

Life In Brief

Current Title: Dr.

Born: April 4, 1956

Ethnicity: White/Caucasian

Education:

- Hershey School of Medicine, Pennsylvania State University, MD, 1980

Family:

2 children

Work History:

- Active Duty Reserve Officer, U.S. Army, 1980-1994
- Active Duty Regular Army, U.S. Army, 1994-2008
- Internship in Categorical Medicine, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 1980-1981
- Residency in Internal Medicine, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 1981-1983
- Fellowship in Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 1983-1985
- Fellowship in Diagnostic and Clinical Immunology, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 1985-1986
- Assistant Chief, Allergy and Immunology Service, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 1985-1989
- Investigator, Cellular Immunology, National Institutes of Health, 1986-1989
- Assistant Chief, Department of Retroviral Research, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1989-1994
- Chief, Department of Retroviral Research, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1994-1995

- Laboratory Director, HIV-1 Vaccine Development, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1995-1996
- Director, U.S. Military HIV Research, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1996-2005
- Director, Division of Global HIV/AIDS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, 2005-2014
- Member, Department of State, Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Health Diplomacy, PEPFAR Scientific Advisory Board, 2011-2018

Quick Summary

Career government physician and researcher motivated by personal experience to fight infectious diseases; leader of massive foreign aid program applies HIV/AIDS epidemic expertise to COVID-19 outbreak

- Focused on HIV/AIDS, first treating infected soldiers as a young Army doctor; experience shaped Birx's career
- Credits the Army for instilling leadership and giving her the opportunity to treat infectious diseases from around the world at Walter Reed
- Long history of collaboration with Dr. Anthony Fauci; jointly convinced Pentagon to continue funding HIV vaccine research
- Oversees President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) as U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator
- Connected to international health community; collaborates with significant nonprofit players, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Retired Army Colonel and Obama appointee maintains non-partisanship

Approach and Motivations

Experienced, impassioned researcher relies on data for decisions; projects calm and empathy

- Birx's HIV/AIDS approach is characterized by personal zeal, boldness, and faith in data
- Motivated by feeling "helpless" to treat patients in early days of HIV/AIDS
- Ran vaccine trials despite skepticism from other scientists that trials would work
- Based limited resource allocation on data, prioritizing places most in need
- Used data models to convince Trump to prolong social distancing guidelines; stated that data on number and location of cases should drive process of reopening U.S. economy
- Seeks to alleviate fear through careful explanation of data, scientific concepts, and risk factors; expresses empathy for victims and families

Policy Position and Areas of Focus

Career has focused on HIV/AIDS research and aid implementation; proponent of U.S. foreign aid

HIV/AIDS: *Starting at Walter Reed hospital in the 1980s, Birx ascended the government's scientific ranks to shape U.S. global AIDS policy*

- First treated soldiers suffering from AIDS at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 1982
- Convinced the Pentagon to continue funding HIV/AIDS research in 2001
- Since 2014, has overseen PEPFAR; program provides testing, antiretroviral therapies,

education, and health infrastructure assistance to 31 countries

- Birx's aid disbursement approach characterized by adherence to data; shifted funds to areas and demographics hardest hit by new cases
- Established DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) program; combines public and private sector resources to address high rate of infections of adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa
- Worked to transition PEPFAR towards partnerships with local organizations

Foreign Assistance and Collaboration: *Top U.S. global health diplomat extols value of aid money and cooperation*

- Steeped in the intricacies of U.S. foreign aid provision and implementation
- Considers PEPFAR an example of a tremendously successful assistance program (estimated 17 million lives saved to date)
- Believes PEPFAR progress shows that foreign assistance can have an end point, with aided countries assuming greater control
- Emphasizes that disease outbreaks can be effectively dealt with if global resources are marshalled; praised U.S., Europe, and Japan for contributing \$53 billion to fight 2014 Ebola outbreak

Core Communities

Birx has a strong professional relationship with Dr. Anthony Fauci; well-known and respected in scientific and international health circles

Dr. Anthony Fauci: *Mentor and collaborator*

- Trained under Dr. Anthony Fauci as a clinical immunology fellow at NIH

- Close collaboration with Dr. Fauci spanning decades of HIV/AIDS research; called Fauci “a fixture in my life” over career in government
- Present unified front on HIV/AIDS; interviewed jointly at Washington Post Live event in 2017

Infectious Disease Experts: *Connected across professional community*

- Top deputy Dr. Angeli Archekar has worked on PEPFAR since 2003 at both the CDC and State Department; close personal friendship
- Clinton AIDS czar Sandra Thurman endorsed Birx for Global AIDS coordinator position in 2014; currently serves as her strategic advisor
- Hosts meetings of the PEPFAR Scientific Advisory Board; committee of academic and government experts meets to advise State Department on U.S. HIV/AIDS response
- Attends relevant conferences (e.g. Conference on Retrovirus and Opportunistic Infections)

Private and Non-profit Health Organizations: *Partners with and conveys U.S. objectives to organizations dedicated to fighting diseases*

- Board member of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria
- Birx’s DREAMS program is funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Interviews with international development organizations (e.g. Devex); spoke at Devex and Chemonix hosted event to discuss PEPFAR funding in February 2020

Relevant Financial Information

No recorded political donations

Publications, Media and Speaking

Has published hundreds of peer-reviewed papers and primarily speaks to global health audiences

Publications: *Birx has published over 200 research papers; no op-eds*

- Favorite Subjects: Infectious diseases, HIV/AIDS
- Examples:
- Laboratory Challenges in the Scaling Up of HIV, TB, and Malaria Programs (2009)

Media: *Prior to COVID-19, Birx had very little TV coverage; now seen widely across cable and broadcast outlets*

- Preferred Outlets: National broadcast outlets, conservative cable outlets (e.g. Fox News)
- Preferred Topics: COVID-19 response
- Social Media Habits: No Twitter account

Speaking: *Discusses U.S. anti-AIDS efforts and personal role in HIV/AIDS at global health, development, and research events*

- Favorite Subjects: HIV/AIDS epidemic strategy, personal experience
- Preferred Audience: International development organizations, think tank events (e.g. GMF Brussels Forum), and research and advocacy groups (e.g. The Foundation for AIDS Research), college commencements

Congressional Testimony: *Testified on State Department Global Health Programs*

- Testified before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs on State Department Global Health Programs, May 6, 2015

Awards

- Lifetime Achievement Award, African Society for Laboratory Medicine, 2011

Family and Personal Background

Gifted science student from STEM-focused family developed passion for fight against HIV/AIDs as an Army doctor in the 1980s

- Comes from family of successful scientists; older brothers became a nuclear physicist and a mathematician; father was an electrical engineer
- Exhibited aptitude for science as a teen, winning science fair awards in high school
- Decided to join the military out of medical school to stay close to then-husband, who graduated as an Army doctor
- Believes that her career would not have taken the same path if she had started in a different organization; credits Army for leadership training and giving her familiarity with government operations
- As a resident at Walter Reed in the early 1980s, Birx gained experience with “the most complicated” cases of infectious disease and cancer from around the world
- In 1982, Birx was assigned to care for soldiers suffering from the mysterious immune disease later known as HIV/AIDs
- Called the experience incredibly frustrating, because she could not effectively treat her patients
- Deeply touched by the experiences of soldiers afflicted with AIDS, who she says “died with courage”
- Close brush with HIV in 1983; refused transfusion from HIV-tainted blood during childbirth

- Referring to this moment, then Sec. of State John Kerry called the fight against AIDS “a calling” for Birx at a 2014 swearing-in ceremony
- Birx stated in an interview that she wants to do “everything she can” to save lives and create an AIDS-free future

Criticisms and Controversies

No notable criticisms or controversies