

Both Obama, McCain would be strong advocates of US-Turkish ties, senator says

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Both Democratic presidential contender Barack Obama and his Republican rival John McCain would be strong advocates of the United States' relationship with Turkey if elected president, a leading Republican senator said Monday.

"Each (Obama and McCain) has a very special appreciation of relations with Turkey. Each would be a strong advocate of this relationship," said Chuck Hagel, a senator from Nebraska.

Hagel was speaking at an event at the Senate to mark his new book "America: Our Next Chapter." It was held by the American Friends of Turkey and the Turkish Coalition of America, two groups seeking to boost U.S.-Turkish ties.

Serving in the Senate for 12 years, Hagel has been a prominent figure in the Republican Party. He has also been very close to Turkey.

Two years ago his name was among potential Republican presidential candidates, but since then he has fallen out with President George W. Bush and the party leadership over major disputes on Iraq and other matters.

As a result Hagel, known as a maverick, has been alienated by the Republicans, announcing earlier this year that he would not seek a new term in the Senate elections in November.

Can't choose between Obama, McCain:

Meanwhile, he has moved closer to Obama, sharing similar views on Iraq and other international matters.

Obama has praised Hagel a lot, counting him among a number of Republicans he would like to work with in his administration, if elected president.

Hagel's name has been already floated as a potential defense secretary in an Obama cabinet.

Asked if he would vote for Obama, Hagel said he had stayed out of the race between the two candidates, who are both his colleagues in the Senate.

"Both are very good friends of mine. Both are good and honest men and would be competent presidents. The good news is that the new president will be my friend," he said.

He said he had talked to both Obama and McCain on many matters and would remain available for assistance to the new president. "But not necessarily in the government," Hagel said.