Esper Nominated as Defense Secretary, Spencer Steps Into Acting Role



Acting Defense Secretary Richard V. Spencer walks into his office at the Pentagon on July 15 following the announcement of the nomination of Army Secretary Mark T. Esper to be defense secretary. Esper had served as acting defense secretary since June 24. U.S. Army/Sgt. Amber I. Smith

WASHINGTON — Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer has become acting defense secretary, as the Senate has received the packet nominating Mark T. Esper to be the confirmed secretary of defense.

Eric Chewning, the chief of staff to the defense secretary, said the transition from Esper to Spencer went smoothly. "There is only one secretary of defense, and that person is fully capable of defending the country and protecting the homeland," Chewning said.

> *LIVE: @SecArmy Dr. Mark T. Esper testifies at a #SASC hearing for his nomination to be secretary of defense. https://t.co/uS3lLN7CJJ*
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> *— Department of War □□ (@DeptofWar) July 16, 2019*

Esper was named acting defense secretary when Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick M.

Shanahan stepped down from the position last month. President Trump nominated Esper for the position — a move that requires Senate confirmation. By law, Esper cannot continue to serve as acting secretary while he is under consideration for the permanent job. He reverts to his position as secretary of the Army.

The principals involved in this program met to discuss how the transition would happen. This included Esper, Spencer, David L. Norquist, the undersecretary of defense who continues to perform the duties of the deputy defense secretary, Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Chewning.

When Spencer became acting secretary, he assumed the full authority and responsibility of the secretary of defense.

To ensure continuity, the team supporting the Office of the Secretary of Defense remains in place.

"We've been working closely with Senate leadership and the Senate Armed Services Committee, and we thank them for their efforts and commitments to swiftly consider top DoD leadership," Chewning said.

DoD does

not assume Esper’s confirmation, and Chewning was quick to point out that it is the Senate’s prerogative to take as long as it believes is necessary to examine and confirm the nominee. “Secretary Spencer is prepared to remain in the role until there is a Senate-confirmed secretary of defense,” he said.

If Esper is confirmed by the Senate, then Norquist will be formally nominated to be the deputy defense secretary. In deference to the Senate, he will step out of his role of performing the duties of the deputy secretary of defense while that nomination is pending. If this happens, Spencer will then perform the duties of the deputy secretary.