

ASSISTANT SECRETARY-DESIGNATE DR. CAROLYN HUNTOON
CONFIRMATION TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Senator Levin and other Members of the Committee. It is a privilege to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management. I am honored by the President's and Secretary Richardson's confidence in me and would like to thank them both for their support. If confirmed, I look forward to serving at the Department of Energy under Secretary Richardson's able leadership and working with the Members of this Committee.

I also would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and your staff, for moving forward expeditiously with my nomination. I have appreciated the opportunity to meet with some of you and your staff to discuss the issues facing this enormously challenging program and I look forward to meeting with other Members of the Committee.

Dealing with the environmental legacy of the Cold War is one of the most difficult tasks facing this country. The formidable job of cleaning up thousands of tons of nuclear waste is one of the most technically and managerially complex problems in this country. Like the space program, much of this territory is uncharted and demands creative solutions to unique problems.

I see my job as leading the Department's environmental management program in a way that enjoys the confidence of the Congress, the states, the Tribes, and our citizens. The principles that will guide me are straightforward:

First, we must have clear goals. This is a basic tenet of good management and the Government Performance and Results Act enacted by Congress. I fully support the Department's goals of:

- addressing urgent risks first;
- ensuring that we conduct our work in a manner that is protective of our workers, the public and the environment;
- reducing program costs;
- maintaining compliance; and
- completing as much cleanup as possible by 2006.

Second, to achieve these goals, we must implement good project management. With more than 350 projects of the size, scope, and complexity of those facing the Environmental Management program, it is critical that we clearly define -- from the outset -- what we are trying to accomplish, when and how we are going to accomplish it, and at what cost. In addition, we need a process that inculcates safety into daily operations and can reduce the inevitable uncertainties and risks that are factors in all programs and projects. We will need to:

- establish solid cost and schedule project baselines that maintain safety;
- implement the best project management practices of the public and private sectors;
- institute systems to allow early detection of problems and timely corrective action;
- make effective use of independent reviews and project control boards, ensuring strong follow through on their recommendations;
- provide strong incentives for good performance and hold ourselves and our contractors accountable for that performance.

In short, we need to use practices that ensure we are getting the most for the taxpayers=dollar. As I learned at NASA, these mechanisms are essential for reducing costs, improving operational and safety performance, and maintaining accountability.

But the best processes and procedures are not enough to get the job done. We must have effective project managers in both our Federal and contractor staff. We must have a work environment that encourages employees to surface issues, concerns, and ideas for doing business more effectively and know that their issues and ideas will get a fair hearing. We need closer coordination between headquarters and the field. I know from having managed a field center and from working in Washington, the importance of both perspectives for the program. Therefore, one of my priorities, if confirmed, will be to gain a better first-hand understanding of the sites and establish a good working relationship with them.

Third, we need to bring the best scientific and technological information and expertise to bear to solve our problems. This science and technology must be focused on the major obstacles to achieving progress. It is clear that in several areas, such as mixed- and high-level radioactive waste, we will need technological breakthroughs in order to get the job done, to improve system productivity, and to reduce the costs of many of the projects. We must use the considerable technological talent and resources of the Department and its laboratories in partnership with those of the private sector to better link research with on-the-ground@cleanup needs.

Finally, we must ensure that the Congress, the local communities, the Tribes, the states, and interested institutions, individuals, and citizen groups are involved in the process from beginning to end. We need open lines of communication to ensure that we have a common understanding of issues as they arise and the hard choices that may need to be made. This is important for building public confidence that the Department will fulfill its responsibilities at all its sites. We need to move promptly to work with workers and communities at all our sites to help ensure smooth transitions as missions change. This is particularly important for closing sites such as Rocky Flats, Fernald and Mound. If confirmed, one of my priorities will be to meet with stakeholders regularly to ensure that we receive their input as we grapple with the tough issues facing the program.

I fully recognize the difficulty of the many challenges ahead if I am confirmed. But I think I bring a number of important skills to the job.

-- As Director of the Johnson Space Center, I managed an organization with similarities to the Environmental Management program -- an organization with approximately 15,000 Federal and contractor employees; a large reliance on contractor employees to fulfill its mission; a unique and technically complex program; and an organization that needed good project management skills.

-- As a scientist and a manager in a multi-discipline program, I know first hand the value of independent technical reviews and the importance of including all of the key parties to a decision in a way that is open, honest and fair.

-- As someone who has built and managed a laboratory from the ground up, I know the importance of integrating technology into the program mission to solve problems.

-- As a manager of both international and domestic programs, I fully appreciate how to negotiate and work cooperatively with other entities to achieve acceptable outcomes for all involved.

-- As someone who has been in government for thirty years, I have learned not only how to manage in times of growing budgets, but more importantly, how to manage as budgets tighten.

-- As someone responsible for the safety of our astronauts in space, I understand how imperative it is to create and maintain a culture that views safety of the workers and the public as its first and foremost mission.

B As a manager of biomedical and life sciences, I fully appreciate the hazards posed by chemicals as well as the need to determine the risk they pose and the means to mitigate those risks.

I believe the Department can effectively address its cleanup responsibilities. My commitment to you, if confirmed, is to evaluate what needs to be done and to work to find more effective ways to do it. If confirmed, with your help Mr. Chairman, and the help of the Members of this Committee, I believe we can make significant progress.

Mr. Chairman and other Members of the Committee, let me say again, it is an honor to be nominated for this position and to be considered by the Members of this Committee. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.