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Retiring Sen. Jim Webb says he's leaving Senate but won't leave public life, sees other roles

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By Associated Press, March 22, 2011

RICHMOND, Va. — Sen. Jim Webb said Tuesday he's not leaving the political arena when he retires after one term in the U.S. Senate next year.

Webb, after touring a new Veterans Administration facility in Richmond that treats veterans who suffered spinal cord trauma, wouldn't say what public role he might pursue.

Greeted at the start of an impromptu media gaggle as "short-timer," Webb grinned, arched one eyebrow and replied, "Maybe."

Asked later to elaborate, the Democrat said only that he plans to stay politically involved after 2012 but that "six years in the United States Senate is about right."

...A decorated Marine veteran of the Vietnam War, Webb served as Navy secretary under President Ronald Reagan. Webb has been mentioned in some Washington circles as a possible successor to Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

But the famously independent senator has forcefully criticized President Barack Obama's decision to commit U.S. troops to the multinational coalition enforcing a no-fly zone in Libya against forces loyal to Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

"We began a military action at the same time that we don't have a clear diplomatic policy or a clear foreign policy when it comes to what's going on in Libya," Webb said.

The senator also said that while Gadhafi's regime is oppressive and brutal, the United States lacks a clear understanding of rebel forces trying to oust Gadhafi.

"The opposition is not a defined entity," Webb said. "Do we know what their intentions would be, would they be able to govern if they were to succeed, and the answer is we don't really know."

Webb noted that while the U.S. is acting with other countries under United Nations Security Council authority, "if you look at the ... Security Council vote, there were five very important abstentions, people who did not concur: Brazil, Russia, India, China as well as Germany."