

THE BRIEFING ROOM
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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
IN NOMINATION OF JOHN McHUGH
AS SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

Diplomatic Room

11:56 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon, everybody. As President and Commander-in-Chief, I have no greater responsibility than the security of the American people. And keeping the American people safe demands keeping our armed forces strong -- the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen who bear the burden of America's defense.

Few have borne a heavier burden in recent years than America's Army: the soldiers -- Active, Guard and Reserve -- who have deployed multiple times to Afghanistan and Iraq; the thousands who have given life or limb -- our wounded warriors, like those I'll be visiting this week in Germany; the spouses and children -- the heroes back home -- like those my wife Michelle has visited at Fort Bragg and around the country; and the veterans we honor still, like the heroes of D-Day who we'll remember this week in Normandy.

As a nation, we have a sacred trust with all those who wear the uniform: To always take care of them as they take care of us. And that's why my administration is increasing funding for our military, including the Army, and increasing the size of the Army two years ahead of schedule. That's why we're investing in the equipment our forces need today, including the additional Army helicopters and crews urgently needed in Afghanistan. That's why we're investing in the new capabilities demanded by 21st century missions. And that's why we're increasing support to soldiers and families -- increasing pay, investing \$1.7 billion in Army family programs and making historic investments to improve care for our wounded warriors and veterans.

And today I'm proud to announce the distinguished public servant who will help keep us safe and keep our sacred trust with our soldiers and their families, the next Secretary of the Army -- the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, John McHugh.

Through more than 30 years of public service -- at the local, state, and national level -- John has proven himself a dedicated representative of the people of northern New York. But it is his service over the past 16 years in Congress -- as a champion of our men and women in uniform -- that uniquely qualifies him to help lead America's Army.

John understands personally and deeply the sacrifices that our soldiers and their families make every day. Just ask the soldiers he's always fought for in his

district at Fort Drum, home to the legendary 10th Mountain Division -- the most deployed division in the U.S. Army. Or ask the soldiers he's visited on his many trips to Iraq and Afghanistan.

John is committed to keeping America's Army the best-trained, the best-equipped, the best-led land force the world has ever seen. He has been a member of the Armed Services Committee for 16 years. He has been a co-chair of the House Army Caucus for 14 years. He served as ranking member of the Military Personnel Subcommittee. As Secretary of the Army, he will ensure that our soldiers are trained and equipped to meet the full spectrum of challenges and threats of our time -- the conventional and the unconventional, the nation state and the terrorist network.

John understands that confronting these challenges also requires something else. He served on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and three of its key subcommittees. He knows that we -- when we send our forces into harm's way, they need the best, most accurate intelligence to protect our soldiers and advance our interests.

At the same time, John knows that we must reform the way the Pentagon and the Army does business. Along with Senators Carl Levin and John McCain and Representative Ike Skelton, he played a leading role in passing the landmark Weapons System [sic] Acquisition Reform Act, which I signed into law two weeks ago. As Secretary, he will help lead our efforts to save taxpayers billions of dollars and equip our soldiers with the weapons they need -- on time and on budget.

Most importantly, John understands that the Army's greatest strength is its people. He served for many years on the Board of Visitors of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He has been honored by our soldiers and their families for his efforts to increase their readiness, health care and quality of life. As Secretary, he will ensure that America keeps faith with our soldiers -- increasing their pay, increasing child care and helping families deal with the stress and strain of war.

Finally, John shares my belief that a sustainable national security strategy must include a bipartisan consensus at home. He hasn't agreed with every decision my administration has made. But he brings patriotism and a pragmatism that has won him respect on both sides of the aisle.

I should note that this patriotism runs in the McHugh family. During World War II, John's father served with distinction on a B-17 bomber, his mother cared for wounded GIs through the Nurses Corps.

I know giving up his seat in Congress after nine terms will require a sacrifice - both for John and his constituents. But I also know that he is more than ready to carry on his family's tradition of service and to write the next great chapter of his own service to his country. And I know that the Army and America will be stronger for it.

With that, I'd like to invite John to say a few words.

REPRESENTATIVE McHUGH: Thank you, Mr. President. I've thought long and hard as to what I might say that would sound original at this moment. But honestly, I don't have an original thought in my mind -- all I know is what I feel in my heart, and that is that I am enormously moved and deeply proud of this nomination.

And Mr. President, I want to say to you both thank you, sir, for the opportunity and for the distinguished honor you have extended to me through this nomination, and to promise you that if confirmed by the Senate I will do everything I possibly can to work in concert with the Army leadership to provide you and to Secretary Gates the broadest based, the most accurate, the most informative information as you go forward in discharging your very, very weighty responsibilities in these dangerous times as Commander-in-Chief.

And Mr. President, let me thank you very briefly for your very gracious and kind comments about my family and about my affinity for the United States Army.

My dad has been gone from us now for 19 years, and yet not a day passes we don't miss him, not a day passes when he is unable to bring a smile to our faces or a tear to our eye, and we love him dearly.

My brother, my best friend, I've always thanked him for taking the bottom bunk in the one bedroom we grew up together, but most of all for having the good sense to marry my sister that I never had, his beautiful bride, Marti, and for giving us as they both did the apples of all of our eyes, my nephew and niece, their son and daughter, PJ and Michaela. Most of all, my mom, who through all of these years, after having brought us into the world still finds a way to help us take that next step in a very difficult world.

As to the United States Army, for the last, as the President rightly said, 16 years, I've been a proud member of the Armed Services Committee. It is an amazing committee, in my humble judgment the most productive, the most responsible, and frankly the most fun committee to serve on because of the challenges we face. But we're like every other committee -- when we walk in the door we have our political differences, we have our political divides and opinions, and we don't always check them at that door. But at the end of the day and every year of my experience, Republicans and Democrats alike have put aside those differences and worked for the most important common good -- that is the welfare and the interest of the men and women who voluntarily put on the uniform of the branches of the United States military -- and their families, because they serve as well.

And President Obama has put that priority at the top of his considerations as well, and I not just commend him for it, I thank him deeply for that path forward.

I would simply say that for all of the special feelings for all of the military, I've always had the Army somewhat apart. I grew up in the shadows of Fort Drum, for the last 20 years I've worked in concert with those men and women of the communities around that great facility in support of the men and women of the 10th Mountain Division, as the President so graciously noted my service on the Army Caucus and the Board of Visitors at West Point. The Army has always had a special place in my heart and, Mr. President, that's why I so deeply appreciate this nomination.

In the days ahead I look forward to working with the Senate as they discharge their constitutional authorities and obligations in considering this nomination.

But I want to make one final point, if I may. I feel very blessed today. I am blessed today. But the fact of the matter is I'm nothing more than the latest in a growing line of individuals of many different backgrounds, many different life experiences, as my nomination suggests, different political persuasions, who have been provided by President Obama the chance to heed, to answer new, important, and challenging problems facing this country.

Mr. President, for the opportunity to be in that long and growing and proud line, I thank you and I hope never to let you down. (Applause.)