

## Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

### Transition From Bush to Obama Presidency Presents Challenges

11/07/08

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/transition\\_11-07.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/transition_11-07.html)

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

**Student Worksheet** (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

#### 1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

#### 2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

#### 3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. **When will Barack Obama officially become president?**

2. **What is a president's "Cabinet"? What are the most important White House jobs besides president?**

3. **How do you think Barack Obama makes decisions? Do you think that will change when he becomes president? Why or why not?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

1. **When does Barack Obama officially become president?**

ANSWER

President-elect Barack Obama began announcing plans for his new administration just days after winning the election, but he doesn't officially become president until he takes the oath of office at noon on January 20.

2. **What are some of the major problems Obama faces when he becomes president?**

ANSWER

Mr. Obama inherits a wealth of problems as he noted in his acceptance speech: "two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century."

3. **Who is President-elect Obama's Chief of Staff and what do Republicans think of the choice?**

ANSWER

On Nov. 6, after breakfast with his family and a quick work out, Obama and his team revealed his pick for the new chief of staff: Illinois Representative Rahm Emanuel.

The chief-of-staff is the highest ranking member of the office of the presidency. Emanuel is a former senior advisor to the Bill Clinton White House and is known for his fiery words and tactics.

Republicans were quick to criticize the choice.

"This is an ironic choice for a president-elect who has promised to change Washington, make politics more civil and govern from the center," Republican leader in the House, John Boehner, said in a statement.

But political analyst Ornstein says Emanuel is good choice because he can get things done and play bad cop to Obama's good cop.

#### **4. How many jobs does Barack Obama have to fill?**

##### **ANSWER**

Over the next few weeks, the Obama team will fill 2,600 positions in the so called "Plum Book" of political appointments.

#### **5. What mistake did President Jimmy Carter make, according to Stephen Hess?**

##### **ANSWER**

Stephen Hess, who wrote a book about past transitions, warns Obama not to focus on the people who helped him in Chicago.

"Poor Jimmy Carter. He picked his first eight positions in the White House; seven of them were Georgians, and only one of them had ever had any service in Washington," Hess said, adding that such inexperience led to deep disagreements with members of his own party in Congress.

#### **6. Why might it be especially hard to switch from a Republican president to a Democratic one?**

##### **ANSWER**

Previous transitions, especially those from one party to another, have often been marred by distrust and missteps.

The incoming administration may be wary of the information of the other because of party prejudices or bad blood from campaigning.

#### **7. What is the White House Transition Project and what did it warn new administrations to be wary of?**

##### **ANSWER**

The White House Transition Project, a non-partisan group, urges new administrations to be "wary of plans that have been developed by executive agencies during the previous administration and are placed before them, in the early weeks and months, urging quick action."

"Obama has got to be very careful about not letting himself be pushed over beyond that line, which has happened repeatedly to presidents in the past," Hess warns.

"An example might be George H.W. Bush, says, 'Oh, I've got a great idea. I'm going to send some troops to Somalia.' Bill Clinton says, 'Hey, that's a nice idea.' He said, 'Yes, and they'll be out by the time you get around.' Well, of course, they're not out by that time, Black Hawk down, and [Clinton] pays a price for that. So you've got to be a little careful."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

**1. What concerns do you have about the Bush to Obama transition? Do you think it will be smooth? Why or why not?**

**2. Would you want to be in the Obama administration? What position would you want? Why?**

**3. What are your expectations about the Obama presidency?**

##### **Extension Activity**

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.