NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

STATEMENT OF

THE HONORABLE MICHAEL CADENAZZI
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR FOR INDUSTRIAL BASE POLICY

ON THE DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE AND
THE SKILLED TRADES WORKFORCE

BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 4, 2026

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the men and women of America's Defense Industrial Base (DIB) and our skilled trades workforce. I appreciate this Committee treating the skilled trades with the seriousness they deserve.

Let me be clear about what we face. The threats to this country are real. For the first time in a long time, the primary threat comes from a competitor who can outbuild us in many of the most important weapons of modern war. We must meet that challenge by fixing what is broken at home. That begins with rebuilding the DIB. This will require workers and robust supply chains, spanning shop floors and shipyards. This undertaking requires patience, commitment, and a willingness to invest in something greater than any one of us here today: the future generation of Americans.

There are no overnight solutions. Our response will require bipartisan commitment, resources and the support of the American people. Prior generations met the challenge, but at no small cost. And the cost grows each day we delay our response. That is my job now: to make sure we have the industrial base to meet that challenge again.

Rebuilding and scaling the DIB requires people. These are the skilled tradespeople: the engineers, the pipefitters, the welders, all those who make the world's finest weapons and systems for our warfighters. Decades of government policy and societal pressure have driven millions of talented young Americans towards degrees which haven't delivered the benefits they were promised and have left defense manufacturers with few skilled workers waiting in the wings. There are as many as 400,000 unfilled skilled trades jobs in the DIB today, and that number could grow to 2.5 million by 2030.

The efforts my organization manages are made possible by the men and women of our DIB – whom I call the Wizards behind the Warriors. Strengthening and expanding our workforce, especially in skilled trades, is both our greatest obstacle and our greatest opportunity to ensure our nation's security. We need to reach Americans in their living rooms and classrooms, break

the stigma of blue-collar work, and drive a massive influx of passionate, capable people into these programs.

That's why the Department launched the Build Freedom initiative this July. Build Freedom will act as a national hiring, training, and awareness campaign to drive America's resurgence in domestic defense manufacturing. Build Freedom aligns more than 70 Industrial Base Analysis & Sustainment (IBAS) workforce projects under one campaign, ensuring that federally funded workforce opportunities reach the Americans they were designed to serve. Each one of these workforce programs is handcrafted and targeted to fill specific needs in the industrial base.

We've now rolled out Build Freedom in three states, with plans to expand the program nationwide. This national awareness will drive individuals to our new Buildfreedom.US website, a one-stop shop where their interest can be converted into scholarships, training, credentials, and job opportunities. I was proud to launch Build Freedom with Mike Rowe and the mikeroweWORKS Foundation, with an initial $10 million grant that will fund more than 9,000 scholarships. At the center of this effort are Registered Apprenticeships—a proven, earn-while-you-learn model that puts people on a debt-free path to a skilled trade.

Our goal with Build Freedom is to send a clear, compelling message to the American public: there are hundreds of thousands of good-paying, AI-proof jobs available today across the DIB and in other skilled trades. These jobs will allow young men and women to serve their country, build something worthwhile, and enjoy a better quality of life for them and their families.

The Department is taking aggressive action across our workforce portfolios. These programs range across all fifty states and down to the K-12 level, where last year we reached over 800,000 students wondering about what paths to take after graduation. In fiscal year 2026 alone, my office's IBAS program invested $340 million in workforce programs. Our training programs produced over 22,000 skilled trades and technician workers for the DIB in the past year. Some of these programs include:

- The New England Submarine Shipbuilding Partnership (SENEDIA) has trained nearly 11,000 total students in skilled trade jobs to support the submarine industry. SENEDIA can train 4,000 students per year and is building towards training up to 6,500 per year.

- The Accelerated Training in Defense Manufacturing (ATDM) program in Danville, Virginia has enrolled over 2,000 students from 47 states, Puerto Rico, and Guam to become qualified, skilled technicians in welding, CNC machining, and additive manufacturing. This year's graduates boast an over 80% job placement rate.

- The Talent Pipeline Program (TPP) provides hiring, onboarding, and retention support for over 600 small- to mid-sized DIB suppliers around the country. My office is expanding this program to support sectors throughout the broader DIB, including the critical materials, munitions, batteries, and microelectronics workforces.

There is also a larger Department ecosystem engaged in building this critical workforce. For example, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness recently established the Patriot Pipeline initiative, which provides transition pathways, including into the skilled trades for veterans and their spouses. Additionally, earlier this summer, the Department of Labor announced the award of nearly $162 million in "Pay-for-Performance" funding to expand Registered Apprenticeship in occupations critical for the Administration's reindustrialization agenda, including $40 million specifically to train Americans for jobs in the Shipbuilding and Defense Industrial Base industry. This effort builds on the momentum of the American Manufacturing Apprenticeship Incentive Fund, a $35.8 million initiative aimed at expanding Registered Apprenticeship programs in advanced manufacturing occupations across the country.

In addition, there are many Service, component, and local area workforce development initiatives (funded by other Federal Agencies) underway. Time does not permit me to list more than a few here. For example:

- The United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP) is a joint Department of War - Department of Labor effort which allows active-duty service members who are logging on-the-job training hours to earn a Department of Labor-issued Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship.

- The Department's Manufacturing Innovation Institutes partner with technical schools and community colleges to provide certifications, upskilling, and professional development in advanced manufacturing.

- The Hampton Roads Workforce Council, funded through the Department of Labor, has placed more than 12,000 transitioning service members, veterans, and spouses into the regional maritime industrial base.

The skilled trades have been in decline in this country for too long. If we are to deter conflict, we have no other option other than to overcome these obstacles and invest heavily in the men and women of America. Rebuilding the Arsenal of Freedom is a crucial opportunity to bring back good-paying jobs to communities devastated by factory closures and outsourcing. Under this Administration, we are scaling the workforce that will secure this nation for decades to come.

The Build Freedom campaign brings new energy and focus to the Department's commitment to secure the workforce of the future. The enthusiasm and support we have seen for this initiative has been remarkable. We expect these initiatives to deliver measurable, on-the-ground results across our 70 workforce programs nationwide—from Hawaii to Virginia, and the Gulf Coast to Michigan.

This is a fight we can and will win.

Thank you for everything this committee does to help resource these key workforce programs. I look forward to working with you all to maintain this momentum and ensure our workforce can meet this moment.