

My name is Pierre Sprey, and I want to thank you for allowing me to come here and speak on a super important matter, super important for Vermonters and for our country. My background is I've spent my entire adult life working on defense matters, some nuclear, more non-nuclear. I started at Grumman Aircraft working on a number of fighters there, and the Navy's small nuclear bomber at the time, the A-6. I went to Washington to work for the Secretary of Defense, and I worked on nuclear accuracy, among other things. I did a study that convinced the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Advisor and the President that what they'd been told about the accuracy of our nuclear weapons was greatly exaggerated. More importantly to me, I had the privilege of serving in a very small team with some very brilliant Air Force officers, and we started the F-16 and the A-10 programs, oversaw the basic design and the basic contracting for the prototypes. I left the Pentagon in 1986 and have been working ever since on military reform matters, but I have not accepted a penny from any defense force since then.

I'd like to pick up on Colonel Barrasso's very dramatic and very convincing presentation. And by the way, please interrupt me at any point because I'm going to give you a little history. If any of it seems a little tangled, please interrupt me right away.

To address this question of the mission of the 158th fighter squadron: you've been told from various sources, political and military, that we're assured that there will be no nuclear mission coming to Burlington. That's an empty statement. I'm going to start with a very simple piece of history from the early sixties, when Colonel Barrasso was in F-89s and F101s, and the mission here was nuclear-armed intercept aggression bombers. Until today, there have been six changes of mission, none of which Vermont had anything to do with or any say in, it was simply imposed. They actually range from the early nuclear intercept mission to a complete change to electronic jamming, and then back to a nuclear attack mission, a nuclear and non-nuclear ground attack, then back to air defense, then back to multipurpose and nuclear ground attack, and the last change has been adding on tactical reconnaissance and close-air support. In none of those were the citizens of Vermont or the legislature consulted, it just happened. So that's six changes of mission from 1960, actually, the last one was in 1994. And you're facing right now perhaps the most momentous mission change that's likely to come to Vermont, so let me give you a little background on that.

The first really important change that affects us today, other than the six changes I talked about, came in 1973 when we got a new Secretary of Defense unusually independent of the weapons industry named James Schlesinger. You need a little background to understand what happened with James Schlesinger and the promises that were made to him and were broken. At that point in 1973, the Air Force had made every single-seat fighter in the Air Force a nuclear bomber, and that had been true since the mid-fifties. What was the reason for that? The reason for that was that during the fifties, the Army and the Navy invented a bizarre concept called "tactical nuclear war," that is the idea that you could fight some small nuclear war in some corner of Europe or Asia and it wouldn't spread anywhere. Why did they do that? Very simply because the Air Force under Truman and Eisenhower had knocked down this huge portion of the budget from nuclear

bombers, and of course the Army and the Navy weren't going to sit still for that, as you can imagine. And so they invented this thing that there would be these short-range nuclear wars, little local deals, and that they would have to develop lots of weapons for that, and of course, collect lots of money for that. The Air Force, of course, again, as you would imagine, didn't just take that sitting down. They came back with the idea that they would turn all their small fighters into short-range nuclear bombers to cut into some of that pie of these small nuclear wars. All that was approved by Eisenhower, unfortunately, and the Air Force ever since then has armed all their first-line, single-seat fighters with nuclear wiring to enable them to become small nuclear bombers.

This is the background where James Schlesinger steps in. Schlesinger was a really staunch advocate of stronger national defense, including stronger nuclear defense. However, being a man of conscience, he wanted to leave a legacy of improved weapons behind in the Pentagon, and he started that right from the day he entered office. With regard to the Air Force, he had two very specific ideas in mind for his legacy. One was that he would introduce new airplanes that were cheaper and much more combat-effective than the airplanes they were replacing, something that went very much against the grain of the Air Force. They always like more expensive airplanes. And, because he was very versed in nuclear matters, he understood the true danger, if not absolute insanity, of arming a single-seat fighter with a nuclear weapon. He understood that deeply because he'd been mostly grounded in nuclear studies for most of his career. And so, he decided, as I said, very early on in his tenure that he would back the two airplanes that I had worked on, the A-10 and the F-16. They would be his legacy to the Air Force. And he would end this insanity of making every single-seat fighter a small nuclear bomber. Being a very able bureaucrat, as well as a brilliant man, he understood that the Air Force sure didn't like that idea, either of the two ideas. They hated the airplanes, they were too cheap, and they were doing missions that the Air Force really didn't want to do, especially the close support mission for the A-10, so it would take an offer they couldn't refuse, let's say. Schlesinger came up with that offer. Very simply, he offered to expand the Air Force by 1500 airplanes using the A-10 and the F-16, 1500 airplanes that they never expected to get. So it's, of course, a huge feather in the cap of the chief of staff of the Air Force to preside over this major expansion of the Air Force. And he said, "One string: you must accept these without putting any nuclear wiring on them." Well the deal was too sweet, and the Air Force chief of staff George Brown basically signed in blood for the deal in 1973, and they went to work on that basis, started producing the airplanes.

All that changed suddenly in 1975, when Schlesinger was axed in the Saturday Night Massacre, organized by the now-famous Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney. So he was out. Within one week, the Air Force chief of staff reneged on his promise and ordered nuclear wiring on the F-16, an enormously consequential decision because it's the reason you got F-16s that had nuclear wiring here in Vermont, and it's the reason that when the first contracts were let to start the F-35 in 1996, the nuclear wiring was baked in. The Air Force never had the slightest doubt that they were going to make this a nuclear-capable airplane.

The next real major turning point that brings us to the current time was in 2018, very recently. Donald Trump and his Secretary of Defense issued a new Nuclear Posture Review. Those are done about every four years to state what the overall nuclear position of the United States is. And that new posture review has some momentous stuff in it that directly affects Vermont. What happened was the whole issue of the small nuclear wars that I just talked about that had been so consequential earlier had been gradually suppressed, and from about the early nineties, small nuclear bombers, that is fighters with nuclear weapons, had no longer been standing nuclear alert, which of course was the most dangerous thing they could do. So this issue hadn't gone away, the nuclear wiring was still on all the fighters, but it was less in the forefront. Trump's 2018 Nuclear Posture Review has brought that roaring back in a way that we've never had before. It now makes the small nuclear war an integral part of the strategic defense of the United States. It says in essence that there's a seamless ladder of nuclear weapons options, from tiny warheads in small regional nuclear wars all the way up to the all-out Holocaust. That's in essence what it says, I mean mind you, this is fifty pages of very tedious reading.

What's the consequence here? The consequence is very simple: that report places the F-35 front and center in the strategic defense of the United States because for the first time ever, it mentions a specific fighter by name. In the postulate review, it's never happened before. And in fact, it brings up the F-35 eight times in this report, very unusual. And of course, there's a reason why. One, of course, is they're trying to justify the unprecedented budget of the F-35. Remember, this is the most expensive weapons program in the history of the world, much more so than, say, the atom bomb as an example, or the nuclear submarine or any of that. Needless to say, the administration's nuclear posture has to justify those budgets and it works hard at doing it. It also puts the F-35 front and center because it will be the first weapons system deployed with this whole new emphasis placed on small nuclear weapons. Remember, Dan Grazier mentioned how dangerous small weapons are, kind of counter-intuitively. The small weapons are much more dangerous than the big ones because it's easier to envision dropping them. That's exactly what the Nuclear Posture Review does, it says, "We can envision the credibility of using small nuclear weapons to settle small regional wars, and we reserve the right to use them first against an enemy who's never used a nuclear weapon against us." It says that very specifically. And if in the judgment of the president we're facing some super-dangerous threat, which may or may not exist, of course, he reserves the right to drop a nuclear weapon, presumably a small one, to supposedly keep all this from going anywhere, and of course, as Colonel Barrasso pointed out, a very small weapon could be the beginning of basically the end of the world.

Bringing that up to date, the F-35s you're getting now, of course, are not nuclear wired. Left to its own devices, inevitably the Air Force will nuclear wire them. No present F-35 has nuclear wiring because the F-35 hadn't even been fully designed yet. We're producing it like crazy and it's like a do-it-yourself kit. We're still building it, we're still designing it, we're sending parts to redo it as we go down the production line. And a very clear part of that is the new modernization program, it used to be called Lock-4, now called C2D2, I won't bore you with the ridiculous acronyms. That is an upgrade program that has about fifty different upgrade items, central among which is nuclear capability, and that will be applied to every one of the current production

F-35s that are like the ones that you are getting, and it will be applied to future new production. So it will continue the Air Force tradition of every single-seater fighter being a short-range nuclear bomber. That's of enormous consequence to Vermont. You are going to be the first state to receive National Guard F-35s, no other states will have them before you. The F-35 is the opening wedge for the small nuclear warhead and the supposed ability to fight a small nuclear war, and that will be coming here. So you, as the Vermont legislature and the people of Vermont, are facing a very, very large issue, which is simply, do you really want to be the lead in all National Guard units in the country to house a small nuclear bomber that could be the very first nuclear weapon dropped on another country that never dropped one on us and set off the nuclear holocaust, and at the same time turn Vermont into a nuclear target for Russians, Chinese, whatever. That's a huge decision, and I hope you take it seriously. It's an enormous consequence, and I'll be very happy to answer any questions now. I'll leave my contact information if you or any of your staff want more details. I know I've laid a lot of history on you here that's probably unfamiliar, but I'm very happy to assist in any of your deliberations in the future, and I can be reached by email and phone.

Speaker 2: Thank you very much, very interesting. Now, one of the reasons it's great to be a legislator is that you learn a lot of things you didn't know before. But I guess one of my questions is, I'm understanding from your testimony that none of the F-35s at the moment are nuclear wired, is that correct?

PS: None here, none anywhere else in the world.

Speaker 2: Right.

PS: Because that hasn't even been designed yet, you see, this is such a work in progress.

Speaker 2: Right, the whole F-35 seems to -

PS: Like we're buying them like crazy, even though they haven't been designed yet.

Speaker 2: Right, but the understanding is they will be? Do we have a timeframe for that, and how do we know that?

PS: We used to have a timeframe. There's been testimony that it would happen in 2024, then there was a general who testified it'll be earlier, 2022, and now because the F-35 has missed almost every single milestone it's ever had, now the Air Force is being cagey, and they've instituted what they call a six-month rolling development. That's the C2D2 acronym I told you about. So they're not committed to any date. God knows when the nuclear capability will come, and as Colonel Barrasso said, you might not even know.

Speaker 2: Right, so I guess that's my second question, which is what control can we actually extend to the federal government in this regard? I mean, let's say we pass this, let's say the

governor supports it, let's say Vermont says no to wanting our F-35s wired for nuclear bombs. How seriously would they take that?

PS: I think it would be of enormous consequence and more than symbolic. I think there'd be real legal consequences, and the reason is because, as you know, the services are full of people that have a conscience, and something as momentous as bringing nuclear weapons to Vermont that have been banned here, somebody for sure would leave. My belief is that the Air Force would not risk such a thing.

Speaker 2: And in your experience, which is substantial, have you ever experienced a state saying no to something that the Department of Defense honored?

PS: Yes, they have. I'd have to look it up, but there have been a number of things - states have refused various things.

Speaker 2: And they have honored that?

PS: Yeah, I mean some of them were really obvious, they couldn't not honor them. But yes, states have not simply rolled over for everything the Pentagon wants or the National Guard Bureau in Washington wants.

Speaker 2: We've just been dealing with (garbled) and, you know, they roll over everything else so it's interesting that they have honored these requests.

Speaker 3: Thank you. It would be interesting to hear about other cases where the Federal Government -

Speaker 4 (Greco?): I can get to those.

Speaker 3: Thanks a lot.

Greco: There aren't any other states that have similar aircraft. Thank you.