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Former Neb Senator Being Considered as Defense Secretary
(KLZA) President Barack Obama's top candidate for defense secretary is a contrarian Republican moderate and decorated Vietnam combat veteran who's likely to support a more rapid withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Afghanistan.

Former Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel has another credential important to the president: a personal relationship forged with Obama when both were in the U.S. Senate.

The 66-year-old Hagel has emerged as the front-runner for the Pentagon's top job. Hagel would succeed Defense Secretary Leon Panetta.

An announcement is expected this coming week.

As defense secretary, Hagel would oversee the Afghanistan troop withdrawal and direct some of the steepest cuts in Pentagon spending since the end of the Cold War.

Hagel left the Senate in 2009, ending a political career in which he carved out a reputation as an independent thinker and blunt speaker.

Associated Press