

COLLINS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Mattis, I recently received a truly alarming briefing about North Korea. I was therefore very concerned about the news last week that you mentioned in passing that the new government in South Korea will apparently be delaying the implementation of the THAAD missile defense system. How important is this missile defense system for defending both South Korean and American service members, as well as the 300,000 Americans living in Seoul?

MATTIS: Senator Collins, the THAAD system is a top-line, superb system. I believe it is critical. It was a combined decision, although it was taken by a previous administration. South Korea went through a bit of political turmoil. I believe there were campaign statements made that have impacted, but at the same time we have not been asked to remove the system or its two launchers. We have several other launchers in country, in theater, right now, or in Korea, and they have not been deployed. There are inside Korean government concerns. They do not have concerns with us, and they made that very clear to our combined commander on the ground, General Brooks. However, they do have some questions about whether their environmental law was followed correctly, and so they want to get the environmental impact statement done. But this is an internal administration, their body politic, having an issue. It is not a military to military issue. And I think we are going to find a way forward, as you know the President of South Korea is visiting here shortly, and we are trying to resolve this. Just so we have clarity on the way ahead.

COLLINS: Thank you, I certainly hope that it will be resolved soon. I want to associate myself with your imploring Congress to avoid continuing resolutions, do away with sequestration, and have more realistic budget caps. I believe that is absolutely essential to your ability to restore readiness to the level that is needed. In your five priorities, you mentioned reforming how the department does business. GAO has been critical of the department for proceeding with weapon systems before most of the design work is completed. And GAO points out that when the department proceeds before the design work is relatively stable that it almost inevitably leads to cost overruns and other difficulties. Is that the kind of reform that you are considering as you look at the way that the department does business?

MATTIS: There is a host of reforms ma'am. That is one of them. For example, we may say that the technological maturity rate of something is simply not sufficient to gamble on it maturing as we build an aircraft carrier for example. At the same time, we have to take some risks because we don't want to turn something out that takes a year, two years, three years and find it's already been outdated because we tried to stop the clock on technological advances while it's going on. So it's a balancing act, but we have to do a better job, I think, of calculating the risk and make certain we're not just gambling. There is a difference between taking a risk and taking a gamble. And there are other reforms as well.

COLLINS: And finally, I just want to follow up on Senator Alexander's comments about the importance of the European Reassurance Initiative. Montenegro became the 29th member of the NATO alliance earlier this month. The Maine National Guard has a longtime state partnership with Montenegro and actually helped them get ready for accession into NATO, something I am very proud of. And yet, the Russian reaction was very hostile and very provocative. Not only have they tried to interfere with Montenegro's elections, but the Russians put out a statement

saying, that in light of the hostile course chosen by the Montenegrin authorities, the Russian side reserves the right to take retaliatory measures. That's truly provocative language, and I just want to encourage you to keep sending the right signals to our NATO allies, and I think the funding in the budget request for the European Reassurance Initiative, as well as continuing these state partnership programs, is absolutely vital. And if you have time in 23 seconds to comment, that would great.

MATTIS: I endorse everything you said. I think it points to, Senator, that NATO is growing. If anyone wondered about NATO's relevance in this age, in the free market of nation's ideas they see this as a value to join NATO. And I think that says a lot about why if we didn't have NATO today we would create it, because it's fit for its time.

###