

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Bush Pledges Full Cooperation with Incoming Obama Administration

President, president-elect hold first private meeting at the White House

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Bush and President-elect Obama held their first post-election meeting at the White House November 10. The Bush administration has pledged its “complete cooperation” in the days leading up to the January 20, 2009, inauguration to ensure a seamless transition.

Greeting each other at the White House, the president and president-elect exchanged a handshake while first lady Laura Bush greeted Obama’s wife, Michelle, with a hug. The Bushes and Obamas then entered the White House for a tour of the residence. The two leaders held private talks in the Oval Office that likely focused on the U.S. economy and national security.

Separately, White House Chief of Staff Josh Bolten held talks with his predecessor in the Clinton administration, John Podesta, on the transition between the Bush and Obama administrations. Podesta now heads the Obama transition team.

White House press secretary Dana Perino told reporters November 10 that the president and first lady invited the Obamas to visit the White House during Bush’s November 4 congratulatory call to the president-elect.

“I think the president and the president-elect have both set a tone of cooperation, one of a spirit of partnership to be able to move forward. Of course they have differences on policies, but they both love their country equally and their love of country they’re going to put first, and then they’ll work together to make sure that they have everything that they need going forward,” Perino said.

In his weekly radio address, President Bush said he has pledged his “complete cooperation” to President-elect Obama.

“Ensuring that this transition is seamless is a top priority for the rest of my time in office,” Bush said November 8. “Our country faces economic challenges that will not pause to let a new president settle in. This will also be America’s first wartime presidential transition in four decades.”

Bush said his administration has provided intelligence briefings to Obama and security clearances that will enable members of the transition staff to be fully briefed on policy issues such as the state of financial markets and the war in Iraq. He also said he would keep Obama “fully informed” on executive decisions during the transition period.

“Taken together, these measures represent an unprecedented effort to ensure continuity throughout the executive branch,” Bush said.

In his own November 8 radio address, Obama said Bush’s offer of “full support and assistance ... speaks to a fundamental recognition that here in America we can compete vigorously in elections and challenge each other’s ideas, yet come together in service of a common purpose once the voting is done.”

The United States is facing serious challenges, especially in the wake of “disturbing” economic reports, and Obama said he wants to “hit the ground running” once he is sworn in as president. “We don’t have a moment to lose,” he said.

According to Obama, further actions and difficult choices are needed to address the economic crisis. “I know that we will succeed if we put aside partisanship and work together as one nation. And that is what I intend to do.”

Secretary Rice Encourages Support for Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

U.S. pledges \$14 million for projects in town of Jenin

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Palestinian and Israeli negotiators have pledged to continue the peace talks President Bush began at the Annapolis Conference on the Middle East in November 2007, and the international community — including the United States — fully supports their work.

“The American people want to see the Palestinian people living in their own state, and that is a shared goal,” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said at a November 8 briefing in the West Bank town of Jenin in the Palestinian territories.

During her visit to the Palestinian territories, Rice stopped in Jenin to see new construction and rebuilding in a town that had once been the scene of considerable conflict. Rice opened a new hospital wing that had been renovated with U.S. funds.

"This wonderful hospital, where I saw mothers with their newborn babies, is an example of an improvement in the life of the Palestinian people," Rice said.

While there, Rice also pledged \$14 million in new American assistance to Jenin to be spent on road improvements; a new co-educational school in Jalboon; water and sanitation rehabilitation and expansion; continued economic development; rehabilitation of schools, parks and community centers in and around Jenin; support for the Jenin Court; and funds to implement joint youth programs and initiatives. The U.S. Agency for International Development will implement the projects.

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who was at the briefing with Rice, expressed gratitude to the United States for its support. He said that during this visit to Jenin considerable emphasis was placed on health issues, but there are other projects where U.S. aid has been vital.

"There are also other U.S.-supported projects in [the] private sector: education, infrastructure ... roads, water and other in terms of capacity building of institutions," Fayyad said. "I thank the United States for this support."

ANNAPOLIS CONFERENCE RELAUNCHED PEACE TALKS

Since the 2007 Annapolis Conference on the Middle East relaunched talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, Fayyad said, negotiators have been working to implement the road map that was designed to resolve core issues confronting the Palestinians and Israelis and lead to statehood for the Palestinian territories.

"Since the conclusion of the Annapolis conference we have exerted tremendous efforts, in terms of building, construction, [and] preparation toward the creation of the Palestinian state and its capable institutions," Fayyad said.

Core issues to be resolved in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks include the final borders of a Palestinian state, the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian refugees, water resources and future relations between the two states.

Rice said that, because of the work being done in Jenin and elsewhere in the Palestinian territories, statehood is going to come.

After meeting with Palestinian officials, Rice met with senior representatives of the Quartet for Middle East Peace — the United Nations, the European Union, Russia and the United States — at the Egyptian Red Sea resort in Sharm el-

Sheik. Rice was seeking to reinforce international support for the Annapolis process.

"We have an international strategy now, to finally establish the two-state solution, which President Bush set as a goal several years ago," Rice said November 9 at a Quartet press conference. "And so, I believe that the Annapolis process is now the international community's answer ... to how do we finally end the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni reaffirmed their commitment to "vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues, without exception, as specified in previous agreements."

Ban added, reading from a statement by the Quartet, that the Quartet endorsed the goals set out by the Israelis and Palestinians and called on the international community to lend their diplomatic and political support to achieve those goals.

Quartet Envoy Tony Blair, the former British prime minister, said it is imperative for the new U.S. administration to engage in this peace process from the start of its term, which begins January 20, 2009.

"It can do so knowing that there is a foundation upon which we can build," Blair said at the Quartet press conference. "For the first time, we have comprehensive political negotiations through the Annapolis process. For the first time, we have a proper plan to build security capability for the Palestinians, which is necessary to create a Palestinian state."

Rice added that the negotiations are producing an atmosphere of trust, as well as a foundation on which to build.

Rice's four-day trip to the region, which included stops in Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Egypt, was her eighth since the Annapolis conference, and likely to be her final trip to the region as secretary of state before the end of the Bush administration.

Non-U.S. Journalists Cite American Voter Enthusiasm, Role of Race

U.S. program sent 50 journalists to cover election in battleground states

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — As U.S. news commentators continue to assess the meaning of Senator Barack Obama's November 4 presidential election victory, 50 journalists invited to the United States by the State Department's Foreign Press Center shared their impressions, expressing surprise at how highly engaged average Americans were in the campaigns.

The group of newspaper, magazine, online and radio journalists covered the election for their organizations from the so-called battleground states on which John McCain's and Barack Obama's campaigns focused special attention. The program was funded by the State Department and administered by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), a nonprofit professional organization.

Speaking in Washington November 6, one African journalist commented on the role of identity politics in the race and the enthusiasm of American voters. "I think we had a front-row seat in this drama of race and religion," he said.

RACE AND U.S. POLITICS

A Ugandan journalist covering the election from Pennsylvania said he arrived in the United States already impressed with Obama's oratory and political skills. "But I didn't know this exuberance, the enthusiasm from all the Americans.

"People have talked about African Americans, the black race and all that. But I know that the black Americans are only 12 percent [of the vote]," he said. He was surprised that white Americans came out so strongly in support of Obama.

Many of the visiting journalists noted that Obama's support extended well beyond the African-American community. President-elect Obama's identity as the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas, and his Islamic middle name "Hussein" were topics of discussion among some American voters during the campaign and had the potential to be divisive in some communities.

"The enthusiasm with which [white Americans] give him the vote, they supported him, the fundraising. You know, for me that was really a shock to me throughout this tour,"

the Ugandan journalist said.

ICFJ's director, Jerri Eddings, said race is becoming less important in American politics. "It's not going to disappear. It's probably never going to disappear," she said. "But the fact that Obama was elected actually proves how much less of an issue [race] is now than it was."

Patrick Butler, who is ICFJ's vice president for programs, said the journalists' observations of the importance of religious identity might be due to the continued role of U.S. churches in influencing voter attitudes.

"Churches are very involved in elections and a large part of the population takes into account religious beliefs and the beliefs of the candidates," he said.

AMERICAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Several journalists remarked on how the crowds at campaign rallies demonstrated U.S. voter enthusiasm.

"People were waiting for four to five hours to listen to a 13 minute speech of the candidate," said one. "People were taking little children with them. It was very interesting for me."

A Nigerian journalist recalled that people stood for two hours waiting to hear Senator Hillary Clinton speak at an Obama rally. "In Nigeria, nobody attends conventions. You have to transport people to the place. You have to provide food if possible," he said.

Others were struck by the dedication of campaign volunteers on both sides. "I met some who left their homes, who left their jobs just to be volunteers for their candidate and also women who left their homes to be babysitters for the volunteers. ... This was something that I noticed very strongly," said another African journalist.

Of the 50 program participants, 11 were from sub-Saharan Africa, eight from East Asia and the Pacific, eight from Europe, 11 from the Middle East and North Africa, five from South Central Asia, and seven from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Depending on where they were stationed, some journalists cited the high number of African Americans involved in the Obama campaign; some reported especially enthusiastic support for his campaign among blacks who recently had immigrated to the United States from Africa and the Caribbean.

Eddings, speaking from her own experience as an African American who had come from a politically active neighborhood, said activism varied from community to community.

"I've always had a theory about immigrants versus people who have been here for several generations, which is that immigrants come with a sense of hope and opportunity and black people in this country, particularly in the South ... have lost their sense of opportunity," following experiences such as segregation and discrimination.

"But in this election, I think many of those very same people who had lost their sense of hope and opportunity actually regained it," she said.

A Mexican journalist working in Florida remarked on how different voter groups she met had different priorities and concerns that played out in their opinions. Cuban Americans, she said, were "hit very hard" by accusations from the McCain campaign that Obama was a socialist.

"They told me, 'Well, we came out of the island, fleeing from [Fidel] Castro because he was a communist from there, and now a socialist wants to be president of the United States,'" she said.

She also observed a generational dynamic, as elderly Jewish voters expressed concerns over the economy and about rumors that Obama was a Muslim. However, "their younger relatives didn't think about that."

A generational divide was also in evidence at a Florida university. "They were all Obama lovers. ... You didn't really have a real discussion over there."

However, one of her colleagues said he had been surprised to find that many young voters were uninformed on the issues and expressed support for their candidate based on more trivial matters such as racial identity or the desire to have "a president with whom I can share a beer."

Butler said, indeed, some Americans vote for candidates they feel they can relate to rather than investigating their policies, and the U.S. system of democracy allows each voter to apply personal criteria when casting a ballot.

"You can vote based on whether you think the guy is good looking or not," he said. "That's the way democracy works. You can't require people to be educated about the issues."

Financial Crisis Underscores U.S.-Chinese Relations

Special envoy Holmer speaks on future of U.S.-Chinese economic ties

By Kelly Daniel
Staff Writer

Washington — The interdependence of the U.S. and Chinese economies has become more apparent during the recent period of worldwide financial turmoil, according to Alan Holmer, special envoy for China and the Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED).

"Addressing these developments requires the dramatic steps we are taking in the United States, and it requires close international collaboration and cooperation," Holmer said in a speech about the future of the U.S.-China economic relationship presented at The Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center in Nanjing, China, November 5.

Holmer said the United States and China are enjoying their most productive relationship ever thanks in part to an economic framework that created the most sophisticated dialogue ever between the nations.

Holmer's remarks highlighted the challenges and opportunities in the U.S.-China relationship, touching on bilateral investment treaties, energy security and environmental sustainability, product safety, intellectual property rights, market-based pricing on interest and exchange rates, and open trade and investment policies.

"One of the most important decisions facing the new American president will be how to respond to China's emergence as a global power," Holmer said. "Possibly the most consequential economic question of the 21st century for the United States and for China is whether we get our economic relationship 'right.'"

China and the United States are linked economically, Holmer said, with the two countries combining for more than 30 percent of worldwide gross domestic product (GDP) in 2007. China is the third-largest export market for the United States and, in 2007, Chinese exports to the United States accounted for 9.5 percent of Chinese GDP. In the past decade, U.S. exports to China increased six times as fast as U.S. exports to the rest of the world.

During the past two years, thanks to the structure and communication afforded by the SED, both nations have navigated crises in global markets, political changes in both governments and protectionist trends that could take both countries in "unhelpful" directions, Holmer said. The SED,

created by President Bush and President Hu Jintao of China in 2006, has achieved tangible, important results by focusing on policy areas in which China's reform agenda and U.S. interests intersect, creating a U.S.-China relationship that is more productive and dynamic than ever, he said. The SED played a key role in creating a culture of collaboration that led to a signed Ten Year Framework on Energy and Environmental Cooperation, worked to modernize the financial sector and will see the formalizing of steps to open U.S. Food and Drug Administration offices in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

"The mere creation and sustained attention of the SED demonstrates to the people of both countries that the United States values a stable, prosperous, and peaceful China," Holmer said. Continuing to recognize the commonalities between the two nations — "that we mutually benefit from trade, investment and deepening exchange" — is the key to the future, the special envoy said.

China can also benefit from the lessons the U.S. financial markets are learning as the global economic crisis has shown "the U.S. financial system is in need of reform," Holmer said. The United States continues to work on implementing the findings of U.S. experts in the President's Working Group on Financial Markets and of international experts in the Financial Stability Forum, which Holmer said are particularly applicable to financial markets around the world. However, the special envoy added it would be unfortunate if Chinese policymakers abandoned their pursuit of financial sector innovations as a result of the global economic turmoil.

"We must recognize that China's growth is an opportunity for U.S. companies and consumers, for our producers, exporters and investors," he said. "A stable, prosperous and peaceful China is in the best interest of the Chinese people, the American people and the rest of the world."

United States Sends Rescue, Engineering Teams to Haiti

Teams work to search for survivors of school collapse

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has sent a search and rescue team from Fairfax County, Virginia, and an eight-person military engineering team to help the Haitian government with recovery efforts at a school that collapsed during classes in Petionville on November 7, U.S. officials said.

Firefighters, who are members of the Virginia Task Force 1,

were flown in from Fairfax County by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to assist search-and-rescue efforts in the wreckage of College La Promesse Evangelique on the outskirts of Port-Au-Prince, the Haitian capital, USAID officials said November 7.

USAID also dispatched a disaster assistance response team (DART). "The team arrived on the scene within hours of the collapse," USAID said.

U.S. Ambassador Janet Sanderson presented condolences to the Haitian people November 7.

"I heard with great shock and sadness of the building collapse today at the 'La Promesse Evangelique' School, which has killed and injured many young students. I wish to extend my heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost their children today. One cannot imagine any greater blow and we mourn with you," the ambassador said in a prepared statement.

"We also extend our deepest sympathies to the students who have been injured, their families, and to all the children who have lost dear friends and classmates today. Our thoughts and prayers are with the children, the parents and the teachers of 'La Promesse Evangelique' School, as well as the Haitian people, as they face this tragedy," Sanderson said.

HIGH-RISK RESCUE TEAMS

The U.S. firefighters are members of the Fairfax County Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team, which has participated in rescue missions worldwide. "The team will be composed of 38 personnel, four search and rescue [dogs] and 31,000 pounds [14,000 kilograms] of rescue equipment," the agency said in a prepared statement.

The USAR team will be accompanied by four additional USAID disaster experts who will join the DART already in country. The team arrived in Haiti on November 8.

"This is a tragic situation, especially since children are involved. We are working alongside the Haitian government to provide immediate assistance in the rescue effort," said USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore. "On behalf of the American people, I wish to convey our sympathy, thoughts and prayers to the families and loved ones of all the victims of this tragedy."

The Virginia search-and-rescue team joined French and Haitian firefighters at the scene. According to news reports based on government estimates, at least 92 people have

been killed in the three-story school building collapse and another 150 people were injured.

In addition to firefighters, the U.S. military's Southern Command sent an eight-person military dive-and-engineering team. The team consists of six U.S. Navy divers, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hydrologist and a senior U.S. Air Force engineer.

The military team had been in Haiti since November 3 supporting efforts to deal with flooding in surrounding areas, but changed missions immediately to support the search-and-recovery effort at the school, Southern Command said.

Southern Command said the team will use all-purpose Humvees to help transport supplies, equipment and personnel from a makeshift camp at a local soccer field to the collapse site approximately 4.8 kilometers away.

In addition, the military team is providing site and safety assessments of the ongoing rescue-and-recovery efforts to the Haitian government.

On November 8, Southern Command donated \$10,000 in medical supplies to Haitian hospitals caring for victims of the school collapse.

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