Chuck Hagel
Statement Before the Senate Armed Services Committee
January 31, 2013

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Distinguished Members of the Committee. I am honored to come before you today as the President's nominee to be Secretary of Defense.

I want to thank my friends Sam Nunn and John Warner for their support, encouragement, and friendship over many years. These two distinguished Americans represent what's best about American public service and responsible bipartisanship. They have embodied both in their careers and are models for each of us.

To my family, friends, and fellow veterans who are here this morning – and those who are not – thank you. A life is only as good as the family and friends you have and the people you surround yourself with.

I also want to thank my friend Leon Panetta for his tremendous service to our country over so many years. If I'm given the privilege of succeeding him, it will be a high honor.

Finally, I want to thank President Obama for his confidence and trust in me. I am humbled by the opportunity and possibility he has given me to serve our country once again.

I fully recognize the immense responsibilities of the Secretary of Defense. I assured the President that if I am confirmed by the United States Senate, I will always do my best for our nation and for the men and women – and their families –

who are called on to make the enormous sacrifices of military service. Their safety, success, and welfare will always be at the forefront of the decisions I make.

I also assured the President that I would always provide him with my most honest and informed advice. I make that same commitment to this Committee and to the Congress. If confirmed, I will reach out to the members of this Committee for advice and collaboration. It will be a partnership, because the national security challenges America faces require it.

Our nation's security is the highest priority of our leaders and our government. We cannot allow the work of confronting the great threats we face today to be held hostage to partisanship on either side of the aisle, or by differences between the bodies represented in Articles I and II of our Constitution. The stakes are too high. Men and women of all political philosophies and parties fight and die for our country. As this Committee knows so well, protecting our national security or committing a nation to war can never become political litmus tests. I know Secretary Panetta has put a strong emphasis on reaching out to the Congress. I, like Leon, come from the Congress, and respect and understand this institution's indispensable role in setting policy and helping govern our country.

We are all products of the forces that shape us. For me, there has been nothing more important in my life – or a more defining influence on my life – than my family. Whether it was helping my mother raise four boys after my father – a World War II veteran – died suddenly at age 39 on Christmas Day, or serving side by side my brother Tom in Vietnam, or the wonderful miracle of my wife Lilibet and me being blessed with two beautiful children. That is who I am. We each bring to our responsibilities "frames of reference" formed by our life's

experiences. They help instruct our judgments. We build out from those personal foundations by continually informing ourselves, listening, and learning.

Like each of you, I have a record. A record I am proud of, not because of any accomplishments I may have achieved, or an absence of mistakes, but rather because I've tried to build that record by living my life and fulfilling my responsibilities as honestly as I knew how and with hard work. Under-pinning everything I've done in my life was the belief that we must always be striving to make our nation a better and more secure place for all of our people.

During the twelve years I had the privilege of serving the people of Nebraska in the United States Senate, I cast over 3,000 votes and hundreds of Committee votes. I've also given hundreds of interviews and speeches, and written a book. So, as you all know, I am on the record on many issues.

But no one individual vote, quote, or statement defines me, my beliefs, or my record. My overall worldview has never changed: that America has and must maintain the strongest military in the world; that we must lead the international community to confront threats and challenges together; and that we must use all tools of American power to protect our citizens and our interests. I believe, and always have, that America must engage – not retreat – in the world. My record is consistent on these points.

It's clear that we are living at a defining time. Our nation is emerging from over a decade of war. We have brought our men and women in uniform home from Iraq, and have started to bring them home from Afghanistan.

That does not mean the threats we face and will continue to face are any less dangerous or complicated. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Recent events in Mali and Algeria remind us of this reality. Twenty first century complexities,

technologies, economies, and threats are bringing the seven billion global citizens closer together. And as our planet adds another two billion people over the next 25 years, the dangers, complications, and human demands will not be lessened, but rather heightened.

Despite these challenges, I believe we also have historic opportunities to help build a safer, more prosperous, more secure, more hopeful and just world than at maybe any time in history. Yes, the curse of intolerance, hatred, and danger exists around the world, and we must continue to be clear-eyed about this danger – and we will be. We will not hesitate to use the full force of the United States military in defense of our security. But we must also be smart, and more importantly wise, in how we employ all of our nation's great power.

America's continued leadership and strength at home and abroad will be critically important for our country and the world. While we will not hesitate to act unilaterally when necessary, it is essential that we work closely with our allies and partners to enhance America's influence and security – as well as global security. If confirmed, I will continue to build on the efforts of this administration and of former Secretary Gates, Secretary Panetta, and Secretary Clinton to strengthen our alliances and partnerships around the world. I will also look forward to working with my former Senate colleague and friend, John Kerry, in this effort.

As I told the President, I am committed to his positions on all issues of national security, specifically decisions that the Department of Defense is in the process of implementing. This includes the Defense Strategic Guidance the President outlined in January 2012. Allow me to briefly address a few of those specific issues now.

First, we have a plan in place to transition out of Afghanistan, continue bringing our troops home, and end the war there – which has been the longest war in America's history. As you know, discussions are ongoing about what the U.S. presence in Afghanistan will look like after 2014. The President has made clear – and I agree – that there should be only two functions for U.S. troops that remain in Afghanistan after 2014: counterterrorism – particularly to target al Qaeda and its affiliates, and training and advising Afghan forces. It's time we forge a new partnership with Afghanistan, with its government and, importantly, with its people.

Second, as Secretary of Defense I will ensure we stay vigilant and keep up the pressure on terrorist organizations as they try to expand their affiliates around the world, in places like Yemen, Somalia, and North Africa. At the Pentagon, that means continuing to invest in and build the tools to assist in that fight, such as special operations forces and new intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance technologies. And it will mean working hand-in-hand with our partners across the national security and intelligence communities, to confront these and other threats, especially the emerging threat of cyber warfare.

Third, as I have made clear, I am fully committed to the President's goal of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and – as I've said in the past – all options must be on the table to achieve that goal. My policy is one of prevention, and not one of containment – and the President has made clear that is the policy of our government. As Secretary of Defense, I will make sure the Department is prepared for any contingency. I will ensure our friend and ally Israel maintains its Qualitative Military Edge in the region and will continue to support systems like Iron Dome, which is today saving Israeli lives from terrorist rocket attacks.

Fourth, while we pursue the reductions in our deployed stockpiles and launchers consistent with the New START Treaty, I am committed to maintaining a modern, strong, safe, ready, and effective nuclear arsenal. America's nuclear deterrent over the last 65 years has played a central role in ensuring global security and the avoidance of a World War III. I am committed to modernizing our nuclear arsenal.

As we emerge from this decade of war, we also must broaden our nation's focus overseas as we look at future threats and challenges. As this Committee knows, that's why DoD is rebalancing its resources towards the Asia-Pacific region. We are in the process of modernizing our defense posture across the entire region to defend and deepen our partnerships with traditional allies, especially Japan, South Korea, and Australia; to continue to deter and defend against provocations from states like North Korea, as well as non-state actors; and to expand our networks of security cooperation throughout the region to combat terrorism, counter proliferation, provide disaster relief, fight piracy, and ensure maritime security.

I will continue this rebalancing, even as we continue to work closely with our longtime NATO allies and friends, and with allies and partners in other regions. At the same time, we will continue to focus on challenges in the Middle East and North Africa, where we have clear national interests. Rather, it is a recognition that the United States has been and always will be a Pacific power, and the Asia-Pacific is an increasingly vital part of the globe for America's security and economy. That's why we must become even more engaged in the region over the coming years.

Doing all of this and much more will require smart and strategic budget decisions. I have made it clear I share Leon Panetta's and our service chiefs' serious concerns about the impact sequestration would have on our armed forces. And as someone

who has run businesses, I know the uncertainty and turbulence of the current budget climate makes it much more difficult to manage the Pentagon's resources. If confirmed, I am committed to effectively and efficiently using every single taxpayer dollar; to maintaining the strongest military in the world; and to working with Congress to ensure the Department has the resources it needs – and that the disposition of those resources is accountable.

Even as we deal with difficult budget decisions, I will never break America's commitment to our troops, our veterans, and our military families. We will continue to invest in the well-being of our all-volunteer force. And, working with the VA and other institutions, we will make sure our troops and their families get the health care, job opportunities, and education they have earned and deserve – just as I did when I co-authored the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill with Senators Jim Webb, John Warner, and Frank Lautenberg. This includes focusing on the mental health of our fighting force, because no one who volunteers to fight and die for our country should feel like they have nowhere to turn.

In my twelve years in the Senate, my one guiding principle on every national security decision I made and every vote I cast was always this: Is our policy worthy of our troops and their families and the sacrifices we ask them to make? That same question will guide me if I am confirmed as Secretary of Defense. Our men and women in uniform and their families must never doubt that their leaders' first priority is them. I believe my record of leadership on veterans issues over the years – going back to my service in the Veterans Administration under President Reagan – demonstrates my rock-solid commitment to our veterans and their families.

We must always take care of our people. That's why I will work to ensure that everyone who volunteers to fight for this country has the same rights and opportunities. As I've discussed with many of you in our meetings, I am fully committed to implementing the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and doing everything possible under current law to provide equal benefits to the families of all our service members. I will work with the service chiefs as we officially open combat positions to women, a decision that I strongly support. And I will continue the important work that Leon Panetta has done to combat sexual assault in the military. Maintaining the health and well-being of those who serve is critical to maintaining a strong and capable military, because an institution's people must always come first.

As we look ahead to the coming years, we have an extraordinary opportunity now to define what's next for America's military and our country. It is incumbent upon all of us to make decisions that will ensure our nation is prepared to confront any threat we may face, protect our citizens, and remain the greatest force for good in the world.

If confirmed as Secretary of Defense, it will be my great honor – working with the President, this Committee, the Congress, and our military – to ensure our policies are worthy of the service and sacrifice of America's finest men and women. Thank you. I look forward to your questions.