

Veteran operatives fill Obama team

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President-elect Barack Obama's transition team reviewing the Executive Office of the President is composed largely of Clinton administration veterans, some of them overseeing departments they had once administered.

A few are skilled operators in the Washington influence game.

Mara Eve Rudman, for example, who's helping direct the transition in the National Security Council, is the president of a lobbying and international consulting firm, Quorum Strategies, and in the past lobbied for the Cohen Group, a consultancy headed by former Defense Secretary William Cohen.

She lobbied Congress on issues related to insurance and international education and seems to clear Obama's ethics test because her transition responsibilities don't cover issues she worked on as a lobbyist.

Chris Putala, a former aide to Vice President-elect Joe Biden on the Senate Judiciary Committee, also clears the ethics bar since his years-long work as a telecommunications lobbyist isn't linked to his area of focus in the transition: the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

But some transition staffers have portfolios that are harder to categorize. And even though they meet the specific ethics requirements laid out by the transition team, their impact on the new administration could cut across numerous policy areas.

Todd Stern, the former White House staff secretary and WilmerHale lawyer, skirts the transition team's ethics guidelines because he's not working on the issue — health care — that he engaged with as a lobbyist.

But his project, a wide-ranging review of White House administration, is not easily circumscribed in a discrete policy area distinct from health care.

And Sally Katzen, the former senior White House budget official who's heading up the entire working group, lobbied for the biotechnology firm Amgen.

She passes the ethics test because her work isn't immediately focused on science and technology. But as the person overseeing much of the West Wing transition, her influence over the new administration could be widely felt.

It's not just lobbyists, though, who provide this section of Obama's transition team with

seasoned Beltway know-how.

Obama's two aides overseeing the transition in the Council of Economic Advisers — Audrey Choi and Michele Jolin — both were chiefs of staff for the council in the Clinton White House.

George Frampton, who chaired the Council on Environmental Quality in the Clinton White House, is overseeing Obama's transition in that area, along with California clean energy financier Thomas Soto, who was appointed to the Border Environmental Cooperation Commission by former President Bill Clinton.

And in addition to Rudman, the two other staffers leading the turnover of power in the National Security Council, Antony Blinken and Ivo Daalder, are also alumni of Bill Clinton's NSC.

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