

April 7, 2025

Brandon Williams

Nominee to be Under Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Security and Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20500

Congratulations on your nomination to be the Under Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Security and Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). If you are confirmed, you would be responsible for overseeing the NNSA, a semiautonomous agency tasked with the design, production, and maintenance of our nation's nuclear arsenal, ensuring the safety, security, and reliability of our nuclear weapons, including managing more than 65,000 federal and contract employees around the country.¹ I am concerned that you lack the experience and judgment to manage this extraordinarily sensitive and complex mission, jeopardizing our national security.

As Senator Cotton has pointed out, “the Undersecretary of Energy for Nuclear Security, [and] Administrator for Nuclear Security Administration is one of the most consequential jobs in our government, even if it’s not one of the most prominent jobs. It is truly a zero-defect, no-fail environment.”² Congress requires anyone nominated to this position to “have extensive background in national security, organizational management, and appropriate technical fields” and be “well qualified to manage the nuclear weapons, nonproliferation, and materials disposition programs of the National Nuclear Security Administration in a manner that advances and protects the national security of the United States.”³

While you completed training at the Naval Nuclear Power School and served as an officer on a nuclear submarine,⁴ you do not possess any of the “advanced degrees in physics or engineering that typically dot the résumés of weaponeers who end up in senior positions of the nation’s atomic complex.”⁵ Each of the six previous Under Secretaries for Nuclear Security and NNSA Administrators had strong backgrounds in fields related to nuclear technology or national security.⁶

¹ U.S. Department of Energy, “The National Nuclear Security Administration at a Glance,” September 2024, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/NNSA%20AT%20A%20GLANCE_Sept2024.pdf.

² Senate Armed Services Committee, “Nominations,” February 8, 2018, p. 52, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/18-11_02-08-18.pdf.

³ 42 U.S.C. § 7132.

⁴ Congressman Brandon Williams, “About,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20230513064239/https://brandonwilliams.house.gov/about/>.

⁵ The New York Times, “Trump Picks Ex-Congressman to Manage U.S. Nuclear Arsenal,” William J. Broad, January 17, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/17/science/trump-brandon-williams-nuclear-weapons.html>.

⁶ Naval Postgraduate School, “Biography: John A. Gordon General, U.S. Air Force,” March 20, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040320111700/http://www.nps.navy.mil:80/PAO/GuestSpeaker/General%20Gordon%20Bio.pdf>; Senate Committee on Armed Services, “Nominations of Linton F. Brooks to be Deputy Administrator for Defense

Jill Hruby, who held the position in the Biden administration, spent 34 years at Sandia National Laboratories, a key research and development hub for nuclear security.⁷ Lisa Gordon-Hagerty, President Trump’s pick for the role in 2018, “spent more than 30 years dedicated to supporting and enhancing our national security...focused on...nuclear weapons surety and radiological and nuclear emergency response,” having served in various roles at the Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Security Council.⁸

The NNSA has been tasked with overseeing \$200 billion in nuclear modernizations,⁹ including taking on some of the riskiest and most technically challenging programs in the agency's history. These include plans that the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) found have already exceeded initial cost estimates by more than \$2 billion and were collectively behind by almost 10 years.¹⁰

The NNSA has been placed on GAO’s “High Risk List” since 1990 – predating the agency beginning the large and complex undertaking of nuclear modernization—for its “record of inadequate management and oversight of contractors.”¹¹ Even the NNSA’s own internal review “concluded that it wouldn’t be able to meet this workload without changes.”¹² This would be an enormous challenge for anyone appointed to this position, and I am concerned that a leader without strong technical

Nuclear Nonproliferation, National Nuclear Security Administration; Dr. Marvin R. Sambur to be Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition; Dr. William Winkenwerder, Jr., to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs; Everet Beckner to be Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs, National Nuclear Security Administration; and Mary L. Walker to be General Counsel of the Air Force,” October 11, 2001, p. 1565-1569, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg75903/pdf/CHRG-107shrg75903.pdf>; U.S. Department of Energy, “About Us Thomas P. D’Agostino - Under Secretary for Nuclear Security & Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration,” October 20, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111020170138/http://energy.gov/contributors/thomas-p-d-agostino>; National Nuclear Security Administration, “Lieutenant General Frank G. Klotz, USAF (Ret), Confirmed as Energy Department Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and Administrator for the National Nuclear Security Administration,” press release, April 8, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141108092444/http://nnsa.energy.gov/mediaroom/pressreleases/klotz>.

⁷ Purdue University, “Alumna Jill Hruby is the first woman to lead a national security lab,” June 30, 2015, <https://engineering.purdue.edu/Engr/AboutUs/News/Announcements/alumna-jill-hruby-is-the-first-woman-to-lead-a-national-lab>; Syracuse.com, “Is Brandon Williams qualified to oversee the nation’s nuclear arsenal?,” Mark Weiner, February 17, 2025, <https://www.syracuse.com/politics/cny/2025/02/is-brandon-williams-qualified-to-oversee-the-nations-nuclear-arsenal.html>.

⁸ Senate Armed Services Committee, “Advance Policy Questions for Lisa Gordon-Hagerty Nominee for Under Secretary for Nuclear Security, Department of Energy,” February 8, 2018, p. 1, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Gordon-Hagerty%20APQ%20Responses_02-08-18.pdf; Defense News, “Trump announces pick for nuclear weapons czar,” December 12, 2017, Aaron Metha, <https://www.defensenews.com/space/2017/12/12/trump-announces-pick-for-nuclear-weapons-czar/>.

⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “National Nuclear Security Administration: Fully Incorporating Leading Practices for Agency Reform Would Benefit Enhanced Mission Delivery Initiative,” February 6, 2025, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-106675>.

¹⁰ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “National Nuclear Security Administration: Assessments of Major Projects,” August 17, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104402>.

¹¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “National Nuclear Security Administration: Fully Incorporating Leading Practices for Agency Reform Would Benefit Enhanced Mission Delivery Initiative,” February 2025, p. 2, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-106675.pdf>.

¹² U.S. Government Accountability Office, “National Nuclear Security Administration: Fully Incorporating Leading Practices for Agency Reform Would Benefit Enhanced Mission Delivery Initiative,” February 6, 2025, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-106675>.

expertise and extensive experience could put our nuclear deterrent at risk and waste billions of dollars.

My concerns are particularly acute given this administration's recent actions to purge the NNSA of its nuclear expertise. In February, the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and the Trump administration fired and then had to rehire 300 NNSA probationary employees because DOGE failed to understand the NNSA's critical role in managing the nation's nuclear arsenal.¹³ Any official confirmed to head the NNSA must understand the need for and support the preservation of this expertise moving forward, particularly when Congress has already "expressed concerns around work force recruitment and retention issues at the N.N.S.A."¹⁴

I am also concerned about your past business experiences and the extent to which it was intertwined with the Chinese government. In 2013, you co-founded CPLANE.ai, a software cloud computing company, which you personally announced had partnered with PCCW Global, which was partially controlled by the Chinese government through China Unicom.¹⁵ China Unicom controlled 18 percent of PCCW and was banned from U.S. markets in 2022 due to "spying concerns."¹⁶ And notably, when you were provided an opportunity to identify China as the greatest threat to American national security, you instead chose to identify "socialist ideology."¹⁷ The person confirmed to lead the NNSA will have access to our most sensitive national security secrets and must be able to distinguish real threats from partisan theatrics. They must also make it abundantly clear that they would not share information with companies that might support China's own nuclear modernization efforts, further jeopardizing American national security.

Your selection marks a significant shift from a traditionally nonpartisan role that prioritizes technical experience in an organization as complex as the NNSA. To better address my concerns, I request answers to the following questions by April 14, 2025:

1. What is your understanding of the purpose of 42 U.S. Code § 7132?
2. Do you support mass firings at NNSA? If yes, what criteria would you use to reduce the workforce?
3. Are you familiar with NNSA's internal program review and how would you address its recommendations?
 - a. How would you address your technical management experience shortfalls?
4. What is your plan to address NNSA's significant management challenges?

¹³ The New York Times, "Trump Fired, Then Unfired, National Nuclear Security Administration Employees. What Were Their Jobs?" Minho Kim, February 16, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/16/us/politics/trump-national-nuclear-security-administration-employees-firings.html>; The Washington Post, "How DOGE detonated a crisis at a highly sensitive nuclear weapons agency," Evan Halper and Hannah Natanson, , March 2, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/03/02/doge-nuclear-worker-firings-musk-trump/>.

¹⁴ The New York Times, "Trump Fired, Then Unfired, National Nuclear Security Administration Employees. What Were Their Jobs?" Minho Kim, February 16, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/16/us/politics/trump-national-nuclear-security-administration-employees-firings.html>.


¹⁵ The American Prospect, "New York's MAGA Republican from Wall Street," Lee Harris, September 30, 2022, <https://prospect.org/politics/new-yorks-maga-republican-from-wall-street-brandon-williams/>

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

5. Do you think it is concerning for U.S. companies with U.S. user data to partner with companies either partially or completely controlled by the Chinese government?
 - a. Do you currently have any dealings with businesses that have ties to the Chinese government?
 - b. Have you ever conducted business with a foreign national?
 - c. If confirmed, would you commit to not share information with any company that could use this information to undermine U.S. national security interests, including by supporting China's nuclear modernization efforts?

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator