

# Pete Hegseth sworn in as US defence secretary after tie-breaking vote

25 January 2025 **Ana Faguy and Ben Hatton**  
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Watch: Moment VP Vance casts tie-breaking vote to confirm Hegseth

Pete Hegseth has been sworn in as US defence secretary after the Senate confirmed his nomination by the smallest possible margin.

Vice-President JD Vance cast the tie-breaking vote in Hegseth's favour on Friday night, after three Republican senators - including former Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell - voted against him.

During Hegseth's confirmation hearing, he faced multiple questions about [an allegation of sexual assault](#), which he has denied, as well as infidelity and drinking.

As President Trump's new defence secretary, the former combat veteran and one-time Fox News television host will oversee a department of some three million employees and a \$849bn (£695bn) budget.

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Four Republicans would have needed to join the 47 Democratic and independent senators who voted against Hegseth for his nomination to be defeated.

McConnell's surprise vote left the Senate in a 50-50 deadlock before Vance arrived to cast the tie-breaker.

Explaining his vote, McConnell issued a bruising statement saying Hegseth was unprepared to lead a vast department of three million people while managing a huge budget and co-ordinating with global allies.

The role of defence secretary is "a daily test with staggering consequences for the security of the American people", McConnell said. "Mr. Hegseth has failed, as yet, to demonstrate that he will pass this test."

In confirming Hegseth, Vance becomes only the second vice-president in US history to break a tie to confirm a cabinet nominee. Trump's previous vice-president, Mike Pence, became the first when he cast the deciding vote to confirm Betsy DeVos as education secretary in 2017.

At his swearing in ceremony on Saturday, Hegseth joked that his kids said he had "won in overtime", and he thanked the vice president for casting the deciding vote.

Vance thanked President Trump for nominating someone "respected by the war fighters".

"I also want to say thank you to my Senate colleagues. It turns out we couldn't spare one," Vance added.

During the confirmation hearing earlier this month, Hegseth said: "Warfighting, lethality, meritocracy, standards, and readiness. That's it. That is my job."

Democratic senators questioned the military veteran about his qualifications to lead one of the nation's largest agencies. But many Republicans, including Trump, have maintained their support for Hegseth.

Mississippi Senator Roger Wicker, who is chair of the Senate's armed services committee, defended Hegseth during the hearing and voted in favour of his confirmation.

He said: "Pete Hegseth is ready to put forward the program of President Donald Trump, and he has satisfied me that he will be a change agent in the Department of Defense and that he's the person we need."

"He's the president's choice, and we owe it to this commander in chief to put him in this position, unless he's not qualified for the office."

Hegseth, 44, a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, later worked at Fox. He has little of the traditional experience expected for a national security cabinet position - a role typically filled by senior civil servants, experienced politicians, generals and high-level executives.

Hegseth also was asked during the hearing, particularly by female senators, about his previous comments that women should not serve in combat roles. He responded that his concern was not women serving in combat, but in maintaining a certain

standard in the US military.

His confirmation process was overshadowed by allegations of misconduct. He was accused of sexually assaulting an unnamed woman in 2017 in a Monterey, California, hotel room. He has denied the accusation repeatedly.

The newly confirmed defence secretary also faced allegations of excessive drinking, including at work events, and infidelity in his previous two marriages.

"I am not a perfect person, but redemption is real," he said during the hearing.

Earlier this week, he was accused of alcohol and spousal abuse in a sworn affidavit given to a congressional committee by his former sister-in-law. Hegseth's lawyer denied the allegations.

For Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski, a Republican who voted against confirmation on Friday, past allegations helped sway their vote.

In a statement released days before the vote, she said his past behaviour, "demonstrates a lack of judgment that is unbecoming of someone who would lead our armed forces".

Meanwhile, Maine Senator Susan Collins, another Republican who voted against Hegseth, said she was "concerned that he does not have the experience and perspective necessary to succeed in the job".

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