

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and members of the Committee. I am honored to be President Trump's nominee for the Assistant Secretary of War for Nuclear Deterrence & Chemical & Biological Defense Policy and Programs. I want to thank the President and Secretary Hegseth for their **trust and confidence**. I **strongly support** their commitment to **preserve peace through strength**, by **increasing the lethality** of our armed forces and **re-establishing deterrence**.

CLEARED
For Open Publication

Oct 16, 2025

Department of Defense
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

If confirmed, I intend to pursue 4 priorities to achieve their objectives:

- 1. Maintain and sustain the current nuclear Triad,**
- 2. Modernize our nuclear command and control.**
- 3. Accelerate the development and deployment of the Sentinel ICBM, B-21 bomber, Columbia class submarine, and other critical nuclear deterrent capabilities, as well as supporting modernization of NNSA's nuclear enterprise.**
- 4. Deploy credible capabilities to deter adversary biological weapons use.**

I want to acknowledge my family, Dr. Ann Vrtis, **an accomplished anesthesiologist, veteran and retired Air Force colonel** and my two daughters, one who is currently serving in the US Army. My daughters are here today in spirit.

I also want to acknowledge the memory of my parents who survived World War II's devastation. My mother, **an American teenager** was held in a Nazi detention camp. She met my father, a Czech national in a forced labor factory. After the war, my mother returned to America. My father escaped in 1949 and worked

in refugee camps until my mom could raise the money for his trip over. He became an American citizen in 1952.

In 1975, at the end of the Vietnam War and height of the Cold War, I entered the Air Force Academy intent on becoming a flight surgeon. I earned the opportunity to attend medical school because of an act by Congress, I attended the War Department's medical school the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

My flight surgeon career began with the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field. In 1984, the Wing was still grappling with the failed Desert One mission and the implications of the Holloway Commission Report. The Cold War was still "hot", and the Wing's focus was how to fly, fight and win in a CBRN environment. That experience influenced my pursuit of training in tropical diseases, military preventive medicine and a career supporting special operations, counterterrorism and counterproliferation.

In 1990, I was assigned to an Air Force Special Tactics Squadron at Fort Bragg. My first day was memorable as Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. I was part of a small team ordered to the Pentagon to support **planning efforts to deter and defeat any use of WMD by Iraq**. From Bragg, I was assigned to OSD's first counterproliferation policy office, serving both as a United Nations weapons inspector in Iraq and the OSD representative to the Biological Weapons Convention in Geneva. From the Pentagon, I served in the CIA's counterproliferation division. Then

taught future military leaders WMD and homeland security policy at the National War College until the 911 attacks. While serving on the White House Homeland Security Council, I co-authored President Bush's Biodefense Policy and **deployed 4 times** to Iraq in support of the counter WMD mission.

After retiring from military service in 2005, Senator Burr hired me as his staff director of the Senate HELP bioterrorism subcommittee and later the deputy staff director of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

During President Trump's first term, I had the privilege of being confirmed as HHS' Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response. In that role, I led the medical responses to hurricanes HARVEY, IRMA and MARIA, planned for the possible use of nuclear weapons by North Korea, led the HHS COVID-19 pandemic response that resulted in accelerated vaccine development and deployment in OPERATION WARP SPEED.

I accepted this nomination because I believe we are at another critical time in our nation's history. The

Congressionally mandated Strategic Posture Commission noted that for the first time, we confront two peer nuclear adversaries who are intent on replacing the US-led international order.

The risk of simultaneous wars with multiple adversaries each possessing advanced conventional, space, cyber, nuclear and chem-bio capabilities challenge our current deterrent posture requiring adjustments in our nuclear forces, including potentially new or different capabilities. The priorities of sustaining our current nuclear triad,

accelerating deployment of future capabilities, ensuring effective command and control, modernizing the nuclear enterprise and creating a credible deterrent against biological attacks are **all urgent and vital** for America's future security.

As the Commission noted addressing gaps and identifying opportunities may require additional deterrent capabilities.

My parents' life story continues to inspire me. If confirmed, I shall work tirelessly modernizing our nuclear deterrent and improving our

chem-bio defenses to protect our homeland and the Joint Force from WMD, preserve peace and freedom for our children and **America's posterity**. I look forward to your questions.