

Patrick Host

From: Tarallo, Julie (McCain) <Julie_Tarallo@mccain.senate.gov>
Sent: Thursday, March 30, 2017 9:49 AM
To: Tarallo, Julie (McCain)
Subject: OPENING STATEMENT BY SASC CHAIRMAN JOHN McCAIN AT HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF HEATHER WILSON TO BE SECRETARY OF AIR FORCE



AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY:
Thursday, March 30, 2017

Contact: Dustin Walker
(202) 224-2575

OPENING STATEMENT BY SASC CHAIRMAN JOHN McCAIN AT HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF HEATHER WILSON TO BE SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, delivered the following opening statement today at a hearing on the nomination of Heather Wilson to be Secretary of the Air Force:

“The Senate Armed Services Committee meets today to consider the nomination of Heather Wilson to be the 24th Secretary of the Air Force. Dr. Wilson, we thank you for joining us this morning. We are grateful for your years of distinguished service to our nation and for your willingness to serve once more. We also welcome your family and friends here with us today. As is our tradition, at the beginning of your testimony we invite you to introduce those that are joining you today...

“The next Secretary will lead America’s Air Force in confronting the most diverse and complex array of global crises since the end of World War II—the threat of terrorism and instability emanating from North Africa to the Middle East to South Asia; advanced potential adversaries like Russia and China; and rogue states such as North Korea and Iran. The world is on fire, and now more than ever, our nation is counting on the global vigilance, global reach, and global power that are the hallmarks of Air Force capabilities.

“However, in recent years, your predecessor has informed this committee that America’s Air Force is now the oldest, smallest, and least ready in its history. Dr. Wilson, if confirmed, it will be your mission—in partnership with Secretary Mattis and the Congress—to change that fact. That starts by recognizing how we got here.

“Twenty-five years of continuous deployments, troubled acquisition programs, and frequent aircraft divestments have aged and shrunk the Air Force’s inventory. The combination of relentless operational tempo and the self-inflicted wounds of the Budget Control Act and sequestration has depleted readiness.

“Meanwhile, potential adversaries are developing and fielding fifth-generation fighters, advanced air defense systems, and sophisticated space, cyber and electronic warfare capabilities that are rapidly shrinking America’s military technological advantage and holding our aircraft at greater risk over greater distances.

“In short, we have asked a lot of our Air Force over the last twenty-five years, and the demands placed on the service continue to grow. But we have not met our responsibility to give our Air Force the resources, personnel, equipment, and training it needs to succeed. We are placing an unnecessary and dangerous burden on the backs of our Airmen. And we cannot change course soon enough.

“Restoring readiness, recapitalizing our combat aircraft fleet, and modernizing to sustain our overmatch will require the strong, personal leadership of the next Air Force Secretary. Dr. Wilson, I look forward to discussing the challenges you will face if confirmed, and how you plan to tackle them.

“For example, the Air Force is facing a massive bow wave of modernization investment programs. And the bills will all come due over the next ten years. Just consider the list of Air Force modernization priorities: F-35A fighters, KC-46A tankers, B-21 bombers, JSTARS, Compass Call, AWACS, and a new trainer aircraft. Not to mention a modernized nuclear force including the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent, B61 gravity bomb, and the Long Range Stand Off weapon. There is simply no way all of these important, yet expensive modernization programs will fit into the Air Force budget as constrained by the Budget Control Act. It will be your task to develop and make the case for a path through this tremendous budget crunch.

“As you do, you will also have to be willing to challenge conventional wisdom and reevaluate how the Air Force is shaped. You will need to take an informed look at the optimal mix of long-range and short-range combat aircraft, manned and unmanned systems, ISR, space, and cyber capabilities, and key joint enablers. And you must also closely examine how the Air Force provides ready and capable forces to our combatant commanders.

“Furthermore, as this committee has emphasized over the last two years, no matter how many dollars we spend, we won't be able to provide our Airmen the equipment they need with a lethargic defense acquisition system that takes too long and costs too much. Like all the services, the Air Force has a troubled history with major acquisition programs. That’s why you can expect this committee will exercise close and rigorous oversight of Air Force acquisition, particularly on programs like the B-21 bomber. Today I will be keenly interested in hearing how you will streamline and accelerate Air Force acquisitions, deliver needed capabilities on time and at cost, and meet our commitments to both our warfighters and American taxpayers.

“Finally, this committee honors the service and sacrifice of the outstanding men and women of the United States Air Force. At the same time, we recognize that high operational tempo, manning shortfalls, reduced readiness, and lucrative opportunities outside the Air Force continue to drive some of our best and brightest to leave the service. This is only exacerbating problems such as the 800-fighter-pilot shortfall you noted in your response to advance policy questions. I am interested in hearing your plans on how to mitigate such manpower shortfalls, improve the quality of life and quality of service of all Airmen, and incentivize them to remain in the service of their nation.

“Dr. Wilson, we look forward to hearing your testimony on how you intend to lead the Air Force to a stronger future.”

###