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Stew Salowitz
Illinois Wesleyan University

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CONTACT: Stew Salowitz, 309-556-3206

Former Secretary of Defense William Cohen To Address IWU Commencement on May 6

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. -- William S. Cohen, who served as Secretary of Defense in the Bill Clinton administration and has a 31-year career of public service, will address an estimated 464 graduates and their families at the Illinois Wesleyan University commencement on Sunday, May 6.

The University's Sesquicentennial graduation ceremony will take place at 1 p.m. on the Eckley Quadrangle. In the event of inclement weather, the ceremony will be held at the Shirk Center, 302 E. Emerson.

One of the world's most influential and insightful voices on defense and security issues, the multi-talented Cohen will receive an honorary doctor of laws degree from Illinois Wesleyan.

Cohen, who was the first elected official in modern American history from one political party (Republican) to serve in the Cabinet of a president in another party, is currently the chairman and CEO of The Cohen Group, a strategic business consulting firm based in Washington, D.C. The Cohen Group assists multinational clients from all sectors of the economy to develop and implement strategic plans and identify and pursue business opportunities.

He is also a co-director at Empower America, a prominent public policy advocacy group and chairman of the William S. Cohen Center for International Policy and Commerce at the University of Maine in Orono.

IWU Commencement

IWU will award bachelor's degrees to about 464 students at commencement. It is estimated that about 19 students will graduate with the designation summa cum laude (3.9 grade-point average on a 4.0 scale), 71 students will graduate magna cum laude (3.70 GPA or higher) and 67 will graduate cum laude (3.5 GPA or higher).

The graduating class includes students from 15 states and from five nations other than the U.S.

Graduating seniors represent 34 fields of study, the top six of which are expected to be (in terms of number of graduates) business administration, biology, English, psychology, political science and public accounting.

William S. Cohen Background

As Secretary of Defense, Cohen skillfully guided the U.S. military through the 1999 NATO air campaign over Kosovo and during operations to prevent Iraq from destabilizing the strategic

Persian Gulf region. He also launched a revolution in the Department of Defense business affairs. Committed to bringing accountability and private sector business practices to government, he saved taxpayers billions of dollars by streamlining, reforming and modernizing acquisition and other operations.

Prior to becoming the nation's 20th Secretary of Defense, Cohen served three terms in the U.S. Senate for the state of Maine (1979-97) and three terms in the House of Representatives from Maine's Second Congressional District (1973-79). He served on the Senate Armed Services and Governmental Affairs committees from 1979 to 1997, was a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence from 1983-91 and 1995-97, and he served as vice chairman from 1987-91.

Cohen helped craft the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and was the Senate sponsor of the GI Bill of 1984 and the subsequent enhancements to this landmark legislation.

His efforts led to the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force, which later developed into the U.S. Central Command and the maritime pre-positioning program, both of which were key to the success of the Gulf War. He also co-authored the Intelligence Oversight Reform Act of 1991 and legislation designed to overhaul U.S. counterintelligence efforts and to defend against foreign political and industrial espionage.

Committed to bringing accountability and private sector best practices to government agencies, Cohen authored the Competition in Contracting Act of 1984 and helped draft the Federal Acquisition Reform Act of 1996. He also authored the Information Technology Management Reform Act of 1986 to improve the way federal agencies manage information technology investments and streamline the acquisition process.

Cohen served on the board of directors of the Council on Foreign Relations from 1989-97. In 1996, he chaired the council's Middle East study group. He has also chaired and served on numerous study groups and committees at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, School for Advanced International Studies and Brookings Institute on such issues as Department of Defense reorganization, NATO enlargement and chemical weapons arms control.

Cohen led the American delegation of senior executive branch officials and members of Congress to the Munich Conference on Security Policy, which brings together senior officials from NATO and Partnership for Peace countries. He also led American delegations to the American-Arab Dialogue in Cairo and the Pacific Dialogue in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, regional conferences on security and economic issues.

In 1974, he was selected by Time magazine as one of America's 200 future leaders. The U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce named him one of the 10 Outstanding Young Men in America in 1975. In 1975, the Boston University Law School honored him with its Young Lawyer's Chair; in 1976, the university alumni association presented him with its Award for Distinguished Public Service.

The Noncommissioned Officers Association presented him the Vanguard Award in 1980 and the L. Mendel Rivers Award in 1983 for his work on behalf of military personnel. In 1996, he received the U.S. Special Operations Command Medal.

Writing has been Cohen's principal avocation for many years, and his published works include "Of Sons and Seasons" (1978) and "A Baker's Nickel" (1986), both volumes of poems; "Roll Call" (1981), a journal of his first year in the Senate; "Getting the Most Out of Washington" (1982), a manual on cutting through government red tape; "The Double Man" (1985), written with Senator Gary Hart, a novel on international espionage and terrorism; "Men of Zeal" (1988), written with Senator George Mitchell, an account of their experience investigating the Iran-Contra affair; "One-Eyed Kings" (1991), a spy thriller involving Soviet and American covert actions that converge in the Middle East; "Murder in the Senate" (1993), a mystery written with Thomas B. Allen; and "Easy Prey: The Fleecing of America's Senior Citizens and How to Stop It" (1995), a non-fiction book concerning fraud and the elderly.

Cohen was born Aug. 28, 1940, in Bangor, Maine, where he served as mayor in 1971-72. He received his bachelor's degree in Latin from Bowdoin College in 1962 and his bachelor of laws degree cum laude from Boston University Law School in 1965. As a Bowdoin senior, Cohen was the captain of the basketball team and the squad's leading scorer.

His wife, Janet Langhart, is president of Langhart Communications. Cohen has two grown sons, Kevin and Chris.