

# Obama nominates John Kerry as secretary of state

By Bill Van Auken  
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President Obama has nominated John Kerry, the richest individual in the US Senate and a trusted defender of the interests of the US ruling establishment, as Secretary of State.

Obama announced his selection of the Massachusetts Democrat in a short White House briefing Friday afternoon in which Kerry did not speak and no questions were taken from the media.

The brevity of the ceremony was no doubt determined in part by the reluctance of the White House to address issues arising from the report of an investigative panel into the fatal September 11 assault on the US consulate and secret CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya, and the resignation of one assistant secretary of state and the disciplining of three other department officials in connection with the affair.

Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations and reportedly Obama's first choice for the nomination, was compelled to remove her name for consideration because of a storm of Republican criticism over what was portrayed as her misrepresentation of the Benghazi attack as originating in a spontaneous demonstration rather than a planned assault by an Islamist militia.

As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on which he has served for 27 years, Kerry is virtually guaranteed a smooth confirmation process in the Senate. Senate Republicans welcome the nomination in part because it opens a Democratic seat to a special election in which Massachusetts Republican Scott Brown, who lost his own Senate seat to Democrat Elizabeth Warren in November, is seen as a likely contender.

The incumbent secretary, Hillary Clinton, was not present at the announcement Friday. Obama said that "Hillary wanted very much to be here today, but she

continues to recuperate." Clinton was reported to have contracted a stomach virus and then fallen and suffered a concussion, leading to the cancellation of her testimony before House and Senate committees on the Benghazi affair. The cancellation led to some Republicans suggesting the illness was feigned.

In his remarks, Obama invoked Kerry's four-month tour of duty in Vietnam in 1968-69 as a junior naval officer to argue for his fitness to help steer the course of American militarism.

"Having served with valor in Vietnam, he understands that we have a responsibility to use American power wisely, especially our military power," said Obama. "And he knows from personal experience that when we send our troops into harm's way, we must give them the sound strategy, a clear mission, and the resources that they need to get the job done."

One would hardly guess that Kerry returned from Vietnam to become a leader of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, throwing his medals over the White House fence and denouncing the US intervention as "barbaric" and a "war crime."

Over the course of a four decade political career—beginning with an unsuccessful campaign for a congressional seat, a stint as a local prosecutor, election as lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, his tenure in the Senate from 1985 and particularly in his unsuccessful 2004 campaign as the Democratic presidential challenger against George W. Bush—Kerry has refashioned his Vietnam record. Now he emphasizes his status as a veteran, as opposed to a passionate opponent of the war, going so far as to pin war medals to his tuxedo at a dinner in Washington this year.

In 2002, he was among those in the Senate to vote for

the authorization of the use of force that led to the US war of aggression against Iraq, and in 2004 ran as a supporter of the war.

Under the Obama administration, Kerry frequently served as a confidential US emissary. He was sent to Afghanistan in 2009 to persuade President Hamid Karzai to accept a run-off election amid charges of vote fraud. Kerry also traveled to Pakistan to convince the government to release a CIA contractor who killed two Pakistanis, and to return parts of a US stealth helicopter that crashed in the raid that ended in the assassination of Osama bin Laden.

Kerry enjoys the distinction of being the wealthiest member of the millionaires' club known as the US Senate. In 2011, he reported a net worth of at least \$198.8 million, much of it originating in the connection of his wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry, to the Heinz Ketchup fortune. In 2009 and 2010, Kerry was the richest member of the Congress as a whole, a position he ceded last year to Texas Republican Congressman Michael McCaul, heir of the Clear Channel Communications founder, who is worth at least \$290.5 million.

Kerry is the first major second-term nomination announced by Obama, who must also fill the post of defense secretary, which is being vacated by Leon Panetta, and CIA director, following the resignation of David Petraeus.

It has been widely reported that Obama's top choice for defense secretary is former Republican Senator from Nebraska, Chuck Hagel, who like Kerry is also a Vietnam veteran.

While his career in the Senate, from 1997 to 2009, garnered Hagel an 84 percent approval rating from the American Conservative Union, his criticisms of the Bush administration's Iraq war policy, as well as statements expressing reservations about Washington's unconditional support for Israel and opposition to sanctions against Iran, have made him a target of Republican critics.

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