

Biden Picks Air Force Fighter Pilot to Be Next Joint Chiefs Chair

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President Joe Biden shakes hands with U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown, Jr., after nominating Brown as the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in the Rose Garden of the White House on May 25, 2023. (Photo by Dan McCue)

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Thursday nominated Air Force Four-Star Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown Jr. to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, lauding the man he wants to see as top military officer in the United States for his service to country, his unquestioned bravery and, in a light-hearted moment, “someone who smokes a mean brisket.”

If confirmed, Brown, who is 60, would be only the second African American in U.S. history to serve as the president’s top military advisor. The first was the late Army Gen. Colin Powell, who served in that post from 1989 through 1993.

But Brown has accomplished many firsts in his distinguished career, including being the first Black commander of the Air Force's Pacific combat arm and, most recently, serving as its first Black chief of staff.

His confirmation would also mark the first time that the top two posts at the Pentagon were held by African Americans, with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin being the top civilian leader of the military.

Biden announced Brown's nomination during a Rose Garden event attended by the other Joint Chiefs and invited guests.

"Gen. Brown doesn't play for second place," the president said, as Austin, Vice President Kamala Harris and Brown stood at his sides. "He plays to win ... and that mindset is going to be an enormous asset to the United States of America as we navigate the challenges in the coming years.

"We have to keep the American people safe, prosperous and secure with the military that is ready to move fast and adapt quickly," Biden continued. "We need to maintain a credible, combat-ready force capable of deterring any [adversary]. ... We have to manage our competition with China ... and meet the reality of renewed aggression in Europe.

"I know I'll be able to rely on his advice as a military strategist ... and as a thoughtful, deliberate leader who is unafraid to speak his mind ... who will deliver an honest message that needs to be heard ... and will always do the right thing when it's hard," Biden said, adding, "That's the number one quality a president looks for in a general. That's a leader."

Three years ago, Brown was confirmed for his present spot on the Joint Chiefs of Staff by a vote of 98-0 in the U.S. Senate.

U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown, Jr., listens as President Joe Biden announces his nominations as the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Photo by Dan McCue)

This year, however, it might prove more difficult to get such a resounding vote.

At present, more than 200 senior military appointments are being held up by Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., because he’s upset over a Pentagon policy that provides travel funds and support for troops and their dependents who are seeking to terminate pregnancies.

Still, a number of Republicans have already gone on record as disagreeing with Tuberville’s position, saying they fear it could pose a risk to U.S. military readiness.

If Brown does make it through the Senate relatively unscathed, he would replace Gen. Mark Milley, whose term ends in September.

On Thursday, Biden urged the Senate to “once again confirm Brown with the same overwhelming bipartisan support for his new role.”

Born in San Antonio, Texas, Brown’s family has long been active in the military. President Biden recalled that his nominee’s grandfather had led a segregated Army unit in World War II and that his father was an artillery officer and Vietnam War veteran.

Brown’s own military career began with his commission as a distinguished ROTC graduate from Texas Tech University in 1984.

Since then, the general has logged more than 3,000 flying hours, including 130 hours of combat missions. He also served repeat assignments at the Air Force Weapons School, a program reserved for only the most elite of the service’s elite fighter pilots.

Brown’s last confirmation hearing before the Senate coincided with the murder by police of George Floyd.

In a video message to Air Force personnel just days after the tragedy in South Minneapolis, Minnesota, Brown spoke of his own experiences with racial bias, saying it forced him to try to perform everything he did “error-free.”

“I’m thinking about my mentors and how I rarely had a mentor that looked like me,” Brown said in the video. “I’m thinking about how my nomination provides some hope, but also comes with a heavy burden — I can’t fix centuries of racism in our

The current Joint Chiefs of Staff (sans Air Force Four-Star Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown Jr.) who was in the Oval Office with President Joe Biden. (Photo by Dan McCue)

country, nor can I fix decades of discrimination that may have impacted members of our Air Force.”

What he could do, he said, was “make improvements, personally, professionally and institutionally” so that no member of the service would ever be questioned about their credentials, as he was, despite the fact he wore the same wings as every other Air Force pilot.

Despite the gravity of some of the president’s remarks, he also punctuated Brown’s biography with some of its ultimately more light-hearted moments.

In addition to the reference to Brown's skill with brisket, Biden recalled how in January 1991, Brown was forced to eject from a burning F-16 fighter jet high above the Florida Everglades.

As he descended beneath his parachute, he looked down at the fabled river of grass below and hoped he wouldn't encounter any alligators, snakes or other danger below.

When was recovered, his flight suit and boots were caked with mud.

"That's how he got his new call sign," Biden quipped. "From then on, they called him 'Swamp Thing.'"

Before the ceremony concluded, the president thanked Milley for his years of service and his "lifetime of selfless commitment to our country."

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