

Extra Feature Story

Obama Team Starts to Take Shape, May Include One-time Rival Hillary Clinton

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The make up of President-elect Barack Obama's new administration began to emerge this week with his announcement of a new economic team and reports that former Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton could be named Secretary of State.

With more people losing their jobs, plummeting stock prices and further declines in the housing market, President-elect Barack Obama held a series of press conferences this week to show that his administration will "hit the ground running."

Obama tackles the economy first

For the important position of Treasury Secretary, Mr. Obama nominated Timothy Geithner, president of the Federal Reserve Bank in New York. Lawrence Summers, a highly respected Harvard economist who got into trouble several years ago for questioning why more women are not succeeding at math and science, will head the White House Economic Council.

By naming a team deeply experienced in dealing with financial crises —Geithner was heavily involved in the efforts to stabilize one of the nation's largest banks, Citigroup — Mr. Obama emphasized his determination to help Americans regain confidence in the economy.

"With our economy in distress, we cannot hesitate and we cannot delay. Our families can't afford to keep on waiting and hoping for a solution. They can't afford to watch another month of unpaid bills pile up, another semester of tuition slip out of reach, another month where, instead of saving for retirement, they're dipping into their savings just to get by," he said.

Obama relies on many from Clinton years

Many of the top posts are being filled by people who were in the Clinton White House from 1992 to 2000, and while the choices have been widely praised, some experts point out that mistakes were made during that period.

"They're very competent people, very experienced people, but at the same time that experience means they've been to some extent implicated in the problems that got us here," Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research said on the NewsHour.

"I mean, taking Larry Summers as one example, he was a supporter of the financial deregulation that, you know, helped to fuel the housing bubble. I should point out he also didn't think that financial asset bubbles like the stock bubble and housing bubble were a big problem," Baker said.

But conservative New York Times columnist David Brooks is impressed by the new president's choices.

"Every other president has had a coterie of people around them from the time they were governor or something else that they bring to town either from Arkansas or Texas or wherever. Obama, because he's so new and inexperienced, doesn't have that coterie. So he really is not picking cronies. He really is picking people who are indisputably qualified," Brooks said on the NewsHour.

Hillary in the Cabinet?

Meanwhile, a New York Times report states that Mr. Obama has chosen Sen. Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, the chief envoy to other countries and lead adviser on foreign policy issues.

While analysts such as Brooks say Clinton would make a very good head of the State Department, the move is attracting strong attention because the two often had heated debates over foreign policy during the Democratic primaries.

He often criticized her for supporting the Iraq War and she called his proposal to meet with the leaders of Iran and Venezuela "naïve."

Taking cues from Lincoln and FDR

The reports of Clinton as a possible Cabinet pick created a flurry of speculation that the president-elect is using lessons inspired by a past president that Mr. Obama often cites as a role model: Abraham Lincoln.

In a recent CBS interview, the president-elect said he's been spending a lot of time reading up on Lincoln, and that he was finishing reading Doris Kearns Goodwin's 2005 book "Team of Rivals."

That book tells the story of how Lincoln, after a hard fought, often-bitter campaign, chose for his cabinet some of the very men who had battled so hard to win the presidency themselves—in part as a way of controlling them, but also to learn from their differing perspectives.

"There is a wisdom there and a humility about his approach to government, even before he was president, that I just find very helpful," Obama said.

When asked whether he would be willing to put political enemies in his Cabinet as Lincoln did, Obama responded, "Well, I tell you what, I find him a very wise man."

Mr. Obama also said he is taking cues from Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

"There's a new book out about FDR's first 100 days and what you see in FDR that I hope my team can – emulate, is not always getting it right, but projecting a sense of confidence, and a willingness to try things. And experiment in order to get people working again," he said.

In his first 100 days in office, FDR introduced 15 major pieces of legislation and created dozens of federal programs called "the alphabet agencies" such as the NRA, the WPA, the CCC, the PWA -- all part of what he called the New Deal.

-- Compiled by Leah Clapman for NewsHour Extra

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