligence community] to be able to start going after those cartels?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, I appreciate those comments, sir. And as I mentioned earlier, it wasn't really an authorities issue when it came to securing the southern border. The previous administration claimed they needed new policies. No, we needed a new President who was serious about it and so we have focused on rightly designating those criminal cartels as foreign terrorist organizations.

Right now we believe we have those authorities. If necessary we would come to Congress for additional ones.

Mr. MILLS. Thank you so much. And again, I want to commend you as well on the operations against the Houthis the previous administration had delisted as a terrorist organization which was disrupting 12 percent of global trade in addition to the Bidenflation that was sinking the middle class.

So thank you for what you are doing. We stand by—support you. I am going to support you from day one, as I always have. Keep fighting and let's go ahead and go after the war fighters.

Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Ryan.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for being here. We have all worn the uniform, we have all served in combat, we all love our country, and we all revere our troops. And I really want to speak with you both not as partisans, but as patriots. And I want to talk specifically about the events at Fort Bragg the other day.

General Caine, I want to start with you. As a junior officer were you ever required to make a pledge of political loyalty, yes or no?

General CAINE. Sir, as you know, we are—

Mr. RYAN. General—

General CAINE.—an apolitical military, so—

Mr. RYAN.—I have limited time.

General CAINE.—you know, no.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you. At any time in your 30-plus years of incredibly distinguished service did you have to make a pledge of partisan or political loyalty?

General CAINE. No, sir.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you. Did you ever serve in any unit or command at any level where servicemembers were required to make a pledge of political loyalty?

General CAINE. No, sir.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you. And I want to commend you. I have been on the record on this including in your confirmation hearings where you clarified, quote, "I've never worn any political merchandise or said anything to that effect." I appreciate that. That is the standard. And I commend you for saying so and continuing to model that.

General Caine, one last question for you. Should soldiers have to pledge political loyalty to participate in an event with our Commander in Chief? Yes or no, please.

General CAINE. Sir, I am not first, no. I don't I am not aware of any time in history that soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines have been asked to do that. I think it all—

Mr. RYAN. And I am sorry, general. I do want to—just in the interest of time I want to talk about what happened at Fort Bragg 2 days ago.

There was guidance put out, and this has been verified by multiple independent news outlets, saying, quote—these are to the soldiers of the 18th Airborne Corps and the U.S. Army—“If soldiers have political views that are in opposition to the current administration, then they need to speak with their leadership and get swapped out.” This is swapped out of the event with the President.

In addition, in an incredibly disturbing incident, there was a pop-up shop selling MAGA merchandize on post at Fort Bragg. And to summarize this, there was a commander from Bragg who said on the record, quote, “This has been a bad week for the Army, for anyone who cares about us being a neutral institution. This was shameful.”

If those are the facts, and I know the Army is investigating at least the MAGA pop-up shop, is that appropriate General Caine?

General CAINE. Sir, I haven’t seen any of these reports. You know, I am not familiar with them, but as I mentioned earlier and in my confirmation hearing, you know, the nation demands an apolitical, nonpartisan military.

Mr. RYAN. I appreciate you saying that and happy to share those reports.

Mr. Secretary, are you familiar with DOD Directive 1344.10, Political Activities of the Members of the Armed Forces?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well first off, I don’t—

Mr. RYAN. Are you, yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH.—buy into the insinuation—

Mr. RYAN. Are you familiar with—

Secretary HEGSETH.—that pledges are being done under this administration. That is—

Mr. RYAN. I reclaim my time. Are you familiar with this DOD directive?

Secretary HEGSETH. There is never one time in my service or in this Defense Department—

Mr. RYAN. Mr. Secretary, will you please answer these questions?

Secretary HEGSETH. I am answering your questions. Where politics has been considered for servicemembers.

Mr. RYAN. Are you familiar with this directive? Yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. Which directive?

Mr. RYAN. DOD Directive 1344.10. I am happy to provide you a copy. There is even a one-page red and green cheat sheet. Are you familiar with it? This is the same directive from when we were all in uniform.

Secretary HEGSETH. I am sure I am.

Mr. RYAN. Has anything changed in that directive under your guidance given what happened 2 days ago at Fort Bragg? Is there a new policy change that we are not aware of?

Secretary HEGSETH. Again, I totally reject your insinuation.

Mr. RYAN. Is there a policy change to DOD Directive 1344.10?

Secretary HEGSETH. I know what you are attempting to insinuate, but there is been—

Mr. RYAN. I will take that as a no.

Secretary HEGSETH.—policy change and there is no policy change.

Mr. RYAN. Mr. Secretary, have you ever work a MAGA hat in front of the troops?

Secretary HEGSETH. I own plenty of MAGA hats, but I don't think I have.

Mr. RYAN. Have you ever one in front of the troops at an official event? I don't believe so.

Secretary HEGSETH. That I am aware of.

Mr. RYAN. I don't believe so. Do you think it is appropriate for the President of the United States to wear political merchandise including a MAGA hat at official events including West Point commencement?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Commander in Chief—

Mr. RYAN. Yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH.—can wear whatever hat he wants to include the phrase “Make America Great Again,” because I would like make—

Mr. RYAN. So you think that is—

Secretary HEGSETH.—America great again as well.

Mr. RYAN. So you think that is appropriate?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Commander in Chief has the right in front of his troops to wear whatever he would like.

Mr. RYAN. Okay. I strongly disagree with you. And I urge you both, especially you, General Caine, as we have seen increasingly political rhetoric, including from the Secretary, to please for the good of our troops—this is an incredibly difficult moment and we need leaders like you to continue to echo the apolitical nature.

I have 12 seconds. Mr. Secretary, I don't say this lightly. I have to say this on the record. I think your tenure as Secretary of Defense has been shameful and weak and you should resign. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Fallon.

Mr. FALLON. Mr. Secretary, we will have a little bit of time to talk about all that.

General Caine, is it true or not true that in 1988 you were at Plattsburgh Air Force Base as an ROTC cadet?

General CAINE. Yes, sir. I think I was, yes.

Mr. FALLON. Do you recognize the person you are addressing right now?

General CAINE. Yes, I actually do. Yes, sir. Please don't tell anybody how we did out there.

Mr. FALLON. We did. We were athletic officers in 1988.

General CAINE. Yes, we were.

Mr. FALLON. I believe you worked for me at the time.

General CAINE. I did, sir. I still do.

Mr. FALLON. Kind of, yes.

[Laughter.]

Mr. FALLON. And just for the record, there was a Commandant Award recognizing the best cadet of all 200. And they got that right because it was the man sitting in front me, General Caine, who won that.

[Applause.]

Mr. FALLON. I got out as a captain, so you are winning.

General Caine, I want to talk to you about the lessons learned in Ukraine and how important it is—I also sit on the Intelligence Committee—and how we can best detour in the Indo-Pacific because that is of vital import. We don't want to get into a war with a peer adversary. And then if you could also just touch on the importance of innovation and acquisition reform?

General CAINE. Yes, sir. Well, as I have talked about before, the entrepreneurial spirit out there in Europe is one that we have all learned from. And as we look at creating multiple simultaneous cognitive fiscal and physical dilemmas for our adversaries around the world, we have to take that same entrepreneurial spirit and bring it back here to our nation, both in our national and our industrial base. So the importance of mass scale building a DIB [defense industrial base] in a national base that can provide the combat capability that our war fighters need at the tactical edge is something that both the secretary and I, as well as the Services, are very focused on.

Mr. FALLON. Well, thank you. And you are both a breath of fresh air.

Mr. Secretary, I want to visit with you a little bit about recruiting first and then I do want to talk about politics in the military.

We have seen recruiting bump, thank the Lord. Over the last 3 or 4 years it was a crisis. And if we don't—if we didn't solve it, I don't know what we were going to do. So I would like to ask you, because I have asked each of the secretaries of each branch, to really do a deep dive and come back to Congress and let us know—because I want to start with doubts and end in certainties—find out the reasons why we—why the change, whatever they may be because whatever we are doing right, we need to continue to do so we don't get in this situation. And if you all need some extra funding, if you have folks that are willing to come in, I would rather have a few more than a few less.

And also I want to talk about the fact that I think you are a breath of fresh air, not only the general, but yourself, because the first thing that you said to us was you were going to reintroduce war fighting and lethality and force projection into our military.

And you specifically said that you did not want to see politics infest. Because we had people up here in the last few years that were clearly like a Democratic general. I never want to see that again. I don't want to see a Republican general. I want to see American generals and American generals only ever address us. And I thought it was a travesty. And I have a case in point.

We have here this individual who was I believe a major in the Army—was exulted and venerated above all 2 million Active and Reservists by the DOD, the former DOD. Why? Was there any excellence that was done? Was there a life saved? Was there a computer program written by cyber? No. It was because this person was transsexual. And they had a political flag in uniform and they were waving it. That was disgusting, not because it was a transsexual. Because that was a political statement. And this person did nothing of excellence at all to be recognized.

And instead we should be venerating people like Gary Gordon and Randy Shughart who gave their lives to save Mike Durant and

won the Medal of Honor. That is the lethality. That is what will deter the Chinese and that is what will deter our enemies.

And I would like to give you a minute and 13 seconds to expound on that and maybe answer Mr. Ryan. Thank you.

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, amen. And you are exactly right. That is precisely what we want to return to and restore. And every accusation and insinuation that that is politicizing is blatantly false and they know it. Ultimately, there were ideologies and particular political perspectives being injected into our Forces. Call it political correctness. Call it DEI. Call it CRT [critical race theory]. Call it what you want. They were being injected in.

Our job has been to remove those political ideologies and go back to basics. High standards that are the same. We are not looking at race. We are not emphasizing your differences. We are focusing on our unity, which is the point of any formation. Every formation I have ever looked at I didn't look at the race or background of the people in that formation. I wanted the most capable leader, squad leader, team leader across the spectrum able to do the job. Because when it hits the fan, that is what I need. And our enemies need to see that.

Let me say something about the chairman. He is the most professional apolitical military expert I have ever worked with. And our country is grateful—should be grateful to have him at the helm because they are in very steady, apolitical hands and he—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from New Mexico, Mr. Vasquez.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, I understand that the border is a top priority for you and the Department of Defense. Well, it is also one of my top priorities in my border district. That is why I have introduced bipartisan legislation to stop fentanyl at the border, secure our ports of entry, hire more CBP [U.S. Customs and Border Patrol] personnel, and combat the cartels, areas that I am sure we agree on.

Now DOD has spent more than \$525 million on the—from the defense budget on military operations on the border. You have done it by diverting over \$1 billion from military modernization and quality of life programs like housing. And as such, I am sure you are well informed as to what your war fighters are doing on our border and the characteristics of the border itself.

Secretary Hegseth, do you know how many border miles there are in New Mexico?

Secretary HEGSETH. Not the exact number of miles.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Can you give me a round figure.

Secretary HEGSETH. Hundreds.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Okay. 180 miles. Can you tell me where the border wall starts and ends on this map of New Mexico?

Secretary HEGSETH. I am not properly oriented to your map, but I know that unfortunately because of the administration previous they did not have the opportunity to finish the border wall—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Secretary.

Secretary HEGSETH.—and let it rust on the ground instead of putting it up—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Secretary.

Secretary HEGSETH.—our border.

Mr. VASQUEZ. And you have been to New Mexico. Could you tell me where in New Mexico you have been to?

Secretary HEGSETH. I have been to the border twice to look at—once at our national defense area down there because it—I can't recall a time when a Secretary of Defense has gone down in the first 4 or 5 months of his tenure to the border to better understand the situation there.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Was that in an urban area or in a rural area?

Secretary HEGSETH. Both areas. Traversed rural areas and urban areas.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Okay. So you must be familiar—

Secretary HEGSETH. Some with walls, some without.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Secretary—

Secretary HEGSETH. And President Trump has actually supported you have a border wall.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Secretary. I reclaim my time.

So the most remote part of New Mexico is called the bootheel. And I am not sure that you spent any time in the bootheel of New Mexico. Mr. Secretary, I was raised on the border. I lived there my whole life. I have worked alongside ranchers, farmers, landowners, wildlife biologists, and other stakeholders for over a decade. I headed a border security task force in my district before coming to Congress. I have traveled with border patrols on ATVs, I have hunted the border on horseback, and hiked dozens of miles in the most remote stretches of the border in this region.

Now do you happen to know why there hasn't been a border wall built in the bootheel?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, based on what you just described you should be a big fan of what our administration is—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, Secretary, I am asking why a border wall has not been built. Funds have been allocated for other parts of the border, but not—

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, here is what I know: Our commander is on the ground and others and our engineers would understand what goes where and why and where there should be a border wall. There will be a border wall.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Okay. Secretary—

Secretary HEGSETH. It will be funded through reconciliation—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Secretary, are you familiar with the Animas Mountains, with Alamo Hueco, with San Luis Mountains, Guadalupe Pass, or Long Canyon?

Secretary HEGSETH. Again—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Critical border areas.

Secretary HEGSETH. I am aware that there are gaps in different places where walls are not as much—as effective as other places. And I get that. We are applying infrastructure—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Secretary. I appreciate your answer on that.

Secretary HEGSETH.—where it makes the most sense, because—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you.

Secretary HEGSETH.—we are going to get 100 percent operational—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you, Secretary. So you agree then that a border wall doesn't make sense for the entire country?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think we need a border wall across our entire border.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Okay. So you should know then why it is almost physically impossible to build a border across the Animas Mountains and the terrain challenges that that poses and the billions of dollars. Do you know if there are roads on those mountains currently?

Secretary HEGSETH. If we are going to spend money as a government—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Okay.

Secretary HEGSETH.—it should be—

Mr. VASQUEZ. I will take that as a no.

Secretary HEGSETH.—to secure our southern border.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, the point I am trying to make, secretary, is that if this is so important to the military and you as the Secretary of the Department of Defense should know more about the border. Mr. Secretary, I urge you to skip the photo ops next time that you go to a port of entry and spend time on the ground in places like the Diamond A Ranch.

Secretary HEGSETH. I think you should ask the soldiers on the border whether they have been photo op visits or not because I spent a lot of time—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Secretary—

Secretary HEGSETH. —on the ground—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Secretary, are you—

Secretary HEGSETH. —with the soldiers getting an understanding of what—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Secretary, I am going to ask you a question—

Secretary HEGSETH. —they are facing, what they are doing, what their capabilities are—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Secretary, I reclaim my time.

Secretary HEGSETH. —not for photo ops.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you. Secretary, I reclaim my time.

Secretary HEGSETH. —understand what our troops do and why—

Mr. VASQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, may I reclaim my time?

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman reclaims his time.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Thank you. Secretary, do you know what a tethered aerostat system is?

Secretary HEGSETH. I do.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Okay. Well, great. Then you know that this type of surveillance technology is superior to having thousands of troops sitting in trucks looking at an empty desert. I have requested funds for more tethered aerostat systems. We haven't had a response from your Department.

Are you familiar with ASTs [autonomous surveillance tower]?

Secretary HEGSETH. What is an AST?

Mr. VASQUEZ. Well, it is an autonomous surveillance tower. They are equipped with these advanced cameras that have the capability to relay critical information to border agents on the ground. And this type of technology is badly needed on the bootheel. And it is a much better expenditure than a border wall is—

Secretary HEGSETH. I have seen those towers in use.

Mr. VASQUEZ. Great. Well, these technologies have been described to me by both border patrol and CBP as force multipliers allowing the personnel to focus on law enforcement efforts while leaving this mundane surveillance task to much more efficient and cost-effective technology, a much more efficient way to surveil that part of the border.

Now, Mr. Secretary, I have serious concerns with your fundamental lack of knowledge about the U.S.-Mexico border considering the billions of dollars that DOD has slated to spend on this mission with little clarity to those of us who live there. I would encourage you to do some homework on my region and learn what will actually make our border more secure and more safe.

Thank you, chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Dr. McCormick.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I think it is great that Democrats are finally concerned about the border. It is fantastic. I hope more of them join that fight in the future. It is fantastic especially after 4 years of allowing millions upon millions to cross the border without any concern until now.

When we talk about politicizing the military I find it also very laughable when, for the first time,—if you were to wear a make the military accountable to the mission again hat, would that be considered political?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think in many ways that is one of our slogans.

Dr. MCCORMICK. Okay. Exactly. Mission accomplishment. When I was a young Marine, and an old Marine, we were always focused on mission accomplishment. One of the greatest things you have done is brought us back to our focal point. The ethos of the warrior. Make America Great Again also I disqualify as political. That is something every politician should want to do let alone any military or non-military person that lives in America. So I dismiss that as political.

I am glad that you brought the mission back to all services. As a matter of fact, when I was down at University of North Georgia—and we challenge you to come down to one of the Elite Eight—I was really impressed. I have always made fun of the Army; no offense to my Army comrades, about their PT [physical training]. They were bringing it. They made scientific. They are mission-oriented. They are absolutely focused 100 percent in large part because of the new leadership of the military, which I am really excited about, and I am looking forward to getting you down there.

One of the interesting things that happened recently is the activation of the National Guard in California. This had to be done because, quite frankly, California didn't take care of its own. We actually recently sponsored and wrote legislation that would make those states culpable for the finances that are spent on those National Guardsmen when the governor or the local magistrates don't do what is required to take control of their own problem that was created because of their lack of action.

Do you think that is a good idea or do you have a better idea for motivating people to do what is right instead of having the President step in?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think what the President has done here is common sense. If a governor and a mayor will not protect law enforcement officers in the execution of their basic functions, then the military, whether it is the National Guard or the Marines, is constitutionally or through statute allowed to come in and provide that security. That is precisely what we have done. The President, unlike in 2020 in Minnesota when Governor Waltz allowed a precinct to burn down—President Trump said that will not happen. We will get in front of this. We will not allow this to cascade. We will protect our law enforcement. And he has provided that clarity and common sense and we are proud to be on that mission.

Dr. MCCORMICK. I am glad the President stepped in where local Democrats have not stepped up to the plate.

One of the things I noticed in my recent experience as a veteran is I had to go down to the DEERS [Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System] Office. In person. Take a half a day off. Now, luckily, I have staff that can help me arrange those things, but I had to send in a form where my son—just to prove my son is still in college. Instead of emailing it or faxing it or whatever we do in the modern technology, I do it at the DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles]. I would hope that you and your leadership would help us a veterans make the—it a much more friendly 21st century experience. And I would hope that you would look at that just in your administration. I appreciate you very much.

Finally, I want to give you an opportunity to talk about—a little bit about Ukraine. One of the things I have said all along is the President's one of the most peaceful presidents there is. When they worry about invasions of foreign—this president has avoided war like no other president in modern history. He has actually been very good at foreign relations despite his lack of previous experience. Now he has a lot of—and he did the Abraham Accords.

One of the things that I thought would be interesting from—we talk about peace from strength. The United States and Europe combined have a \$50 trillion GDP [Gross Domestic Product]. Russia has two. We decimated them. We, meaning the Ukrainian forces with our support, decimated 50 percent of their armor and about a million casualties just based on the little bit they have given.

Do you think according to the Supreme Allied Commander, who has testified here before, that if we gave them wholesale support we could end this war very quickly, if Russia won't come to the table per President Trump's guidance?

Secretary HEGSETH. There are multiple ways in which we could help affect the front line and negotiations. And the department is prepared to support what might be necessary to do so, but our overall message is—and there has been billions spent already. And there are presidential drawdown authorities that exist right now that are still going in support of Ukraine, but our encouragement is that our European allies continue to step up as well.

Dr. MCCORMICK. General Caine, what do you think about Ukraine? You got about 10 seconds. Sorry.

General CAINE. Well, sir, I think, you know obviously the killing has got to stop on both sides. And that is all of us. You, thank you for service. As a war fighter knows—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Deluzio.

Mr. DELUZIO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Caine, I want to start with commending what you have said here today to Mr. Ryan and others about the apolitical nature of our military. I know it is a set of values that any of us who have served understand, that the military respects deeply civilian control. And that certainly runs up to Secretary Hegseth and to the Commander-in-Chief, no matter which party happens to be in the White House.

I think even a pretty powerful example of that is when we have the State of the Union, you and the other members of the Joint Chiefs typically don't applaud for the more partisan parts of any president's remarks.

Briefly tell us why that is even a norm we should care about? Why the American people should care about that norm?

General CAINE. Well, sir, that is codified in the oath of office, our constitution, and our commission. So it goes all the way back to the beginnings and that has always been our tradition.

Mr. DELUZIO. I think it is an important tradition and I think it is one that we should care about no matter which side of this dais we are on, Democrats or Republicans. I think we should demand and expect that our most senior military commanders understand that partisan loyalty doesn't matter. What matters is the oath to the constitution that we all take here, that any of us who have worn the uniform have taken.

And I want to just ask some questions about the kinds of I think difficult positions commanders are going to be placed in given what I saw happen at Fort Bragg, the guidance that exists now already for the military. And I ask this of you because you are not just the President's principal military advisor, you are the senior officer in our Armed Forces.

If you or any other commander were ordered to attend a campaign rally, you would decline. Am I right?

General CAINE. Sir, you know, per the Hatch Act, which we get briefs on every year, it outlines pretty clearly what you can and can't do when you are in active service. And so I completely trust and believe in the professionalism of the United States Armed Forces, as does the Secretary, and, you know, we follow those guidelines.

Mr. DELUZIO. And I agree with you. And my concern here is less that we are going to see bad decisions made by our troops or their commanders. I don't think it is the problem. I think the problem is they are going to be placed in really difficult positions by civilian leadership, and the Fort Bragg episode to me is one of those examples. And I will talk about some of the things, and we have heard some of it brought up here today. And again, my questions are to help give you a chance to put out for the public what you expect of our senior military leaders.

So some things that the President said in his remarks referring to a political rival, the Governor of California, the Mayor of Los Angeles. Called them incompetent in front of the troops.

Referring to Governor Waltz, reference back to the debate between him and now-Vice President J.D. Vance saying, "That was a good debate. J.D. against this guy. Remember how bad he was? He was one of the worst. I think he is running for president to—can you believe it, but he is a radical left lunatic." That is a quote.

Referencing the continued lie that he didn't lose the 2020 election, President Trump said, and I quote, "I was thinking about running because the election was rigged and stolen. We all know it," end quote.

That is what the Commander-in-Chief is saying in an event with troops who were ordered to attend. And let me be clear: presidents for a long time have always had the prerogative to compel the attendance of our troops to be there as the Commander-in-Chief. I get it. But this is different to me.

You heard discussion of the campaign merch being sold on the base. Another piece of this; and let's bring this up, invitations to the event went out from Donald Trump's campaign. Had an invitation right there taken to you—taking you to a place where you can contribute to Donald Trump, donaldjtrump.com.

So my question, my concern is of course you and—I don't think any commander would agree to attend a campaign rally, but you are brought to something that traditionally troops have attended, as they should, with the Commander-in-Chief, but it turns into something that is a campaign rally. What should our commanders be doing when they are put in this position, General?

General CAINE. Well, sir, I hope you will allow me to answer this by—even my engaging in answering this question that is making my job involved in politics. And so while I appreciate the question, I think the Chairman and the Force should stay out of politics. And if I engage in this question, and with deep respect and appreciation for your question, I don't think it is an appropriate question for me to answer.

Mr. DELUZIO. General, that is—I agree with the way you are approaching this. And that is what we should expect of our leaders. In the 10 seconds or so I have left I will tell you I am very concerned for the position that you and other senior leaders are being placed in by this administration. I would urge you as the President's principal military advisor to give him advice to knock it off.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Van Orden.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, did you take an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes, I did.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. General, did you?

General CAINE. Yes, I did, sir.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Well, let's delve into that document. Article 2, Section 2, The President shall be the Commander-in-Chief of the

Army and Navy of the United States and the militia of the several states.

So when people are listening to the Commander-in-Chief, they are actually fulfilling their constitutional duty that they took an oath to defend and uphold the Constitution. And what these folks are saying is absolutely shameful. Because when they are calling you incompetent, Mr. Secretary, guess who is listening? Our enemies. The people that are plotting as we sit in this comfortable room in an air-conditioned beautiful space. They are plotting the deaths of us, Americans. And it's shameful and I wish my colleagues would come back in here and apologize to you personally.

Let's cover a couple other things here. When someone has gender dysphoria and they decide to mutilate their genitals and they are taking cross-sex hormones, they are out-of-pocket for about 3 years.

How many countries is the DOD involved in right now? What, 50, 60, 80, 100, whatever it is, right? Okay. Someone is going to get on a plane and leave their family and potentially leave their wife a widow or their husband a widower because somebody has decided to self-actualize. We are going to go forward and we are going to complete the mission because that is what we do. And a lot of my colleagues simply don't understand that or they are trying to ignore it.

Clear up a couple things: The former Chief of Naval Operations was incompetent and gave the Red Sea to the Houthis. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff let so much DEI garbage fly around that it almost destroyed the military. That is why they got fired.

Okay. As far as standards, the standard is the minimum. That is the minimum level of performance that someone will reach or they are not qualified for the job. The NFL [National Football League] does not have a standard for females. If you are a lady and you want to join the NFL, go try out for the team. How many women play on the NFL? Anybody? The answer is zero. Why is there an NBA [National Basketball Association] and a WNBA [Women's National Basketball Association]? Why? Because they acknowledge biology.

So we can have as many whiz-bang, high-tech things available, but at the end of the day to win a war you need someone to go in room and beat someone to death with their hands. That is a fact. And all this other stuff is meaningless. The Chinese Communist Party does not care what your pronouns are. They care if they know we will be able to destroy them, crush them, and grind them into dust if they mess with the United States of America.

Mr. Secretary, there is five SOF truths: The first one is that people are more than—more important than hardware. Do you concur?

Secretary HEGSETH. I would concur with that and all of your previous statements.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, sir.

General, do you concur that humans are more important than hardware?

General CAINE. I do along with the other SOF truths.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. All right. Well, good on you.

So here is an issue that I am having right now: It doesn't matter how great our people are if they are not upholding this oath and

understanding that the President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, is the Commander in Chief and that you are the Secretary of Defense and that you are the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

And we have had a rash of incidents around bases that can only be described as insubordination, taking down the President's portrait, turning yours around, turning the Vice President's pictures around, removing them from stations, covering them with flags. That is insubordination. And insubordination is a crime according to the United States—the UCMJ, Uniform Code of Military Justice.

So what I just need to hear from you, Mr. Secretary—and I commend you for your performance or what you did for Fort McCoy in my district. I need to hear from you that you are actively trying to find the people that are subverting the chain of command and then you will deal with them in the appropriate manner.

Secretary HEGSETH. Every place where we find incidents like that or others, they are immediately addressed.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you.

General CAINE, do you think it would be a political act for someone to be held accountable for insubordination? If you did that as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff holding Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians?

General CAINE. Well, Congressman, of course you would have to have the context around that.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Right.

General CAINE. So I would want to know more information, sir.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. I want to commend you for your performance today and your restraint by not lashing out at some of the most disgraceful comments I have ever heard in my short tenure in Congress. And with that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Hawaii, Tokuda.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I agree we have had many performances today, but what we would like is some answers.

Mr. Secretary, did you invite Elon Musk for a briefing on war plans with China to the Pentagon? Yes or no is simple.

Secretary HEGSETH. There has been a lot of hyperbole and incorrect reporting around that situation, but we did invite Elon over to come talk to us generally. But there was not war plans being discussed.

Ms. TOKUDA. Okay. So whose idea was it to invite him to the Pentagon for a briefing? You mentioned you served at the pleasure of the President. Was it the President's will to have him come and be briefed?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, as you know, at that time Elon Musk was leading up DOGE [Department of Government Efficiency] efforts.

Ms. TOKUDA. Yes.

Secretary HEGSETH. And we have taken a great investment in DOGE at DOD. And so getting his input on how we make DOD more efficient makes a great deal of sense.

Ms. TOKUDA. Okay. But don't you think it is a conflict of interest for the world's richest man—many of the contracts that the DOD

is engaged in, billions of dollars of contracts going to his company and he is—as to your point, was leading DOGE which was involved in cutting hundreds of contracts, but also becoming intimately aware of the platforms and the requirements that would be given out for new contracts? Did you not think it was a conflict of interest to invite someone with financial interests into the Pentagon to have firsthand knowledge of what they could then bid on for their own enrichment?

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, it was just an informal discussion, but I will tell you anyone that knows our Defense Department knows we show no preference to any company other than what your capabilities are. And we are grateful for the places where his companies benefit our national defense in—

Ms. TOKUDA. So for a \$280 million donation the world's richest man with companies intimately linked and involved in billion dollar contracts with the Department of Defense gaining access into the Pentagon—so would you say that any company right now that has multi-billion dollar contracts with the Department of Defense has access to the Pentagon right now, 1-hour briefings with you personally?

Secretary HEGSETH. On the regular basis—

Ms. TOKUDA. I think the answer is—

Secretary HEGSETH. —I meet with many people and many different companies in many different aspects of our defense industrial base to ensure we have the best possible capabilities. It would be imprudent to—

Ms. TOKUDA. Well, I am sure if an investment of \$280 million Elon's investors are quite happy that it has come out into the billions.

I want to jump questions right now. Mr. Secretary, on January 6, 2021, rioters and looters attacked federal law enforcement officials, vandalized and destroyed Federal Government property and caused an estimated \$2.7 billion damages right here at the Capitol. Would you have sent the National Guard and the Marines in on that day?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, unfortunately—

Ms. TOKUDA. A yes or no would be—

Secretary HEGSETH. —President Trump requested the National Guard in advance and that was—

Ms. TOKUDA. It took him quite a long time. I am asking you as Secretary of Defense, would you have sent in the National Guard and the Marines on that day? We had 140 Capitol Police officers injured. One died the next day. Would you have sent in the National Guard and the Marines?

Secretary HEGSETH. As I said, President Trump directed National Guard to be there in advance.

Ms. TOKUDA. And I think you can look at the record of how long—

Secretary HEGSETH. For whatever reason—

Ms. TOKUDA. —it actually took for him to actually send them in. But it is good to hear that it sounds like you would have sent in the National Guard and the Marines on that day in which the insurrection was taking place right here at the Capitol.

Mr. Secretary, during your confirmation hearing you failed to deny the conclusion that you would carry out an order to shoot protestors in the legs. So let me be direct: Given what we are seeing across the country right now, would you carry out or issue an order by the President for our military to fire upon protestors actively engaging in their civil right to exercise free speech, their First Amendment rights? would you give that order from the President?

Secretary HEGSETH. I assume you are insinuating what is going on in Los Angeles and I wouldn't call that a peaceful protest.

Ms. TOKUDA. Not just Los Angeles. If we take a look at protests throughout the country,—it is a simple question. If directed by the President, would you order our military to fire upon protestors? Simple yes or no is fine.

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, we have—as you know and as this committee knows, we have standard rules of engagement that are in place that give guidance to our troops and they abide by them.

Ms. TOKUDA. I am asking what you would do. Again, you said you serve at the pleasure of the President. Is that not true?

Secretary HEGSETH. I do serve at the pleasure—

Ms. TOKUDA. So if the President told you shoot people in the legs, would you do so? Now you failed to answer question as well during your confirmation hearing when asked by members of the Senate.

Secretary HEGSETH. Because I refuse to accept a false hypothetical that is attempting to put me in a corner and make it look like a—

Ms. TOKUDA. At a time when we have more—

Secretary HEGSETH. —standard rules of engagement—

Ms. TOKUDA. —Marines and National Guard—

Secretary HEGSETH. —and they are followed.

Ms. TOKUDA. —in Los Angeles than we do in Syria and Iran alone, I don't think this is a hypothetical. This is an actual situation that we are dealing with right now. So again, I will ask the question in the last 14 seconds I have. Would you order our military to shoot at their fellow countrymen if ordered by the President?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think it is interesting that for 4 years insurrection was the left's favorite word—

Ms. TOKUDA. I think we know your answer.

Thank you., Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Secretary HEGSETH. —and that was invoked in L.A. They were—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentelady yields back. The gentelady's time is expired.

The gentleman from Virginia, Mr. McGuire, is recognized.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

To all of our men and women who have served or are serving, your mission is important and we would not have a country without you.

Secretary Hegseth, I last saw you at Memorial Day. We really appreciate your remarks as we honored and remembered our fallen.

Secretary Hegseth and General Caine, thank you both for being with us here today. General Caine, I would like to say congratula-

tions to you on your recent confirmation as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. President Trump has put his trust and confidence in two great patriots to lead our men and women in uniform.

To me MAGA, Make America Great Again, means America first. And that is America first or Make America Great Again for all Americans regardless of race, religion, or creed. And your policies are working and day by day, week by week, all Americans are safer at home and abroad. So we commend you for your efforts. If you had a basketball team and you hated your team, you probably wouldn't win any games. And so I love the emphasis. All of us love the emphasis on patriotism and love in our country.

Secretary Hegseth, I would like to also thank you for all that you have done to restore the Department of Defense's focus on lethality and the warrior ethos. Facts don't care about your feelings and our enemies don't care about our social experiments. I have a quote from the Commandant of the Marine Corps. I hope I don't mess it up. But he said, quote, "Our job is to stick bayonets in the hearts of our enemies, and these social experiments detract from that mission."

I get messages from my Navy SEAL brothers and other veterans all the time applauding the work that you are doing. The distractions of the last 4 years of the Biden administration are finally out of the Department of Defense. DEI, which to me is Marxist, and it stands for "didn't earn it," no longer takes precedence in our military. Merit is once again valued. We are no longer worrying about the gender dysphoria or woke books in our DOD schools and those policies that have been erasing women. Climate change is no longer the concern of the war fighter. And by the way, I am looking forward to celebrating with you guys on Saturday, 250 years of a story that must be told of the U.S. Army.

I want to thank President Trump restoring American history. I know you had to jump through some gymnastics to do it by returning the names of our bases that many of us called during our time in service. And thank you and President Trump for showing the United States and the world that we are a nation built on law and order by the Department's response in the Los Angeles riots. Through your leadership and help of this committee, we will realize peace through strength and our warrior ethos.

So, Secretary Hegseth, Section 866 of the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act directs the Department to submit a strategy to ensure that solid rocket motor programs of record are adequately supported by the domestic industrial base. Yet solid rocket motor production is critical to a variety of systems like President Trump's Golden Dome we have been lacking.

I would say, Mr. Secretary, what progress has the Department made in developing a solid rocket motor industrial base strategy?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, I would say in particular—in general the defense industrial base is a focus of ours, the projectiles and other capabilities being a huge part of that munitions. But particularly on solid rocket motor projection, I would have to hand it to my colleague, Bryn, if she has it on that line item.

But if it was a priority that this committee identified and that we identified, then you can count on with a 13 percent in this budget it has been plussed.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Well, we really appreciate that. By the way, in my district, Virginia's Fifth Congressional District, we applaud what you guys are doing to protect our country. We have a place called ATDM, Accelerated Training and Defense Manufacturing. As I toured the new Columbia submarine and the new Enterprise aircraft carrier, the Secretary of Navy said the welders have the same level of training as a neurosurgeon. And we don't have enough of those guys. But they are doing that right there in my district. And if your schedule ever permits it to come visit, I would love to tour that with you folks. And again, we appreciate all you are doing.

So under President Trump's leadership you said that recruitment is up in the Army and I think you said all services is up? Is that right?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes, sir.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Awesome. I appreciate that. And maybe getting rid of these divisive ideologies and focus on more what unites us has something to do with that. Would you agree with that?

Secretary HEGSETH. Very much so. It is the leadership from President Trump and the environment they are entering into, which is back to basics.

Mr. MCGUIRE. By the grace of God. And I would say morale amongst our enlisted servicemembers and across our military is up. Would you guys agree with that?

Secretary HEGSETH. I have seen that.

General CAINE. Yes, sir. The Force is united against the problems that we have out there.

Mr. MCGUIRE. Well, we are lucky to have you. Thanks for all you are doing. If we could be of help, reach out any time. God bless you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here today. And to General Caine.

"The radar just lit up and at that point we were in an hour-long fight just trying to kill whatever we could." These were words of a pilot at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base speaking of a deployment that occurred on April 13, 2024, in the Middle East where pilots shot down rockets and drones heading to Israel from Iran. Another pilot said it was a deployment like we have never seen before.

Mr. Secretary, I am incredibly proud of the airmen at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. And I was glad to join the ACC [Air Combat Command] commander at a decoration ceremony recognizing 31 of the airmen and what they accomplished, and they accomplished the mission on April 13.

As you have highlighted the war ethos, lethality, and readiness, I cannot think of a better example than what we saw on April 13. There was not a lot of time. There was a lot of scrambling. They

packed up, took those F-15s to the Middle East, and they got the job done.

Seymour Johnson plays a key role in our national defense. It also is the location of the Air Task Force. We have one air task force which aims to generate more efficient, integrated, and deployable units.

Mr. Secretary, the Air Force has conveyed a commitment of plans to bring back F-15Es with the 229 engines from Lakenheath. Meanwhile, we are working right here trying to prioritize operational and maintenance needs at the installation. We also help to come back and address the training needs.

In your opening statement you mentioned NGAD, the F-47. Could you please just briefly expand further in terms of your vision of NGAD and looking long-term at the potential of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and others to deliver and ensure the nation's continued air superiority in the face of growing global threats?

Secretary HEGSETH. I will take it briefly and then hand it to the chairman. I have met some of those men and women from April 13. Impressive Americans. Some of the refuelers I have had a chance to talk to from that evening.

We are investing in NGAD in a historic way in the F-47. A lot of its capability is obviously classified, but with six-generation fighter of that type it shows to our adversaries that we are prepared to project power in the future. And where those go and where they are stationed is an open question, but we are happy to take a look. And I will hand it to the chairman.

Mr. DAVIS. And thanks for speaking with our airmen, Mr. Secretary.

General CAINE. Yes, sir. First, thanks for your service in the Air Force and in the Joint Force as well. You know, just piling on here, that particular day for the Air Force—not just with those Strike Eagle crews, but also the maintainers on the ground who were loading missiles up while there was engagements going on right over their heads. So extraordinary acts of bravery under fire out of your home district there.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you so much. General Caine, thank you too for your service. In the opening statement you shared that you were honored to serve alongside some of the most incredible warriors and civilians and their families. And you didn't stop there. And I appreciated it. You said I always especially remember our fallen and their families who demonstrate true sacrifice, courage, and commitment to our families.

Corporal Ryan Russell was a medic. The 2nd Battalion, Fort Bragg. Was killed March 5, 2007 in Iraq. I talked to his mother. He was 20 years old. Putting a face on this. 20 years old. Killed with others about the same age. And she—the only thing she missed the most was his smile.

My question is: We have—for instance we can't bring back those loved ones, but we have the Honor and Remember Flag. Representative Kiggans, myself. If you could take a look at H.R. 1363, I would ask you to do.

And, Mr. Secretary, I would simply ask what else are we doing to honor our fallen?

Secretary HEGSETH. We will take a look at 1363. I will tell you we initiated the first ever advisory board for Gold Star families at the Defense Department to follow through on their families as well and finding every way possible to recognize.

Mr. DAVIS. I too heard your Memorial Day comments. Thank you. And I yield back.

Secretary HEGSETH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. His time is expired.

We will now go to another North Carolinian, Mr. Harrigan, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HARRIGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Secretary and Chairman Caine. Thank you all for your testimony today.

I would like to first identify with my colleague's comments from Wisconsin, but I would like to take it a step further. I think you all are owed an apology. And although I really wish that all of my Democratic colleagues' comments were of the nature of my colleague from North Carolina just a minute ago, that is not what happened today. And all we saw was flagrant disrespect towards both of you. And that is not what this committee is about. We should be able to disagree without showing disrespect. We should be able to have discourse without sewing discord. And we should be able to question without using words that you can't take back. And that is not what happened today from the other side of this committee. We need to do a lot better than this.

But I will say, gentlemen, that you handled those questions with humility and grace. And today many of my Democratic colleagues have struck out. And it is the second day in a row that many of my Democratic colleagues have struck out.

So with that, I have got a couple questions for you today. Mr. Secretary, I want to talk about Army Transformation Initiative. I want to thank you for the bold work that you have done to reshape our nation's Army. Purging our Department of Defense and our Army of legacy weapon systems, force structures, and contracting mechanisms that have not helped us win the last 30 years of war are not relevant to helping us deter or defeat China is something that this country desperately needed. It is something that American taxpayers desperately needed. It is something that our service men and service women have desperately needed.

What is your plan to iterate the Army Transformation Initiative across both our Navy and our Air Forces?

Secretary HEGSETH. It is a great point. I want to first compliment Army Chief General George as well as Army Secretary Driscoll for their initiative out the gate to not waste any time in recognizing precisely what you said, that we need an Army structured and prepared to fight the wars of the future. We owe it to the Service. We owe it to the American people. And they followed in large part a Marine Corps that led the way overall in those, as sometimes they do. Often.

But I recognize other services: the Navy and the Air Force, could do more in that regard as well. Different ships you might say to steer than an Army and how you effectuate that modernization or that shift. We think the hard choices we are making in platforms and capabilities in those services mirror the kind of hard choices we are making in the Army. And that is what we see as our job

in this moment right now considering the threats we face, the world we live in.

I am going to spend the capital I have to, be happy to take the arrows of constituencies or districts, say no, we are going to put forward what is best for the Army, or the Marine Corps, the Navy, or the Air Force. And we are going to make the tough calls. And that might create some consternation. And that is okay, but our job is to ensure our budget matches those capabilities. Army Transformation is a great example, and we are going to look for it in other services, too.

Mr. HARRIGAN. I very much look forward to seeing what you will have the Navy and the Air Force do and we will be behind you 100 percent of the way.

And, Chairman Caine, a lot of talk today about the Golden Dome. I don't really fully appreciate some of my Democratic colleagues not knowing what that is about or knowing the threats behind why we have to have the Golden Dome, but I also believe that we have to have mini domes all across our country. As we have seen we have had very low-cost, high-impact technology proliferate all around the world. And I think we need to look no further than what happened in Ukraine just 2 weeks ago where you had \$100,000 investment by the Ukrainian scuttle over \$7 billion worth of hardware by the Russians.

I think that we have to look forward into the future and anticipate that we may face the exact same threats, maybe not against our military, but against our infrastructure, against our stadiums, against our city centers. And we need mini domes to protect this country against those threats.

How are you all working that problem set?

General CAINE. Well, sir, first thanks for the question. Thanks for your service. You know, one of the things that we are learning is the nature and way we fight wars is changing. We are starting to face, as you are alluding to, problems of mass where numbers of exchanges, kinetic exchanges, and frankly non-kinetic in the cyber domain, are increasing exponentially. So we have to match networks with networks and mass with mass. And so as we move forward to create the force of the future that is on our radar.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Cisneros.

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, so many topics to cover. I represent California's 31st District located in Southern California where you have deployed the National Guard and Marine combat battalion in an effort by this administration to provoke a confrontation. God only knows for what reason.

As my colleague from Tennessee mentioned, the military has been activated before by the President, but let's tell the whole story. President Johnson federalized the troops after the governor of Alabama activated them to keep Black students out of the University of Alabama. President Johnson did it so the students could attend the university. He did it for the right reason. He corrected a wrong.

California did not ask the President for help. And the presence of the military is an effort by this administration to intimidate and incite fear and violence amongst its citizens.

You failed at ensuring basic operational security by sharing classified data over an unclassified network. This was blatant, lazy, and put servicemembers' lives at risk. And knowing that your office is a SCIF [Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility] I hope you are not bringing in your devices, your personal cell phone or even your work phone, because that is not supposed to be in there either, right, your cell phone, into your office to send these Signal chat texts. Your blatant lack of basic OPSEC [operational security] would have gotten you resigned—forced you to resign from any other administration.

You are requiring 8 percent cuts across all services, not to save the taxpayers money, but to fund President Trump's pet projects. You talk about quality of life for our servicemembers, but yet you take a billion dollars away from the Army that was meant to improve their barracks and their [inaudible][RK1]. You said that money [inaudible], but we don't know that yet because we haven't see a budget.

If the President has projects he wants funding for, you need to come before this body and provide reasoning, not just shift money around. Right now, you are stealing from our servicemembers, robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Now you have repeatedly said that you will judge every individual on their merit. Is that true?

Secretary HEGSETH. Unlike the previous administration, we are focused on—

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, yes or no? For our service—

Secretary HEGSETH. They are at their job, yes.

Mr. CISNEROS. But, yet, you are separating thousands of servicemembers who are performing and doing their job at a high level. They are being separated not based on merit. You know, some of them have been recommended for early promotion, and have gotten awards, and are doing a great job. But you are separating for no other reason than, frankly, you just don't like them.

And you are classifying many of them as a national security threat, which is simply not true.

You asked the Secretary of the Navy to change the name of a ship, the ship because Harvey Milk didn't meet your definition of warrior ethos.

If a Korean war veteran and a Navy diver who gave his life for standing up for his beliefs doesn't meet your definition, I don't know what will.

You keep talking about recruiting. Well, let's face the facts here, right. Recruiting started improving before President Trump even came into office. And the reason that changed was because of the investment that was put into recruiting.

Now, I was at the Pentagon at the time, and I know how much we invested in it, and I know how much of the services. And when you take away that investment you are going to get exactly what happened in President Trump's first administration. In 2019, we had this same recruiting crisis, you know, back in 2019 when he was President the first time.

You continue to attack diversity. But I have always said diversity is about creating opportunity. And I have seen plenty of individuals, many of them enlisted members who, when given the opportunity have succeeded, not because of their sex, not because of color, not because of their sexual identity, but because of their work ethic, ethic and merit.

Mr. Secretary, when using your definition of DEI I think there is only one individual at the Pentagon right now who got his job based on that merit, and that is you. And you got it because of sucking up to your boss.

With that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. Messmer.

Mr. MESSMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Secretary Hegseth and General Caine, for being here today.

Secretary Hegseth, I would like to start by following up on some questioning from Mr. DesJarlais this morning regarding SLCM-N. I really appreciate your response regarding the importance of the program.

I want to add my voice to the chorus of those who believe the SLCM-N is a vitally important program. And I am looking forward to the budget boost that you mentioned for its development and deployment.

Is there anything else you would like to add about your view of the importance of investing in the SLCM-N program?

Secretary HEGSETH. No. I have nothing to add to what I said previous.

I think it is an important part of the dynamic battlefield of the future to continue to maintain the proper level of deterrence.

Mr. MESSMER. Excellent. Thank you.

General Caine, in response to a question in front of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense about non-strategic nuclear capabilities you spoke about the four C's across enterprise that you also mentioned here this morning.

I would like to focus my question on the competition piece. General Caine and Secretary Hegseth, can you elaborate on the strategy related to competition in the department?

And would you agree, in general, the Department achieves better outcomes and programs when it engages industry in a competitive process?

General CAINE. Yes, sir, absolutely we do.

I mean, there are many case studies over the arc of the last 30, 40 years that show how the taxpayer gets a better deal, the warrior gets a better deal when multiple entrants come to the table to drive better outcomes out of each of those producers.

And as we look at the House's efforts, the Senate's efforts to work together, along with the Department and the other leadership to generate the national industry and defense industrial base of the future, I really hope we encourage competition, not just with the existing primes but new entrants and even start-ups.

You know, I spent some in the private sector as a, as an entrepreneur, and realized quickly the value of competition to get to better outcomes.

Mr. MESSMER. Outstanding.
Secretary?

Secretary HEGSETH. To echo the chairman, I think we are at a special moment where a lot of younger, scrappier, dynamic companies want to enter into the market. And our job is to open that up so that not just the big guys who have mostly defense-related industries at this point, not as much of a commercial base in some cases, it is that aperture has widened to, to those other smaller, medium-size companies that invest a lot of their own money in R&D [research and development] in hopes that they can cross the Valley of Death and actually participate in larger systems.

So, we want a lot more competition.

Mr. MESSMER. Excellent. Thank you.

Are you considering an open competition process for development of the SLCM-N missile system?

Secretary HEGSETH. I don't know the particulars of the competitive process of the SLCM-N. But we can get that to you.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 159.]

Mr. MESSMER. Okay, that would be great. Thank you.

Secretary Hegseth, on the HAC subcommittee hearing you also mentioned our AUKUS partnership and how you have been working with Mr. Marles and Secretary Healey, not only relying upon the previous administration's Pillar II framework but also finding new way, new ways to supercharge Pillar II, and setting up new signature programs under the AUKUS framework.

What are the best capabilities in the near-term that AUKUS Pillar II can deliver to our warfighters?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, I don't want to get ahead of our discussions with Marles and Healey, and Australia and the U.K. in particular, but they are ongoing, they are recent, and with an interest in identifying precisely those projects that we share mutual interest in that are part of the—our future fight where all of our defense industrial bases can contribute and benefit from collaboration. So, we are, we are looking for that, and we will.

Mr. MESSMER. Excellent.

Would you anticipate hypersonic capabilities, like a hypersonic live vehicle or new electronic warfare systems would be potential programs that AUKUS could focus on delivering?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think you were at our meeting, sir. Yes, long-range fires is something we are definitely, we have definitely been a part of our conversations.

Mr. MESSMER. Thanks for that.

Secretary Hegseth and General Caine, we know that China is developing new technologies at an alarming pace, mainly hypersonic weapons. The previous administration, sadly, did not seem to understand the gravity of this situation and did not prioritize funding for our missile defense and hypersonic programs.

Can you speak about the Trump administration's and your Department's views about the importance of prioritizing investment in hypersonic and missile defense?

General CAINE. Well, sir, I will defer to the—the prioritization to my civilian leadership.

What I am trying to create is a global integrator along with the incredible work by the Joint Chiefs and the services, is the mix of capabilities that we need, to include hypersonics and other long-range fires to achieve the effects at the tactical edge so we can win in the future, and continue to win the way we do now.

Mr. MESSMER. I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from New Hampshire, Ms. Goodlander.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

We have one really important thing in common: we all swore an oath to this great document, the United States Constitution. We swore that oath when we joined the military. And we swore that oath when we began the jobs that we are holding now.

And I want to begin at the beginning of this document and at the beginning of your testimony, Mr. Hegseth.

In the first sentence of your testimony you said you are here today to testify about the fiscal year 2026 budget for the Department of Defense. You are required under law to submit this budget to the Congress, because we have got the power of the purse after all, by the no later than the first Monday in February.

Here we are in the second Thursday in June. We don't have your budget as the chairman, the ranking member, and many of my colleagues on this committee have pointed out.

You have testified that you want to be accountable for every dollar, every taxpayer dollar, where it goes. We can't do our job without your budget.

When can we expect your budget, Mr. Hegseth?

Secretary HEGSETH. As I also acknowledged in my opening remarks, in the first year of an administration it does take more time. We expect—

Ms. GOODLANDER. Mr. Hegseth, please, reclaiming my time.

Secretary HEGSETH. —to be longer addressing the priorities of the previous administration.

Ms. GOODLANDER. When can we expect your budget?

Secretary HEGSETH. You have details of it already. And you will have it very soon.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Can we expect the budget before the end of the month?

Secretary HEGSETH. I would, I would defer to, to Bryn, who is working that. But I know there are a great deal of detail that is already with the committee.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Okay. Let the record reflect that you haven't given us a commitment, but you are required by law to do so.

You are also required by law to pass an audit. That has been true since the 1990s. The Department of Defense is the only department that has continually failed an audit.

You have committed to passing an audit in 2028, but we expect you to pass an audit this year, and hope that you will work with us to achieve that goal.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your testimony and what, what you have said about the threats that we face in the United States, threats from China, Russia, and Iran. And I want to ask briefly questions about each.

Mr. Chairman, you said that the Chinese Communist Party is advancing an unprecedented military modernization effort with cutting edge technologies, including artificial intelligence.

Do you agree that the United States military must have more powerful AI capabilities than China?

General CAINE. Well, ma'am, first, thank you also for your service in the Navy.

I think LLMs [large language models] and AI really underpinning all of our command and control capabilities will—is now and will be in the future a key and essential tool for decision-making.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you.

I agree that American AI dominance is extremely important.

General CAINE. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Mr. Hegseth, should American AI dominance be up for negotiation with China in any trade talks that are underway?

Secretary HEGSETH. As the chairman said, we are very focused on AI dominance as central to maintaining our cutting edge. And we are doing that.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Good.

Well, I hope will you commit to telling the President not to sacrifice American AI dominance in any of his negotiations with the Chinese?

Secretary HEGSETH. The President is not surrendering any of our, any of our dominance to the Chinese.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Good. I will take that as a yes that you will be advocating for that. Thank you very much.

I hope you will also, you have both spoken to the importance of competition in the defense industrial base. I agree with that deeply.

I would point out that 40 percent of small businesses have left our defense industrial base supply chain in the past decade. And trade wars that have caused unprecedented uncertainty are going to drive more small businesses out of business. And that is something I hope we can work together to try to prevent because it is very real in my home state of New Hampshire.

Mr. Hegseth, did you order a pause in offensive cyber operations against Russia?

Secretary HEGSETH. That, I know the story you are referring to and it is false. We said it then and I will say it now.

Ms. GOODLANDER. So, it is your testimony that you never ordered a pause in offensive cyber operations against Russia?

Secretary HEGSETH. We did not.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Okay. Let the record reflect that. And we will be following up on that.

I am going to skip around because there has been a lot said in this hearing that has given me grave concerns.

One of the things that has been said in this hearing, Mr. Hegseth, was I want to give you the opportunity to correct the

record and make clear that you will abide by, that you will obey a ruling of the United States Supreme Court.

Secretary HEGSETH. I don't believe we have any cases pending before the Supreme Court right now.

Ms. GOODLANDER. I want to ask you will you abide by a ruling, by a decision by the United States Supreme Court if it is issued and you are asked to do so?

Secretary HEGSETH. What I have said, and I will repeat, is that district courts should not set the policy, the foreign policy of the United States of America.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Mr. Hegseth, this is a fundamental principle of the United States Constitution. The—

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kansas, Mr. Schmidt.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Mr. Secretary and General, thank you for being here and for your extensive commitment of time today. We are grateful for it, and it is the way the system is supposed to work.

I want to ask, Mr. Secretary, on the servicemember family health care side, in your opening statement you haven't talked much about it today. But you brought up quality of life improvements made, partnership with Congress in prior years and going forward and your commitment to it.

I jotted down what you said, which is, the quality of care given by the defense healthcare system is an important priority for you.

At the end of the last year, prior to the current administration's service in office there was concern in many base towns, Army base towns, about what we viewed as a push by the Biden administration to downgrade a number of our healthcare facilities. I represent, among others, Fort Riley, for example, and we were very concerned about the future of Irwin Army Hospital.

We thought we had that sidetracked, and perhaps we do. But we have heard some concerns sort of bubbling up again that perhaps DHA's [Defense Health Agency] taking another look. And I just want to make sure that it is on, on your radar screen.

We understand some of the resources is one of the issues. And in respect to Irwin in particular, it is a wonderful facility. I have had a chance to be out, and we would invite you, too, to come out to Fort Riley, or Fort Leavenworth, or both. Irwin's a state-of-the-art physical facility. One of the challenges is the physical plant is under-utilized.

One of the ways we have attempted to respond to that on my watch, which is now 5 months old, is to work with the command staff and his team at Riley to connect them with appropriate high-grade civilian providers in the area to try to bring more specialty capacity there, to look at other ways to fully utilize that capacity for our servicemembers and families, veterans in the area, perhaps others, maybe be creative.

We want to grow our way out of any back-of-the-envelope challenges. We don't want to shrink our way out of it.

So, I just wanted to be sure to bring that to your attention. I guess I would ask, do we have cause to be concerned?

Can we at least have an assurance that if there is cause to be concerned you are going to take another look at this and engage us fully before we have any surprises?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, we will certainly take a look in particular, I would say, that we are increasing our expenditures on, on the healthcare side to make sure we are addressing the needs properly.

We are also willing to get creative. And one of those, it is not precisely what you addressed, is working with VA. I mentioned it earlier in this hearing where there are places we can cross level to mutual, in a mutually beneficial way that ensures the throughput necessary, the skillsets necessary at different facilities. That makes sense also.

But looking into the civilian side is another alternative.

So, I don't know if, Bryn, you have particulars on that facility, but we will get more information to you.

Mr. SCHMIDT. I appreciate that, Mr. Secretary. And if there is something else I need to know now, I will take it otherwise. Maybe we can follow-up with you.

But we, we want to get creative. It is a great asset. And for Riley in particular, as you know, it is an old cavalry post, not unlike Fort Carson for my colleague to the right here. Provides relatively large maneuver space in the middle of the country. You can't get that back. We want it to survive and thrive in a 21st-century warfighting environment.

And in order to do that we have got to make sure we are doing the small things that are critical, including providing the right kind of health care to our troops. It is a great family post by the way, so.

Let me ask you, shifting gears a bit, and I don't know if this is appropriate for the secretary or the general. I would direct it to your discretion.

But with respect to sort of the future of the E-7, another issue that we have some Kansas-based interest in. But obviously we are more, more interested, more broadly in what we are going to do for aerial surveillance aspects. There has been some discussion that the E-7 might be under consideration for, for reconsideration going forward. And some talk about perhaps the E-2 being a bridging platform.

What can you tell us about the thinking there?

And, in particular, are you—what level of confidence do you have that the E-2 has the capacity to do the INDOPACOM operations that we need to be able to do, and it is a long distance.

Secretary HEGSETH. I would file the E-7 under the top choices file for us for sure. Our assessment that, you know, it was gold-plated, it was late, and it was over cost.

And if we look at the future fight, extending the E-2D is our view, alongside we believe that space-based ISR [Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance] is the capability of the future, not a prospective hopeful future but the technologies are there to begin to deliver even more robustly than an aerial platform.

So, our budget does reflect those top choices.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Can the E-2 do what we need it to do over the Pacific?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, we know that the E-7 being late to cost may not make it in time. And that is part of the consideration that we are looking at.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Understood.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you, Secretary.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Maryland, Ms. Elfreth.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to our witnesses today.

I want to echo, first, my colleagues and their concerns surrounding a number of issues, including the deployment of Marines to Los Angeles, the importance of supporting our ally in Ukraine, the alarming security breach that was Signalgate, and the unjust termination of members of our military from diverse backgrounds who simply want to serve our nation.

But before I get to my questions, Mr. Secretary, I want to just follow up on my colleague from New Hampshire.

Setting aside district courts, do you believe you have the authority to defy a Supreme Court ruling? Yes or no?

Secretary HEGSETH. We are not here to defy a Supreme Court ruling.

Ms. ELFRETH. Okay. I will take that as a win.

I want to move on to CYBERCOM [United States Cyber Command] in my state.

Mr. Secretary, earlier in this year General Haugh was relieved of his command of CYBERCOM and NSA [National Security Agency] following a Tweet that accused him of being disloyal to the President. And the oath that you took, the oath that I took, does not demand loyalty to any president but to this Constitution. I, too, brought my copy from college with me.

And, yet, as of this date, General Haugh, his successor has not yet been named. And you have stated many times the lethality of the military is critical. So it is difficult to understand how this administration would allow any, any billet to remain unfilled, especially those who lead our combatant commands.

I join my colleague Congressman Bacon in my grave concern that both the firing and the delay in hiring of a leader of CYBERCOM only gives assurance and comfort to our adversaries.

So, I am sure you would agree that any combatant command cannot be at its most lethal if a commander remains absent.

When will the President announce the new commander of CYBERCOM?

Secretary HEGSETH. I would note there is a very highly capable deputy there. So, it is not—

Ms. ELFRETH. Absolutely. I agree.

Secretary HEGSETH. —at risk at all.

We recognize that, and we are in the process of ensuring that slot is filled.

Ms. ELFRETH. And in the next month, 2 months period?

Secretary HEGSETH. It, it will not be that long.

Ms. ELFRETH. Okay. I appreciate that.

General Caine, during your confirmation process you stated that the dual-hat arrangement provides the ability to look across both

organizations and has empowered both USCYBERCOM and the NSA to fulfill their missions better than each could do alone.

Can you confirm for this committee that you hold that view to this day and, in one sentence or less, speak to the importance of that dual-hat arrangement?

General CAINE. Yeah. That, that reflects the current policy of the administration. The Secretary, of course, as does the President, reserves the right to re-think that.

Both organizations are critical. And whether they are a single- or dual-hat relationship, if directed, we will take a look at the risk associated with each one of them and come back to our civilian leaders with those risks and let them make a decision on it.

Ms. ELFRETH. But you are in the room, are you not, advising the President as to what is best for our national security?

General CAINE. I am in the room, yes. Thankfully.

Ms. ELFRETH. And can you commit to—I agree—can you commit to continuing your advocacy for that dual-hat relationship?

General CAINE. After some analysis. At the time I wasn't even in the military, I was still coming back in.

Mr. Elfreth. Yes.

General CAINE. So, if directed to take a look at it we will carefully, ma'am, measure the goods and others of each of those. But you have my commitment that I will continue as I have, giving my candid, forthright military advice on the each's and other's of all this to the Secretary and the President.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank you, sir.

I want to move on to sexual assault in the military. And it remains a stain in this DOD and this entire nation. It erodes cohesion. It brings a lifetime of pain and recovery for victims, including my constituents.

It is important to members of this committee that funding for SAPR, in particular, increases, and that any flatline of that funding would be viewed as a decrease.

In preparation for and during your confirmation, Mr. Secretary, you made commitment that you would support a robust sexual assault program and response, program that "seeks to drive sexual assaults in the military down to zero."

I commend you for that commitment. I agree with it. And, yet, it has been brought up many times we have no budget by which to measure your commitment and your promises.

So, can you commit today that when we do, at last, receive your final fiscal year 2026 budget we will see an increase to SAPR [Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office] funding and a plan from you as to how to drive sexual assaults down to zero?

General CAINE. As I said in my confirmation, I applaud Congress for the efforts that have been ongoing to address that issue, which we do need to drive to zero. That funding has not been reduced.

We have looked at a lot of places for efficiencies. That has not been one.

And I think you have seen the same news I have that, thankfully, sexual assaults are coming down. And we continue to want to do that.

Ms. ELFRETH. But we have to remain ever vigilant, which is why I hope it is not level funded. I hope we can continue to drive that

down. So, I look forward to that final budget whenever we do receive it.

Lastly, and I will take this for the record, moving on to a similar topic which is rape kits for DOD civilians overseas.

In April, DOJ [Department of Justice] issued a memo denying DOD non-beneficiary civilians who are victims of sexual assault and rape access to rape assault evidence collection kits.

If I could get for the record your explanation for this decision, civilian support by DOD. It is incredibly important that we fund and bring justice to those victims. And I look forward to working with you on it.

And I will yield back my time, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Crank.

Mr. CRANK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary and General, thank you for being here.

And I want to first, kind of apologize for the sort of personal attacks. My mom and dad taught me to be different. You won't get that from me, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Hegseth and General Caine, we have heard multiple times this year that we can't do Golden Dome because it will just cause China and Russia to build better missiles to get around our defenses. For that logic to make sense it would mean that China and Russia aren't already advancing missile technology and have stood pat on the missile technology they had 20 or 30 years ago.

I founded the Golden Dome Caucus here in the House. Is that an accurate statement that they have stood pat on missile technology or are they advancing, our enemies, on missile technology?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think it is fair to say, like us, they are attempting to advance in every way possible.

Mr. CRANK. Secretary Hegseth, El Paso County is the fastest growing county in Colorado. It is projected to see significant population growth over the next 3 decades. And we are proud that the region has become such a desirable place for families. But that growth has to be balanced with protecting critical operations of our five military installations.

And that is why initiatives like Security, Open Space, and Agricultural Resiliency, or SOAR, initiatives are so important. Through a combination of private funding, USDA's [United States Department of Agriculture] Regional Conservation Partnership Program and the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program, or REPI, this initiative supports targeted land acquisitions near military bases. These efforts help conserve wildlife habitat, preserve agricultural interests and, of course, maintain the necessary buffer zone—the most important part—that allows military missions to continue.

Does the Department of Defense plan to continue to support the REPI program in the fiscal year budget request to Congress?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yes, sir, it does. But I can get back to you with a specific number.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 159.]

Mr. CRANK. That would be great. Thank you.

Additionally, the Colorado Trust for Public Land has been awarded an \$18.5 million USDA RCPP grant to help leverage DOD REPI funds and reduce future land use conflicts around installations like the U.S. Air Force Academy. However, I understand that USDA is currently holding the funds under review.

While I recognize this may fall outside of your direct jurisdiction, the success of this land acquisition is essential to protecting the Academy's training capabilities.

Can I count on your assistance in working with USDA to find a solution that protects the readiness of the Air Force Academy and responsible federal funding?

Secretary HEGSETH. Yeah. We are happy to look at that with you.

Mr. CRANK. Great. Thank you.

I also would like to talk a little bit about the—the border. My district is home to U.S. Northern Command. We are very proud of, of what U.S. Northern Command has done with the new authorities that on January 20th the President gave Northern Command on the southern border.

And, in addition, 4th ID [infantry division] has troops down there.

Could you talk a bit about some of the great work that the U.S. military is doing in support of securing our southern border?

Secretary HEGSETH. We think it is foundational and fundamental work to the security of our nation. And as I have said before, because the previous administration allowed 21 million illegals from places we don't know to enter our country.

Thank you for asking that because it gives me a note, an opportunity to sort of—I, I see questions that are specifically meant to sow discord between the chairman and I, knowing you are going to get different answers based on our positions. And he has said, you know, the technicalities of an invasion.

Well, we are not talking about an invading army here. So, of course, everyone is trying to spin his words.

What we are talking about is the invasion of human beings, mostly military-age males from all around the world. We have no idea what their intentions are and they facilitated under the previous administration.

So, me in my position I can happily—not happily—I can clearly state that it is an invasion. And we are proud to have the military at the border to interdict that, and that every single day through increased authorities are working together with Border Patrol goes from 99.9 percent to 100 at the southern border.

I cannot commend the Joint Staff, NORTHCOM [United States Northern Command], and our military for reacting to that in the early days of the administration, orienting their focus to the southern border, and applying the manpower, expertise necessary. Because for 2 decades we spent, we spent 20 years guarding other people's borders and we got really good at it. And it is about time we take that expertise and apply it to ours.

And I commend our military for following those lawful orders and executing it incredibly well.

Mr. CRANK. They did a great job. And it is very similar to what is happening right now in Los Angeles. It is a support role. They

are not down there arresting people. They are not doing that but they are doing a great job supporting.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I yield back.

Mrs. KIGGANS [presiding]. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Whitesides.

Mr. WHITESIDES. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman and Mr. Secretary, thank you for your service to the country.

I am a new member of Congress from the north side of Los Angeles. And I am proud to represent a region with both a large veteran community and a world class aerospace production base. It was our area that broke the speed of sound for the first time, that assembled the space shuttles, and that now builds many of the most advanced aircraft that this nation depends on for its national security.

I want to start by communicating my deep concern for the deployment of military troops to the streets of Los Angeles County. Over the past few days, I have received briefings from military leadership, including the Marine Corps and National Guard, and one thing is eminently clear: so far this operation has been poorly planned and poorly executed, and is not an example of the operational and logistical excellence that the Department of Defense is famous for.

Our servicemembers have been sleeping on the concrete floors of federal buildings, and even outside on roads. No contract has been made to feed them or adequately house them.

NORTHCOM was not given adequate time or resources to prepare to absorb these guardians. The lines of command are muddy at best. I have personally heard that NORTHCOM is the lead agency, that DHS is the lead agency, that the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] is the lead agency, or that your office, Mr. Secretary, is the lead agency.

It is unclear whether the Marines who have been deployed have even completed their full training for this civilian-focused non-lethal mission. The briefings that we have received to date indicate that only a fraction of the assigned forces are actually being utilized on a day-to-day basis.

On top of this, yesterday we heard in your testimony, Mr. Secretary, that the Department may start sending troops to other cities and states. And early today you refused to say whether you would follow the Supreme Court on the legality of the deployments of the National Guard and the Marines.

We are on an extraordinarily dangerous path. The nation's founding fathers were rightfully deeply skeptical of domestic deployment of federal troops. That skepticism stretches all the way back to the Boston Massacre, and is a skepticism based on blood. Going forward, I would urge you to avoid politics and actually pay attention to what law enforcement officers are saying on the ground.

Now, we talked a lot today about leadership and accountability. I have been lucky to work for several inspiring leaders. When I was NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] Chief of

Staff, my boss was Administrator Charlie Holden, who you may know. Served as a decorated Marine general as well as a space shuttle commander.

This is a Marine who flew more than 100 combat missions in North and South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. He commanded the mission which deployed the Hubble Space Telescope which, at the time, was the largest object ever deployed by the shuttle. He is a serious man and an American hero.

I haven't been a member of the Armed Services Committee for very long, just over 5 months, but in that time, I have had the privilege to meet and talk with the senior-most members of our military. I have met men and women who have served for decades in our armed services, who have served for years in combat zones.

What have I learned from these American heroes? Leaders don't just speak, they listen. They are strong but they show humility. They are curious, and they learn from all members of their team, even people that they disagree with.

You and your team have made multiple serious errors: putting our pilots and troops at risk by disclosing operational details in unclassified communication channels, firing general officers with unique experience and leadership skills, hiring senior team members who seem to be unable to work together well and who seem unable to hold confidential information private.

We need the Department of Defense to be run well so that our troops are led well and our nation is protected. In order for that to happen, Mr. Secretary, I suspect you will need to listen more and talk less. You will need to be more curious and capable of learning from different voices.

I know that that is not the style of this administration. But you now have the lives of millions of servicemembers and hundreds of millions of Americans depending on your capacity to learn and change. I sincerely hope you can do it.

And I yield back my time.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes 5 minutes for myself.

I have the privilege and honor of representing a district that has a huge Navy presence. I want to switch gears and talk about naval aviation.

I, although I am the daughter of a Green Beret who served in Vietnam, I had the privilege of serving 10 years as a helicopter pilot. I am married to a 20-year veteran who flew F-18s. And now a proud mom of a naval aviator, and a son who graduated from VMI [Virginia Military Institute] about 3 weeks ago. So, big military family, and I represent a district where naval aviation, really the heart, heart of East Coast aviation, the East Coast Master Jet Base.

Yesterday we spent some time talking about the importance of the East Coast. I understand the importance of the West Coast very much in this potential China fight that we are all thinking of every day. But it can't be understated the value of what the East Coast brings when our battle groups and our carrier strike groups are deployed, the people that live in my district.

So, it is a little disheartening when I read about and think about the future of naval aviation when I heard from the Department of

Defense that about \$500 million that was appropriated for the next generation strike fighter in the form of the F/A-XX is to be reallocated to the Air Force.

And then when I read memos from this committee, that this committee is unaware of any changes to the Navy's requirements justifying the procurement of F/A-XX and continue to support efforts to award the F/A-XX development and design contracts to the Navy.

So, we are trying to piece together—and I asked the same question yesterday, and I echo the comments of my colleague from Virginia, Congressman Wittman. But that piece is very important. Right now I have very aging F-18 squadrons. There is no prioritizing or no commitment from the Navy to give me even F-35 squadrons. I have four F-35 squadrons that the Marine Corps has on the East Coast.

But you all know better than anybody that putting all your eggs in one basket is one of the worst strategies.

At the West Coast, Naval Air Station Lemoore, West Coast Master Jet Base, looks great. We have been out there to visit just to compare. They are slated to have, I believe, eight F-35 squadrons. And there is even an F-35 Center for Development that they want, or Center for Excellence that they want to put there, with no mention of the East Coast Master Jet Base.

So, I just want to hear from you all, I will start with you, Secretary Hegseth, but could you explain a little bit about your comments, why that is, and what your plans are to be supportive of our East Coast Master Jet Base that is, that is equally if not more important?

Secretary HEGSETH. I think it is a fair point. And I do think it is equally important.

On the F/A-XX we are reviewing it. No doubt, it is fair to say the budget does provide for a completion of the design. As I have stated, the F-47, the NGAD program, is a priority in this budget to get that moving.

So, we are invested in 6th gen, and we do recognize the Navy's unique power projection capabilities. The F-35 factors into that also. And, so, we are looking at its development in the future. And we will take into consideration those options and certainly make sure, if we are planning, it is considered.

Mrs. KIGGANS. That base needs it.

And, General Caine, I would love to hear your thoughts, too. You, to quote you, you said, "We need a capability that is mobile. There is nothing more mobile than a United States aircraft carrier."

General CAINE. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. KIGGANS. And when I turn on the television and we want to talk about dropping bombs on Houthis in Yemen, who do they show? They always show my husband taking off F-18s. And I get very jealous.

I know there is a helicopter over there in starboard D, just waiting—

General CAINE. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. KIGGANS. —for something to happen.

General CAINE. Yes.

Mrs. KIGGANS. But that is what they show, it is naval aviation.

General CAINE. Right. Or fish somebody out of the water.

Ma'am, thank, thanks for the question. Thanks for your service. Thanks for your husband's service. And congratulations to your son. That is a, that is a big, big deal.

You know, obviously the Navy is working all those issues, East Coast/West Coast power. But, you know, as a global integrator, having 5th gen on the West Coast that can go on those carrier air groups and get out there and provide deterrence and/or capabilities is key.

You know, I will echo the Secretary's comments, I will get with the Navy and—and take a look at their fourth rail in terms of 5th gen and moving forward.

And, of course, the F/A-XX timing is a policy decision, so defer to my leadership.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Thank you.

Well, and also just I know that you all are aware of our work we did in this Congress last Congress with quality-of-life initiatives and for the infrastructure needs at our bases. But that base is hurting and, again, that is our East Coast Master Jet Base. And we all know money follows the new toys sometimes, so, so please think of that and please prioritize and at least give us a commitment that that is coming our way.

And in closing I just want to talk about I am the co-chair of the Women, Peace and Security Caucus which we have here. We have had, this is a 2017 Trump—Trump bill that was signed into law, co-sponsored then by Senator Marco Rubio, strongly championed by Ivanka Trunk—Trump. It is a design for military readiness, strengthen our allies, promote lasting stability, for the inclusion of women in peace and security efforts.

Just please be mindful of that. It is a cheap \$3 million in fiscal year 2024 but having been in a lot of meetings with a lot of our allied partners, it is a cheap form of just maintaining those relationships and really giving, giving a role to the roles that women want to play. I mean, it is an important role for us.

I will say this, I will say that we are watching. Women are watching. And as a person who was commissioned in 1993, which was the first year that women could fly in combat, it was an important piece in my decision to serve.

So, so I just would love to hear your thoughts about the future of Women, Peace and Security.

Secretary HEGSETH. Ma'am, my issue is not what Women, Peace and Security was, it is what it became under the Biden administration.

So, our review showed that what it became, which was far more ideologically focused, was not what it should be. And so, our decision there was driven by removing that aspect.

Mrs. KIGGANS. I don't disagree. And happy to be a part of the solution to fix that.

And my time has expired.

And the chair now recognizes the Senator from California, Mr. Tran.

Mr. TRAN. Oh, got promoted.

Mrs. KIGGANS. I am sorry. Congressman.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Sorry about that.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Secretary, I just got word that Senator Padilla from my great state of California was physically assaulted and arrested for attending Secretary Noem's press event. The mere fact that he showed up, he was forcibly removed.

Is this how you would treat a member of Congress who attends your press event, whether invited or not?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, I have been here for 5 hours, sir. I don't know about that.

Mr. TRAN. I am just asking, would you have me forcibly removed from your press event—

Secretary HEGSETH. I am not—

Mr. TRAN. —if I walked in?

Secretary HEGSETH. I am not going to speculate on a hypothetical. I am sure there is more context.

Mr. TRAN. I will take that as a yes.

Mr. Secretary, does the DOD have any plans to allow the military to follow the orders of President Trump when his order violates the Constitution? Yes or no.

Secretary HEGSETH. I reject the premise of that question which is that President Trump is ordering unconstitutional orders.

Mr. TRAN. I will take that as a yes as well.

Mr. Secretary, the deployment of active-duty Marines to California is incredibly disruptive to the lives of servicemembers who are being drawn into the President's publicity stunt. And I want to know how you are planning to take care of these troops.

So, will you commit to sending my office and this committee a detailed plan on how you plan to house and feed the 700 Marines, and potentially thousands of Marines?

Secretary HEGSETH. What is disruptive is when concrete blocks are thrown at the heads of ICE officers. And so, we are proud that National Guards and the Marines have responded in real time to help defend the law enforcement officers.

Mr. TRAN. So, do you have a plan? Do you have a plan to house and feed the Marines?

Secretary HEGSETH. Not only do we have a plan, but it has been a focus of mine, who has held—I have held a riot shield before in a riot. I recognize what it means to respond in real time without—

Mr. TRAN. I reclaim my time.

Secretary HEGSETH. —enough time. And—

Mr. TRAN. Mr. Secretary, will you get me that plan, please.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 159.]

Secretary HEGSETH. —do everything they can as fast as they can. And we have a plan for that.

Mr. TRAN. Mr. Secretary, I reclaim my time.

Chairwoman.

LA Mayor Bass stated that the area placed under the recent curfew is around one square mile. Is that the same area where servicemembers will be deployed?

Secretary HEGSETH. Servicemembers are in Los Angeles to defend law enforcement,—

Mr. TRAN. Do you know?

Secretary HEGSETH. —ICE agents, and facilities.

Mr. TRAN. So, essentially you are telling me that American people, the American people, that a one square mile block of LA—and for the record, LA County is over 4,700 square miles—warrants the deployment of 700 Marines and the federalization of 4,000 California National Guardsmen.

You testified earlier that you were sending the military to protect local law enforcement. Did LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] Police Chief McDonald ask you for your help?

Secretary HEGSETH. I read reports on a regular basis—

Mr. TRAN. Did he ask for your help?

Secretary HEGSETH. —from ICE agents who couldn't—

Mr. TRAN. I will take that as a no.

Secretary HEGSETH. —be more grateful—

Mr. TRAN. Did LA Sheriff Luna ask—

Secretary HEGSETH. —and happy to see—

Mr. TRAN. —for you to send in the military, Mr. Secretary?

Did LA Sheriff Luna ask you to send in the military? Yes or no.

Secretary HEGSETH. I don't work for the LA Sheriff, sir.

Mr. TRAN. Well, you said you sent them in to support the military, but they didn't even ask for you—to support law enforcement, but they didn't even ask for your help.

Have you been to Los Angeles in the last 7 days?

Secretary HEGSETH. My team is from the top down focused on making sure Los Angeles—

Mr. TRAN. I will also take that as a no.

How did you arrive at the decision not to coordinate with local law enforcement and the Governor's Office on the initial deployment?

Secretary HEGSETH. It would be great if the Governor attempted to actually coordinate instead of grandstanding.

Mr. TRAN. All right. So, I believe your secretly coordinating troops in an area without coordinating with local officials is somehow not disruptive to the logistical and operational conditions on the ground; do you agree with that?

Secretary HEGSETH. I would need you to repeat the question, sir.

Mr. TRAN. Does the Department plan on coordinating with Governor, Governor Newsom's office on local law enforcement and—law enforcement going forward, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary HEGSETH. We have coordinated with local law enforcement quite well, but the Governor has been an obstruction to that, of course.

Mr. TRAN. All right. Secretary Hegseth, this political stunt, and by your own admission, is expected to cost the American taxpayer at least 134 million and will disrupt the lives of hundreds, and potentially thousands of active-duty Marines, and 4,000 National Guardsmen. That is 134 million and thousands of personnel diverted away from critical missions in the Indo-Pacific where China is rapidly expanding, from Europe where NATO needs U.S. support with growing Russian aggression, and from CENTCOM where tensions are escalating so critically that your own General Kurilla had to cancel all his testimony in Congress today.

Your redirection of combat-ready troops from real world national security threats to manage a domestic protest is gross mismanage-

ment and a slap in the face of servicemembers whose lives are disrupting—disrupted throughout this event.

As a veteran myself, it is a disgrace and you should be ashamed. I yield back.

Mrs. KIGGANS. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. MILLS. Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can we have in the record, please that the gentleman from California just stated that it was okay to have one mile of complete criminality in LA so long as it doesn't cover—

Mr. TRAN. That was not my statement.

Mr. MILLS. Madam Chair, we have—

Mr. TRAN. Mr. Mills has not been recognized.

Mrs. KIGGANS. The Chair now recognizes the congressman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Well, thank you, Madam Chair, for bringing it down a notch there.

It is always fascinating to observe folks talking about things they never experienced with a great deal of authority up in this bizarre body, reading scripted, hateful, planned rhetoric, and directing it at you gentlemen who do indeed know what it is to stand at post.

Let me address first to General Caine. I have to say this, sir, that researching your service career, my goodness gracious, 35 years of distinguished, exceptional service. I can't imagine that there is a better American man to be the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Thank you, good sir.

As an enlisted Army grunt, I thank you for being where you are and for your 35 years of service.

Mr. Secretary and General, I have plenty of questions that I don't have to get to because you are almost finished with this thing. I have questions on recruitment, and training, and Fort Polk, and software modernization, artificial intelligence, shipbuilding, our new Army rifles, which I find questionable by the way.

But when I met with you in the Pentagon a couple of months ago, Mr. Secretary, to dive deep into reconciliation considerations in a budget, what the DOD would need, and primary threats facing our country, I had never really sat down with you like that before. But what struck me, good sir, was that, was that you are a committed and dedicated patriot. And I know that I can expect that sort of transparency, and accessibility, and candor from your office.

So, I will get to these questions down the line. I know you will answer the phone and your people will respond because that is the man that you are.

You have covered a tremendous amount today and you have been subjected to some politically motivated vitriol. On behalf of Congress, I apologize for that.

So, let me just state that from my humble position I am going to make a promise to you two gentlemen, and by extension to the country that we love and serve, whatever you need to accomplish your mission we are going to work very hard to provide. May God give you strength, and may He provide shields of protection and peace for your families, because I know you are nicer, although you are probably each working 20-hour days every day.

Thank you for that and being here today, for your accessibility. May God bless you each.

Madam Chair, I yield.

The CHAIRMAN [PRESIDING]. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Vindman.

Mr. VINDMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I ask unanimous consent to submit for the record an article. A distinguished member of this committee—

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 149.]

Mr. VINDMAN. —confirmed that there was, in fact, a pause in offensive cyber operations earlier this year. The SECDEF just denied this.

This committee deserves to know whether the Secretary just lied.

Mr. Secretary, many believe you are unqualified, under-qualified for this role. You have been Secretary 4.5 months now. For the sake of the American people and our servicemembers, I hope you have done your homework since.

Let's talk INDOPACOM.

What year has the Navy publicly set as the benchmark for being ready to fight a war with China?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, it needs to be right now. We know what China—

Mr. VINDMAN. I am glad to hear that.

Secretary HEGSETH. —has said. Right now.

Mr. VINDMAN. That there is a publicly set date.

Secretary HEGSETH. We know—it wouldn't be prudent in this environment to reveal when we think we are ready. That is what China has said, and we understand what they are saying, and we want to be capable and ready for it.

Mr. VINDMAN. Mr. Secretary, I asked for a year. Not a filibuster. 2027 is the year. According to unclassified DOD assessments, how many warships does China have in its Navy today?

Secretary HEGSETH. Many and growing.

Mr. VINDMAN. 370. It is the largest Navy in the world.

How many does the U.S. Navy have today?

Secretary HEGSETH. Thanks to this budget, it is increasing substantially.

Mr. VINDMAN. A number, I am looking for a number.

Secretary HEGSETH. But it is just south of 300.

Mr. VINDMAN. 286. Pretty close.

How many ships is China expected to field by 2030?

Secretary HEGSETH. I believe that is a classified number, but it is going to go up at a rapid rate.

Mr. VINDMAN. In a DOD PR report that was released there is an unclassified number.

Secretary HEGSETH. It is going up at a rapid rate.

Mr. VINDMAN. Let me help you out: 435.

Let's see if we can do better in EUCOM.

What corridor in Eastern Poland is vulnerable and a priority for U.S. reinforcements that connects Belarus to a Russian region?

Secretary HEGSETH. I am sure you can tell me.

Mr. VINDMAN. I can tell you. It is the Suwalki Gap.

Which heavily militarized Russian territory connected the Suwalki Gap that contains nuclear capable missiles that threatens all of NATO? It is right there in the middle, Eastern Europe.

Secretary HEGSETH. I see we are playing a quiz game here. Ultimately, thankfully—

Mr. VINDMAN. It is the Kaliningrad Oblast.

Secretary HEGSETH. —we are giving our NATO allies a step up in their spending to make sure that they can hold the line.

Mr. VINDMAN. Mr. Secretary, I asked you a specific question. Thank you.

It is the Kaliningrad Oblast.

So, what percentage of Ukrainian front-line casualties, let's talk drones, are now caused by FPV drones?

Secretary HEGSETH. A very large percentage. And we are studying that conflict closely to understand—

Mr. VINDMAN. I hope so.

Secretary HEGSETH. —that fact.

Mr. VINDMAN. It is over 70 percent.

And which U.S. service has written doctrine or standardized procurement for integration of FPV drones?

Secretary HEGSETH. That is the Army.

Mr. VINDMAN. I wish that were the case. But, actually, the answer is none of them. So, we are not prepared yet, and we need to get there fast.

Let me turn to a different topic. A few weeks ago when my office opened up in Fredericksburg, I spoke to the mother of one F-18 pilot who flew the March 15th mission over the Red Sea and Yemen that you discussed over Signal. I spoke to her again on Tuesday and asked her if there was anything she wanted me to bring up.

She believes that you need to resign.

She also had several questions. But the one thing she said, she would appreciate an apology, an apology for putting classified information. Her son couldn't even tell her where the Truman was going. But into the Houthi PC [Principals Committee] small group Signal chat that risked her son's life and the mission.

Mr. Secretary, yes or no, do you think you owe her an apology?

Secretary HEGSETH. Please make sure to let her know how grateful we are for the skill and heroism of her—

Mr. VINDMAN. I am very much grateful. I am sure everybody in this room is grateful. I am proud of what her son has done.

The question is, do you owe her an apology for your actions? Are you going to be accountable?

Secretary HEGSETH. It was an incredibly successful mission. Her son did great work.

Mr. VINDMAN. He did a magnificent job.

Secretary HEGSETH. And, thankfully, the Houthi campaign was a success.

Mr. VINDMAN. Mr. Secretary, I agree with you. Magnificent job, the performance of those pilots and Navy personnel. Magnificent.

We are talking about what you did and accountability. Are you going to apologize to the mother or not?

Secretary HEGSETH. I don't apologize for success.

Mr. VINDMAN. You don't apologize for putting her son's life in danger and for putting the mission in jeopardy.

Well, that is, that is very disappointing and not befitting the tough leadership that our troops and families deserve. It is, frankly, a stunning lack of OPSEC. Privates are trained to do much better than that. It was reckless.

And sounds like that accountability doesn't extend as far as the Secretary of Defense.

So, I think you should resign. The mother said she wants you gone.

And with that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Sorensen.

Mr. SORENSEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to the Secretary and the General for joining us today.

Mr. Secretary, I am hopeful that we can come to an agreement that we need both sides of the chambers working together for the betterment of the military.

Do you believe that bipartisanship is essential to the mission of our Armed Forces? Yes or no? Bipartisanship?

Secretary HEGSETH. Bipartisanship can be a wonderful thing.

Mr. SORENSEN. Great.

Because I didn't come to Congress with political baggage. I mean, I was called here because, you know, we believe, I believe and my constituents believe that we need impartial bipartisan people to find solutions to complex problems. But today this nation is being pushed and pulled in so many different directions.

I have a constituent this weekend that said, Eric, I don't even know what to believe anymore. Facts don't matter. Conspiracy theories run rampant like brush fires without anyone to quell them.

So, I am hoping you can shoot straight from the hip with me. We are almost done.

Do you have a targeted number of reductions in civilian personnel in our Armed Forces?

Secretary HEGSETH. We have very diligently tried to identify the places where we might need to make changes. But for the most part it has been a DRP [Deferred Resignation Program] process, a volunteer process of civilians to try to reduce the number for cost saving.

Mr. SORENSEN. Is there an analysis that supports how you are coming up with these decisions?

Secretary HEGSETH. We looked at, we looked at about 8 to 10 percent, Congressman. But, ultimately, everyone here acknowledges that the civilian size of the DOD has exploded over the last 20 years.

And so, where there are room for efficiencies, we are actively trying to find them and right-size those spots. Because a lot of those places are not making us more nimble or faster at what we do. And—

Mr. SORENSEN. Right. What do we say to the people that have strived their entire life, these are former, retired members of the military working in as civilian backup, what do we say to them?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, almost all of them took a voluntary DRP to separate.

Mr. SORENSEN. Do you have a timeline for making these cuts?

Secretary HEGSETH. Like I said, almost all of them were volunteers who themselves decided to retire early.

Mr. SORENSEN. Okay. I want to reset for just a moment.

And I am going to be honest with you. I learned a lot about military service from both of my grandpas who served and fought in World War II. My Grandpa Sorensen was a proud Navy photographer. You know, I have his photos framed above my desk here on Capitol Hill. You know, I learned to be proud of him.

And from him I learned how to become proud of veterans, which is why I want to talk about a different veteran, one who served in the Korean war from 1951 to 1955. He served courageously like my Grandpa Sorensen.

But unlike my grandpa this veteran was forced to resign from the Navy—I am talking about Harvey Milk—because he was gay. You see, as a kid all I wanted to be was the weatherman on T.V. You know, I learned that I could have gone into the Army or the Navy to learn meteorology, but someone like me wasn't allowed. They didn't want someone like me, Mr. Secretary. There wasn't anything that I could do to change myself or the way that my nation thought of me.

And so, I want to keep this very simple.

Do you believe that Harvey Milk is a veteran who deserves his country's thanks?

Secretary HEGSETH. Sir, the decision to rename the ship was not—

Mr. SORENSEN. I am just asking do you believe that Harvey Milk is a veteran who deserves his country's thanks? Yes or no.

Secretary HEGSETH. If his service is deemed honorable, yes.

Mr. SORENSEN. Yesterday the Secretary of the Navy was in your seat. He couldn't give me a straight answer.

I disagree with your leadership and his, because I believe that every veteran deserves our thanks. We all walk in the footsteps of leaders before us. And you may not find the value in the fact that many of those people are women, with different skin colors, different backgrounds, different talents, immigrants, gay, straight, transgender, disabled. You may want to change it, but you can't.

Because the America that you and I both serve is a place where everyone has the ability or should have the ability to grow up and be the hero that grandpa was. I wanted to do that when I was a kid.

We are going back to that time. Gay kids like me, they don't want to go into the Army, they don't want to go into the Navy because you don't care for them. It is happening all over our country.

My grandpa taught me never to judge the value of a veteran's service. But I hope, Mr. Secretary, you learn to do the same in your capacity and you can find it in your heart to make that part of your process.

May God continue to watch over our troops, our veterans, and our military families.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Bell.

Mr. BELL. Mr. Secretary, unlike my colleague down the dais, I don't feel sorry for you. I have visited with soldiers in war zones whose life, life was on the line. So, a few tough questions. I think you will be okay.

And so, my first question is are you authorized to disclose intelligence that would put our troops in harm's way to our enemies?

Secretary HEGSETH. Well, I reject the premise of the question.

Mr. BELL. Just saying as a hypothetical, are you authorized to do that?

Secretary HEGSETH. I have not and do not.

Mr. BELL. Exactly. And I assumed that.

So, when you told our ranking member that everything that you say is authorized, that wasn't completely accurate; correct?

Secretary HEGSETH. What I said is that every way that I communicate is authorized.

Mr. BELL. No. You actually said everything that you said is authorized. I wrote it down.

Now, with that said, and the reason I bring that up is because it is about accountability. And we are talking about this war ethos, the primary, the primary component of that is accountability.

And indulge me in a quick analogy.

Republicans introduced a bill on the House floor a few days ago, a resolution standing against terror, racism, hate, antisemitism which, as an African, as an American, as a Black man I am going to support, I am going to stand against those things 6 times a week, twice on Sunday.

Now, the nefarious part was there a line that was stuck at the end of that, that resolution that essentially gave a shout out to law enforcement, which I do support, but also to ICE, which right now a lot of Americans have a problem with the way ICE is being deployed. And I am not happy with what they are doing, nor do I want to shout them out for that.

And so, accountability was I didn't duck from the question, I went and I talked to my constituents. I went on social media. I did interviews to explain exactly where I stood, that I stand against hate, I stand against racism, I stand against antisemitism. And I hate that that line was stuck in there.

That is accountability.

So, when we are asking you these questions and you are ducking, and you are not answering them directly, that is not, that is not a culture of a war—what was the term, a war ethos, a warrior ethos. I am looking at members of our, of our—who served, and they are taking their lead from you. That starts with you.

And if we have troops who are in war zones and they are watching while they are risking their lives and you can't just answer some tough questions, what kind of culture is that setting?

So, as a prosecutor, when I think about what is happening in California and around the country with ICE, it is not only dangerous and unconstitutional but it raises serious public safety con-

cerns because we have people with masks that are going around saying that they are ICE—and we have had reports of that—saying that they are ICE and committing crimes. And that is, that is a big problem.

But it gets me back to the point of the accountability piece.

So, for example, do you believe quality military housing is important? Yes or no.

And just keep your mike on for the time because I don't only have a minute left.

Secretary HEGSETH. Our budget commits to robust military housing and barracks up to date.

Mr. BELL. Do you believe military children deserve a strong education?

Secretary HEGSETH. Our budget funds strong education and we hope more educational choices for military children.

Mr. BELL. Love it.

Is it a priority to provide real reliable care to our veterans?

Secretary HEGSETH. Of course.

Mr. BELL. So, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Secretary, we have a problem here because your answers don't match your budget priorities. You said your mission is to restore this warrior ethos and that threats we face are serious, but so must our investments.

So, when we think of, for example, a \$45 million parade, I can think of 45 million things we could do more effectively with \$45 million than a parade, such as the things that I mentioned: military housing, military children's education, providing reliable care for our veterans. All of these things would be higher on the priority than a parade.

And so the parade, and when we talk about, when we talk about showing strength we are not talking about theater, we are not talking about showmanship. We are talking about things that actually make our military more lethal and keeps, and keep us, keeps us safer.

And so, what I am saying is, is that, in my limited time left is accountability goes matter. And this body cares about what the what our military, what our military is doing because we care about national security and we take it, and we all take it very seriously.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. BELL. My time has expired.

The CHAIRMAN. All time for member questions has expired.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member for any closing comments.

Mr. SMITH. I just want to thank the chairman for his excellent leadership of the committee. Obviously a highly contentious time.

The only comment I would make, a number of members from the other side expressed outrage that we were critical of Secretary Hegseth. I don't know how many of those members sat here when Joe Biden was President, but the savage attacks on Biden, and Secretary Austin, and Chairman Milley, I mean just the hypocrisy of that was just breathtaking for me to behold.

And let me just say I think I agree with what Mr. Bell just said, you know, tough job. Not as tough as our other jobs. Part of it is you are accountable to this body. You are accountable to answer

questions even if sometimes they are obnoxious. That is part of the gig.

And I do hope going forward that the Department of Defense will have greater contact with this committee. I have not spoken to you one-on-one in the entire time you have been Secretary of Defense. Only interacted with you twice.

I have been through a ton of Secretaries of Defense that served for presidents, including President Trump. Always had a very good relationship and a very good conversation.

Your Department is cutting us off in a way that is not helpful to any of the bipartisan hopes that have been expressed by the other side of the aisle. I hope that will change. I hope there will be interactions.

I will say, General Caine, you have been very generous and reached out, effective communication, and I do appreciate that because that is the responsibility of the job. I haven't met too many people at the Pentagon that like coming over here. I can't think of one. But it is part of the job in a constitutional republic. We are the people's voice. We are charged with conducting oversight.

So, I hope that interaction will continue. Criticism is part of the game.

Again, I thank the chairman for conducting an excellent hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, my friend.

And I would say, Mrs. MacDonnell, you crushed it today.

So, for your first—

[Applause.]

The CHAIRMAN. And to our other two witnesses, thank you for your first appearance before the House Armed Services Committee. Thank you for your service to our country.

And with that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:11 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

JUNE 12, 2025

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JUNE 12, 2025

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

THE HONORABLE PETE HEGSETH
Secretary of Defense

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FIRST SESSION, 119TH CONGRESS

ON DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET REQUEST

THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2025

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

FY26 Written Posture Statement
HASC — 12 June 2025**Introduction**

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of President Trump's proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget for the Department of Defense.

I am honored to testify alongside General Dan Caine, the 22nd Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He embodies the warrior ethos that President Trump wants to reinvigorate in our joint warfighting force. General Caine exemplifies courage, honor, and selfless service.

I'm impressed by his focus on increasing readiness, capability, and fighting spirit across the force. Our shared values and commitment to defending our nation have fostered a strong and collaborative working relationship. General Caine's unique background, including his previous role as Associate Director for Military Affairs at the CIA, makes him an invaluable advisor to me and the President. I look forward to our continued partnership, which will leverage his expertise to inform our decision-making and ensure the strength and effectiveness of our military.

I am also honored to testify alongside Bryn MacDonnell, who is performing the duties of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer. Ms. MacDonnell's experience supporting the work of the Chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and serving as a Special Assistant at the White House Office of Management and Budget make her uniquely qualified to testify about the budgetary needs of the Department.

Under the leadership of our Commander in Chief, Donald J. Trump, this budget puts America First and enables the Department of Defense to achieve its clear mission of achieving Peace through Strength. To carry out this mission, I have set three priorities for the Department: restore the warrior ethos, rebuild our military, and re-establish deterrence.

The \$961.6 billion budget put forward by the President reverses four years of mismanagement and underinvestment. It realigns the military to the historic strength that began in President Trump's first term and makes generational investments in the President's priorities including developing the Golden Dome, sealing the Southwest Border, investing in the F-47, revitalizing our shipbuilding industry, and shaping end strength to match to the threats we face.

These investments are amplified by the savings and efficiencies that the Department has found in collaboration with the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). To date, we have found \$6 billion in savings through this collaboration. Additionally, we have pulled \$30 billion away

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from the last administration's nonlethal priorities to reinvest into the President's priorities. We will ensure every single dollar of taxpayer money funds lethal Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Guardians. Every cent will provide capabilities to deter our adversaries, and if necessary, prevail on the battlefield.

These savings and efficiencies are considerable, but are just the beginning of our focused effort to rein in waste, fraud, and abuse. The Department of Defense must pass a financial audit by 2028. We will ensure full accountability to Congress and the American taxpayer. We will improve our processes and controls to make better financial decisions. And we will understand where every taxpayer dollar goes and why. This is what it will take to rebuild our military and exactly what we will do. We will pass an audit by 2028.

Workforce Acceleration and Recapitalization

The Department is optimizing our civilian workforce. This ensures that we have the right employees in the right roles at the right times to support our warfighters. We're doing this by voluntary means, to the greatest extent possible, through incentives like voluntary early retirement and separation initiatives. The Department approved approximately 22,000 employees to participate in Round One of OPM's Deferred Resignation Program (DRP). The DoD also offered its own second round of the Deferred Resignation Program from April 7 through April 14, 2025.

With thanks for Deputy Secretary Feinberg's leadership, we are undertaking a workforce acceleration and recapitalization initiative. This means we are re-evaluating every position to make sure that each focuses on our core mission of supporting our warfighters. Reorganization plans will strip away bureaucracy, accelerate decision-making, and deliver maximum value to the warfighters. We will eliminate non-essential and redundant roles, consolidate functions, flatten hierarchies, and eliminate unnecessary vestiges of the past. This realignment will ensure our ability to respond to any threat with speed, precision, and overwhelming force.

The technologies used by our adversaries — and the threats they pose — are evolving at breakneck speed. We cannot deter — or if need be, defeat — opponents like Communist China if we're moving at yesterday's pace. We need to be lean and nimble. We need to be fast. And that is exactly what we are doing.

We have ended the culture of full-time, low-productivity telework. We expect employees, at all levels, to deliver results and respond to leadership needs. Incentives and performance plans will

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reflect that. These changes will allow us to properly allocate the workforce, boost readiness, and increase efficiency across our team.

Threat Environment

For a generation, the United States ignored China's threat to U.S. interests. We became distracted by open-ended wars, regime change, and nation building. In the process, past leaders sent our service members on mission after mission with no exit strategy, no end in sight, and with little articulation for the American people or for the war fighters about how these conflicts would benefit Americans and our core national interests.

These costly diversions lacked clearly defined goals and were not tied to vital and core American interests. President Trump is changing that.

We are done with that approach. Under this Administration, we are focused on delivering for the American people, on safeguarding their security, on protecting their economic interests, and on using common sense to preserve peace in the Indo-Pacific

The Department of Defense has already made great strides to reverse the trend of deterioration and decay.

First, border security is national security. To secure our own border first, we deployed troops and declared two new National Defense Areas in Texas and New Mexico to allow our military to effectively assist the Department of Homeland Security. We will achieve 100% operational control of the border.

We will also defend our nation's interests throughout the Western Hemisphere. In Panama, as the President promised, we are taking back the Panama Canal from Chinese influence. We have also secured "First and Free" canal passage for our military and auxiliary vessels.

The President has also been clear – we will not tolerate attacks on American vessels. To that end, we have completed a highly successful and focused campaign against the Houthis. Our message — and our goal — was clear: Stop shooting at our ships and we will stop shooting at you. I am pleased to report that the attacks on American ships have now ended.

Despite this significant progress, real threats remain. Our pacing threat is Communist China. Beijing is preparing for war in the Indo-Pacific as part of its broader strategy to dominate that

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region and then the world. Were it to succeed, it would be able to attempt to derail American reindustrialization and then strangle the U.S. economy. This cannot happen and my Department will not let it happen.

As I said at the Shangri-La Dialogue recently, the United States seeks a durable peace in the Indo-Pacific. Our goals are limited, and peaceful. To ensure this peace, the Department is laser-focused on strengthening deterrence in the Indo-Pacific to ensure that core U.S. interests are protected.

That means restoring and modernizing America's forces with a strong focus on the capabilities required to maintain peace through strength in the Western Pacific. It also means strengthening our forward posture in the region and working closely with our allies to enhance their own defense capabilities. In fact, we have already expanded the scope and scale of our cooperation with Australia, Japan and the Philippines to deter China, including with new understandings for enhanced posture in the future.

But Asia isn't the only place where we're strengthening our nation's alliances. In Europe, President Trump and his administration have told our NATO allies that they must step up and take primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense – and we are already seeing progress. We are seeing recognition across NATO on the need for European nations to spend 5% of GDP on defense spending.

This is a break from the last Administration's policies, which failed to encourage NATO allies to invest in their own defenses and distracted them from their core mission in the Euro-Atlantic region by encouraging them to do more in the Indo-Pacific.

Our strategy is one of common sense: our NATO allies have the economic strength to deter Russia, and our own resources are increasingly strained. As we shift our focus to the Pacific, we are counting on our NATO allies to devote more resources to defense to forge a strong shield of deterrence in Europe. Our NATO allies taking primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense is vital and as it is overdue. Not just as a matter of fairness to American taxpayers who are tired of freeriding, but to ensure that NATO remains a strong and sustainable alliance, even as U.S. forces prioritize defending our nation's homeland and deterring China. This is how we can restore and sustain peace through strength in Europe for the coming generations.

Continuing Resolutions

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As the members of this committee know, despite supporting a flexible full-year Continuing Resolution (CR) in FY25 in order to keep the Department funded, the routine use of CRs degrades our ability to deter our adversaries, and reduces our readiness to fight if necessary. This state of affairs is insufficient to meet the moment, and I urge members of this committee and Congress to:

- Fully fund this budget request which makes generational investments to rebuild our military and restore deterrence;
- Support the savings and efficiencies that the Department has found in coordination with DOGE

Restoring the Warrior Ethos

My first priority is to restore the warrior ethos and restore trust in our military, both of which were casualties of the last four years, as demonstrated by historically low recruitment numbers across the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. President Trump charged me to bring the warrior culture back to the Department of Defense. He, like me, demands a Pentagon laser-focused on warfighting, lethality, meritocracy, standards, and readiness.

Balanced Accountability

I have directed each of the military departments to conduct a review of their Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity programs and processes. Our personnel deserve fair treatment and a positive work environment that is free from unlawful discrimination and harassment. They also deserve qualified leaders who are empowered to make tough decisions, enforce standards, and restore good order and discipline through balanced accountability.

We are going to streamline investigation processes, address problematic behaviors, and mitigate undue mission impacts. Complaints that are unsubstantiated by actionable, credible evidence will be dismissed in a timely manner. Flimsy allegations will not be used adversely against the accused. Personnel who knowingly submit false complaints will be disciplined.

This is critical to advancing meritocracy and balancing accountability. It is also the right thing to do for the DoD and our workforce. We will continue to hold leaders at all levels accountable for their actions, but the Department will no longer foster a culture of “walking on eggshells.”

Focus on Warfighting, Lethality, and Readiness

At the Department of Defense, we are sweeping away distractions to focus on our core mission of warfighting. One of our Department's early actions was commissioning a rapid, force-wide review of military standards. This review included fitness standards, training standards, physical standards, grooming standards, and gender-neutral standards for combat roles. To be the world's most lethal and effective fighting force, we must set and maintain high, equal, and unwavering standards for our men and women in uniform, particularly our leaders. We are assessing how the department has maintained standards in the past, particularly the last four years, and whether those standards have dropped, formally or informally.

The Department of Defense has an obligation to the American public to ensure their sons and daughters serve under the best leadership we can provide them. Doing so is a national security imperative. A foundational tenet of the Department must always be that the most qualified individuals are placed in positions of responsibility in accordance with policies that are merit-based and color-blind.

That is why President Trump established the "Restoring America's Fighting Force" Task Force. I have tasked it to abolish the DEI bureaucracy across all of our services. That begins with ending any DEI offices and all of their vestiges, including sub-offices and initiatives established to promote a race-based preferences system. These programs devastated morale under the last administration, subverted meritocracy, perpetuated unconstitutional discrimination, and promoted divisive concepts and radical gender ideology.

We will not consider sex, race, or ethnicity in promotions. We will eliminate racial and gender quotas. We will not teach CRT, DEI, or gender ideology in any contexts. Our contractors, boards, councils, and working groups will cease any operations relating to these divisive ideologies. We are removing any content from the DoD that does not support our core mission of warfighting.

We are undertaking an exhaustive internal review to discover all programs that fall under the remit of President Trump's order. We are ensuring that our military is protecting the Constitution and our nation's history, not subverting them. At the DoD, unity is our strength. Providing Service members an equal opportunity to excel will help us remain the world's strongest and most lethal fighting force.

General and Flag Officer Reductions

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In addition to these reorganization efforts, I have directed a reduction in the number of general and flag officer positions. To accomplish our mission of lethality, deter threats, and achieve decisive victory, we must cultivate exceptional senior leaders who drive innovation and operational excellence. They must be unencumbered by unnecessary bureaucratic layers that hinder their growth and effectiveness.

Therefore, we will reduce 4-star positions across the Active Component by a minimum of 20%, general officers in the national guard by a minimum of 20%, and general and flag officers by a minimum of 10% with the realignment of the Unified Command Plan.

COVID Reinstatements

We are also welcoming back former service members who were wrongly forced to leave the military. More than 8,700 service members were involuntarily separated for not taking an experimental COVID-19 vaccine. Others were more informally pushed out or decided to get out. We are actively welcoming back those warriors of conscience.

We have begun identifying those individuals and sending them letters to apologize for the wrong that was done to them and invite them to return back to the military, with back pay. In April, I directed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to provide additional guidance to remove adverse actions based solely on refusal to take the COVID-19 vaccine or a request for accommodation, provide discharge upgrades for those individuals, and facilitate additional remedies for Service members who suffered other career setbacks resulting from their principled stand. Through these efforts we will continue to restore confidence in our military and retain a Force that meets the highest standards.

Recruitment

The Trump administration recognizes that our most valuable resources is the young people who are brave enough to put on the uniform and risk your life for this country. One of our clearest metrics of success to date is coming from outside the military. Young Americans are responding positively to our articulation of our mission. Year-to-date, the Army has seen its best recruiting numbers since 2010. Earlier this month, the Army hit its annual recruitment goal four months early, bringing in over 61,000. And under Secretary Driscoll, they are still going strong. The Navy has seen its best recruiting numbers since 2010. Every service branch is on track to meet or exceed their targets for FY2025.

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This recruiting renaissance is welcome news, but unsurprising. When our standards are high, when the mission is clear, when we prioritize warfighting over wokeness, that energizes the young men and women of our country, the very patriots our American experiment has always needed. President Trump's clear vision for a Golden Age of national defense has been a catalyst for this upward trend in recruiting.

Rebuilding our Military

After the Cold War, a new consensus emerged: we had no peer or even near-peer competitor. The Soviet Union had dissolved, China's GDP was less than one-tenth of ours, Iran was on its heels after a grueling eight-year war with Iraq, and North Korea was far from achieving nuclear technology. Scholars proclaimed "the end of history" was at hand. America enjoyed a mostly unchallenged command of the commons, airspace, sea, space and cyberspace. Consequently, the United States, along with allies, scaled down our military and defense spending. We cancelled strategic-defense initiatives, halved the size of our naval fleet, closed shipyards, and cut spending on troops and technology. We believed that we could reap a peace dividend in perpetuity, and that American leadership would remain unchallenged.

But that was always wishful thinking. The era of uncontested U.S. dominance, is over. President Trump's 2018 National Defense Strategy made clear that great power competition was back – and that is exactly what we are seeing now. This Administration inherited a world with Europe and the Middle East at war. Meanwhile, China is undertaking a historic military buildup and actively rehearsing for an invasion of Taiwan.

As President Trump has stated, our policy is Peace Through Strength. That will require rescuing our stagnant defense industrial base. Only by having the most powerful and lethal military in the world — and focusing it where it is needed most to protect and advance America's interests — can we deter our nation's adversaries and, if necessary, prevail any potential conflict.

Reviving the Defense Industrial Base

Reviving the Defense Industrial Base (DIB) is a key component of rebuilding the military. We must be prepared to match capabilities to threats, and to ensure we are prepared to deliver the warfighter what is needed to win. While the DIB remains technologically advanced and essential to our warfighting capabilities, decades of under-investment have left it strained, overly consolidated, and at risk of not keeping pace with modern and near-peer threats, especially in a protracted conflict. As foreign competition has hollowed out American manufacturing, we have

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lost capacity and resilience in our defense supply chain as well. Meanwhile, Communist China has enjoyed explosive growth in manufacturing capacity.

While much more is needed, we have already undertaken some actions to address this crisis through our Office of Industrial Base Policy. Congress should also reauthorize the Defense Production Act to continue providing President Trump the broad authority he needs to respond swiftly and agilely to national security needs.

Consistent demand signals to industry are key, and I look forward to working with Congress on this matter. Our industry partners need consistency to plan out additional capacity — on-time budgets help provide those demand signals. I am encouraged by Congress's emphasis on multi-year procurements, especially for key munitions. Multi-year procurements provide an additional measure of stable and sustained demand signals to promote DIB investment. New entrants encounter numerous barriers to entry, including heavy regulations and scrutiny — I look forward to working with Congress to roll back unnecessary red tape to reinvigorate our DIB.

Modernizing the Nuclear Triad

Defending the homeland, is the top mission for DoD and our nation — and few things if any are more important for that mission than maintaining a strong and reliable nuclear deterrent. This is vital not just to deter enemies from using nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction against our nation's homeland. It also empowers the United States to help deter aggression against allies in forward theaters, while providing U.S. forces — and the President himself — with maximum flexibility and options for restoring deterrence and managing escalation in the event of a crisis or conflict anywhere.

Yet the nuclear deterrence mission is growing more difficult — not just because America's nuclear forces are getting older, but because America's adversaries are increasingly expanding, modernizing, and diversifying their own capabilities. This not only complicates escalation dynamics with individual adversaries — it also poses new difficulties as we work to deter multiple adversaries simultaneously.

To address these challenges and maintain a strong deterrent, we must continue to not only sustain our legacy triad systems — which remain a crucial component of our military — but also to complete the decades-long modernization of our nuclear forces. Therefore, in FY26, the Department is requesting more than \$62 billion in support of the nuclear enterprise, including \$50 billion to modernize and sustain our nuclear forces and over \$12 billion for nuclear

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command, control, and communications. A modernized nuclear triad supports President Trump’s goal of Peace Through Strength and enables our ability to reestablish deterrence and rebuild our military.

Each leg of our triad offers complementary attributes that support deterrence. Our modernization efforts include transitioning the land leg — our most responsive capability — from the Minuteman III to the Sentinel; the sea leg — our survivable and assured second strike capability — from the OHIO-Class SSBN equipped with the Trident II (D5) Life Extension to the COLUMBIA-Class SSBN equipped with the Life Extension II and a new sea-launched cruise missile; and, finally, the air leg — our most visible and flexible capability — from the B-2 Spirit to the B-21 Raider equipped with the Long-Range Standoff Cruise Missile. The future of these programs will depend on sustained, consistent, and sufficient funding, as requested in the FY 2026 Budget.

Additionally, the Department continues to support modernizing our nuclear command, control, and communications; nuclear stockpile; and production and supporting infrastructure and the defense industrial base. We recognize this large-scale modernization effort was conceived in a more benign security environment. It may not be sufficient to address current and future challenges. The Department’s current nuclear employment posture and planning guidance begins to address the risk presented by multiple nuclear challengers, and, if necessary, we will adjust U.S. nuclear forces to ensure they are responsive to the current and evolving security environment.

Shipbuilding

Improvements in ship construction are needed, and more efficient processes are required to ensure ships are built on time and on budget. Currently, we are losing the shipbuilding race with China, both in terms of capacity and available ships. China has over 230 times the shipbuilding capacity of the U.S. 70 percent of Chinese warships were launched after 2010, while only 23 percent of U.S. warships were. Our maritime advantage is shrinking rapidly due to decades of deindustrialization, consolidation, and reduction in U.S. ship construction and repair capacity, affecting both public and commercial sectors. Given this formidable challenge, we are revitalizing our shipbuilding industry with \$5.9 billion in funding in FY26.

The Navy’s current goal is to achieve a fleet of 381 vessels. We have stagnated below 300. In peacetime, our force struggles to replace vessels as they are decommissioned. This bodes poorly for our force in wartime.

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Shipbuilding is the top priority for the Navy and for both President Trump and myself. Alongside Secretary Phelan, we are aggressively improving ship construction processes and methods, prioritizing modernization, and expanding the capacity of our commercial maritime industrial base. We can no longer spend billions of taxpayer dollars to receive years-long delays and capacity shortfalls.

President Trump signed his executive order, “Restoring America’s Maritime Dominance,” demonstrating his commitment to not only revive the Navy, but our nation’s defense industrial base and commercial maritime industrial base, for decades to come. Alongside President Trump, we will Make Shipbuilding Great Again.

Generational Investments in F-47 and Golden Dome

We have awarded the contract for the Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) fighter jet – the F-47. This will be the world’s first 6th generation fighter jet, ensuring our nation’s continued air superiority in the face of growing global threats. The F-47 will be the most advanced, lethal, and adaptable fighter ever developed, with state-of-the-art stealth technologies to stay one step ahead of America’s adversaries. The F-47 is built to dominate the most capable adversaries and operate in the most perilous threat environments imaginable. The F-47 will have significantly longer range, more advanced stealth, be more sustainable, supportable, and have higher availability than our fifth-generation fighters. . The platform will also take significantly less manpower and infrastructure to deploy.

In FY26, the Department is allocating \$3.5 billion for this generational program. The F-47 will significantly strengthen America’s air power and improves our global position. It will keep our skies secure – even as it ensures we are able to reach out adversaries wherever they may hide. The decision to proceed with the F-47 is the first of several decisions required to maintain air dominance into the future, and I look forward to working with Secretary Meink to make those decisions.

Golden Dome

One of President Trump’s key campaign promises was a Golden Dome for America (GDA). Inspired by Israel’s Iron Dome, the GDA will be a next-generation missile defense system to protect Americans from the threat of nuclear, hypersonic, and conventional weapons in our homeland. The GDA architecture will employ a combination of sensors and effectors working across multiple layers: a space layer with space-based sensors, and interceptors; an upper layer

with Ground-based Midcourse Defense next-generation interceptors; an under layer with upgraded expeditionary effectors and other supporting terrestrial sensors; and a lower-tier layer for cruise and terminal missile defense and other advanced aerial threats.

The Department is investing \$25 billion in FY26 to accomplish that goal. DoD Acquisition and Sustainment is working with the Missile Defense Agency and the military services to address supply chain challenges and begin the work necessary to construct the Golden Dome. This project will include developing cutting-edge domain awareness systems, kinetic and non-kinetic missile defeat capabilities, and advanced command, control, and battle management systems to integrate and augment existing U.S. missile defense capabilities.

Drone Technology Investment

The rapidly transforming arena of small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) and counter-sUAS (C-sUAS) presents enormous challenges and opportunities that require us to bring the very best American innovation to bear. Massed, affordable, and attritable platforms with short lifespans are changing the character of war and transforming the way our forces must fight. Incidents in the homeland and conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine remind us of how this technology has changed modern warfare. The supply chain is a significant challenge. For every commercial drone made in the United States, China makes more than a hundred.

The current global UAS capability threat is broadly characterized by a wide variety of kinetic and non-kinetic uncrewed systems capabilities. Kinetic capabilities include short-range, remote-piloted, kamikaze drones commonly known as First Person View (FPV), reusable bomber drones, one-way attack (OWA), and long-range one-way attack (LROWA) platforms. Non-kinetic platform capabilities include, but are not limited to, short-range intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), long-range ISR, electronic warfare, signals intelligence, communications relay, and drones with other critical warfighting missions.

On offense, we must take advantage of the pace of commercial technology progress to enable our forces — on the ground, in the air, and at sea — to defeat our adversaries and to overcome our adversaries' rapidly evolving C-UAS capabilities as we do so. DoD's Replicator-1 initiative — with sustained senior leadership focus, cross-Departmental collaboration, the help of the Defense Innovation Unit, and support from Congress — has made enormous strides towards delivering and fielding multiple thousands of unmanned systems across multiple domains, with thousands more planned under this budget to further strengthen our deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. On defense, we must meet the exponentially growing challenge from ever more-capable

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drone weaponization. We must also end the unsustainable pattern of shooting down increasingly sophisticated, lethal drones — that in many cases cost just a few hundred dollars and are therefore accessible to a much broader range of bad actors — with exquisite multi-million-dollar weapons that are difficult to produce and to replace once used.

This is why the DoD, with support from Congress, must reinforce the progress made over the last few years to quickly improve its UAS and C-UAS capabilities and integrate them into how we fight.

Cybersecurity

A robust cybersecurity posture is critical to safeguarding sensitive data, increasing operational lethality, and ensuring the resilience of critical infrastructure. Without a proactive and comprehensive approach to cybersecurity, we leave ourselves vulnerable to attack.

The current cybersecurity landscape is characterized by escalating sophistication and frequency of threats. Nation-state actors, criminal organizations, and individual hackers are constantly developing new and innovative methods to exploit vulnerabilities. We are seeing an increase in attacks targeting critical infrastructure, sophisticated phishing campaigns, and supply chain compromises.

The DoD recognizes the urgency and severity of this threat environment.

We are therefore strengthening our defensive capabilities through enhanced threat detection, incident response, and vulnerability management. Investing in advanced technologies like AI-powered security tools and zero-trust is crucial.

We also aim to deter malicious actors by imposing costs and consequences for cyberattacks. This includes working with international partners to uphold norms of responsible behavior in cyberspace and holding attackers accountable.

Finally, we are investing in developing a highly skilled cybersecurity workforce through education, training, and recruitment initiatives. We must foster a culture of cybersecurity awareness across the DoD and encourage collaboration between government, industry, and academia.

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By prioritizing these objectives, the DoD is committed to maintaining a strong and resilient cybersecurity posture that protects our nation's interests against evolving threats.

Reestablishing Deterrence

Everything I describe above is designed to deter our adversaries from aggression toward the United States and protect our interests at home or abroad. Under the leadership of President Trump, the message to our adversaries has been undeniably clear. We will relentlessly pursue American interests, prioritize the Indo-Pacific region, and work with our allies and partners to establish deterrence worldwide.

Southwest Border

Defending our homeland is our first objective. We must secure our own border before we can help secure other nations' borders. From day one, we have surged forces to the Southwest border to achieve 100% operational control there.

Some of the greatest threats to the American people came over our border. Under the previous administration, cartels — now designated as foreign terrorist organizations — enjoyed easy access across the border. Encounters with foreign terrorists between ports of entry rose 3000% under President Biden. Under President Trump, the open-borders era is over and the Golden Age of border security is here.

On Day One of his administration, President Trump issued executive orders declaring a national emergency at the southern border, and clarifying the military's role in protecting the territorial integrity of the United States. These swift and decisive actions directed the military to seal the border and defend our sovereignty.

This has included deploying personnel and resources, constructing additional physical barriers, countering unmanned aerial systems, and more. Joint Task Force Southern Border is now conducting enhanced detection and monitoring, including vehicle and foot patrols, rotary wing and fixed surveillance site operations. We have sent a Stryker brigade combat team and a general support aviation battalion. And we have created the New Mexico and Texas National Defense Areas, allowing Service members to detain illegal aliens until Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) or other agencies can assume custody, further securing our border.

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Approximately 11,900 troops are currently deployed protecting the southwest border. Working with our partners at DHS and CBP, these interagency efforts have achieved at least a 99.99% reduction in migrant crossings. There are now fewer illegal crossings than at any point in the 21st century.

Panama

At the same time, President Trump has made clear that we are pursuing not just an America First foreign policy, but an Americas First foreign policy. Prioritizing American interests begins with our neighbors. To that end, the administration is working with Panama to regain control of the Panama Canal from the malign influence of the Communist Chinese. We have achieved a framework for “First and Free” passage for U.S. warships and auxiliary ships, as well as increasing the presence of U.S. troops on both sides of the canal.

People’s Republic of China (PRC)

China is the Department’s pacing threat. Beijing has made clear its desire to achieve hegemony in the Indo-Pacific and then the world, and in the process could strangle America’s economy and even project military power into the Western Hemisphere on a larger and more sustained basis. That is evident not just in China’s belligerent activities throughout the region but also – and most glaringly – in its massive, historic military buildup, including expanding numbers of advanced submarines, ships, aircraft, and satellites, as well as increasingly dangerous missile threats and cyber capabilities. That is not to mention China’s ongoing efforts to rapidly expand its nuclear forces.

President Trump is committed to Peace Through Strength – and that is precisely what the Department will deliver in the face of China’s military buildup. To that end, in addition to homeland defense, DoD is prioritizing deterring China in the Indo-Pacific, including by focusing U.S. military modernization on the capabilities required to deny Chinese aggression in the First Island Chain, strengthening our forward posture in the Western Pacific, and working closely with our allies and partners to bolster our collective ability to deter or respond effectively to aggression.

In Australia we have increased rotations of air assets, expeditionary submarine visits, Army watercraft, and more. Through our U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership, we have targeted enhanced operational coordination, greater information sharing, expanded regional and global cooperation, and closer industrial cooperation. In Japan, we have started Phase One of

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upgrading U.S. Forces Japan to a Joint Force Headquarters and deployed B-1 bombers at Misawa Air Base, the first ever bomber task force to operate from Japan. In the Philippines, we maintain a robust rotational force presence and we have extended the timelines of exercises with the Philippines. With these partners we are also investing in multilateral maritime cooperative activities in the South China Sea. These investments will prioritize combat-credible military forces to and re-establish deterrence.

Finally, even as we strengthen our relationships with each of these allies and partners, we are also urging them to increase investments in their own defenses. This is vitally important if they are to field the range of military capabilities and supporting infrastructure required to deter China in the coming years, and for decades to come.

Israel and the Middle East

In the Middle East, President Trump has made it clear that America is fully committed to the security of Israel, our close ally. Just days after his inauguration, the Administration released the shipment of 2,000-lb MK-48 bombs to Israel — critical munitions that the Biden administration had blocked. The Defense Department has also delivered three new F-35s to Israel with another three aircraft on the way.

Defending Freedom of Navigation in the Red Sea

At President Trump's direction, the Joint Force took decisive action to defend freedom of navigation in the Red Sea — and the results speak for themselves. After several weeks of U.S. strikes killing key members of the Houthi organization and degrading their capabilities, the Houthis agreed to stop striking American shipping. Not only is this a victory for Americans — it sends a clear signal to all others in the region, and the world. President Trump is a man of a peace — but he can and will take decisive action to defend our nation's interests where they are threatened.

Conclusion

We have the opportunity to create a new Golden Age of National Defense. The threats we face are significant, and rising. Communist China is on the rise and is preparing for conflict. But conflict is not inevitable, and let me stress once again that our goal is to prevent war through increasing U.S. strength. We long for peace, but we must prepare for war. By restoring the

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warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence we can deter and deny our adversaries' objectives and ensure peace for our homeland and the world.

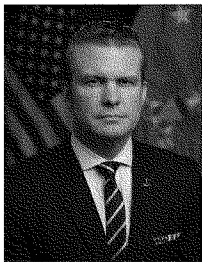
For decades, our military has been stagnant. Our leaders have spent more time focusing on diversity goals than in rebuilding our Navy. We have lost the moral confidence that animated prior generations. We have lost the focus and sense of responsibility that our positions demand.

We are reversing those trends. With a trillion-dollar national security budget, surging interest in military service, and an industrial base reinvigorated by President Trump's America-First industrial policy, we have the chance to overcome decades of decline and strengthen our position as the world's most lethal and focused fighting force. Our allies and partners increasingly stepped up to share the burden as we prioritize and confront the most pressing conflicts of the day, and our adversaries will take note of our revitalized military.

Of course, we cannot do this without the critical leadership and oversight of Congress. This committee is our critical partner in everything we do. I look forward to working with you to reinvigorate our national defense.

HON PETE HEGSETH

Secretary of Defense



The Honorable Pete Hegseth is the 29th Secretary of Defense, sworn in on Jan. 25, 2025.

Hegseth was commissioned as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army National Guard after graduating from Princeton University in 2003. He participated in a number of active-duty deployments during his time in service, including operations in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq and Afghanistan. Hegseth also served in multiple staff positions in the National Guard.

Hegseth's military awards include two Bronze Star Medals, the Joint Commendation Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) and the Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB). He has authored five books, including the *New York Times* best-seller *The War on Warriors* (2024).

Hosted by Defense Media Activity - WEB.mil

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL JOHN DANIEL CAINE, USAF
22ND CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BUDGET HEARING
12 JUNE 2025

1 **OVERVIEW**

2 I am honored and filled with gratitude to represent our incredible Joint Force,
3 Department of Defense (DoD) civilians, and their families, who serve and sacrifice for
4 our national security every day. I am also honored to testify alongside the 29th
5 Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, and I thank him and the President for the trust
6 they placed in me to serve as the 22nd Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

7

8 I would like to thank Congress for your continued support to our United States Military
9 and for your continued collaboration as we work to achieve peace through strength.
10 Particularly, I would like to thank the Senate Armed Services Committee for advocating
11 for an additional \$150 billion in national defense funding through reconciliation.

12

13 The President's \$961.6 billion Department of Defense budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026
14 invests in and enables the Joint Force to act urgently to strengthen U.S. homeland
15 defenses and to match our end strength to the threats we face. It includes funding to
16 defend the Homeland by sealing our borders, and repelling illegal immigration and
17 narcotics trafficking. It advances U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere, and defends
18 the American people through the Golden Dome for America. Further, it invests in our
19 ability to deter China in the Indo-Pacific by prioritizing properly postured, combat
20 credible military forces.

21

22 The Joint Force is fully engaged in supporting the Secretary of Defense's three pillars of
23 restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence. We
24 are prioritizing warfighting and are laser focused on lethality and readiness. We support
25 the Secretary's charge to ensure that only those who meet the highest standards and
26 merit are made leaders in our ranks. Our Joint Force's strength stems from our unity.

27

28 We are also working to rebuild the military. This budget invests in reenergizing our
29 national and defense industrial base and modernizing the Nuclear Triad, enhances

30 shipbuilding efforts, funds the Golden Dome and the newest F-47 fighter jet, and makes
31 crucial investments in drone technology and cyber security. We are also working toward
32 cutting wasteful spending to re-invest in filling critical mission needs.

33

34 We will ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently and with purpose. We strive to
35 provide accountability to Congress and the American people while achieving our end
36 goal of providing every service member with the right capability, equipment, and training
37 to deter our adversaries, and if necessary, crush our enemies on the battlefield with
38 overwhelming technological superiority.

39

40 We are gaining 100% operational control of our Southern Border and working with our
41 partners in Panama toward enabling a mechanism to ensure U.S. warships and
42 auxiliary vessels transit the Canal on a cost-neutral basis. We are also working to deter
43 China in the Indo-Pacific by increasing regional force posture, investing in our military to
44 maintain our competitive edge, and working with our network of allies and partners.
45 Finally, we are postured to maintain stability and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

46

47 This budget invests in our ability to keep pace with both the rapidly evolving strategic
48 environment and developing technology. We owe the Nation's 2.8 million service
49 members, our Department of Defense civilians, and their families the very best. We
50 must be a force that is properly armed, globally integrated, and ready. We must deter
51 our Nation's adversaries and, if necessary, fight and win now and in the future. I have
52 full trust in our Joint Force to make hard decisions, persevere in adversity, and to do the
53 right thing. This budget helps support the essential work of our Joint Force.

54

55 The President's FY 2026 budget also makes critical investments in our most important
56 asset – our people. It has been an honor to serve alongside some of the most
57 extraordinary warriors, civilian teammates, and families that our Nation has ever known.
58 I'm grateful for the opportunity to continue serving with them. I remain mindful of all

those currently deployed, at home and around the world, standing watch in defense of our Nation and its ideals. And I hold in special remembrance our fallen and their families, whose sacrifice, courage, and unwavering commitment embody the highest ideals of service.

THE THREAT

The world remains a dynamic and turbulent place. The return of great power competition requires us to make large scale changes and take an entrepreneurial mindset to adapt. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) actions throughout the world, and conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia make it clear: our adversaries are advancing. Nuclear threats are on the rise and maintaining deterrence is more critical than at any point in our history. The United States homeland is being threatened by hostile gray zone activities, including cyber attacks, economic coercion, and increasingly aggressive behavior in space and cyber space.

Additionally, China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are pursuing unprecedented levels of cooperation, driven by a desire to challenge U.S. interests and stability around the world. Their collaboration extends across military, cyber, economic, and informational domains. These developments come alongside growing threats to the U.S. homeland, including cyber intrusions, transnational crime, and coercive influence operations. While the CCP has not openly taken a leading role in directing these efforts, China continues to support and enable this growing network of collaboration. This convergence marks a strategic shift – one that reinforces the need for sustained American resolve and unity in the face of more aligned challengers.

U.S. Homeland: Illegal migration, illicit narcotics trafficking, foreign terrorists, and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) continue to pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. TCOs, violent gangs, and violent extremist organizations leverage revenue from drug trafficking and human smuggling to degrade regional democratic institutions.

88 Criminal violence drives drugs and illegal migration to the U.S. southern border,
89 threatening the safety, security, stability, and sovereignty of the nations in our
90 hemisphere.

91

92 The CCP's influence and economic coercion in the Western Hemisphere is growing.
93 Using its Belt and Road Initiative, China has become South America's largest trading
94 partner, with the aim to monopolize access to the region's abundant natural resources
95 and use them for political control.

96

97 **China:** The CCP is advancing an unprecedented military modernization effort alongside
98 increasingly aggressive actions that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland, as well as to
99 our allies and partners. The CCP is employing a multifaceted strategy that blends
100 military pressure, cognitive and cyber operations, and economic coercion. The People's
101 Liberation Army (PLA) continues to display expanding capabilities through sustained
102 pressure activities across multiple domains, activities that are growing in scope, scale,
103 complexity, and frequency against Taiwan. These aggressive maneuvers are not
104 routine exercises, they are rehearsals for a forced unification.

105

106 The PLA is developing and integrating cutting edge technologies at an alarming pace.
107 They are adopting artificial intelligence (AI), hypersonic and advanced missiles, and
108 space-based capability. They have greatly advanced their development of space and
109 counter space capabilities, including direct-ascent anti-satellite weapons, co-orbital
110 threats, and advanced jamming systems. The PLA Defense Industrial Base is
111 manufacturing thousands of weapons and hundreds of fighters every year. Finally, the
112 CCP deploys extensive resources toward its cyber operations and has an enormous
113 workforce dedicated to launching cyber-attacks.

114

115 **Russia:** The war in Ukraine continues, and Russia continues its attempt to accomplish
116 its geopolitical objectives using military force. These objectives include expanding its

117 territorial control, broadening its influence regionally and globally, and weakening U.S.
118 leadership and influence. Russia has strengthened its relationships with the CCP, North
119 Korea, and Iran. Russia has used the war as an opportunity to refashion its military and
120 build a military that is now larger than its pre-war forces. Russia has modernized its
121 Pacific fleet, particularly submarines, becoming an increasing threat to U.S. interests in
122 the Indo-Pacific.

123

124 **North Korea:** North Korea's advancing and unlawful nuclear program threatens U.S.
125 interests and regional stability. Its ongoing and increasingly aggressive ballistic missile
126 research and testing represent a threat to our homeland and to our Allies and partners
127 in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, North Korea's direct involvement in the Ukraine conflict
128 has allowed North Korean soldiers to gain combat experience, and enhanced their
129 proficiency with advanced weapons systems, including drones, further sharpening North
130 Korea's military's preparation for future conflict. A significant portion of Russia's
131 supplies, including ballistic missiles and artillery shells, come from North Korea. In
132 exchange, Russia has provided North Korea with advanced military technology.

133

134 North Korea has accelerated its navy's nuclear armament and the development of a
135 nuclear-powered submarine, signaling a significant modernization of its naval forces.
136 These developments underscore North Korea's growing capacity to project power
137 beyond its borders, posing an escalating threat to U.S. interests and regional stability in
138 the Indo-Pacific.

139

140 **Iran:** Iran continues to pose a multifaceted threat to U.S. interests through its regional
141 proxy networks, missile development programs, and support for Russia's military
142 operations in Ukraine. Since the October 2023 Hamas attacks, Iran-backed militias
143 have intensified assaults on U.S. forces in Syria, Iraq, and the Red Sea region. In the
144 Red Sea, Iran's support has enabled the Houthis to conduct hundreds of attacks on

145 commercial shipping, significantly disrupting global trade routes and prompting
146 international military responses.

147

148 Iran's nuclear ambitions have also escalated, and they have undertaken key activities
149 that better position it to produce a testable nuclear device. Additionally, Iran has
150 threatened to target U.S. bases, indicating advancements in its missile range
151 capabilities.

152

153 Furthermore, Iran's deepening military cooperation with Russia, including the provision
154 of drones and other military support, underscores its role in sustaining Russia's war
155 efforts in Ukraine. Collectively, these actions reflect Iran's strategic intent to challenge
156 U.S. influence and destabilize regional security architectures.

157

158 **JOINT FORCE FUNDAMENTALS**

159 Today's threats demand an entrepreneurial mindset that drives us to identify
160 opportunities, take calculated risks, fight through adversity, and foster innovation across
161 the Joint Force. Meeting these challenges requires a force that is properly armed,
162 globally integrated, and ready.

163

164 **Properly Armed:** The United States military is the most professional, capable, and
165 lethal force on the planet. Make no mistake – we are the world's best. But our
166 competitive edge is not a preordained right. If we want to stay ahead of our adversaries,
167 we must continually reinvest and renew our ability to produce capability. We owe
168 America's force of 2.8 million the right tools, weapons, and capabilities to enter any
169 battle with overwhelming strength. They must be armed so that they never have to enter
170 a fair fight.

171

172 We must reinvigorate our Defense Industrial Base – now. Today’s threats require an
173 industrial base that can accelerate the right capability to match the threat to the
174 warfighter at capacity. We need to be able to harness America’s innovation and
175 entrepreneurial spirit to increase the speed of developing technology and get it into the
176 hands of our warfighters at the tactical edge. The Department must be better buyers.

177

178 During World War II and the early Cold War, industry was able to produce game-
179 changing systems quickly. Technology like the B-29 Superfortress and the nuclear
180 submarine went from concept to combat in under 5 years. Today, it takes 16 years to
181 develop a basic ground vehicle and more than 20 years for a fighter jet.

182

183 Meanwhile, technology keeps accelerating. Simply put, we are not moving fast enough.
184 We must make the reforms necessary to restore trust in the Department of Defense as
185 a partner of choice for private industry. We must optimize alignment and agility between
186 requirements, acquisition, and budgeting, helping smaller firms and new entrants work
187 with DoD and allowing DoD to leverage innovation within the private sector. The
188 Department will benefit from increased competition among defense contractors, which
189 drives down prices and grants more opportunities for innovative solutions.

190

191 Additionally, we need to send consistent demand signals to industry, which allows
192 industry partners to plan out additional capacity. This budget makes crucial investments
193 in boosting munitions production and we are investing in expanding domestic production
194 of critical minerals.

195

196 Defending the homeland through strategic deterrence remains the DoD’s top priority.
197 U.S. nuclear forces deter adversaries, reassure allies, and provide unmatched
198 capabilities that are essential if deterrence fails. Today’s security environment features
199 multiple nuclear-armed challengers, some actively engaged in conflict, requiring the
200 U.S. to deter more than one nuclear challenger at a time.

201 To meet this challenge, the U.S. is both sustaining legacy triad systems and
202 modernizing all three legs of the nuclear triad, including transitioning from Minuteman III
203 to Sentinel ICBMs, moving from OHIO-Class SSBNs to COLUMBIA-Class with updated
204 Trident II missiles, and replacing the B-2 with the B-21 Raider and introducing the Long-
205 Range Standoff Cruise Missile.

206

207 Modernization also includes command and control, the stockpile, supporting
208 infrastructure, and the defense industrial base. While this modernization effort began
209 under less urgent conditions, it now underpins deterrence in a more dangerous and
210 complex world.

211

212 We must also keep pace with China's shipbuilding capacity, who now vastly outpaces
213 the United States. Decades of deindustrialization and underinvestment have eroded
214 U.S. maritime strength. The Navy's current goal is to build a 381-ship fleet, but it
215 remains stuck below 300.

216

217 Replacing decommissioned vessels is already a challenge in peacetime, raising serious
218 concerns for wartime readiness. The President's budget makes significant investments
219 to advance shipbuilding, to include commercial shipbuilding, a necessary aspect of
220 industrial capacity to aggressively improve military ship construction, modernization of
221 the fleet, and expanding the capacity of the maritime industrial base.

222

223 The President's FY 2026 budget also makes generational investments in our homeland
224 defense, including for a next-generation missile defense system, or Golden Dome, and
225 for fielding the F-47.

226

227 The F-47 is the world's first sixth-generation fighter, offering superior stealth, range, and
228 adaptability compared to fifth-generation platforms. It is designed for peer conflict, cost-

229 effective sustainment, and higher availability, all while requiring fewer support
230 resources. This aircraft will ensure continued U.S. air dominance for decades.

231

232 The Golden Dome for America is a layered, next-generation missile defense system to
233 protect against nuclear, hypersonic, and conventional threats. It includes space-based
234 sensors and interceptors, next-generation ground-based systems, and lower-tier
235 defenses. Work is underway to integrate these systems into a seamless homeland
236 defense architecture.

237

238 The President's budget also makes crucial investments in rapidly advancing drone
239 technology, including improving our acquisition and production of drone systems at
240 scale. This is an area where we must take advantage of fast-moving private sector
241 innovation to field low cost, attritable, kinetic and non-kinetic, small, unmanned aircraft
242 systems (sUAS) and counter sUAS systems to keep pace with our adversaries.

243

244 The budget makes additional investments in F-35 development.

245

246 **Globally Integrated:** In addition to being armed, we must also be globally integrated.
247 Threats today are borderless and fast-moving. Today's battlefields cross domains and
248 regions. Wars take place on land, at sea, in the air, and in space and cyber space, often
249 all at once. They cross geographic boundaries and regional lines. The Joint Force
250 needs to fight as one, aligning Joint and Service concepts.

251

252 We must field interoperable capability and rehearse at every echelon, across our
253 Services. We must test our readiness concepts in dynamic, contested environments.
254 We must never miss an opportunity to create consistent and trusting joint relationships
255 at all levels.

256

257 Additionally, we need to integrate the Department of Defense, Department of State,
258 Intelligence Community, and the rest of our government across aligned legal authorities
259 and operating frameworks. And we must work more closely with the private sector,
260 leveraging advancing technology and the American entrepreneurial spirit.

261

262 Finally, in today's capability and capacity constrained world, we must be integrated with
263 our allies and partners. We need a common, all-domain operating framework. That is
264 why this budget makes vital investments in Combined Joint All-Domain Command and
265 Control; space-based Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Cyber,
266 Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Targeting equipment; Precision,
267 Navigation, and Timing capability; and air and refueling capability and capacity like the
268 KC-46.

269

270 **Ready:** Lastly, we must be a Joint Force that is ready. Having the right tools is just part
271 of the equation. We need our military to be organized, trained, and mentally prepared to
272 fight at a moment's notice. Our Nation's adversaries can never doubt the readiness,
273 capability, and lethality of the Joint Force. Our leaders at every level must be trained,
274 educated, and prepared to fight a large scale war.

275

276 We need to get families ready too. We ask much of our service members, and by
277 extension, their families. Readiness at home is readiness in the field. Our Nation's
278 warriors have spouses, children, and parents. If we want them fully focused on the
279 mission, they need to know their loved ones are taken care of. Lifting that weight from
280 their shoulders increases combat readiness.

281

282 In addition, we must think in terms of national readiness. While our military stands at the
283 forefront, history shows that major conflicts must be met by the full strength and
284 resilience of a nation. In the event of a large-scale crisis, we will need all parts of
285 American society to respond with urgency, especially within our industrial and

286 commercial sectors. Meeting the moment will require shared effort, shared
287 responsibility, and a united sense of purpose.

288

289 **Take Care of our People:** Wrapped around all of this, is our most critical asset – our
290 people. Humans are always more valuable than hardware. The most important thing is
291 to take care of our people and make sure they are ready to go. No amount of advanced
292 hardware or cutting-edge technology can replace the value of human commitment,
293 judgment, and resilience. There are 2.8 million service members and civilians who make
294 up our Armed Services. They have volunteered, along with their families, to serve our
295 great Nation. We must acknowledge the sacrifices military families make and take
296 seriously our responsibility to care for them, including making sure they are armed,
297 trained, equipped, and supported. We are committed to having leaders that are
298 empowered to make tough decisions, enforce standards, and uphold accountability.

299

300 This budget makes necessary investments in quality of service and quality of life for our
301 service members and their families, including for enlisted housing. In addition, we are
302 committed to improving the lives of our service members by ensuring healthcare for
303 service members and their families, the timely moving of their household goods,
304 improved housing conditions, childcare access, and career support for military spouses.
305 We must ensure families have the resources, support, and stability they need to sustain
306 our all-volunteer force.

307

308 **CONCLUSION**

309 I have the utmost trust and faith in the men and women of our Joint Force. The threats
310 we face are advancing and they are multi-faceted. Emerging technology and the
311 American entrepreneurial spirit to innovate and overcome provide us ample opportunity
312 to meet the challenges before us. We have fought and won as a Nation before, and we
313 can and will do it again, if necessary. We, as a Joint Force, Congress, and society, must

314 move faster. We need to take unconventional approaches, think outside the box, be
315 disruptive, and create a sense of urgency within our Joint Force.

316

317 I ask Congress to fully fund the President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget and to pass it on
318 time. While the flexibility granted to the Department in the FY25 Continuing Resolution
319 was greatly appreciated, routinely operating under Continuing Resolutions limits audit
320 efforts, lowers real buying power, results in less deployable capital, and makes it harder
321 for industry to make long term investments.

322

323 I am honored to have served alongside some of most incredible warriors and civilian
324 teammates our Nation has ever seen, and their families. I am thankful to continue
325 serving with them. I am mindful of all service members who are currently deployed at
326 home and abroad, defending this Nation and its values. I always specially remember
327 our fallen and their families, who demonstrate true sacrifice, courage, and commitment
328 to our Nation.

329

330 Once again, I thank Congress for their support to our Joint Force. The President's Fiscal
331 Year 2026 budget is designed to ensure that the Joint Force can effectively address our
332 national security priorities. Together, we will achieve peace through strength.



BIOGRAPHY



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

GENERAL JOHN D. CAINE

Gen. Dan Caine is the 22nd Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's highest ranking military officer and the principal military advisor to the President, Secretary of Defense and National Security Council.

Prior to becoming Chairman on April 11, 2025, Gen. Caine was the Associate Director for Military Affairs at Central Intelligence Agency.

Gen. Caine has served in a wide range of operational, staff and joint assignments, primarily as an F-16 fighter pilot, weapons officer, member of the White House staff and special operations officer.

Gen. Caine was commissioned in 1990 through the ROTC program at the Virginia Military Institute, and he has a Master of Arts in Air Warfare from the American Military University. He has completed a range of national security and leadership courses, including Harvard Kennedy School's course for Senior Executives in National and International Security and the Syracuse University Maxwell School's Program on National Security.

As a Command Pilot, he has logged more than 2,800 hours in the F-16, including more than 150 combat hours. From 2009-2016, Caine was a part-time member of the National Guard and a serial entrepreneur and investor.



EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION

Second Lieutenant	
October 01, 1990	
First Lieutenant	
October 01, 1993	
Captain	
October 10, 1995	
Major	
December 28, 2000	
Lieutenant Colonel	
April 08, 2005	
Colonel	
January 10, 2011	
Brigadier General	
May 05, 2016	
Major General	
September 19, 2019	
Lieutenant General	
November 03, 2021	
General	
April 11, 2025	

EDUCATION

1990 Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington
 1998 Squadron Officer School, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., by correspondence
 1999 Air Force Weapons School Instructor Course, Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.
 2001 Air Force Air to Ground Operations School, Nellis AFB, Nev.
 2004 Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., by correspondence
 2005 Master of Arts, Air Warfare, American Military University, Charles Town, W.Va.
 2006 White House Fellow, Air Force Fellows Program, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.
 2012 North American Aerospace Defense Command/U.S. Northern Command Joint Task Force Commander Training Course, Peterson AFB, Colo.
 2012 Senior Leaders Maintenance Course, Washington, D.C.
 2017 Joint and Combined Warfighting Course (JPME 2), Norfolk, Va.
 2019 Capstone, National Defense University, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C.
 2019 Senior Executives for National and International Security, The Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, Mass.
 2020 Advanced Senior Leader Development Seminar, Arlie Center, Warrenton, Va.
 2020 National and International Security Leadership Seminar, Alan L. Freed Associates, Alexandria, Va.
 2021 National Security Studies Management Course, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. November 1992–December 1993, Student, EURO-NATO Undergraduate Pilot Training, 80th Flying Training Wing, Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas
 2. January 1994–April 1994, F-16 Pilot/Assistant Training Officer/Scheduling Officer, 138th Fighter Squadron, Syracuse Air National Guard Base, N.Y.
 3. April 1994–June 1995, F-16 Pilot/Assistant Weapons Officer, 138th Fighter Squadron, Syracuse ANG, N.Y.
 4. June 1995–November 1995, F-16 Instructor Pilot/Chief of Scheduling and Training, 138th Fighter Squadron, Syracuse ANG, N.Y.
 5. November 1995–April 1998, F-16 Instructor Pilot/Chief of Training, 138th Fighter Squadron, Syracuse ANG, N.Y.
 6. April 1998–July 1998, F-16 Instructor Pilot/Chief of Weapons, 138th Fighter Squadron, Syracuse ANG, N.Y.
 7. July 1998–January 1999, F-16 Instructor Pilot/Chief of Weapons, 121st Fighter Squadron, Andrews AFB, Md.
 8. January 1999–June 1999, Student, F-16 Fighter Weapons School, 57th Fighter Wing, Nellis AFB, Nev.
 9. June 1999–November 2001, F-16 Instructor Pilot/Flight Commander/Chief of Weapons and Tactics, 121st Fighter Squadron,

Andrews AFB, Md.

10. November 2001–February 2002, F-16 Mission Commander/Chief of Group Weapons and Tactics, 332d Air Expeditionary Group, Ahmed Al Jaber Air Base, Kuwait
11. February 2002–January 2003, Counter SCUD Project Officer, United States Central Command, MacDill AFB, Fla.
12. January 2003–May 2003, F-16 Mission Commander/Flight Commander/Chief of Wing Weapons and Tactics, 410th Air Expeditionary Wing, Location Masked
13. May 2003–January 2005, Chief of Weapons and Current Operations, ANG AFRC Test Center, Tucson ANG, Ariz.
14. January 2005–August 2005, Director of Operations, ANG AFRC Test Center, Tucson ANG, Ariz.
15. August 2005–September 2006, White House Fellow, Special Assistant to the Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.
16. October 2006–January 2008, Policy Director for Counterterrorism and Strategy, White House Homeland Security Council, Executive Office of the President, Washington, D.C.
17. January 2008–July 2008, J3 and Commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force - Air Directorate, Balad, Iraq
18. July 2008–November 2010, F-16 Instructor Pilot/Mission Commander, 121st Fighter Squadron, Andrews AFB, Md. (July 2008 March 2010, Special Tactics Air Liaison Officer, 24th Special Tactics Squadron, Joint Special Operations Command, Pope AFB, N.C.)
19. November 2010–June 2012, Director of Operations (A3)/Deputy Director of Joint Operations (J3), Joint Force Headquarters, District of Columbia ANG, Washington, D.C.
20. June 2012–June 2014, Commander, 113th Maintenance Group, Joint Base Andrews, Md.
21. June 2014–May 2016, Director of Joint Operations and Training (J3), Joint Force Headquarters, District of Columbia ANG, Washington, D.C.
22. May 2016–June 2016, Deputy Commanding General, Air, Joint Force Headquarters, District of Columbia ANG, Washington D.C.
23. June 2016–May 2018, June 2016–May 2018, Assistant to the Vice Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, Special Operations Command Washington Office, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va. and Assistant Commanding General, Joint Special Operations Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, N.C. (Concurrently)
24. May 2018–September 2019, Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Central Command Special Operations Component and Deputy Commanding General–Special Operations Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq) (Concurrently)
25. September 2019–September 2021, Director, Special Programs and Director, Special Access Programs Central Office, Va.
26. September 2021–November 2021, Special Assistant to the Chief, National Guard Bureau, Washington, D.C.
27. November 2021–December 2024, Associate Director for Military Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency, D.C.
28. April 2025–present, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.

SUMMARY OF JOINT ASSIGNMENTS

1. February 2002–January 2003, Counter SCUD Project Officer, United States Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. as a major
2. August 2005–September 2006, White House Fellow, Special Assistant to the Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. as a lieutenant colonel
3. October 2006–January 2008, Policy Director for Counterterrorism and Strategy, White House Homeland Security Council, Executive Office of the President, Washington, D.C., as a lieutenant colonel
4. January 2008–July 2008, J3 and Commander, Joint Special Operations Task Force - Air Directorate, Balad, Iraq, as a lieutenant colonel
5. June 2016–May 2018, June 2016–May 2018, Assistant to the Vice Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, Special Operations Command Washington Office, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va. and Assistant Commanding General, Joint Special Operations Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, N.C. (Concurrently), as a brigadier general
6. May 2018–September 2019, Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Central Command Special Operations Component and Deputy Commanding General – Special Operations Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq) (Concurrently), as a brigadier general
7. April 2025–present, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.

FLIGHT INFORMATION

Rating: command pilot
 Flight hours: 2,800 hours, to include more than 100 combat hours
 Aircraft flown: T-37, T-38 and F-16

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Distinguished Service Medal
 Defense Superior Service Medal with bronze oak leaf cluster
 Distinguished Flying Cross
 Bronze Star Medal with bronze oak leaf cluster
 Defense Meritorious Service Medal
 Meritorious Service Medal with bronze oak leaf cluster
 Air Medal with bronze oak leaf cluster
 Aerial Achievement Medal
 Air Force Commendation Medal with two bronze oak leaf clusters
 Joint Service Achievement Medal
 Air Force Achievement Medal
 Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with "V" device and four bronze oak leaf clusters

Combat Readiness Medal
National Defense Service Medal with bronze campaign star
Iraq Campaign Medal
Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
Air Force Expeditionary Service Medal
Air Force Longevity Service Award with three bronze oak leaf clusters
Armed Forces Reserve Medal with hourglass device
Air Force Training Ribbon
Presidential Service Badge

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

1992 Distinguished Graduate, EURO-NATO Undergraduate Pilot Training
1999 Outstanding Graduate, USAF F-16 Weapons School
2004 Lieutenant General Claire Chennault Award as the Air Force's Outstanding Aerial Tactician
Multiple Civilian Pilot Ratings, including Air Transport Pilot

PUBLICATIONS

"The Air Force Book", The Air Force Association, September 11th vignette
"Concept of Operations for the location, identification and destruction of Scud Missiles", Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003
"Hurricane Katrina Lessons Learned Report", The White House, March 2006
"The National Strategy for Homeland Security", The White House, Oct. 2007

(Current as of April 2025)



DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JUNE 12, 2025

**What we know about the U.S. pause on cyber operations against Russia**
(05:22)Politics**GOP congressman confirms Hegseth ordered pause in cyber operations against Russia, despite Pentagon denial**By [James LaPorta](#)

May 16, 2025 / 4:56 PM EDT / CBS News

Washington — Republican Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska said the U.S. government halted cyber operations against Russia for one day in February as President Trump was trying to negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, confirming CBS News reporting at the time and undercutting statements of denial from the Defense Department.

"I actually dug into this whole matter. I just want to address it: It was a one-day pause, which is typical for negotiations," said Bacon, chair of the House Armed Services cyber subcommittee, during a [hearing](#) on Capitol Hill on Friday. "That's just about as much as I can say. It was a one-day pause."

In March, multiple U.S. officials [told](#) CBS News that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had issued a directive to U.S. Cyber Command to pause cyber operations against Russia, including those that were the most provocative. At the time, the duration of the pause was unknown.

In response to reports about the pause, the Pentagon said on March 4 on X that Hegseth "has neither canceled nor directed operations directed against malicious Russian operations down order whatsoever from that priority."

Two sources familiar with Hegseth's order said the pause directive lacked specificity. It's not clear how the order about planning was interpreted. Multiple officials also told CBS News in March that strategizing for future operations was never paused and that U.S. cyber policy on Russia "is very much intact" and remains at the same level, one of the officials said.

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Bacon's remarks are the first on-the-record acknowledgment of the directive's existence, which was first reported in February by [The Record](#), a cybersecurity news publication.

It's not uncommon for certain military operations to be paused during sensitive negotiations between countries. Both Democratic and Republican administrations have halted operations to prevent U.S. intentions from being misconstrued and to keep diplomacy on track.

In addition to the Pentagon's statement on X, the Trump administration stonewalled inquiries on the matter and continued to deny any pause was ordered.

A senior U.S. defense official at the Defense Department declined to answer questions from CBS News at the time when asked.

In Friday's House hearing, the statement from DOD Rapid Response was called out by Army veteran and Democratic Rep. Eugene Vindman, who accused the Pentagon of lying about the pause directive.

"What I would like to do is basically point out that that statement by DOD Rapid Response was an outright lie," said the Virginia congressman. "It was at least misleading. And that is not what the American people deserve, and that will be something that I intend to follow up with the secretary when he actually shows up."

The Pentagon created the DOD Rapid Response account in February, and it is overseen by conservative podcaster and Army veteran Graham Allen, who is now the Pentagon's digital media director.

The account commonly attacks news publications and posts comments criticizing reporting about Hegseth and the Defense Department. The X account has omitted context from its statements, touting an increase in U.S. military recruiting numbers between February 2024 through February 2025, even though much of the period showing improved recruitment numbers occurred during the Biden administration, as CBS News' Confirmed team found.

Trump administration officials have promised to run "the most transparent Defense Department in history," but to date, the Pentagon has held just one formal briefing. Instead of regular press engagements, the Pentagon's modus operandi for official Defense Department communications is often to bypass legacy news media outlets and attack their reporting. Questions to the Pentagon's Cyber and Electronic Warfare Command, which told CBS News Friday that "we do not comment nor discuss cyber intelligence,"

[Eleanor Watson](#) contributed to this report.

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**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING
THE HEARING**

JUNE 12, 2025

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. TRAN

Secretary HEGSETH. To support the Marines conducting the Federal Protection Mission, a logistics hub was established at Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach. Contracted services provide and maintain facilities including laundry, showers, food distribution, climate-controlled tent billeting, and waste disposal, ensuring continued support for the Marines. [See page 96.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. MESSMER

Secretary HEGSETH. In the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2025, the SLCM-N program is planning a multi-phased, multiple award contract through another transaction agreement for a competitive missile prototype design for early underwater launch demonstration. The SLCM-N prototyping effort intends to evaluate proposed solutions through open competition that assesses cost, producibility and manufacturability, operational performance, and risk. [See page 83.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. CRANK

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department's Fiscal Year 2026 budget request includes \$158.3 million for the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program. [See page 90.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

JUNE 12, 2025

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WITTMAN

Mr. WITTMAN. The American biotechnology industry is at the front line of innovation, enabling our warfighters to do more with less by developing everything from high-performance coatings for ships to increasing access to critical minerals. Domestic biomanufacturing is critical to reducing vulnerabilities and securing our defense supply chain. However, as stated in the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology's 2025 report, if we lose momentum in bio-innovation now, we risk ceding ground to adversaries like the CCP that are investing heavily in biotechnology for both offensive and defensive capabilities. Given how much is at stake for our national security and domestic biomanufacturing base, do you share the concern that current DOD biotech investments are at risk and loss of such investments could harm innovation and national security? And will you commit to supporting sustained, robust funding of DOD programs to ensure that small U.S. biotechnology companies can continue contributing to creating a robust defense industrial base?

Secretary HEGSETH. American technologies are always at risk because we have superior innovation in U.S. companies that is desired by adversaries and competitors, and biotechnology is no exception. The Department is leveraging the ingenuity and bioindustrial manufacturing advances of the industrial base to strengthen our defense supply chain, and the People's Republic of China knows this and targets our efforts. We take this challenge head on with our robust technology protection program to support our investments in biotechnology and bioindustrial manufacturing to bring superior performance to our weapons systems and protect it from adversary acquisition. To support peace through strength, the Department of War (DoW) will continue to invest in the domestic biotechnology industry, and in protecting industry intellectual property, US military advantage, and the American people. The Department engages small U.S. biotechnology companies by maximizing available authorities, such as through the Department's Office of Small Business Programs and other transaction agreements with nontraditional defense contractors.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. NORCROSS

Mr. NORCROSS. Can you describe in detail the changes you are making to the staffing and budget of the office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E)? How will you ensure that DOT&E continues to fulfil its statutory role and that any changes to staffing or budget will not have an adverse effect on the safety of our warfighters?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department implemented a strategic and deliberate reorganization of the Office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) to eliminate any non-statutory or redundant functions, to reduce bureaucratic overhead and to drive greater efficiency. The Department also provided guidance for DOT&E to deliver its core statutory function through a reduced staff of 30 civilian positions, with no more than one Senior Executive Service member and 15 assigned military personnel. DOT&E is being reduced to this size through a targeted, deliberate, and expeditious civilian reduction-in-force. To carry out this mission I appointed Mr. Carroll P. Quade, the Department of the Navy's Test and Evaluation Executive, to perform the duties of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation. Mr. Quade has assumed all duties of the Director, including overseeing the transition and ensuring DOT&E's statutory requirements remain effective and in compliance with statute. The Department is committed to adhering to the statutory requirement for DOT&E to provide independent analysis, evaluation and reporting of operational test and evaluation for programs on the DOT&E oversight list. DOT&E is continuing to execute oversight responsibilities of programs on the DOT&E oversight list, as required by statute, and any changes to the oversight list are still solely the responsibility of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation.

Mr. NORCROSS. What is the Department's plan, in terms of timeline, investments, and specific priority areas, for how to use the billions of dollars included in the Reconciliation bill for improvement of munitions production and the munitions industrial base? What facilities, components, and elements of the workforce for munitions are the Department going to invest this money in first?

Secretary HEGSETH. The DoW and our Warfighters require a growing munitions industrial base with a resilient supply chain independent of adversarial foreign sources that remains flexible to respond to demand signals across a changing national security environment. The Department's goal for rapid investment timelines is to finalize performance awards in less than six months using aggressive acquisition processes. Specific DoW priority initiatives are dedicated towards improving munitions and missile production capacity through advanced manufacturing, reducing costs of components and integration through automation, increasing capacity, and enhancing munitions capabilities to meet service requirements.

Mr. NORCROSS. What is the Department of Defense's current acquisition strategy for the E-7 Wedgetail, a successor to the E-3 airborne early warning and control aircraft? If the Department of Defense is not going to pursue acquiring the E-7, what analysis can you show to demonstrate that any resulting gap in capability would be covered by alternative means on an operationally relevant timeline?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department believes it needs a layered, multi-domain capability to ensure a robust, resilient, and global Airborne Mission Target Indicator (AMTI) and Battle Management System. The Department cancelled the E-7 Wedgetail program based on programmatic delays, rising costs and alternate solutions. The AMTI mission will be met by multiple platforms across multiple domains and that we would be happy to discuss at a higher classification level. To mitigate risk, the Department is procuring four additional E-2Ds in Fiscal Year 2026 and keeping options open for potential future investments.

Mr. NORCROSS. Considering that the Army is planning to stop procurement of High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) as part of the Army Transformation Initiative, is the Department of Defense considering at all how to mitigate the rollover safety concerns of existing Army HMMWVs? Will the Department maintain or accelerate funding to retrofit HMMWVs with rollover mitigation kits now that the Army is not procuring new HMMWVs with the safety modifications built in?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Army continuously addresses HMMWV rollover concerns and will continue to address these concerns as long as the vehicle remains in the inventory. Rollover data collection and risk mitigation measures, and the associated lessons learned, are key aspects of our communication and information-sharing with commanders and leaders across the force. Safety Assistance Visits are one way that this information is communicated, in addition to regular promulgation of findings, advisories, and recommendations across the enterprise. Additionally, information and data collection on rollovers are critical to informing the Army's risk mitigation procurement options as the Army persistently seeks ways to improve safety controls.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SCOTT

Mr. SCOTT. How has the use of U.S.-provided systems in Ukraine informed DoD's research, development, and procurement strategies, and does this represent a tangible return on investment in terms of future military capabilities?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department of War leverages intelligence from all ongoing conflicts to understand strategic, operational, and tactical security challenges as the basis for the formulation of new operational concepts and capabilities. The Department of War has studied the ongoing war in Ukraine and has used the lessons gleaned from the conflict to adjust our research, development, and procurement strategies to make the Joint Force more capable and better suited to respond to any potential adversary on accelerated timelines. Multiple kinetic and non-kinetic warfare domains have benefitted from these efforts, with potential capabilities undergoing detailed analysis via modeling and simulation to ensure they will have the intended effect on the battlefield. If proven to be effective, capabilities are further developed as prototypes and undergo operational experimentation within a relevant environment to validate and refine employment concepts. The proven capabilities have been accelerated to the Joint Force via multiple pathways including the use of new acquisition capabilities, such as the Accelerate the Procurement Fielding of Innovative Technologies program. Using lessons learned over the last two years, the Department of War has accelerated new capabilities to the force by as much as three years as compared to previous acquisition processes.

Mr. SCOTT. To what extent has the provision of stored or surplus equipment to Ukraine allowed the Department of Defense to modernize its own inventories, and how is this factored into the overall ROI of the assistance program?

Secretary HEGSETH. Funding appropriated by Congress for the replacement of materiel provided to Ukraine has presented opportunities to procure modernized equipment and munitions. Procuring modernized equipment and munitions was a delib-

erate effort, aligned with Service modernization plans and priorities. Specific examples include replacing older M113 Armored Personnel Carriers and Bradley fighting vehicles with the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle (AMPV) and the updated Bradley M2A4 respectively; HAWK missile systems with Patriot PAC-3 MSE missiles; and outdated High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) with Infantry Squad Vehicles (ISVs). The Department will continue to ensure that the transfer of stored or surplus equipment is in the United States' best strategic interest.

Mr. SCOTT. What metrics or outcomes does the DoD use to evaluate the effectiveness of weapons, platforms, and ammunition provided to Ukraine in enhancing its defense capabilities and degrading adversarial military capacity?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department of War evaluates the effectiveness of security assistance provided to Ukraine through a multi-faceted framework that includes outcome-based performance metrics, system-specific assessments, and real-time battlefield feedback. Together, these quantitative and qualitative measures provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of U.S. security assistance.

Mr. SCOTT. How can the Joint Staff enhance the integration of the Joint Trauma System (JTS) across all Unified Combatant Commands to ensure standardized combat casualty care protocols, particularly in contested environments with prolonged field care scenarios?

General CAINE. To enhance integration across all Unified Combatant Commands (CCMDs), the Office of the Joint Staff Surgeon will need to work closely with the JTS and the Defense Health Agency, to identify, support, and prioritize CCMD Trauma System (CTS) requirements and the modernization of the DoD Trauma Registry (DoDTR).

Mr. SCOTT. What measures are being implemented to address the "Walker Dip" challenge, ensuring medical personnel maintain trauma care proficiency during periods of non-conflict to support readiness for large-scale combat operations?

General CAINE. To enhance military clinicians' trauma care skills for large-scale combat operations, the Joint Force is implementing several strategies. Support and expansion of CCMD Trauma System (CTSs), aligned under the JTS, to bring trauma system doctrine, oversight, and data collection into theater-level operational plans and exercises. Championing military-civilian clinical partnerships with Level I trauma centers, enabling military providers to maintain hands-on trauma experience in high-volume, real-world settings when combat deployments are limited. Reinforcing that readiness cannot be sustained without recapturing volume, acuity, and complexity in MTFs via the Military Healthcare System Direct Care.

Mr. SCOTT. How can the DoD Trauma Registry (DoDTR) be further leveraged to provide real-time, actionable data to combatant commanders for optimizing trauma care outcomes, and what resources are needed to expand its capabilities?

General CAINE. To meet the demands of large-scale combat operations, the DoDTR must be modernized from its current state. The JTS is currently modernizing DoDTR which is supported by the Office of the Joint Staff Surgeon and DHA leadership. In preparation for LSCO, the DoDTR must evolve and modernize into a real-time, forward-integrated, decision support platform that can inform battlefield commanders at the speed of relevance. Enhanced analytics, predictive modeling, and simplified interfaces will ensure the system delivers value across all echelons of care-from Role 1 through strategic evacuation.

Mr. SCOTT. What steps can the Joint Staff take to ensure the En Route Care (ERC) Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPGs) are uniformly adopted and resourced across all services to improve patient outcomes during evacuation?

General CAINE. The Joint Staff uses CPGs to inform the development of Universal Joint Tasks (UJT). These are assembled to develop a joint Mission-Essential Task List (JMETL).

There are six UJTs related to patient movement, including OP 4.4.3.11 (Conduct Patient Movement), which addresses measures to ensure personnel assigned to intra-theater patient movement platforms complete education and training informed by the ERC CPG.

The Joint Staff is conducting a Capability Portfolio Management Review to identify any gaps and risks Combatant Command and Service Component Commands have related to conducting ERC to inform resourcing solutions.

Mr. SCOTT. Are current training and resourcing for Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) trauma care, as outlined in JTS CPGs, sufficient to meet the needs of joint forces operating in high-threat environments? If not, what additional investments or policies are required?

General CAINE. Although the Joint Trauma System's Clinical Practice Guidelines provide an improved foundation for CBRN trauma care, current training and resourcing are not fully sufficient to meet the potential demands of the Joint Force operating in CBRN-contested environments. Gaps exist in several key areas, to in-

clude improving interagency information sharing, ramping up CBRN exercise realism and complexity, and more training on CBRN casualty management.

Mr. SCOTT. How can the Joint Staff support the expansion of frozen and deglycerolized red blood cell programs to ensure blood availability in austere operational environments, and what logistical barriers need to be addressed?

General CAINE. Blood requirements are determined by the Combatant Commander - informed by the Command Surgeon and supporting staff using scenario-based casualty estimates. The Joint Staff collaborates with the Defense Health Agency in its role as a Combat Support Agency to support Combatant Command requirements, including requirements for frozen red blood cells (FRBCs). If the requirement for FRBCs increases and additional deglycerolizing capacity is needed to convert these units into transfusable products, the Joint Staff can advocate for prioritizing resources to expand deglycerolizing capabilities.

Mr. SCOTT. Are there plans to expand or modify the scope of medical support for Ukrainian soldiers in U.S. facilities given the opportunity to enhance the combat trauma training of U.S. medical personnel?

General CAINE. I defer to OSD Policy for any plans to expand or modify the scope of medical support in U.S. medical facilities for non US military personnel.

Mr. SCOTT. How is the U.S. military working with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to counter hybrid threats, such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and irregular warfare, which are prominent concerns in the region?

General CAINE. USEUCOM maintains engagement with Latvia through Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) initiatives aimed at bolstering Latvia's cyber defenses, supporting its efforts to centralize its cybersecurity and defensive cyber operational capacity under its Cyber Command through existing legal frameworks, and advancing the preparedness of its cyber workforce to mitigate risk.

USEUCOM's engagement with Lithuania, including ICB, has been instrumental in its efforts to stand up a Cyber Command (established January 1, 2025) and ensure its capability targets are aligned with NATO's. USEUCOM continues to consult with Lithuania's Armed Forces Cyber Command to ensure its progress toward operational capacity is aligned with United States and NATO objectives in cyberspace. Exchanges include Table Top Exercises, large-scale cyber exercises, such as Cyber Flag and Cyber Shield, and training of cyber workforce personnel.

The United States is engaged in a bilateral project with Estonia to jointly produce cyber incident reports for NATO standardization. USCYBERCOM and Estonia's CYBERCOM (ESTCYBERCOM) have an established partnership involving joint planning and information exchange, which reduces the burden on USCYBERCOM and increases the cyber defense posture of NATO Allies and other like-minded partner nations.

Mr. SCOTT. What steps are being taken to improve interoperability between U.S. forces and the militaries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, particularly in joint exercises and capability development?

General CAINE. USEUCOM engages with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania through a robust program of joint exercises, security assistance, and information sharing. For example; Exercise SWIFT RESPONSE 25 demonstrated significant improvements in the ability to effectively respond to crisis situations as an interoperable, multi-national team.

Exercise BALTOPS 25 allowed the U.S. and NATO Amphibious Task Force to demonstrate joint naval warfighting capability and strengthen partnerships in the Baltic region.

The IRON WOLF and STRONG GRIFFIN series of exercises are brigade-level maneuver exercises held annually to improve the integration of fires, engineers, and maneuver elements of Lithuanian Mechanized and Motorized Brigades. The goal is to ensure U.S. and Baltic forces can operate seamlessly together to deter aggression and maintain regional stability. USEUCOM will continue to work closely with the Baltic allies to address the challenges and risks associated with improving interoperability and to achieve shared security objectives.

Mr. SCOTT. Given the strategic vulnerability of the Baltic States to Russian air and missile capabilities, what is the U.S. doing to bolster integrated air and missile defense systems in the region?

General CAINE. The U.S. assists the Baltic states in developing their capability to individually and collectively detect, analyze, coordinate, and respond to airborne threats under the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI), which began in FY 2020. BSI funded programs improve data sharing and command and control (C2) between the Baltics, the U.S., and NATO by gradually introducing new equipment, training, and processes through FY 2026. The Baltics are fielding C2 equipment and expanding their integrated Integrated Air and Missile Defense networks, as well as procuring sensors to increase their detection and tracking capabilities.

Mr. SCOTT. How is the U.S. assisting Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in modernizing their armed forces, including through security assistance, training, and equipment transfers?

General CAINE. As part of the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI), the U.S. is assisting the Baltic states with delivering their NATO capability targets, including targets for Integrated Air and Missile Defense, Land Forces Capabilities, and Maritime Domain Awareness. U.S. rotational forces partner closely with Baltic and NATO Allies to conduct multinational training exercise to further enhance readiness and interoperability.

Mr. SCOTT. How is the U.S. collaborating with Estonia, a leader in cyber defense, to strengthen NATO's cybersecurity framework and protect critical infrastructure in the Baltic region?

General CAINE. USEUCOM is engaged in a bilateral project with Estonia to jointly produce cyber incident reports for NATO standardization. The partnership has provided six cyber incident reports to NATO for review and distribution. This work with Estonia and other NATO nations has been validated by NATO Exercise - Coalition Warrior Interoperability Exercise to enable collective cyber defense using new tools and technologies. Estonia has accepted an invitation from United States Cyber Command to participate in Cyber Flag 25-2 from 8 to 25 July 2025.

USCYBERCOM and Estonia's CYBERCOM (ESTCYBERCOM) have an established partnership involving joint planning and information exchange, which reduces the burden on USCYBERCOM and increases the cyber defense posture of NATO Allies and other like-minded partner nations. Further, ESTCYBERCOM leads the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Community of Excellence, which works to identify and coordinate cyber defense education among member nations, and notably, organizes the annual LOCKED SHIELDS cyber exercise.

Mr. SCOTT. What messaging strategies is the U.S. military employing to signal resolve to adversaries while reassuring Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania of unwavering U.S. support?

General CAINE. USEUCOM demonstrates resolve, readiness, interoperability, and capability through joint exercises and military-to-military cooperation with the Baltic states. U.S. rotational force presence in the Baltics enables deterrence and increases interoperability across NATO. The U.S. encourages NATO investment in collective defense through Forward Land Forces (FLF) and the Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission. As demonstrated during the NATO Summit in The Hague, U.S. leadership has contributed directly to Allied commitment to increasing defense investment to 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) to fund the capabilities needed to deter Russia's continued aggression toward Europe.

Mr. SCOTT. What is your assessment of how security assistance to Ukraine contributes to long-term stability in Europe, and how is this weighed against the immediate costs of providing military aid?

General CAINE. I defer to the State Department and OSD Policy as this is a whole of government matter. I will ensure the Joint Force is prepared to provide a vast array of options to the President to achieve global security objectives.

Mr. SCOTT. To what extent has the provision of stored or surplus equipment to Ukraine allowed the Department of Defense to modernize its own inventories, and how is this factored into the overall ROI of the assistance program?

General CAINE. While I defer to OSD Policy on this complex matter, I do wish to highlight the necessity to revitalize the National Industrial Base (NIB) to support the rapid reconstitution of critical warfighting equipment and weapons systems. I greatly appreciate Congress' continued work with our team to resolve the current NIB challenges.

Mr. SCOTT. How do you assess the strategic return on investment of security assistance to Ukraine in terms of advancing U.S. national security objectives?

General CAINE. I defer to the State Department and OSD Policy as this is a whole of government matter. I will ensure the Joint Force is prepared to provide a vast array of options to the President to achieve global security objectives.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. STEFANIK

Ms. STEFANIK. Secretary Hegseth and General Caine, it's great to see you both here today and thank you for your service to our country. As the proud representative of New York's 21st District, home to Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division, as well as the Air Force Research Lab in Rome, I'm focused on ensuring that our military remains the most capable and ready force in the world, and that the strategic assets in my district receive the support they need.

Secretary Hegseth, the 10th Mountain Division continues to be one of the most deployed units in the U.S. Army. I have been tirelessly advocating for Secretary Driscoll to fast-track FY27 funding for Wheeler-Sack Airfield, that is in desperate need of electric power system repairs.

Secretary Hegseth, In 2019, the Department of Defense designated Fort Drum as the preferred East Coast site for homeland missile defense. I've worked across multiple NDAA and Appropriations cycles to secure Fort Drum's central role in our national missile defense architecture, including a requirement for the construction of an additional homeland missile defense site on the East Coast to be completed by 2030 with seed funding appropriated to accomplish just this.

This parallels perfectly with President Trump's historic leadership to implement the Golden Dome to modernize and strengthen our missile defense capabilities in the face of rapidly evolving threats from our adversaries. Given Fort Drum's proven strategic value, its designation by DoD, and Congress's repeated support and funding, what is your assessment of the critical role Fort Drum will play in bringing President Trump's historic missile defense vision to fruition?

Secretary HEGSETH. The President's Executive Order 14186 directs me to deliver and maintain a next-generation missile defense shield to defend against foreign aerial attack on the U.S. Homeland and to guarantee a secure second-strike capability, known as Golden Dome for America (GDA). To accomplish this, I have created the position of the GDA Direct Reporting Program Manager (DRPM). The GDA DRPM is responsible for creating a viable GDA architecture that develops and accelerates contributing technologies to deliver on the President's policies in Executive Order 14186. Now that General Michael Guetlein is confirmed to the position, the GDA DRPM will have 60 days to deliver a layered homeland missile defense architecture to the Deputy Secretary of War. This will include evaluation of the requirement, location, and details of an additional homeland interceptor site. Whatever site or sites are selected, the GDA will protect your constituents, and we will continue to rely on the contributions of the 10th Mountain Division to the Joint Force.

Ms. STEFANIK. Another unique aspect of Fort Drum is its arctic zone classification, meaning in New York's 21st District, the U.S. Army is currently enhancing our soldiers arctic combat readiness. Can you discuss how the FY26 budget enhances high-altitude and cold-weather warfare training capabilities critical to the 10th Mountain Division's mission readiness?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Army strategically invests in the 10th Mountain Division - including funding for cold-weather home station training, the U.S. Army Mountain Warfare School, participation in joint exercises like Arctic Forge with NATO Allies, and Arctic Soldier organizational clothing and individual equipment - to ensure combat readiness through specialized training and multinational exercises. These financial investments, which represent an increase from FY25, enhance the Division's expertise in arctic and high-latitude warfare, supporting regional deterrence and collective defense objectives.

Ms. STEFANIK. One of my top priorities has been improving the quality of life for our service members and their families in New York's 21st District. How is the Department allocating resources to enhance housing, childcare, and access to quality healthcare at Fort Drum?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Army recognizes the importance of quality-of-life investments and the FY26 President's Budget increases the requests for barracks and childcare programs. The Army prioritizes these investments through its Facility Investment Plan. At Fort Drum, while near-term focus is on runway improvements critical to its power-projection role, barracks renovations are ongoing and planned. A \$33M Child Development Center (CDC) is under design (PN 96977), utilizing the \$25M Congress appropriated for CDC designs. Construction funding will be sought in future budget cycles. In addition, Fort Drum manages 91 Unaccompanied Housing (UH) barracks (9,334 bed spaces) and three barracks Restoration and Modernization (R&M) projects, awarded in FY23-24, are improving 272 bed spaces. Beginning in FY25, 100% of UH sustainment requirements will be funded to mitigate facility degradation. In June of 2021, Centinel Public Partnerships began investing \$41M in privatized family housing improvements (e.g., minor renovations, HVAC upgrades, exterior siding, roof repairs, and infrastructure upgrades), with \$25.9M spent to date on renovations, HVAC upgrades, and infrastructure.

Ms. STEFANIK. AFRL in Rome is at the cutting edge of quantum computing, cyber defense, and AI. The Future Flag testbed offers a unique opportunity for the Department of Defense (DoD) to experiment, test, and evaluate emerging technologies while they are in the hands of operators. Can you speak to how the budget supports increased funding and growth for these mission areas in Rome, and the expansion of its partnerships with industry and academia?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 President's Budget Request provides the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) Rome, NY, with approximately \$218M in science and technology funding for advanced quantum computing, cyberspace dominance technologies, multi-domain sensemaking, assured communications and networks, counter-unmanned aerial systems technologies, and other areas. A portion of this funding is directed towards advancing quantum computing capabilities, including photonic chips, ion trap quantum computing, and secure quantum computing facilities. The FY 2026 President's Budget Request also supports university-based quantum materials applied research and engagement with industry. While the Future Flag testbed is not explicitly resourced in the President's Budget Request, the AFRL Information Directorate Rome research site works very closely with the operator community in experimentation, and the Department of War has benefited greatly from congressional support in this effort.

Ms. STEFANIK. What is the Department doing to ensure the continued recruitment and retention of high-skilled talent, especially in cyber and AI fields, for AFRL Rome and installations with similar vitally important national security missions?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department attracts and retains the best and brightest minds that advance national security at installations such as the Air Force Research Lab (AFRL) at Rome, NY. AFRL participates in local STEM career fairs and community hiring events and offers a local summer internship program as a vital talent pipeline. As well as student programs like Premier College Intern Program and Palace Acquire. In recent years, research internship participants accounted for 20% of new science and engineering hires. Special hiring authorities, such as AFRL Lab Demonstration, allows AFRL to recruit from a national pool of highly qualified candidates who may not have looked for a federal position via USAJobs. AFRL also provides incentives such as science and technology reinvention laboratories supplemental pay, lab demonstration bonuses, student loan repayment, and developmental opportunity programs, which help retain and attract high-caliber talent, recruit talent from outside of the geographical area, and encourage highly specialized skillset building by allowing the workforce to obtain advanced degrees.

Ms. STEFANIK. Given AFRL Rome's growing mission and the evolving AI and cyber threat landscape, are there planned infrastructure upgrades or new construction projects planned to support expanded operations?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) Information Directorate Rome Research Site in Rome, NY is currently executing a lab upgrade to support the critical AI and cyber work required to address the threat landscape. This upgrade is constructing the Corporate Agile Spectrum Environment facility that will enable the AFRL Information Directorate to execute radio frequency communications and signal test activities at all classification levels. This is a unique facility that will empower the AFRL Science and Technology Enterprise to rapidly advance the state-of-the-art and accelerate development & delivery of next-generation communications capabilities to DAF warfighters.

Ms. STEFANIK. Secretary Hegseth, I've led efforts in Congress to prohibit the Department from procuring or operating drones made by Chinese companies like DJI, which are controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. While Congress banned the DoD from purchasing Chinese drones, many federal and local contractors, some operating on or near military installations, still use DJI or Chinese platforms. Simultaneously, I have advocated for strengthening the U.S. domestic drone industry. What steps is the Department taking under this budget to support American manufacturers?

Secretary HEGSETH. The DoW takes the threat to national security posed by Chinese-made, small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) very seriously and works diligently to ensure compliance with the laws restricting the use of these systems. The DoW is also committed to supporting American manufacturers, particularly in the dynamic industry and has ongoing efforts to strengthen domestic sUAS production and affordability. These efforts include creating consistent demand signals, expanding acquisition programs, establishing common standards, and incentivizing industry investment in increased production capacity. The DoW is also focused on securing the supply chain by actively identifying and mitigating vulnerabilities and promoting reliable, non-adversarial sourcing of components to reduce uncertainty and encourage manufacturers to invest in innovation and expanded production. Furthermore, the DoW is directly investing in domestic sUAS production through various programs, ensuring American manufacturers can meet the warfighter's rapidly growing need for these systems.

Ms. STEFANIK. Follow-Up to the Previous Question: What does the Department need from Congress to make this happen?

Secretary HEGSETH. Additional restrictions on adversary sourcing for essential sUAS components like batteries and electric motors, which are heavily reliant on

Chinese suppliers, would further support domestic sUAS production. This would mirror existing restrictions on other components and not only reduce dependence on potential adversaries but also create a strong demand signal for domestic and allied suppliers. Increased capital investment is needed for motors, airframes, and final assembly. Existing authorities like the Defense Production Act, Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment (IBAS) funding, or programs managed by the individual armed services could be utilized to facilitate this crucial expansion.

Ms. STEFANIK. General Caine, given the proven risk of data exfiltration and real-time surveillance by Chinese-manufactured UAS, what specific steps are being taken to ensure that data collected by any drone used on or near our military installations is secure from foreign adversaries - especially China?

General CAINE. I defer to OSD Policy and I&S, but I greatly appreciate Congress' work on enabling the Joint Force to improve installation security. This will be a whole of government effort, especially as it will include federal, state, and local law enforcement cooperation.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY DR. DESJARLAIS

Dr. DESJARLAIS. I understand that current implementation of Clean Sheet authority under 10 USC 4123 appears primarily targeted toward major program offices, like Sentinel, that have an OEM under contract to deliver an end system or platform.

We're interested in exploring whether this authority could be expanded to accommodate multiple project sponsors supporting a test operations contractor, such as at AEDC, where the work enables test and evaluation across numerous programs but does not result in direct system delivery.

Can OSD provide a read on whether the current statutory and regulatory framework permits this kind of multi-sponsor application? If not, what changes would be needed to enable this?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department has not considered whether to seek to expand the authority under 10 U.S.C. § 4123 to accommodate multiple project sponsors supporting a test operations contractor and would be interested in dialogue on the issue.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. BACON

Mr. BACON. I believe we on the same page that our adversaries are not deterred from striking us through cyberspace. I also believe we agree that we need to get more aggressive and less restricted in the use of cyber capabilities. That means ensuring not only the right policies, but also adequate capacity in terms of people and technology. The Cyber Mission Force of today has grown by less than 5% since first established in 2012. Can we count on the Department to finally grow this force to meet the actual needs of the nation?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department of War recognizes the critical need to enable the Cyber Mission Force (CMF) to meet the evolving cyber threat landscape and is committed to increasing the lethality and capabilities of the CMF. Therefore, the Department is building a world-class cyber workforce through our 2023-2027 Cyber Workforce Strategy, encompassing skills-based hiring, expanded training, and the Cyber Excepted Service. The Department is also leveraging an advanced analytics platform like ADVANA to assess the qualifications of our current cyber workforce and execute a precise talent management process to ensure we have the right workforce for the future.

Mr. BACON. Just a few weeks ago, this committee received an official notification that the Department would be unable to meet the congressional deadline associated with the new force generation model for cyberspace operations, or more commonly known as the Sec. 1533 efforts. From what I gather, your team is revising the work conducted under Sec. 1533, in the meantime, can you please tell us what you want to see specifically come out of this effort?

Secretary HEGSETH. The revised Sec. 1533 effort will deliver a revised cyberspace force generation model that enhances the Department's ability to defend the homeland and project combat power in support of the Joint Force. This model will align with our China deterrence strategy and will incorporate lessons learned from other Department models to ensure the greatest lethality is delivered to the warfighter.

Mr. BACON. I was disappointed to see that the Administration's budget includes only a modest increase in the Air Force topline, and a reduction in the Space Force topline. How is the Department of the Air Force going to continue to evolve to keep pace with China and Russia when we have flat budgets, which when you factor in-

flation in, is actually more of a cut? How can we possibly win a fight with China when we are not investing in the capabilities that we need to defeat them from the two services that I believe are the most critical to that fight?

Secretary HEGSETH. This FY26 budget makes tough choices in order to propel a transformative leap to build a modern, agile, and lethal force that projects power through Air Superiority and Space Control. The FY26 President's Budget Request includes a 13.9% increase for the U.S. Air Force and a 39.5% increase for the U.S. Space Force from FY25 funding levels. This increase is necessary to meet the high-end fight for Nuclear Enterprise modernization efforts, F-47 and Collaborative Combat Aircraft programs, and Golden Dome.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. MACE

Ms. MACE. As I highlighted in a hearing I chaired last week for the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, there are enormous benefits to be reaped by the Federal Government using AI for both civilian and defense purposes. Of course, however, AI carries some risks if implemented improperly. Failing to properly label data before it is ingested by AI systems almost inevitably leads to unauthorized users gaining access to sensitive, even top secret, information. In April 2025 alone well over 2 million tips on how to get AI systems to create false or malicious results - known as "jailbreaking" - were shared by hackers on Telegram. Such facts are obviously very worrying to me and my fellow Committee members, and so I'd like to ask you 1) what (if any) data labeling tools are currently in use 2) identify the open source intelligence capabilities you are utilizing to stay abreast with what threat actors are doing to jailbreak or otherwise corrupt AI systems being used by the Defense Department.

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department of War (DoW) is committed to ensuring data is appropriately classified, labeled, and protected. DoW employs a range of industry-leading data labeling tools, best practices, and associated techniques to ensure AI models are accurate, trustworthy, and robust against adversarial attacks. The DoW established the Data Readiness for AI Development (DRAID) basic ordering agreement to partner with the best of industry to make data "AI Ready" so DoW components can rapidly access, acquire, and reuse commercial services across the AI lifecycle, including data management, security, and ethical considerations. Lastly, the DoW Chief Digital and AI Officer (CDAO), in partnership with the Defense Intelligence Enterprise, leverages both open source intelligence tools and publicly available information to stay at the forefront of emerging threat streams.

Ms. MACE. Programs combining commercial and commercial off-the-shelf software and hardware capabilities for defensive cyberspace operations (DCO) operate throughout the Navy and Marine Corps Intranet, ONENet, and InformationTechnology-21 networks and are critical to protecting our forces. Will your March 20, 2025 directive entitled Continuing Elimination of Wasteful Spending at the Department of Defense have an impact on this effort? If funding cuts are anticipated, has the Department evaluated the effects this may have on readiness and security of our Armed Forces?

Secretary HEGSETH. No, my 20 March 2025 directive was focused on the termination of wasteful spending on an over budget HR software development program, grants not aligned with DoW priorities, and contracts for analysis products that are not mission critical. In contrast, conducting effective defensive cyberspace operations (DCO) is essential for mitigating active threats to the DoW Information Network and deemed mission critical. Besides leveraging government solutions, our cyber forces wield commercial and commercial-off-the-shelf tools for cyber defense efforts. In the unlikely event that funding reductions were considered for tools supporting defensive cyberspace operations, DoW would carefully evaluate any proposals to fully understand the implications for security and readiness.

Ms. MACE. As I highlighted in a hearing I chaired last week for the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, there are enormous benefits to be reaped by the Federal Government using AI for both civilian and defense purposes. Of course, however, AI carries some risks if implemented improperly. Failing to properly label data before it is ingested by AI systems almost inevitably leads to unauthorized users gaining access to sensitive, even top secret, information. In April 2025 alone well over 2 million tips on how to get AI systems to create false or malicious results - known as "jailbreaking" - were shared by hackers on Telegram. Such facts are obviously very worrying to me and my fellow Committee members, and so I'd like to ask you 1) what (if any) data labeling tools are currently in use 2) identify the open source intelligence capabilities you are utilizing to stay abreast with what

threat actors are doing to jailbreak or otherwise corrupt AI systems being used by the Defense Department.

General CAINE. The Department of Defense currently employs several data labeling tools to ensure accurate and secure data ingestion into DoD AI systems. These tools include commercial capabilities and custom-built solutions designed to meet specific mission needs. DoD continuously develops rigorous technical tradecraft and validation requirements to ensure model reliability and data integrity. These requirements include protecting AI models that have been exposed to--or trained on--classified data with the same stringent security measures as the classified data themselves.

Traditional open-source intelligence (OSINT) techniques are employed to monitor counter-AI and jailbreaking activities. These include monitoring social media platforms and known hacker forums. Analysis also incorporates public databases and repositories for indications of adversarial AI development, to include leveraging threat intelligence reports from industry partners, academia, and the intelligence community.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. FINSTAD

Mr. FINSTAD. Secretary Hegseth, in your opening testimony you mentioned ongoing efforts to expand our Defense Industrial Base by engaging with industry and non-traditional DoD suppliers. Could you elaborate on any new programs or outreach initiatives aimed at increasing the role of small businesses in our Defense Industrial Base?

Secretary HEGSETH. Small and non-traditional DoW suppliers are critical to expanding the defense industrial base (DIB) and ensuring that the Warfighter has the most lethal and effective capabilities and that our industrial base is resilient and hardened against adversarial aggression or supply chain disruptions. The Department has several new initiatives to strengthen our outreach and support to this critical sector. We are improving our training and technical assistance to small businesses through Project Spectrum, a cybersecurity and Foreign Ownership Control and Influence (FOCI) training tool, as well as through the DoW Mentor-Protege Program, our APEX Accelerators program. The Department's Small Business Programs Office has also conducted a series of webinars to highlight and amplify how the Department can help businesses navigate the complex Federal acquisition process. The Department's Defense Industrial Base Consortium is a valuable forum for amplifying the Department's priorities regarding strategic and critical minerals, receiving industry input and proposals for strengthening American critical mineral production. In addition, the Small Business Integration Group, which was established earlier this year and which consists of all small business leaders and stakeholders throughout the DoW enterprise, is crucial to streamlining and synchronizing the Department's internal efforts to increase the role of small businesses in the DIB and send a unified demand signal to those businesses. I am committed to working with Congress to support this Administration priority.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. DAVIS

Mr. DAVIS. Do you agree that divesting older F-15E models, without one-for-one replacements and investments in upgraded aircraft, including F-15EXs, would undermine our national security?

Secretary HEGSETH. We cannot sacrifice our combat capability today by too rapidly divesting from legacy systems without alternatives, so the USAF is working to balance sustaining systems essential for deterrence while improving the way we develop innovative next-generation platforms. A one-for-one replacement requirement would restrict the USAF's ability to modernize strategically, so we are employing a flexible and adaptable approach that prioritizes capability. The USAF is actively pursuing both recapitalization and sustainment to modernize its fighter fleet. This includes upgrading existing platforms like the F-15E -229 fleet, post-block F-16s, and F-22 Block 30/35s, developing new assets such as the F-15EX, F-35, and future systems like the F-47.

Mr. DAVIS. Secretary Hegseth and General Caine: Albeit in an unclassified setting, can you speak to the vital role F-15Es outfitted with the new Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System further increase air superiority in CENTCOM and INDOPACOM and how important it is that we prioritize funding for our frontline fighter force across active duty bases?

Secretary HEGSETH. The F-15E and other 4th generation aircraft equipped and outfitted with the new Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System provided a cost-ef-

fective means to engage one-way drones, while preserving other Air Force air-to-air munitions for the high-end fight. In addition, the F-15EX has greater payload capacity and long-range capabilities to complement stealth fighters like the F-35 and F-22. Continuing to holistically modernize our fighter force is important to our defense strategy and remains a priority. In PB26, the Department keeps the F-15EX line open, preserving the defense industrial base and supply chains which build the platform. The budget proposes to continue procurement of the F-15EX instead of ending procurement in FY25 as previously planned due to their value in long-range kill chains and fighter force capacity.

Mr. DAVIS. Secretary Hegseth and General Caine: Do you believe active duty bases, like Seymour Johnson, which have a history of extended deployments, are ideal candidates for future positioning of NGAD assets like the F-47?

Secretary HEGSETH. The Department of the Air Force will use its strategic basing process to determine the locations best suited to support the F-47 mission. The process uses a criteria-based analysis, combined with the application of military judgment, to link mission and Combatant Commander requirements to the attributes of Air Force installations to identify those locations. The results of this analysis are used to inform the basing decisions made by the Secretary of the Air Force or delegated authority. The process is deliberate, repeatable, standardized, and transparent.

Mr. DAVIS. Ahead of Memorial Day, I had the opportunity to participate, alongside fellow veterans, in the now annual Vietnam Memorial wall washing. Days later, Secretary Hegseth, you stated during your Memorial Day remarks that we honor the selfless sacrifice, duty, and love of our servicemembers. Nevertheless, there is no single national symbol that recognizes our fallen heroes.

To right this wrong, I have filed a bill, H.R. 1363, the Honor and Remember Flag Recognition Act, to establish the flag nationally, which is already officially recognized in 28 states. The legislation provides days of the year, memorials, and other locations on or at which the flag would be displayed, such as the U.S. Capitol, war memorials, and national cemeteries.

My question to you, Mr. Secretary, is this: Will you, on behalf of our nation's veterans and Gold Star families, in consultation with your team, review this bill and consider finally supporting what would be a historic first step in recognizing all those who have lost their lives while serving our nation? It would make President Trump the first in history to sign legislation designating an official symbol of remembrance for all fallen servicemembers.

Secretary HEGSETH. Thank you for your support of our Nation's veterans and Gold Star families. Honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our Nation is a priority of the Department and I commit to reviewing this bill.

Mr. DAVIS. Do you agree that divesting older F-15E models, without one-for-one replacements and investments in upgraded aircraft, including F-15EXs, would undermine our national security?

General CAINE. We cannot sacrifice our combat capability today by rapidly divesting from legacy systems without alternatives. Thus, the USAF is working to balance sustaining systems essential for deterrence while improving the way we buy innovative next-generation platforms.

Mr. DAVIS. Secretary Hegseth and General Caine: Albeit in an unclassified setting, can you speak to the vital role F-15Es outfitted with the new Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System further increase air superiority in CENTCOM and INDOPACOM and how important it is that we prioritize funding for our frontline fighter force across active duty bases?

General CAINE. The AGR-20 FALCO APKWS has proven highly effective against one way attack unmanned aerial vehicles and is a low-cost solution when compared to the AIM-9X or AIM-120. In a modern battlefield, APKWS provides excellent counter drone capability for fighter aircraft. As far prioritization, I defer to the Services as to the best units and aircraft to fund for these capabilities.

Mr. DAVIS. Secretary Hegseth and General Caine: Do you believe active duty bases, like Seymour Johnson, which have a history of extended deployments, are ideal candidates for future positioning of NGAD assets like the F-47?

General CAINE. The Department of the Air Force will use its strategic basing process to determine the locations best suited to support the NGAD mission.