

The Honorable Andrew C. Weber

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear,
Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs

Keynote Address

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, would like to express my appreciation to all the elected officials and community leaders in attendance today from the State, the county and city of Pueblo. Your support is invaluable to the success of not only the Pueblo project, but to the entire United States chemical demilitarization program.

I am honored to be here with you today. Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to thank Conrad, Lieutenant Colonel Mike Quinn, and Mr. Bruce Huenefeld for their warm welcome and, more importantly, for their hard work enabling us to start chemical weapons destruction operations here in Pueblo.

We are approaching the 100th anniversary of the start of modern chemical warfare, when the first full-scale deployment of chemical warfare agents occurred at the Second Battle of Ypres in the Spring of 1915. Over the last century, many countries, including the United States, produced and stockpiled large quantities of chemical weapons. These deadly and indiscriminate weapons have been used by conventional armies in times

of war, by rebels in domestic conflicts, and by terrorists against innocent civilians. Which is why, in 1997, the United States ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention. As parties to that treaty, we made a commitment “for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.”¹ The U.S. has undertaken both international and domestic initiatives to honor that commitment. For more than a decade, we have provided significant financial and material aid to a number of countries, large and small, to assist with the safe destruction of their stockpiles. This year has shown tremendous progress toward the goal of eliminating chemical weapons, though we must continue to press for universality of the convention. If you will indulge me, I want to take just a moment to talk about two key international successes we've had this year, first in Libya, and then in Syria.

Following the fall of the Qaddafi regime, Libya's new government discovered nearly two tons of undeclared chemical weapons within its borders. Recognizing the threat of chemical weapons proliferation and use in a country with considerable security challenges, we worked with international partners to provide safety and security upgrades, as well as destruction technology and training for the operators. I am proud to say the last of Libya's chemical munitions was destroyed on January 26 of this year.

¹ Preamble, Chemical Weapons Convention

As the world's gaze turned toward Syria and the danger posed by its chemical weapons, our confidence that they could be safely eliminated was reinforced by our success in Libya. Thanks to the foresight and considerable advance planning of the Department of Defense, the U.S. was able to seize an opportunity and work with the international community to rid the world of Syria's chemical weapons. We provided the equipment needed to ensure safe removal of the weapons from Syria, the destruction technology used to eliminate the most dangerous chemicals in the stockpile, the Motor Vessel CAPE RAY – which provides a secure platform for the conduct of operations, and the operators who performed the destruction mission, most of whom will also operate these EDSes. I am extremely proud to say that, less than a year after Syria acceded to the CWC, on August 18, U.S. operators completed neutralization of the chemicals aboard the CAPE RAY.

Both of these international successes have been the result of remarkable partnerships, exhibiting innovative collaboration between governments, industry, and non-governmental organizations, most particularly with the Nobel-prize winning Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. These efforts reflect our commitment to the spirit of the CWC and the goal of eliminating an entire class of WMD.

These were indeed great successes. But, as a signatory, the U.S. committed not only to the spirit of the Convention, but also to carrying

out every one of its provisions. In addition to the things we agreed not to do – like produce, use, or transfer chemical weapons – we committed to destroying our own stockpiles. Over the past twenty or so years, we have made great progress, completing destruction of 90% of the stockpile by 2012. For nearly two and a half years, we have worked toward the start of operations here at Pueblo. Thanks to your hard work and dedication, we are primed for yet another success story right here in Colorado. Only 10 percent of the originally-declared stockpile remains, and most of it will be destroyed right here.

We've also made commitments to the public, and to one another, to ensure the destruction of these weapons is done safely. Right before coming over here, I had the opportunity to tour the PCAPP EDS site. I will be touring the main facility after we leave here today. I am so impressed with the work you've done, and with the history of this program. We've experienced ups and downs like any other challenging undertaking. But, every day, you make good on the government's commitment to completely eliminate the U.S. chemical weapons stockpile as expeditiously as possible, while ensuring maximum protection of the public, your coworkers, and the environment. You've demonstrated that safety is the number one priority. In fact, I understand yours was the first of our demil facilities to achieve Star Status² during construction, that your injury rates are below national averages, and that

² One of the highest recognitions for safety practices in the country

you've had 857 consecutive days without a lost-time incident. That's over four and a half million safe work hours. Outstanding.

I am confident you will continue this excellent track record as you conduct destruction operations. These facilities are engineered to meet stringent environmental protection standards and are outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment and technology designed to ensure you can conduct the mission efficiently and safely. While the program leadership can ensure the facility is properly engineered and incorporates the very best protection measures, we rely on your hard work, every day, to meet our commitment to safe and efficient destruction of the stockpile. We absolutely cannot meet that commitment without you. The people of Pueblo, the "Home of Heroes," have been good citizen-stewards of the stockpile, as employees of the depot, providing decades of safe and secure storage, and as members of the workforce, helping to build these facilities and soon perform the destruction operations. You have made – and are making – a significant contribution to our national defense, and it is sincerely appreciated.

As President Obama said, “We simply cannot allow the 21st century to be darkened by the worst weapons of the 20th century.” We eliminated Libya’s and Syria’s stockpiles. And right here at home, we are making a push to the finish line working to destroy the remaining 10% of our chemical weapons stockpile. The PCAPP EDS will pass the baton to the

main PCAPP facility, which will then pass it to Blue Grass to take across the line. With every project and each passing day, we get closer to a world without chemical weapons. Thank you for your vital contributions to this important mission.