

Carter takes Oath of Office in White House ceremony

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 17, 2015 - With his wife, Stephanie, holding the Bible upon which he swore to support and defend the U.S. Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic, Ash Carter took the oath of office as the 25th secretary of defense in a ceremony at the White House today.

Vice President Joe Biden administered the oath in the Roosevelt Room, characterizing Carter as a genuine scholar of strategic military affairs and nuclear weapons policy and as a profoundly capable manager "with universal respect and affection from the people you work with, reflected in a near-unanimous vote in the U.S. Senate."

"For me," Carter said after taking the oath, "this is the highest honor, to be the 25th secretary of defense. I'm grateful to [President Barack Obama] and the vice president for your trust and confidence, and to the U.S. Senate as well for their trust and confidence."

Attending the ceremony were Carter's son, Will, Deputy Defense Secretary Bob Work, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, Joint Chiefs Vice Chairman Navy Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr., members of Carter's transition team, and several men and women in uniform.

A Driving Intellectual Force

In his introduction, Biden called Carter a "physicist and a genuine expert on the acquisition and technical capabilities that are going to help guarantee the U.S. military is second to none in the world."

Carter has a driving intellectual force behind all he does and all the administration has been doing, the vice president added, including strengthening the nation's cyber capabilities, improving the way the Pentagon does business, and implementing the Asia-Pacific rebalance, including deepening defense cooperation with India.

"Most important of all, you've been a fighter," Biden told Carter, "like the men and women in uniform here today, for the women and men who serve in uniform."

The defense secretary, like his predecessor, Biden added, "understands that while this country has many obligations, it only has one truly sacred obligation, and that's to equip and protect those we send to war, care for their families while they're there, and care for them and their families when they come home."

Tough Missions Ahead

Many tough missions lie ahead, the vice president said, from fighting against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, strengthening NATO, and rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region, to maintaining the nation's technological edge and continuous efforts to make the most out of every dollar invested in defense.

"Dr. Carter," Biden said, "as you take leadership of the greatest military in the history of mankind, ... you do so with the confidence of everyone in your building, confidence of the United States Senate, confidence of President Obama and me, and so many other people who admire your work."

Carter thanked his wife and children, his transition team and the team he joins at the Pentagon, including Work, Dempsey, Winnefeld and others.

The defense secretary characterized the defense of the nation as "the highest calling," and he made three commitments to the men and women of the Defense Department, to the president and vice president, and to his fellow citizens.

Three Commitments

"The first is to help our president make the best possible decisions about our security and the [world's] security, and then to ensure that our department executes those decisions with its long accustomed competence and effectiveness," he said.

While dealing with challenges to national security, Carter said, he wants to help the nation's leadership grab hold of opportunities that lie before the country, and to help make the world safer and a better place for the next generation.

"My second commitment is to the men and women of the Department of Defense, whom I will lead, to reflect in everything I do and to honor the commitment and dedication that brought them into service," Carter said, "and to protect their dignity, their safety, their well-being, [and] to make decisions about sending them into harm's way with the greatest reflection and care."

A Force for the Future

Carter's third commitment was to the future, he said, "to building a force for our future that involves not

only securing the resources we need but making ... the best use of the taxpayers' dollar, making sure we embrace change so that years from now, ... we continue to be a place where America's finest want to serve, and a place that is a beacon to the rest of the world."

As Obama enters the fourth quarter of his presidency, the defense secretary added, "these commitments, ... I think, will help me help him and help the vice president to ensure that those years are productive, and that they leave our country's future in the best possible place -- in the best possible hands."

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