

American

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Jack Lew Nominated as Obama's Treasury Secretary

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 10 January 2013

Washington — President Obama has nominated White House Chief of Staff Jack Lew to serve as the secretary of the U.S. Treasury Department. If confirmed by the Senate, Lew will be in charge of overseeing U.S. financial security and will serve as the president's chief economic adviser, replacing outgoing Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner.

Announcing Lew's nomination at the White House January 10, Obama recalled the dire U.S. financial situation when he assumed office in 2009, when the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression was causing Americans to lose their jobs as U.S. stock and housing market values plunged.

With the help of outgoing Secretary Geithner, "our economy has been growing again for the past three years," and along with steps to boost American industries and taxpayers, "we've put in place rules to prevent that kind of financial meltdown from ever happening again," the president said.

"While a lot of work remains, especially to rebuild a strong middle class and offer working folks new pathways to rise into the middle class, our economy is better positioned for tomorrow," Obama said, and "I cannot think of a better person to continue Tim's work at Treasury than Jack Lew."

Before serving as the president's chief of staff, Lew served in the Obama administration as the White House budget director and the deputy secretary of state for management and resources. Obama noted that Lew presided over three U.S. budget surpluses in a row in the 1990s while serving as White House budget director for President Bill Clinton.

"Over the past year, I've sought Jack's advice on virtually every decision that I've made, from economic policy to foreign policy," Obama said, adding that Lew has spent years in Washington building a reputation as "a master of policy who can work with members of both parties and forge principled compromises."

If confirmed by the Senate, Lew would likely play a pivotal role in upcoming negotiations between the White House and the U.S. Congress as they face a deadline to raise the \$16.4 trillion U.S. federal debt ceiling, as well as automatic spending cuts to the U.S. federal budget that will go into effect unless a compromise can be reached by U.S. lawmakers.

As Treasury secretary, Lew would also be a key official working with European leaders to address Europe's economic crisis, manage economic relations with

emerging powers such as China and India, and oversee the enforcement of U.S. economic sanctions.

Speaking with the president, Lew, 57, said that as a child of Polish immigrants growing up in Queens, New York, "I had dreams of making a difference in the world" and that he has felt a constant "responsibility to engage in issues of public concern."

Lew said he had been able to work with officials in the Obama and Clinton White Houses to "execute a responsible fiscal policy while advancing policies to promote economic growth," and said he had worked closely with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton "to advance our nation's national security agenda, including our international economic policies."

Under the U.S. Constitution, the president nominates high government officials such as Cabinet members, federal judges and ambassadors with the "advice and consent" of the U.S. Senate. The Senate typically exercises its role by holding committee-level confirmation hearings in which senators question the nominee and discuss his or her credentials before issuing a report on whether to recommend approval by the full Senate.

Once the committee's report is issued, the 100-member Senate can discuss and debate the nomination and vote on whether to confirm. If a majority of senators votes to confirm, the nomination is accepted.

Speaking with the president, Geithner praised Lew as "a man of exceptional judgment, calm under pressure, with an extraordinary record of accomplishment and experience over decades spent at the center of American economic policy."

Lew "understands what it takes to create the conditions for stronger economic growth and broader economic opportunity. And he understands that to govern responsibly is to govern with a recognition that we have limited fiscal resources," he said.

White House press secretary Jay Carney told reporters January 9 that President Obama's top domestic priorities are economic growth and job creation, and "all the members of his economic team will be focused on those priorities in the second term."

Carney said that over the past 25 years, Lew has been "an integral part of some of the most important budgetary, financial and fiscal agreements, bipartisan agreements, in Washington."

Austan Goolsbee, a former chairman of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, told the Washington Post January 10 that Lew "is a great budget man taking over Treasury

at exactly the moment that budget and tax issues have become the dominant economic issue in Washington.”

U.S. Condemns Sudanese Bombardment of Rebel Areas

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 09 January 2013

Washington — The United States has condemned the Sudanese government’s aerial bombardment of rebel areas in the south and called for the United Nations to take action to address a humanitarian emergency there.

“We remain deeply concerned by the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile,” U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice said in New York January 8. Those two states in southern Sudan are fighting an insurgency against the government in Khartoum.

“We’re also deeply concerned about the ongoing aerial bombardments by the Sudanese Armed Forces, including in civilian areas. The Security Council must work collectively now to press for immediate and unfettered humanitarian access,” she added. Rice said the rebel leaders of Sudan People’s Liberation Movement – North and the government of Sudan both bear blame for the humanitarian crisis, but most of the blame is on the shoulders of the government in Khartoum.

She said the United States favors “turning up the heat” on the warring parties to allow humanitarian access to the areas.

“We will continue to put emphasis on the necessity for access, for protection of civilians, and for accountability. That has been our focus from the very outset and will remain so,” she said.

Rice made her remarks after the director of operations for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, John Ging, said hundreds of thousands of people in South Kordofan and Blue Nile are affected by the fighting.

“We hear incredibly alarming stories of people having to rely on roots and leaves. This is 2013, and to think that hundreds of thousands of people are living in such desperate and deplorable circumstances, and we can’t get in to help them as humanitarian organizations, is just not acceptable,” Ging said.

Rice also urged the leaders of Sudan and South Sudan to implement an agreement to stabilize the oil-rich Abyei area that both governments claim, pending a referendum to settle its final status. The presidents of the two countries met in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in

early January and reaffirmed their commitment to withdraw their forces from the area and deploy a joint border verification monitoring mechanism. South Sudan won its independence from Sudan in 2011, but a number of border issues remain unresolved.

Presidents Obama, Karzai to Discuss Afghanistan's Transition

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 08 January 2013

Washington — Afghan President Hamid Karzai is in Washington this week for talks with President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton as Afghanistan prepares for far-reaching security and political transitions.

Obama and Karzai plan to hold a summit at the White House January 11, a day after Clinton and the Afghan leader meet at the State Department. White House press secretary Jay Carney said Karzai’s visit is about the “transition in Afghanistan and our shared vision of an enduring partnership between the United States and Afghanistan.”

The Obama administration plans to withdraw the 66,000 U.S. combat troops in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, leaving Afghan national forces in control of security. Discussions are under way about keeping a residual U.S. force in Afghanistan beyond 2014, but no agreements have been reached. Afghanistan also is preparing for a presidential election in 2014 that will select a successor to Karzai, who is nearing the end of his second term.

In May 2012, the U.S. and Afghan presidents met in Kabul and signed a strategic partnership agreement that lays out the framework for U.S.-Afghan relations for the next decade. At the time, Obama said the agreement “sends a clear message to the Afghan people: As you stand up, you will not stand alone.” The agreement contains “shared commitments to combat terrorism and strengthen democratic institutions. It supports Afghan efforts to advance development and dignity for their people,” Obama added.

In July 2012, the Afghan government and the international donor community met in Tokyo to define the international community’s pledge of support for Afghanistan through 2025. The Tokyo conference also set benchmarks for Afghanistan to improve governance, rule of law, anti-corruption efforts and development performance. The participants in the Tokyo conference promised to provide \$16 billion for Afghanistan’s development through 2015.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the full range of issues between the United States and Afghanistan will be discussed during Karzai’s stay —

security, political, economic and regional.

“The United States is deeply invested with our international partners in supporting and helping Afghanistan as it continues to move forward on all these fronts. And that’s what this visit is going to be about,” she said.

Nuland said Afghanistan has come a long way under Karzai’s leadership, especially considering where the country was in 2001. She noted that Afghanistan “is now a democratic country with an elected government, with human rights for all.”

Obama Nominates Two for National Security Team

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 07 January 2013

Washington – President Obama rounded out his second-term national security team January 7 by nominating former U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel for defense secretary and White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan to head the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

With the recent nomination of Senate Foreign Relations Chairman John Kerry to become the next secretary of state, Obama has completed the major appointments for the crucial national security team during his second and final four-year term. All three nominations must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

The three nominees, along with Vice President Biden, would perform crucial roles in providing timely advice and helping to shape and implement the president’s national security strategy.

“The work of protecting our nation is never done, and we’ve still got much to do: ending a war in Afghanistan and caring for those who have borne the battle, preparing for the full range of threats, from the unconventional to the conventional, including things like cybersecurity, and within our military, continuing to ensure that our men and women in uniform can serve the country they love no matter who they love,” Obama said during a White House ceremony announcing the nominations.

In nominating Hagel, Obama reached across the political aisle to select his next secretary of defense. Hagel, a Republican from Nebraska, served in the U.S. Senate from 1997 to 2009. He is currently a professor at Georgetown University’s Edmund W. Walsh School of Foreign Service, chairman of the Atlantic Council and co-chairman of the President’s Intelligence Advisory Board. While serving in the Senate, Hagel served on the Foreign Relations Committee; the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee; the Select Committee on Intelligence; and the Committee on Rules and Administration.

Hagel, if confirmed by the Senate, would become the first former U.S. enlisted serviceman and first Vietnam War veteran to become secretary of defense, according to the president. Hagel, twice wounded, is an Army veteran.

“Chuck Hagel is the leader that our troops deserve,” Obama said at the White House. “Chuck Hagel’s leadership of our military would be historic.”

“And Chuck recognizes that American leadership is indispensable in a dangerous world. He understands that America stands strongest when we stand with allies and with friends,” Obama added.

Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin said in a statement January 7 that he regarded former Senator Hagel as “well-qualified” to be the next defense secretary. Levin and his committee will oversee Hagel’s nomination. Senator Jim Inhofe, the top Republican on the armed services panel, said he would seek full clarification of Hagel’s policy positions during the confirmation hearing, which hasn’t been scheduled.

Hagel would succeed Defense Secretary Leon Panetta.

John Brennan has served as the president’s deputy national security adviser for homeland security and counterterrorism for the past four years. He is a 25-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency and is regarded as one of the president’s closest advisers.

“A 25-year veteran of the CIA, John knows what our national security demands: intelligence that provides policymakers with the facts, strong analytic insights and a keen understanding of a dynamic world,” Obama said at the nomination ceremony. “John developed and has overseen our comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, a collaborative effort across the government, including intelligence and defense and homeland security and law enforcement agencies.”

“John has an invaluable perspective on the forces, the history, the culture, the politics, the economics, [and] the desire for human dignity driving so much of the changes in today’s world,” Obama added.

Brennan would succeed former CIA Director David Petraeus, who resigned in November.

Record Number of Women in 113th U.S. Congress

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 07 January 2013

Washington – A record number of women – 101 across both chambers – has been elected to the new U.S. Congress, and they are predicting that their more collaborative work style will make itself felt.

"I think women bring a slightly different perspective," Representative Tammy Duckworth (Democrat from Illinois) told the *New York Times*. According to Representative Tulsi Gabbard (Democrat from Hawaii), the congresswomen, no matter what their party affiliation, "are going to reach across the aisle a lot more. We're a lot more pragmatic, but we do come from all different backgrounds."

"What I find is, with all due deference to our male colleagues, that women's styles tend to be more collaborative," Senator Susan Collins (Republican from Maine) told ABC News' Diane Sawyer.

"I always push back the idea that there are 'women's issues,'" Collins said. "Because every issue from war to taxes to education affect women in this country. And that's why the point of having women be represented on all committees and leading many of them is so important."

With the opening of the 113th Congress on January 3, 20 women were sworn into the U.S. Senate and 81 into the House of Representatives.

"I can tell you this is a can-do crowd," said Senator Barbara Mikulski (Democrat from Maryland) of the Democratic and Republican women senators after their swearing-in. "We are today ready to be a force in American politics."

Mikulski is the first woman to chair the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee. She is also the longest-serving female senator and the longest-serving woman in the history of the U.S. Congress, having been first elected in 1976.

U.S. senators serve six-year terms; representatives two-year terms. Each state has two senators; representatives are apportioned according to the size of the state's population.

One state, New Hampshire, now has an all-woman congressional delegation. California and Washington state are each represented in the Senate by two women. Nebraska elected its first woman senator, Deb Fischer (Republican).

"It was an historic election," Fischer said. "But what was really fun about it were the number of mothers and fathers who brought their daughters up to me during the campaign and said, 'Can we get a picture?'"

The 113th Congress is also the most diverse in history. It includes 31 Latinos, 12 Asian Americans and seven openly gay or bisexual members.

Gabbard and Representative Tammy Duckworth (Democrat from Illinois) have become Congress' first women combat veterans after serving in the war in Iraq.

Religious diversity in the U.S. Congress has also expanded. Senator Mazie Hirono (Democrat from Hawaii) is the first Buddhist senator and Gabbard becomes the first member of Congress to have embraced Hinduism.

Although the swearing-in ceremony was a jubilant occasion for the congresswomen, second-term Senator Claire McCaskill (Democrat from Missouri) told the *New York Times*: "I don't think we should be satisfied until we have the same number of women in the Senate that represent the percentage of the population that are women, so we still have a long way to go."

Even so, women are gaining seniority and important committee assignments.

Senator Patty Murray (Democrat from Washington) will chair the Senate Budget Committee. Just elected to her third term, Senator Maria Cantwell (Democrat from Washington), takes over as chair of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. Cantwell also sits on the Finance, Commerce, and Energy and Natural Resources committees. Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler (Republican from Washington) gained a seat on the House Appropriations Committee. Fischer of Nebraska is joining the Defense, Environment and Public Works, Indian Affairs, Small Business, and Commerce committees.

Treasury Sets Sanctions on DRC Militant Groups

04 January 2013

Washington – The U.S. Department of the Treasury has designated two militant groups fomenting violence and instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The action against Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) and the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) was taken under Executive Order 13413, which targets people contributing to the DRC conflict.

M23 and the FDLR, operating in eastern DRC, have committed serious crimes involving the targeting of children, Treasury said in a January 3 press release. The crimes include recruitment as well as killing, maiming and sexual violence. M23 is also being designated for receiving arms and materiel related to military activities that have contributed directly to the conflict.

Under the designations, U.S. persons are prohibited from providing support to M23 and the FDLR, and any of their assets within U.S. jurisdiction must be frozen.

A credible body of evidence demonstrates support for M23 from the Rwandan government, including significant military and logistical support as well as operational and political guidance, Treasury said. The United States has repeatedly called for a permanent end to all support for M23 and the FDLR as well as other armed groups operating in the DRC.

“The United States is committed to working with the international community to end the violence perpetrated against children in the DRC and exposing those responsible for these atrocities,” said David S. Cohen, under secretary of the Treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence. “We also urge Rwanda to halt its assistance to M23 and prevent any and all forms of support to Congolese armed groups.”

M23 has recently taken control of large parts of eastern DRC. It is made up of forced recruits and rebels who mutinied from the DRC armed forces. The FDLR is led by Rwandan Hutus who were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Top commanders of both groups, M23’s Bosco Ntaganda and the FDLR’s Sylvestre Mudacumura, are wanted by the International Criminal Court.

Both groups have been actively recruiting and using children in armed conflict, Treasury said. They have been responsible for campaigns of horrific violence against civilians, and they have used their resources to undermine peace efforts in the region.

On December 31, 2012, the United Nations Security Council’s DRC Sanctions Committee, with the support of the United States, added M23 and the FDLR to its consolidated travel ban and asset-freeze list. The United States and the Security Council previously designated several leaders of M23 and the FDLR for their roles in the conflict.

Secretary Clinton on Burma Independence Day

03 January 2013
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
January 3, 2013

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Burma Independence Day

On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I am delighted to send best wishes to the people of your country as you celebrate your Independence Day on January 4. Together, our two countries have been working on a number of important issues, and we are pleased with the steady process of reform. 2012 saw a number of historic steps forward in

the development of our bilateral relationship, including the reestablishment of normal diplomatic relations, and President Obama and I both enjoyed our visit in November of last year. We look forward to continuing to deepen our partnership and cooperation in the years to come. In the spirit of our long lasting friendship, I wish your country continued prosperity and a joyful Independence Day celebration.

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